

The Celebration of Scandal: Toward the Sublime in Victorian Urban Fiction by Carol L. Bernstein. Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, PA, 1991. ISBN 0-271-00718-4, \$28.50

The "scandal" to which the title of Carol L. Bernstein's book, *The Celebration of Scandal*, refers is the theoretical "challenge to the natural" posed by the Victorian city. Though it does so by an obscure methodology, the argument of the book takes us from the urban sketches of Andrew Means, James Greenwood, G.H.A. Sala, and others "toward the sublime in urban Victorian fiction," the subtitle of the book and the subject of its last chapter. Following Walter Benjamin, Bernstein describes the sketch as the "site for a collector of objects that represent both the cultural and individual memory" (44). Once scandal has crossed over from the still-life of sketches into fiction, temporality and the narrative possibility for uprising or revolution comes into play.

Bernstein splits her ensuing discussion of Gissing's early and late fiction into two chapters separated by an anachronistic chapter on the fashionable novel, including Pierce Egan's *Life in London*, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Young Duke*, and Disraeli's *Coningsby*. Presumably, this interruption is to be justified by "chiasmus," a rhetorical device which the author invokes approvingly as an alternative to history as a determining structure for her book. In any case, the dandy of these

fashionable novels appears to have been an unwitting harbinger of Baudelaire, valorizing in a Baudelairean "double gesture" the "delights of the surface" at the same time as "a concern for the well-being of self and city" (85). The return to Gissing in Chapter 4 follows from an assertion, quoted from Jeffrey Mehlman's *Revolution and Repetition*, that "vision is the privileged sense of realism" (126). In his later fiction, Gissing goes beyond realism to what "organic" sense reveals; he no longer trusts the visible surface of the city, which has been appropriated by advertising, concealing more than it reveals. In later Gissing, the once-threatening mob is rendered passive, in the domain of the "specular" (vs. the "spectacle") by the direct and indirect effects of mass advertising.

The final two chapters, "Urban Figures: Negative Imaginings" and "The Empty Spaces of the Urban Sublime," develop a reading of the city as text in "agonistic" relationship to the person. Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*, James's *The Princess Casamassima*, and Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*, and other novels are constructed on the tacit assumption that "character owes its continuity to word or surroundings, to the veil woven by the city," but these novels nonetheless present enigmatic, "passive figure(s), whose passage through the city may transform site into insight but who [achieve] his or her artistry at the cost of identity" (168-9). In her discussion of "empty spaces," which concludes the book, Bernstein focuses on the "loss that precedes the ulti-