parlayed this social capital to further replenish her fortune and to assert, in Dobbins' words, "the value of Black women's labor in an economy otherwise inclined to cheat, forget, and abandon Black subjects of capitalism as so much bad debt" (116).

The book concludes with a coda on Oscar Wilde which nicely encapsulates the multiple meanings of "queer." At Wilde's 1895 trials for "gross indecency," the prosecution constructed a "moralized financial narrative" (156) in which the writer was cast as "an extravagant queer debtor" (159) for his excessive spending on art, jewelry, flowers, and champagne. In particular, Wilde's many gifts of money to working-class youths seemed clear proof of sexual entanglements. When the prosecution demanded a valid reason for Wilde's payments to one young man, the writer replied: "Because he was poor, because he had no money and because I liked him. What better reason is there for giving a person money than that?" (160) Here, as elsewhere in his writings, Wilde rejects a rational system of exchange based on set values or what a person deserved.

As these few examples make clear, *Queer Economic Dissonance* offers fresh readings of familiar works while also developing bold counter-narratives to the old Victorian accounts of self-help, individual initiative, upward mobility, and wealth accumulation. Dobbins' cast of economic misfits—frauds, bankrupts, spendthrifts, and wastrels, many of them women—reminds us that many Victorian writers were sympathetic to those persons left behind or marginalized by modern capitalism. These writers imagined more humane alternatives to an economic system driven by competition and a seemingly endless quest for profit and personal advancement. Although densely argued, *Queer Economic Dissonance* is written in clear, accessible prose. It also provides a nice balance of critical theory, historical research, and close readings of literary texts. Ultimately, Dobbins knocks *homo economicus* off his dusty pedestal, replacing him with "better, messier, more complex stories of the pleasures, risks, perks, and liabilities of capitalist life" (28).

## Notes on contributor

*George Robb* is professor emeritus of British history at William Paterson University of New Jersey. He has published extensively on Victorian financial history. His most recent book is Ladies of the Ticker: Women and Wall Street from the Gilded Age to the Great Depression (U Illinois P, 2017).

George Robb
*History Department, William Paterson University*
RobbG@wpunj.edu


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## **Down from London: seaside reading in the railway age**, by Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, Liverpool, Liverpool UP, 2022, Xi + 272 pp., $143 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-80085-461-1

In *Down from London*, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton analyzes the cultures of seaside reading that formed in Britain's Southeast from the 1840s through the 1930s. Drawing on a wealth

of literary sources – at least 130 titles – Oulton shows how particular practices of reading, genres of writing, and techniques of publishing and distribution took shape alongside the expansion of railway lines in the region. The railway network that came to crisscross the Southeast enabled Londoners of some means to travel with relative ease to a string of resort towns, running eastward along the coast from Weymouth to Margate. The remolding of these towns into popular resort destinations over the second half of the nineteenth century was accompanied by the emergence of distinctive literary cultures of seaside reading. Oulton works with the multivalence of *seaside reading* to frame the different sides of her project, allowing this phrase at once to describe a class of novels marketed to a mass public, a site-specific social practice, and a topic of cultural controversy.

As a shorthand literary designation, "seaside reading" – used interchangeably with "railway reading" from the 1860s – described a variety of sensation fiction. Often combining elements of romance and detective fiction – or standing more squarely in one or the other camp – novels of this sort tended to feature elements of disguise, hectic travel, attraction, and bodily injury or peril. The protagonists of such novels may have spent more narrative time along the beach than in industrial settings, but formally speaking, "seaside reading" recapitulated from beginning to end the shocking tempos and sensory experiences of early railway travel. In Victorian culture, the railway network commonly was likened to the body's circulatory system, while the adjacent telegraph network was associated metaphorically with the body's nervous system. Seaside reading, as Oulton shows, took these prevailing cultural metaphors and ran with them, rendering coastal destinations as exposed nerve endings: shores onto which bodies in all their vulnerability were cast by modern infrastructures, encountering there the magnitude of the sea, the heat of sun and sand, gusts of wind, variegated crowds, supernatural sea creatures, and, at times, an unexpected pool of blood.

Novels in the seaside reading subgenre, along with other sorts of middlebrow literature, were marketed to holiday travelers in a variety of ways, including through railway bookstalls and subscription libraries. Oulton reconstructs archivally the shifting circuits of exchange, techniques of marketing, and practices of library management that enabled holiday travelers to access such sensation fiction. In doing so, she builds upon recent scholarship on Victorian economies of book publishing and distribution, including Aileen Fyfe's *Steam Powered Knowledge* (2012), which describes how the firm of W.H. Smith and Son was able to monopolize bookselling rights along many early British rail lines. Moreover, through close literary analysis of sensation fiction set at seaside resorts, Oulton imaginatively reconstructs beach-going readers' doubled vision of the coastal towns to which they had traveled. Such readers would have been able to visualize fictional protagonists racing down nearby piers or digging for clues in the sand on which they rested. This kind of fictional overlay allowed seaside resort towns to appear as sites of intrigue or narrative drama, even as readers' visits to these places may have been more relaxed affairs. Another sort of doubled vision Oulton analyzes concerned divisions of social class and place of residence. Seaside reading at times dramatized the divergent perspectives held by visitors versus those permanent residents who made a living catering to tourists, or by those fishermen whose patterns of life and labor were put under pressure by the annual invasion of Londoners. With 1930s-era crime fiction, there is an interesting turn of the screw here: members of organized crime syndicates – which may in fact have operated in Brighton – brushed shoulders with unsuspecting tourists, showing to readers a potentially real social underworld in the place they were visiting. But did the true danger emanate from this underworld, readers were invited to ask, or from the seemingly respectable travelers down the hall?

By imaginatively reconstructing early readers' doubled visions of resort towns, Oulton implicitly writes against contemporaneous cultural commentaries on the dangers of seaside

reading – commentaries that tended to direct anxious attention toward young women readers. Such paternalistic cultural commentary presupposed women's relative incapacity to engage in conceptually generative contemplation of alternative worlds and lives. Rather, in line with sexist medical and popular conceptions, young women readers were seen as uniquely prone to being swept onto the wayward paths traveled by fictional characters, or to finding their nerves frayed by shocking plot twists. Such sexist treatments of seaside reading ironically reproduced some of the same literary devices they excoriated, writing female characters into sensation-driven plots, while evacuating such female characters of rational agency in ways that, as Oulton's plot summaries make clear, far exceeded the objectifying tendencies of much popular sensation fiction.

We began with the observation that Oulton works with the multivalence of the phrase "seaside reading" to frame the different dimensions of her project, allowing this phrase at once to describe a class of novels marketed to a mass public, a site-specific social practice, and a topic of cultural controversy. For the most part, I found compelling the ways Oulton's project worked with this multivalence of the phrase, as doing so allowed *Down from London* to combine various disciplinary methods, to immerse the reader in different layers of Southeastern resort towns and their histories, and to consider the "infrastructures" of seaside reading while also entering imaginatively into the experiences of early seaside readers.

At times, however, I found myself bumping against this methodological oscillation between different senses of "seaside reading." Seaside readers, after all, read far beyond the subgenre of South coast sensation fiction. The novels sold at railway bookstalls to those traveling down from London on holiday often were not set in the Southeast, even as these novels and the imaginative worlds they projected may nevertheless have implicated this region and its imperial infrastructures. Emily Madson, taking a cue from Kyle Powys Whyte, recently has argued in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* that the genre of the boys' adventure novel might productively be recast as post-apocalyptic fiction. Perhaps seaside readers of such novels would have imagined taking the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway to Portsmouth, then embarking on trans-Atlantic journeys to the post-apocalyptic, settler colonial landscapes of North America. Along different but related lines, Oulton makes a passing parenthetical reference to the entry for 'Confessions of a Thug,' in the Free Library's 1896 catalogue. As Mary Poovey has shown, the latter was a widely read, pseudo-ethnographic and starkly racist work of fiction, published in London to much acclaim in 1839. The book, written by Philip Meadows Taylor, helped provide ideological cover for the East India Company's violent policing of road networks in 1830s India. Examples along these lines could be multiplied. But perhaps a more productive gesture would be to ask how the subgenre of South coast sensation fiction discussed by Oulton might productively be reframed with an eye to the legacies of enslavement and colonial dispossession that profoundly shaped the history of this coastal region. We might begin by asking certain questions about the ubiquitous sea creatures, from serpents to mermaids, who populate these works of sensation fiction. Might such marine figures register, albeit in a displaced fashion, the historical haunting of the sea? We can learn here from Alexis Pauline Gumbs' Black feminist marine poetics, composed in her genre-defying *Undrowned* (2020), and in her speculative story "Bluebellow," published in *Strange Horizons* (2017). The latter story, as Gumbs writes: "imagines mermaid zombie survivors of the middle passage connecting with Black people who take a reverse transatlantic journey to Europe." In *Undrowned*, Gumbs references Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, "where the protagonist jumps off of an enslaving vessel and becomes a dolphin." She also engages with M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008), observing that this work of "anti-narrative lament" for the African people murdered on an eighteenth-century enslaving vessel taught her that "water

holds sound, that it can reverberate on and on and keep on calling us." Perhaps from such Black feminist poetics of the reverberating, haunted sea, and from experimental and engaged filmic works, such as John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015), a revised account of South coast sensation fiction, with its bracing supernatural seascapes, its uncanny marine life, and its relentless tempos, might begin to be imagined.

**MATTIE ARMSTRONG-PRICE** is an assistant professor of History at Fordham University, specializing in modern Britain and gender. They are currently working on a monograph entitled *Domestic Life on the Lines: Managing Social Reproduction Along the Railways of Britain and Colonial India, 1848–1914*, and have published in *Postmodern Culture, History of the Present, South Atlantic Quarterly*, and Mediations.

Mattie Armstrong-Price
*Department of History, Fordham University*
aarmstrongprice@fordham.edu


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## **Theologia Cambrensis: Protestant religion and theology in Wales, volume 2: the long nineteenth century 1760–1900**, by D. Densil Morgan, Cardiff, U of Wales P, 2021, 356 pp., £24.99 (paperback) ISBN: 9781786838063

In order to appreciate Wales's nineteenth-century national identity – an extension of any effort to unharness "British identities" from "English identity" – one needs to examine its religiosity. In 1866 the radical MP Henry Richard declared "that the Welsh are now a nation of Nonconformists," a sentiment that reflected the results of an 1851 religious census that revealed that four of five Welsh worshippers attended a Nonconformist – i.e., non-Anglican Protestant – chapel. Reflecting this situation, much of Welsh literary and social life revolved around the scripture, and D. Densil Morgan's *Theologia Cambrensis: Protestant Religion and Theology in Wales, Volume 2: The Long Nineteenth Century 1760–1900* illuminates the tapestry of Welsh cultural life masterfully, both for scholars of Wales and for those approaching this area of British history for the first time.

Morgan facilitates these qualities by way of an intuitive organizational structure, wherein his chapters move chronologically, with each devoting space to the developments and literary output of different denominations. Such a framework allows him to elucidate the breadth of the waves of evangelical revivals and growth of Nonconformity over this period. The opening chapter, "1760–1790," lays the foundation, introducing readers to the mid-eighteenth-century bed from which Nonconformity would grow. This chapter's focus falls largely on William Williams Pantycelyn (1717–1791), a founding father of Welsh Methodism and a fitting representation of Welsh religiosity at this time, as a figurehead of a religious movement that had not yet broken from the Established Church (Welsh Methodism would not separate from Anglicanism until 1811). Morgan complements his discussion of Pantycelyn's early work with layered discussions of the theology of Welsh Anglicans, and the theologies of Welsh Dissent (such as Independents and Baptists). Morgan deftly navigates the porousness of such categorizations – e.g., members of one movement occasionally went on to participate