

and generations through time. The challenge for the future will be how to translate that understanding into more effective policies that are sensitive to the complex dynamics revealed in this volume.

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Emily Cuming (2016), *Housing, Class and Gender in Modern British Writing, 1880–1912*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, £64.99, pp. 244, hbk.

doi:[10.1017/S0047279417000484](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279417000484)

Emily Cuming brings a splash of colour to UK housing narratives. She explores domestic interiors and housing environments through fictional and non-fictional representations covering, in four chapters: slums; boarding houses; mid twentieth century working class childhood homes and council house estates. Her aim is to undermine ‘tenets which privilege forms of bourgeois interiority’ and the idea that ‘the individual’s real sense is to be found “at home”’ (p. 2).

In chapter one, ‘Slums: Reading and writing the dwellings of the urban poor’, Cuming cites Charles Booth as declaring ‘everywhere the same conditions repeat themselves and George Sim’s statement ‘the story of one slum is the story of another’. She then illustrates the negative portrayal of the slum interior in ‘top down’ literature using vignettes such as Engels’ shock in discovering that many Manchester slums contained ‘absolutely nothing’, Sims’ depiction of walking across the floorboards in a slum as producing the ‘slushing noise of a plank spread across a mud puddle’ and Charles Booth’s declaration on the slums as ‘dirt, drink and swearing prevailing with all’. Such reports are contrasted with accounts from slum dwellers such as Pat O’Mara’s *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy* where the ‘shadowy, degenerate figures of earlier slum narratives are replaced by an individualised cast featuring the idiosyncratic faces and voices of families living at extremely close quarters’ (p 66). Surprisingly, Robert Roberts’ (1990) *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* — the most valuable antidote to the association between poor housing conditions and low character — is not included.

Accounts of boarding and lodging houses have been neglected in UK housing accounts. In chapter two, ‘Boarding and lodging houses: At home with strangers’, Cuming explores their significance as a spatial ‘other’ to the middle-class bourgeois home, sometimes leading such places ‘to be cast as inauthentic and even possibly illicit places’ (p 73). The distinction between a boarding house and a lodging house is opaque and Cuming, with the exception of a section on ‘Windrush: Culture of lodging in black writing’, focuses on the genteel boarding house. This reveals interesting dimensions to ‘living with strangers’; boarding house proprietors resisted liaisons because they might end in marriages that were bad for business. However, the ‘down and dirty’ common lodging house is a better exemplar of ‘othering’ via ‘tenets which privilege forms of bourgeois identity’. Universally condemned as ‘dens of iniquity’, one London common lodging house was home to 9 clerks, 5 ‘broken down’ gentlemen, 3 engineers, 3 insurance agents, 2 school masters, an actor, a doctor, a solicitor and a farmer who might occupy the same cubicle for several years (City of London, 2016).

Chapter three, ‘Unholy homes: Life writing of the postwar ‘scholarship’ generation’, although an interesting account of how scholarship boys and girls interpreted home, does little to illuminate the main theme of the book but chapter four, ‘Estates: Social Housing in twentieth

and twenty-first century literature and culture' returns to examining the journalistic 'slumming' of the 19th century, now applied to the council estates. Here Cuming explores surveying and narrating the council house estate through the work of, *inter alia*, Paul Harrison, Tony Parker, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Lynsey Hanley's 'insider' estate account and fiction such as Alice Irvine's *The Road is Red* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Cuming concludes that accounts that take into consideration 'the subjectivity and viewpoints of particular individuals in specific circumstances result in portrayals of mass housing estates, that, against the dominant narrative, reveal images of heterogeneity, ambivalence and difference' (p. 212).

Despite some over-elaborate theorising and an erratic use of vignettes in her account of the diversity of housing interiors and the reactions to these interiors Cuming injects nuance into the housing story. The book could have made more use of mainstream housing literature such as Chris Allen (2008) *Housing Market Renewal and Social Class* and Alan Mayne's (1993) *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities 1870–1914*, but it is a valuable contribution to unsettling the normal in housing discourse.

In her conclusion Cuming refers to a fight-back against dominant portrayals of council housing as revealed in the New Era housing estate in Hoxton, London. The 'Brexit' vote, with its high turnout on 'social' housing estates to vote 69% in favour of leaving the European Union, ought to be a reminder that disparaging others may produce unwanted consequences for the 'liberal elite'.

References

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Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson (2016), *Unequal gains: American growth and inequality since 1700*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, £27.95, pp. 424, hbk.

doi:10.1017/S0047279417000496

Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson are among the most prominent economic historians of their generation, and have been collaborating with each other for more than four decades. One important strand of their work has been concerned with the conceptualisation and measurement of living standards, most notably, perhaps, in relation to the longstanding debate over the standard of living during Britain's industrial revolution (see e.g. Lindert and Williamson, 1983). However, an even more consistent theme has been the study of inequality, most obviously within the United States but also elsewhere (see e.g. Lindert and Williamson, 1976; 1985; 2003).

Their current work builds on these foundations to offer a new synoptic history of trends in American growth and inequality since the early-eighteenth century and incorporates a great deal of new data which have only become fully accessible in recent years. It makes particular