increasingly efficient and often more effective as a light source until after World War I.

There are some strong elements to this book and some exciting new ways of looking at the Victorian city are opened up. However, there are also some irritating weaknesses. Though the book has an extensive bibliography it contains few of the texts one might expect to find in a work addressing the politics of the urban and it makes no particular reference to the types of debates which have taken place in recent years around governance, the politics of space or the rise of the urban professional. The book would have engaged more with the interests of the readers of this journal if it had focused less on the rather arcane debates amongst cultural historians and historians of science and more with the mainstream concerns of urban historians. This is reflected in the choice of sources which come mainly from the national level. Good use is made of the technical press and general debates around how, what and why lighting technologies were or should be deployed, but aside from a few examples from London and Manchester, little use is made of operational records from the cities. The book would also have benefited from a more straightforward use of language, especially in the introduction which is very hard going and not very illuminating. Overall, this is a challenging, innovative but patchy book which provides and original approach to the inter-relationship between liberalism, technology and the Victorian city.

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Bernd Roeck, *Florence 1900: The Quest for Arcadia*. Translated by Stewart Spencer. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009. xiii + 317pp. 28 figures. Bibliography. £25.00.
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In one of his many moments of self-reflection, the distinguished art historian and compulsive melancholic Aby Warburg contemplated his own inheritance. He was, he wrote, 'ebreo di sangue, amburghese di cuore, d'anima fiorentino': Jewish by blood; Hamburger at heart; and with the soul of a Florentine. This was, as a number of authors have subsequently observed, rather a heady mixture – and it comes as no surprise that it all proved a little too much for Warburg himself. After only a few years residence in Florence, he had become so fed up with the cold winters, the poor drains and the prospect of pandemic that he could be driven from the city 'on the strength of a mere rumour' (p. 235). Plunged into depression, he wrote 'I hate Italy', and moved north, returning to his home and – presumably – his heart in Hamburg.

Warburg's time in Florence, in the years between 1897 and 1904, forms the focus of this fascinating, evocative and highly original book. Bernd Roeck uses Warburg's experiences to explore Florence at the *fin de siècle* and investigate the large expatriate community which made it their home. He captures the appeal of a city that appeared to be timeless for those who were seeking to escape the challenges of modernity. He also reveals the disappointments experienced by those who wanted Florence to be a place out of time, yet were increasingly forced to see

the city develop, industrialize and become part of the modern world. Warburg's ambivalence – his deep love of Florence and his profound dissatisfaction with it – make him the ideal vehicle for this project. Using his diaries, plus other manuscripts and memoirs, has enabled Roeck to recapture a whole world and a worldview with it.

Writing about the *fin de siècle* carries with it a number of dangers, and Roeck does not avoid them all. In particular, there is the risk of taking the subjects of one's research on their own terms: overplaying the novelty and overrating the particularity of the period. Every generation thinks it is special – and the generation of the 1890s was convinced that it was more special than most. Yet some of the issues that Roeck describes – the search for a modern art and architecture, the advent of modern technology, the worship of the past – were scarcely new. Likewise, the notion that this generation was peculiarly preoccupied with religious doubts does not stand up to much scrutiny. Most of these debates go back decades. Moreover, the lives of Warburg and his wife, their contemporaries Bernard Berenson and the Lesbian collective who called themselves 'Michael Field' (to name only a selection of characters from this book) give the lie to the idea that this was an especially godless time. Far from being inhabitants of 'a secularised world' (p. 149), religion was still a powerful force: leading to disagreements between the Warburgs, to Berenson's Christian conversion and to Michael Field's Catholicism and bizarre devotional poetry.

Overall, however, this is a strikingly successful exploration of a moment in history. It is intellectually ambitious and stylistically brilliant – becoming poetic in Stewart Spencer's wonderful translation. Yet it never ceases to be rooted in material reality. It describes a Florence of the imagination – a place of art, of culture, of exquisite beauty. But it juxtaposes this with the rebuilding of the city – a re-planning that forcibly removed 6,000 people and involved the destruction of 26 streets and nearly 1,000 old buildings. In telling this story, Roeck is as good on the repaving of Florence as he is on the Renaissance art that brought Warburg to visit it. What he shows is the unbridgeable division between the people of Florence and the expatriates who lived amongst them. Warburg and his circle had almost nothing to do with any Italians. They were not on visiting terms with the local aristocracy, nor did they seem to notice the eruption of social protest in the riots of May 1898. They lived, as Roeck puts it, 'on a kind of Anglo-German space-ship' (p. 101). Their chief encounters were the campaign to frustrate the council's attempts to modernize the city – a protest that drew in petitioners as unlikely as Sarah Bernhardt, Rudyard Kipling, Jean Jaurès and Theodore Roosevelt. The expatriates wanted an imaginary world – the world of a romantic, Renaissance past. The locals, however, were forced to deal with real – and really modern – life.

Warburg's tragedy, Roeck implies, was that he was 'the first to attempt with any real seriousness to deconstruct the myth of Florence' (p. 60). Although he was just as disengaged, just as ill-informed about ordinary Florentine life as his social circle, he could see the rising tide of time and the effects of change on the city he loved. He could never escape the threat of modernity – and nor, as Roeck shows, could Florence.

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