



Capital Offenses: The Geography of Class and Crime in Victorian London (Victorian Literature and Culture Series)

Simon Joyce

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As London became the first major city of the nineteenth century, new models of representation emerged in the journalism, poetry, fiction, and social commentary of the period. Simon Joyce argues that such writing reflected a persistent worry about the problem of crime but was never able to contain it. Such commentators as Wordsworth, Dickens, Mayhew, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Booth, and Wilde all struggled with the same questions about how to represent London and the relations among its varied populations, yet their accounts often undermined one another.

Whereas Victorian social science presumed a correlation between criminal activity, geographical residence, and social class, the popular literature of the period often sought just as strenuously to deny the link, giving rise to privileged and pathological offenders like Dorian Gray and Dr. Jekyll. This in turn shifted attention away from the urban slums that had been the setting for the so-called Newgate novels of the 1830s and 1840s. By 1900, crime appears as a distinctively modern problem, requiring large-scale solutions and government intervention in place of an older approach that was rooted in personal morality or philanthropic paternalism.

Illustrating "literary geography" in which physical space is not merely a backdrop for the plot but an integral element in shaping textual meaning? Simon Joyce's *Capital Offenses* reveals how certain geographical patterns can not only give weight to interpretive meanings already suggested in the texts but also enable us to read them in a new and surprising light.

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