Institute, the Ulster Railway Terminus and Queen's College. In 1871 Belfast Town Hall opened in Victoria Street. This Belfast volume also includes an interesting 1884 facsimile map of the town, by the renowned Belfast printers Marcus Ward, which provides an insight into its development on the eve of its rise to city status in 1888. The expansion of Belfast was further evidenced in the 1890s, with Queen Victoria conferring the title of lord mayor on the mayor of Belfast in 1892, and the boundary of the city being extended, with the city's wards expanding from 5 to 15, in 1896. The 1901 map in the folder provides the reader with a series of coterminous civic timelines with the Town Hall in Victoria Street marked as well as the new City Hall, still a work in progress (indicated by the fact that its name on the map is not fixed and in John Adams' 'Birds-eye view of Belfast' *c*. 1900 it is imagined). In the rapidly expanding town the Town Hall building was soon considered too modest and Belfast's municipal fathers began to plan for the creation of a new and grander municipal home, which culminated in 1906 in the opening of Belfast City Hall in Donegall Square.

Juxtaposing the 1901 map with that of 2005 reveals the evolution of Belfast in the modern period. In the latter half of the twentieth century, urban developments in the city (particularly in the 1960s and 1970s), in addition to the 'Troubles', destroyed once densely populated, largely working-class areas, such as 'Sailortown' near the docks. Royle notes the destruction of industrial Belfast, through economic decline and decay in the inter-war period, and contemporary developers, but he concludes with a positive note about the city's future (as 'a lively tourist and service centre') under devolved government. Overall this fascinating collection brings to mind the poet Ciarán Carson's volume *Belfast Confetti* (1991) and his image of 'a map which no longer refers to the present world, but to a history'.

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A.E. Simpson (ed.), *Witnesses to the Scaffold. English Literary Figures as Observers of Public Executions: Pierce Egan, Thackeray, Dickens, Alexander Smith, G.A. Sala, Orwell*. Lambertville, NJ: The True Bill Press, 2008. 230pp. $65.00.
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A popular joke of the nineteenth century, Antony Simpson tells us, concerns a shipwrecked mariner washed ashore. After searching the barren landscape for hours, the sailor spies a corpse swinging from a gibbet. 'Thank God!' he declares, 'I'm in a civilized, Christian country!' (p. 47). Such a tale, whether apocryphal or not, captures the compelling essence of this fascinating new collection of execution narratives. Why, asks Simpson, in light of the rapid social and moral progress evident during the Victorian age, was the 'barbarity' of a public hanging so widely observed and tolerated? Why did the sight of a dangling corpse exert such a hypnotic, uncontested cross-class appeal for so long, and what was the core attraction of these essentially brutal events?

By bringing together a host of primary execution accounts for the first time, the editor of this fine anthology sets out to provide possible answers to some of these still generally perplexing questions. Prefaced by an authoritative essay surveying the changing nature of the nineteenth-century criminal code, and complemented

by exceptionally detailed biographical chapter introductions, Simpson draws on the pertinent experiences of six key figures of a similar literary pedigree in order to expose the raw experience of witnessing judicial death. Among the first-hand narratives included here are the words of Pierce Egan, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens, which together provide a remarkable cross-section of personal gallows encounters.

Understanding the variability of both the crowd's response and the writers' own reactions to the execution experience represents the central theme of this collection. At the hanging of Francois Courvoisier at Newgate in 1840, for example, William Thackeray was so horrified by the sight revealed before him that he cowered at the moment of the 'final drop', though otherwise described a generally restrained audience, noted for its placable good humour. Similarly, Pierce Egan's account of the hanging of John Thurtell in 1824 portrays a murderer of 'kindly spirit' (p. 79) who died before a peaceable crowd, noted mainly for its 'orderly and decorous behaviour' (p. 91). Charles Dickens, on the other hand, famously reacted with revulsion at the execution of Maria and Frederick Manning in 1849. Writing at length in the pages of the metropolitan press (and reproduced here) Dickens excoriated the debasing, corrupting effects of witnessing such dreadful scenes, evidenced clearly, he believed, by the crowd's licentiousness in the shadow of public death. Likewise, George Augustus Sala recoiled in disgust from the 'holiday' spirit at a Sussex execution of 1852, which he too felt reflected well enough the 'natural depravity of the people' (p. 198). George Orwell's account of a military execution in 1920s Burma is also particularly striking for the shocking dehumanization of the gallows' victim and the indifference displayed by those carrying out the culprit's death, though its inclusion here seems a somewhat curious choice in this predominantly British, mainly urban nineteenth-century collection.

These contrasting responses, however, nicely illustrate another key problem addressed within this anthology: namely the prejudices inherent in so many contemporary descriptions of the motley urban crowd. Depictions of nineteenth-century execution 'mobs' in particular regularly employed a jaundiced syntax of moral criticism in order to illustrate the dissolute habits of a brutal underclass, as detailed in the reports of a disparaging London press, so many of which routinely failed to incorporate the generally more peaceable, socially promiscuous nature of an execution scene. As Simpson seeks to demonstrate, by reading between these impressionistic lines, a more rounded representation of the execution tableau can be sometimes revealed. Many audiences in reality were constituted of a generally more 'respectable' patronage altogether, inclined more often than not to approve of a hanging's grisly denouement, especially so once the execution sanction was reserved for homicidal cases only.

As these accounts suitably show, for many of those who chose to attend, the execution spectacle was often an altogether more sobering experience. Alexander Smith's account of a Glasgow execution of 1841 is particularly useful in this respect, in which the author describes the initial 'commotion' throughout the town as the execution approached. Such chaotically protean scenes were quickly replaced by the spectators' horror and dread, when suddenly the 'surging crowd became stiffened with fear and awe' (p. 177). In Simpson's view, such electrifying experiences, when bound together by shared experience, continued to exert a profoundly shocking effect, successfully instilling in the spectatorship a heavy

dose of legal terror which, in the long run, guaranteed the survival of the public execution tradition.

This book should be commended for several reasons, not least for the challenge it makes to orthodox depictions of public hangings as the vestiges of a primitive age. Though essentially recorded by men of a similarly privileged social background, flexing the moral hauteur of their class, the accounts included here are intriguing for their remarkably disparate points of view; reason enough for us to believe that the spectacle of death always carried with it a complex web of moral meanings, responsible in turn for the extraordinary range of reactions amongst those who chose to watch.

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Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (eds.), *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870–1950*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xi + 220pp. 19 illustrations. Bibliography. £55.00.
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Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870–1950 is an ambitious volume which seeks to illustrate the richness and great potential of historical investigation exploring and explaining women's relationship with their environments. The book builds upon over 30 years of endeavour across many disciplines including history, sociology and geography, to return women to the historical record. Extending from conventional biographical studies concerned with giving due prominence to those rare and exceptional women who have played a leading role in shaping the built environment through design, professional and political activities or through patronage, researchers have increasingly begun to engage with the more diffuse influence and experience of women's social movements and the anonymous or unknowable woman: the factory worker, the shop clerk and the housewife. Associated with this shift, there has been much methodological experimentation. This has included explorations of new types of documentary evidence and use of different theoretical perspectives to produce alternative gender readings of spaces and things. In bringing together a series of contributions from across the span of the discipline and focusing on England between 1870 and 1950, Darling and Whitworth aim not only to present new material and illustrate the layering and developmental nature of women's experience, but also to reinvigorate debate about gender and space more generally. In particular they propose, and illustrate through the content of the book, a new broad definition of the subject area which they prefer to term 'built space'. By this they mean any material or spatial form which may be understood as playing a part in the production, reproduction or contesting of gender identities, including buildings and artefacts, texts, speeches and living practices.

The book is organized into ten chapters, arranged in roughly chronological order, which encompass contributions from authors with interests in urban, literary, labour and social history as well as architecture and design. A number of the early contributions chart the ways in which educated women, in the years that spanned the beginning of the twentieth century, were able to forge a public role for themselves in the built environment based around society's acceptance of their presumed biological predisposition to nurturing and good citizenship. So, for