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Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London, by Seth Koven (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2004; pp. xvii + 399. £18.95).

As in the 1880s, when the overcrowded streets of London's East End were further swelled by a motley crew of visiting 'slummers', so a host of scholars (including Deborah Epstein Nord, Ruth Livesey, Judith R. Walkowitz) have recently returned to the thoroughfares of London's history intent on reinvestigating the nature of nineteenth-century slum life. They have come not only intent on studying the indigenous culture, social conditions and political complexions of 'outcast' London, but also to elucidate the motives and activities of their ancestor investigators: the social surveyors, philanthropists and fashionable tourists of the Victorian metropolis. Amongst these various publications, none has come as garlanded with praise as Seth Koven's *Slumming*, a book which claims not to offer 'a continuous nor comprehensive narrative', but rather five, loosely chronological chapters divided into two sections. Each features a case study illuminating 'the tension between eros and altruism at a particular moment in the history of slumming in London' (p. 18). The first three focus on individual investigations: James Greenwood's exposés of conditions in Lambeth homeless wards in 1866, the controversy which enveloped Dr Barnardo's mission to street children in 1877, and American journalist Elizabeth Banks's incognito adventures in a variety of working-class guises. Part two seeks to 'offer a more panoramic view' (p. 20) by offering two linked chapters, the first an investigation into elite women's engagement with their slum 'sisters', the second focusing on two 'benevolent institutions devoted to cross-class brotherhood' (p. 21): Toynbee Hall and Oxford House. Some of Koven's advance praise is amply justified. *Slumming* is both a fascinating and, moreover, imaginatively conceived study, in which he deftly employs interdisciplinary analytical techniques whilst investigating his broad ranging case-study material, and succeeds in rendering to the field of Victorian studies a series of important insights. Koven's work scrupulously acknowledges the influence of a host of methodologies, from art history to queer theory. In particular, the care and sophistication which marks Koven's reading of his chosen visual sources is exemplary, as is the way in which he pays attention to issues of dissemination, reception and reconfiguration in his treatment of accounts such as that of Greenwood's 'Amateur Casual'. The author's principal interest is to illuminate the interplays of gender, sexuality and class in both providing motivation for, and structuring, the practice of slumming. He presents much fascinating and compelling evidence of the fraught and complex self-identities in the lives and experiences of the men and women he discusses. His analysis of his elite women subjects shows, for instance, how keenly aware they were of the contradictions inherent in their ideas concerning gender and class kinship, something to which they are often assumed to have been hypocritically oblivious. At the same time, *Slumming* remains a flawed work. By focusing predominantly on individuals and small

groups, Koven finds it understandably hard to move his interpretation of motive beyond the realm of the personal. The efficacy of Koven's subtitle, *Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, is questionable on a number of levels. In his introduction he claims to 'examine the interplay of sexual and social politics both at the micro-level…and at the macro-level of public debates'(p. 3). However, despite a 'Conclusion' which seeks to link his five chapters of material more securely to the realm of state politics, such interrelation is noticeably lacking in the body of the text. Furthermore, as a study set wholly in London, *Slumming* does not provide the reader with a tangible or satisfying sense of place by which to adjudge the activity's geographic nature or boundaries. The activities of Koven's chosen individuals and groups of 'slummers' are briefly located within the city's East End, on the single frontispiece map and in the text, but no time is spent discussing whether and how slumming was affected by specifically metropolitan factors. One cannot help feeling that extending the frame of reference to other British cities would have contributed to Koven's overarching aim of articulating something more essential about the character of slumming as a cultural phenomenon. Another of the book's weaknesses is that Koven's sophisticated employment of categories relating to gender and sexual identity is not matched by his interrogation of religious identities. The historiographical support on which his analysis of late nineteenth-century English Christianity rests is not as secure as that upholding his work on gender and sexuality, and the tenor of some of his discussions of religious identity appears slanted in order to dovetail with his reading of the role sexual identity played in East End philanthropic work. Despite Koven's concluding assertion that a range of motives animated slummers, it is hard not to feel that the investigation as a whole privileges sexual motivations more strenuously than much of the surviving evidence warrants. Thus Koven's queering of the language of his slummers, whilst in individual cases eminently justified, is occasionally overstretched and uncorroborated by other evidence. Had Koven, in his introduction to his methodology, explicitly admitted and more carefully delineated his debt to psychological (if not psychoanalytical) ideas, such analyses might have proved more convincing.

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