

Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: 1843-1907 by Giles Whiteley. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020. xiv, 290 pp. + 24 b/w illus. ISBN 978 1 4711 4372 2. \$105.00.

How do we experience our surroundings? As a constructed environment, realistically rendered and critically analyzed? Or as material worlds invested with memory and experience, shaped by perception? These core questions are foundational to theoretical discourses of space. Textual readings of nineteenth-century urban space – whether social, economic, architectural, or psychological – are shaped by literal as well as cultural shifts in the urban landscape. Demolished buildings, urban restructuring, and the mobile boundaries of class mobility can cause nineteenth-century textual space to be an unfixed referent of many shifting intertexts. Giles Whiteley's *Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* proposes an aesthetics of space which maps spatial and historical perspectives onto core texts by canonical Victorian authors. Drawing on his research interests in comparative literary traditions, and his record of publications on aesthetic authors including Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, Whiteley places John Ruskin within the theoretical framework of spatial theory, a significant contribution to a field of study more frequently associated with twentieth-century authors.

In *Aesthetics of Space*, Whiteley synthesizes core spatial theories, from Marxist economic and social analyses of the major Western cities in the nineteenth century, through Lacanian and Freudian readings of the psychological, and subjective hauntings and unhomeliness of the aesthete. The framework pays homage to the most important lines of spatial theory, without detracting from the core importance of the primary texts themselves. Whiteley's argument never falters from elucidating, challenging, and evolving the central thesis of his first chapter: a Ruskinian "Theoretics of Space," which he argues was established by Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), and inflected aesthetic writings on space, both by adoption and opposition, up to and beyond the turn of the twentieth century. Ruskin famously proposes in *The Stones of Venice* that the city should be read as a total work of art. In this reading, Ruskin establishes *theoria*, the intellectually high-minded and morally elevated state of art, set out by Ruskin as the ideal critical lens. Contrary to *theoria* is *aesthesis*, the lowly and sensual state of art, appealing to the body and its "morbid" base senses. The Christian, intellectual moralism of Ruskin's aesthetics will be familiar to Victorianists. Yet, as Whiteley demonstrates, there is an inherent paradox in this Ruskinian order of logic, to which even Ruskin himself cannot help but fall prey. As Whiteley writes, "Style ... intervenes, with its ornamental flourishes, and an aesthetic quality that brings the body into play." The critical body must always be the intermediary in