

LONDON. Rebuilt after the great fire of 1666, London enjoyed a golden age. Commerce boomed, owing to the kingdom's success as a major European power and its growth of empire overseas. Around 1700, London's quays were handling a staggering 80 percent of the country's imports, 69 percent of its exports, and 86 percent of its re-exports, notably tobacco, sugar, silks, and spices. Meanwhile, the City grew into the world's great financial center, rivaled only by Amsterdam. The Bank of England was founded in 1694, in a city already alive with brokers, bankers, the Stock Exchange, and large firms such as the East India Company.

The Transformation of a City

Commercial prosperity engendered a new urban geography. To the east of the old walled city, the port attracted swarms of working people, who lived in wretched conditions in Whitechapel, Wapping, Stepney, and Limehouse—sailors, watermen, and all those involved with the processing and distributive activities supported by trade. This area became the core of the classic East End, the Cockney's heartland, especially after the construction of London's artificial docks early in the nineteenth century. Major riverside industries included shipbuilding, breweries, and chemical firms, and, in the nineteenth century, gasworks and railway marshaling yards.

To the west of the City, the environs of Westminster attracted the elite. Bankers and merchants, now wishing to live away from their businesses, were beguiled by prospects of a smart domicile away from the city's smoke, dirt, crime, and bustle. Above all, landowners and country gentlemen seeking town houses were attracted to the West End, near Parliament and the royal court at St. James's. Between the Restoration and the Regency (1660–1820), the West End became London's fashionable residential quarter.

The first major speculative development had emerged in the 1630s with Covent Garden, the property of the earl of Bedford. He this developed as an elegant residential precinct centered on a piazza built on the Italian model or perhaps in imitation of the Place des Vosges in Paris. Bloomsbury Square came next, developed by the earl of Southampton, and then St. James's Square, built in the 1670s by the earl of St. Albans as the most elegant residential site in town. “The inhabitants of St. James's,” judged the *Spectator* magazine early in the eighteenth century, “notwithstanding they live under the same laws and speak the same language, are a distinct people from those of Cheapside.” Development followed development—Hanover Square, Cavendish Square, Berkeley Square, Grosvenor Square, Manchester Square, Portman Square—and linking them were the stylish streets and shops of Piccadilly, Mayfair, and, slightly later, Marylebone.

The freeholds to these developments were typically owned by major aristocratic landowners: they would lease out plots of land to speculative builders, who were compelled to uphold high standards in order to sustain top rental values. The preferred style involved squares and terraces of elegant brick-built dwellings in classical proportions with clean, straight lines, tall sash windows, basements for services, and attics for servants—a mode of urban living that was economical in terms of space yet judged extremely smart.

Critics and Devotees

Nevertheless, there remained, many critics who, drawing on entrenched anti-urban traditions, vilified the booming Georgian metropolis. Daniel Defoe dubbed it “the monstrous city,” and Josiah Tucker found it “no better than a wen,” before William Cobbett famously anathematized the capital as the “great wen.” Critics believed that London tainted all it touched, sucking in the healthy from the countryside, and, as the Bills of Mortality proved, devouring far more than it bred. “The Capital is become an overgrown monster,” complained Tobias Smollett's character Matt Bramble, in *Humphry Clinker*, “which, like a dropsical head, will in time leave the body and extremities without nourishment and support.”

To such critics, London was iniquity itself, the poisoned spring of fashion, the nursery of vice, crime, riot, and all the other enormities unmasked in Samuel Johnson's satirical poem *London*. Its Grub Street—according to Johnson's *Dictionary*, “the name of a street near Moorfields in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems”—was the “temple of Dulness.” Not least, the capital was pestilential, as was all too evident to those who could view the rookeries (slum areas) like that of St. Giles. In the moral lessons drawn by William Hogarth's *Gin Lane*, by John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and by Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, London's sordidness precluded any idealization of the city as the cradle of enlightenment and taste.

Despite such censures, many contemporaries were invigorated by the London experience: the metropolis was varied, energizing, an antidote against melancholy. London's diversity thrilled James Boswell, who likened it to a garden, to musical variations, or to an exhibition. The streets, crowds, and sights inspired him, affording an inexhaustible theater in which to perform or spectate. “I was struck,” he commented, “with agreeable wonder and admiration by contemplating the immensity of the metropolis and the multitude of objects.”

Foreigners agreed. London had an excitement which, for all its shortcomings, elevated its maze of streets far above the regular lines of Berlin or Turin. The capital's sheer scale was astonishing. “How great had seemed Berlin to me when first I saw it from the tower of St. Mary's and looked down on it from the hill at Tempelhof,” reflected the Prussian Pastor Moritz, “how insignificant it now seemed when I set it in my imagination against London!” The town was not just big; it was incredibly busy, with crowds and clatter everywhere. “The road from Greenwich to London was actually busier than the most popular streets in Berlin,” judged Moritz, “so many people were to be encountered riding, driving or walking.”

Public Culture

Public life was assuming a more secular air, though piety found practical expression in energetic charity. Five great new London hospitals were founded through private philanthropy and bequests: the Westminster, Guy's, St. George's, the London, and the Middlesex. Numerous other charities were set up for the sick and incapacitated. St. Luke's Hospital for the insane was founded in 1751. Maternity hospitals were established, an innovation. In 1749, the British Lying-In Hospital was set up in Long Acre, Covent Garden; the City of London Lying-In Hospital opened one year later, and

the General Lying-In Hospital (later known as Queen Charlotte's) in 1752. The Lock Hospital for venereal cases opened in 1746. Religious impulses drove the foundation of dozens of charity schools, whose religious instruction was Anglican. "The Charity-Schools which have been erected in late years," observed Richard Steele, "are the greatest Instances of publick Spirit the Age has produced."

Despite such pious expressions, religion was being displaced. A culture of worldly sociability grew up, increasingly secular in form and content, contributing to the commercialization of leisure and the modernization of opinion in the public sphere. Georgian public life revolved around the town itself: its streets, public spaces, and places of entertainment. The urban environment set the scene for passing the time in sauntering, shopping, sitting, strutting, and staring. Citizens and visitors alike devoted leisure to enjoying the spaces and scenes furnished by town, enhanced by commercial facilities like taverns, galleries, shops, and pleasure gardens.

Certain zones—the Strand, Covent Garden, and Leicester Square—were magnets for sightseers. London leisure seemed particularly *flâneur*-friendly. The elite lifestyle impressed the French visitor La Rochefoucauld, who wrote: "The conduct of an Englishman's day in London leaves little time for work. He gets up at ten or eleven and has breakfast (always with tea). He then makes a tour of the town for about four hours until 5 o'clock, which is the dinner hour; at 9 o'clock in the evening he meets his friends in a tavern or a club and there the night is passed in play and drink." The leisured London he was describing had its own clock, and fashion kept ever later hours. "The Hours of the Day and Night are taken up in the Cities of London and Westminster by People as different from each other as those who are born in different Centuries," commented Steele; "Men of Six o' Clock give way to those of Nine, they of Nine to the Generation of Twelve, and they of Twelve disappear, and make Room for the fashionable World, who have made Two o' Clock the Noon of the Day."

Georgian London possessed a well-mapped topography of urban intercourse. The formerly superior precincts around Fleet Street, the Strand, Covent Garden, and Charing Cross were being taken over by inns and taverns, shows, street performers, and shops; it was in Covent Garden, at Davies's Russell Street bookshop, that Boswell first encountered Johnson. As the main corridor connecting Westminster and the City, the Strand and Fleet Street were perfect for watching the world go by. Johnson believed that "Fleet Street has a very animated appearance," but he had his own favorite: "The full tide of human existence is at Charing Cross."

Street life was lubricated by places of refreshment, and the precincts from Charing Cross to Drury Lane were the favorite haunts of streetwalkers, as Boswell's journal amply documents. Another scene of somewhat disreputable pleasure was the fair. Southwark Fair and Bartholomew Fair (Smithfield) remained extremely popular, featuring sideshows, rope-dancers, wire-walkers, acrobats, puppets, freaks, and sometimes wild animals. A special treat was the frost fair, staged when the Thames occasionally froze over during the so-called Little Ice Age.

There were also four main parks, Green Park, Hyde Park, St. James's Park, and Kensington Gardens; Regent's Park came later. Hyde Park became a fashionable ride; on summer evenings, the

sand track of its “Ring” was filled with coaches. Londoners also loved outings to suburban pleasure gardens. Among the spas and watering-places perfect for a Sunday jaunt were Sadlers Wells in Islington, Kilburn Wells (where at the Bell Tavern the “politest companies could come to drink the water from a nearby spring”), Bermondsey Spa, and Hockley-in-the-Hole (Clerkenwell), where there were ornamental gardens, fishing, cream teas, grottoes, skittle alleys, fountains, formal walks, purgative waters, and sometimes bear-baiting.

Leisure entrepreneurs also created more elaborate pleasure gardens. Long famous were Cuper's (or Cupid's) gardens in Lambeth. Spring Gardens, later known as Vauxhall, opened in 1660 upriver on the south bank; access by water created a romantic illusion. Laid out with walks, statues, and tableaux, Vauxhall became the most commodious resort. Visitors could enjoy orchestras playing George Frideric Handel and Johann Christian Bach, dazzling fireworks, dancing, and supper in gaily decorated alcoves in the gardens—all for a shilling. William Hogarth was commissioned to paint the rooms, and Vauxhall displayed Roubiliac's statue of Handel. One high point came in 1749, when a hundred musicians played to an audience of twelve thousand. Next to Chelsea Hospital, Ranelagh opened in 1742, vying with Vauxhall. Its chief attraction was a rotunda 150 feet in diameter, with an orchestra in the center and tiers of boxes all around.

There were also places for sport. Bull- and bear-baiting were traditional Bankside sports, and cock-fights were held at both cockpits and inns. In 1747, John Broughton, self-styled boxing champion of England, opened an academy off Cockspur Street at which gloves were used for the first time. Boxing became commercialized, as did another traditional sport, cricket.

London also catered to more intellectual tastes. Circulating libraries opened; by 1800, the capital boasted of some 122 of these “evergreen trees of diabolical knowledge.” Picture galleries were also set up, depicting scenes from Shakespeare, the Bible, and English history. The Royal Academy, founded in 1769, staged art exhibitions, while scientists met at the Royal Society and connoisseurs at the Society of Antiquaries. Mrs. Salmon opened a waxworks in Fleet Street, before Mme. Tussaud arrived from Paris. The capital possessed an effervescent musical life, orchestrated by composers and impresarios like George Frideric Handel, John James Heidegger, and Johann Peter Salomon. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart performed. In 1791, Salomon paid Joseph Haydn £50 for each of twenty performances, and a £200 benefit on top. Subscription concerts were pioneered.

The theater also thrived. Royal patents granted by Charles II to the “King's Men” and the “Duke's Men” made their two playhouses the only public places in which drama could legally be presented. Such rights were jealously guarded, though there were constant evasions by the so-called minor theaters. Restoration playhouses introduced painted scenery and actresses. Restoration comedy cultivated risqué wit, while John Gay's immensely popular *Beggar's Opera* (1728), with its lowlife story punctuated with street songs and traditional airs, brought a more common touch.

“I believe the parallelogram between Oxford-street, Piccadilly, Regent-street, and Hyde Park encloses more intelligence and human ability, to say nothing of wealth and beauty,” boasted the Reverend Sydney Smith early in the nineteenth century, “than the world has ever collected in such a space before.” Amid these eligible acres, exclusive spaces had been carved out for those seeking

superior company. The club, probably a child of the coffeehouse, defined an almost exclusively male enclave. White's in St. James's Street established itself as the acme of fashion, though later rivaled by Boodle's and Crockford's, both in St. James's Street, and by Almack's in Pall Mall, founded in 1762 by William Almack. In 1764, that club split into two, Boodle's and Brooks's, while two more clubs met on Almack's premises: the Macaroni (for “travelled young men with long curls and spying glasses”), and the Ladies' Coterie, a fashionable club for both sexes. Brooks's in James's Street became a great gambling den.

In what ways, and to what degree, can this busy, exhilarating city be said to have stimulated outlooks and activities that deserve the name “enlightened” and that promoted Enlightenment projects? During the eighteenth century, high culture was in the process of being transformed from an exclusive privilege into a commodity in the public sphere, and London played a major part in that transformation.

London's elite culture had traditionally centered on the royal court and its aristocratic fringe. Expressed through magnificent edifices, extravagant display, and exquisite art collections, it had formed a glittering stage on which the Tudor and Stuart tragicomedy was enacted. Where the arts had traditionally depended largely on royal and noble patronage, however, from the late-seventeenth-century high culture was moving out of the court into the metropolis's diversified spaces—into coffeehouses, reading societies, assembly rooms, debating clubs, galleries, and concert halls. Formerly the servant of monarchy, culture became the partner of commerce.

The Market as Impetus for Culture

Crown and Parliament did little, by contrast, to promote London's public mind and culture. The case of painting is one instance. Commercial galleries opened in Georgian London, but there was no national collection to compare with those in Italy and France, and the capital had to wait until the nineteenth century for the National Gallery. Museums provide a similar story. London had various private museums and collections, but the British Museum—deriving from the will of Sir Hans Sloane—remained ill-managed and rather inaccessible; it was put on a sound footing only in the nineteenth century.

What king and Parliament failed to provide, and what the Corporation of the City never even dreamed fell within its responsibilities, market forces brought into being. “In London,” remarked Casanova, “everything is easy to him who has money and is not afraid of spending it.” Between the Restoration and George III's accession one hundred years later, many hotbeds of cultural activity came into being. Swelling ranks of journalists, hack writers, publishers, and other cultural suppliers now looked for inspiration, applause, and employment not to the court but to coffeehouse and street culture, the crucial clientele in forging new communities of the mind and the pen. London thereby became the marvel of the world, a character in its own right in eighteenth-century literature, and an addictive, self-absorbed imaginary space fictionalized and moralized by essayists like Addison, Steele, and Defoe, poets like Pope, Swift, and Gay, and artists like Hogarth.

Coffeehouses were seminal in providing sites for the new enlightened public culture. A seventeenth-century innovation, the first coffeehouse had opened in 1652 in St. Michael's Alley, Cornhill; by Queen Anne's death in 1714, there were approximately five hundred, catering for distinct clienteles. Merchants frequented coffeehouses near the Royal Exchange, while the booksellers' coffeehouses were by Paternoster Row. Will's Coffee House on the corner of Bow Street and Russell Street, Covent Garden, was where wits were found; lawyers met at the Grecian close by the Temple, clergymen at Child's in St. Paul's Churchyard, artists at Old Slaughter's in St. Martin's Lane, and authors at Button's in Bow Street.

Coffeehouses and taverns served as places of pleasure, business, and discussion, catering to customers from all ranks and walks of life. One could read papers and pamphlets there, critics held forth, and argument raged over the latest opera, sexual scandal, or political rumor. As well as newspapers, books might even be read there; the Chapter Coffee House, for instance, had its own library. The Irish clergyman Thomas Campbell noted at the Chapter what he called "a specimen of English freedom," when "a whitesmith in his apron & some of his saws under his arm, came in, sat down and called for his glass of punch and the paper, both of which he used with as much ease as a Lord."

Coffeehouses spurred the establishment of intellectual and literary clubs, most famously the fictional specimen celebrated in the *Spectator*. Early in the century, the Kit-Kat Club was especially influential as a rendezvous for grandes and men of letters. Its role was later taken over by Dr. Johnson's Club, which met at the Turk's Head in Gerard Street (Soho) and included the painter Joshua Reynolds, the politicians Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox, the playwright Oliver Goldsmith, the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, the musicologist Charles Burney, the actors and theater managers David Garrick, Richard Brinsley, Thomas Sheridan, and George Colman, the historian, Edward Gibbon, the orientalist Sir William Jones, and the economist Adam Smith—as shining a collection of talent as might be found anywhere.

The expansion of the press, the growth of taste and criticism, the proliferation of clubs and societies, and the rise of the literary, journalistic, and artistic professions were turning culture into an elaborate print-based urban communications enterprise serving a large, varied, and anonymous public. Ranging over such fields as aesthetics and art, novels, lexicography, biography, history, literary criticism, medicine and science, Oriental languages and literature, political economy, botany and travel, theology, and the history of music, the writings of members of Johnson's Club might be seen as codifying, ordering, and passing judgment on the miscellaneous activities of the intellectual and cultural spheres. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779–1781), Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781), Burney's and Hawkins's histories of music, Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, and the critical editions of the classics edited by Johnson and others promoted and rationalized modern literature and art, shaping traditions and establishing a canon, an authoritative critical heritage. Such metropolitan circles set themselves up as custodians and interpreters, judges and preservers of a native cultural tradition: it was no accident that it was at this time that Shakespeare was turned into a national institution.

Johnson's Club was limited to men, but women were not systematically excluded from the capital's wider culture. In particular, they exercised power as cultural consumers and arbiters of taste. London gave rise to women's periodicals such as the *Athenian Mercury*, the *Ladies Mercury*, *The Female Tatler*, and the *Town and Country Magazine*. Sentimental comedy in London's theaters, conversation pieces in painting, and above all the emergent novel were regarded as catering primarily to feminine tastes. Blue-stockings held their salons in the fashionable houses of Mayfair and Marylebone.

London gave rise to a new sense of the public, in reality and rhetoric alike. In his *Dictionary*, Johnson defined the adjective "public" as "regarding the good of the community," which he contrasted with private interests. As he clearly recognized, a national culture supporting and supported by cultural producers—an intelligentsia who dominated the media—required that the populace at large should be turned into an audience. In a material sense, London's commercial entrepreneurs conjured up and catered to this audience, be they the anonymous host of newspaper readers or the thousands jamming into theaters or flocking to art shows. Attendance at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1780 topped 60,000; on Friday, 2 June, alone, an astonishing 1,680 visitors crammed into Somerset House.

The eighteenth century produced print technologies, surplus wealth, and sites encouraging clutches of cultural performers who appointed themselves the guardians of public opinion and taste. Catering to growing audiences, writers, painters, and performers had to work within the larger metropolitan milieu of impresarios, critics, and the public; inevitably, the result was a heightened self-consciousness on the part of the capital's men of letters. The writer's status became irrevocably bound up with his relations to the public, and he projected himself as the nation's voice or spokesman, a figure of public fascination or even notoriety. As the much ridiculed Grub Street image suggests, those making their living by the pen had not traditionally been accorded high status. An amateur poet could claim gentility, but anyone else was either the servant of his lord or the plaything of the market. This changed, however, with the creation of an alternative metropolitan economy linking the artist neither to the private patron nor even merely to the marketplace, but, in some sense, directly to the public. Through this connection, top culture-makers could assert a newfound independence. Key figures in establishing these new, institution-anchored urban identities were Samuel Johnson, critic, novelist, poet, and lexicographer; Joshua Reynolds, artist, critic, and first president of the Royal Academy; and David Garrick, actor-manager of Drury Lane.

All this involved a double process: on the one hand, popularization and commercialization, and on the other, its necessary complement, regulation. Its workings are exemplified by the history of British painting, which experienced two distinct phases. The earlier, up to 1760, brought the growth of a London art market, and the second, the development of a metropolitan art public. The former stage was characterized by astonishing activity in the picture trade, and the latter by the proliferation of public art exhibitions and a corresponding increase in critical writing. The growth of an art public was dependent on the rise of a picture trade, but the nature of the art world's blossoming in the London of George III was decided not merely by crude market forces but also by

the battles of the critics—dealers, dilettantes, painters, and collectors. Public conflicts flared about what was great art and about who should adjudicate public taste.

“Paris,” reflected Samuel Rogers during the Regency, “is the City of the Great King, London of the Great People.” This London was two things at once. It was ultra-smart, brimming with wealth, style, fashion, and elegance—perhaps the best place on earth for leisured males to enjoy an inexhaustible round of the pleasures of mind and body alike. Yet it also possessed a special demotic energy that many affected to hate but in reality found a drug.

What made Georgian London so special was this alchemy of money and the masses, its commercialism, run by capitalists great and small, and its intellectual and cultural aspirations. Georgian Londoners became self-referential city-watchers. They relished art, novels, journalism, and theater about themselves and their world. Although they were still fascinated by Rome, Jerusalem, and Byzantium, they were preoccupied with the challenge of superimposing those mythic cities on the London they knew, of which they were proud, and by which they were puzzled. Londoners lapped up Ned Ward's *The London Spy* and Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*; they relished the local writings of Defoe and Fielding; and they loved George Lillo's tragedy, *The London Merchant*, produced at Drury Lane in 1731, which made urban apprentices and harlots into exemplary but also tragic figures. The metropolis, Raymond Williams once emphasized, was a new moral arena: “As London grew, dramatically, in the eighteenth century, it was being intensely observed, as a new kind of landscape, a new kind of society.” Londoners fell in love with themselves.

[See also Academies; Aristocracy; Coffee Houses and Cafes; Clubs; Johnson, Samuel; Salons; and Theater.]

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