

Aware of Bakhtin's notion about writing a history of laughter, Bailey in his last chapter sketches a potential history of noise. He is certainly right that twentieth-century historians have privileged the visual while neglecting the auditory. And noise from music hall to the roar of traffic in the streets is a key aspect of urban experience. I get the impression, however, that Bailey wants mainly to suggest, as in various ways he does in all his chapters, how many aspects of experience social history has so far failed to encompass. And after noise . . . ? But there seems plenty still to do in relation to analysing the history of leisure and popular culture in Victorian Britain. One rather surprising omission from Bailey's account is advertising. He mentions it in passing and in his footnotes—he cites for instance Thomas Richards's *Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain*—but advertising was even then, between 1837 and 1901, becoming the leading, most pervasive, most characteristic form of capitalist modern and now postmodern culture. And it is advertising as a cultural category that was and remains the key site for any theory of ideology (or more generally for any version of cultural studies) “knowing” enough to want to understand how desire, distraction, “parasexuality,” and capitalist mystification all help to support enough versions of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness to keep the entire ramshackle but effervescent system spinning on into the post-postmodern future.

From Coffee and from Supper Rooms,
From Poplar to Pall Mall,
The girls, on seeing me, exclaim,
“Oh, what a Champagne Swell!”

If the self-respecting social historian can't account for Champagne Charlie, he don't amount to much.

Veronica Kelly

Bailey's book is an excellent read. With its stylistic clarity and tactful deployment of a wide range of empirical and theoretical influences, the engagement value of this writing is—to quote sports commentators—awesome. The 1994 essay “Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture” is an inspiring piece of bold speculative investigation backed up by extensive knowledge, which identifies the really productive questions the evidence might yield: what did the popular reader or audience “know” and why did they seek to assemble this “knowingness” into a cultural code? This is how popular cultural studies should be written, one feels, with self-awareness about the author's historical speaking position, his class and gender experiences and especially his libidinal investments in the study. After all, if these debates and investigations didn't afford definite pleasures to the scholar, they wouldn't be occurring.

British social history, Bailey states, is preoccupied with class since it is the product of class at a culture-specific historical moment (5), or so it turned out for this author. But as the date spread of essays in this collection demonstrates this central hunger persistently fuels Bailey's writing long after the initial impulses of the class-driven post-war “lumpenpolytechnic” (6) male scholars had spent or diversified their energies in theoretically problematising discourses of ludic identity and competing

subject positions. Yet class doesn't just dissolve into another sort of "mere difference" (5). For example the essays on Ally Sloper, the strategic conviviality of music-hall "caterers" and "swell" singers demonstrate that precise social and critical ability to "spot" subtle class identifications and interests which is the hallmark of the best British-influenced social history. Although "material conditions" (4) no longer form the master discourse of the Williams-Hoggart school of popular culture studies, Bailey keeps these concerns alive without dissolving them into freely chosen commodities within postmodern identity play. His account of the working conditions of barmaids and musical comedy showgirls materially anchors his analysis of their symbolic function as bearers of the "parasexual" seductions of capitalist consumerism.

My own investments consist of assessing what Bailey's studies can offer an historian, not of social history of popular culture as such but of nineteenth-century popular theatre; a researcher with postcolonial theoretical inclinations situated in a settler society undergoing intense and diffusely motivated examination of its colonial past. The answer is: heaps, and this despite the music-hall obsession. Well, from here it can sometimes appear an obsession. For reasons of legislation concerning liquor and performance venue licensing, music hall as a site-specific performance formation never took hold in the Australian colonies, although the immense popularity of theatrical farce, minstrelsy and spectacular burlesque amply supplied colonial audiences with skilled comedic performances. Hence while its value as a test site for evolving theories of agency and "cultural cross-dressing" (8) is undoubted, the last thirty years' agonising by British social historians about the radical or complicit potential of just this one form can sometimes be a little eye-glazing. However, Bailey's sophisticated use of popular forms doesn't merely thrash over theoretical or political impasses. In the Ally Sloper study for example he sees the agency debate as having moved towards seeing mass culture interpellating specific competences rather than merely conferring consolation. In the context of exploring the "Champagne Charlie" singers he explicates the role of the reader/audience in the negotiations of the "polysemic properties" of popular cultural forms and states his desire for pro-active interpretations with "surprise value" (118). With a questing eye for performative signifiers, he locates just such a fertile interpretational nexus, between the licence and "hydraulic" male sexuality-cum-homosociality of the singer's swell performance and the "constrictive nature of the dress in which the authentic good time is being pursued," pointing towards tensions between "pleasure and consumption in a work-centred culture" (119). Gracenotes such as these show music-hall performance and popular urban culture generally being pressed into service for exciting and vivid cultural readings.

What else can Bailey offer the researcher placed as I am? His "Introduction" situates the incursion of feminist and postcolonial critiques into the social history and cultural studies fields, and the shuffling and readjustments these forms of materialist and epistemological revolution caused in disciplines already digesting (or rejecting) structuralism and the linguistic turn. Bailey is aware of the need to factor gender into his analyses, and throughout these essays one can see his increasing confidence in choosing to turn aside his gaze from the glaring gaslit spectacle of male public urban culture in order to see the women thus rendered invisible or shadowy by its blinding dazzle. The chapters on the barmaid and the musical comedy "girl" best perform this task with the latter being seen as a construction of "reactionary men defining their own New Woman"

(192). However, this angle of perception defines the limits of Bailey's own investigations into gender: how men define women. What pleasures or investments the actual chorus girls or female musical comedy performers derived is left hanging, and one might have wished a scholar with Bailey's flair in dealing with the "writerly" competencies of the popular audience to speculate more "surprisingly" about what specifically female audiences (or audiences strategically inhabiting the culturally feminine subject position) got out of musical comedy. How "knowing" were they in co-opting and subverting these masculinist and homosocial discourses and investing the spectacle with their own meanings and pleasures? Such questions can provide Bailey (and all of us) with fresh points of entry into the polysemic field of readings of popular performance.

As for the postcolonial aspect, in this particular collection of studies it is muted and implicit, which from a scholar long situated in Canada I find intriguing. From an Australian perspective I concur with Bailey that the modern city is the key to the subjectivity ranges of modernity and the channel to a cosmopolitan and "knowing" self-presentation, which I'd argue has interesting postcolonial implications for subject formation in colonial settler cultures. While poco as such doesn't explicitly name itself in this suite of essays, one feels it is ticking away beneath as one of those lived material experiences Bailey so entertainingly outlines in his confessional introductory passages (and we "know" just how performative and strategic a wielding of the confessional mode can be). When he writes of heterotopia and of the "wily and opportunist" working-class subject (6-7), and of the tricky negotiations between complicit and subversive investments in dominant cultures, one recognises tropes also working productively in postcolonial theorising. This book has plenty to offer investigators in the field of settler-society nineteenth-century subjectivities, who work through questions of how colonial theatrical performance both models and negotiates the cosmopolitan discourses of mass international popular culture.

The one part of the book which caused perplexity occurs in the very essay which is my favourite: "Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture." From Raymond Williams (1980) Bailey derives a simplistic contrast between the direct address of music hall and an increasingly "markedly naturalistic" theatre equipped with a box set (132). This model of the theatrical performer as divested of ability to manipulate role/performer dualities is untenable in the context of late nineteenth-century popular theatrical performance: and very likely since this essay was published in 1994 Bailey has had this brought to his attention. The implicit presence of Brecht looms in this historiographical account as the teleological destination of an eventually renovated theatre practice, with the sophisticated distanciation genres of popular, or indeed most pre-modernist, theatre disallowed as valid before his specific incursions into—ironically—not popular theatre but bourgeois and even residually feudal theatrical production. In a pre-modernist performer-centred theatrical practice employing direct address conventions and dependent on audience complicity with, and sophistication in reading, metatheatrical framings and scenic illusion, what is now called Brechtian splitting of the performer/character functions remained the dominant communicative mode.

Current postcolonial and feminist theorising of the act of representation has instated—or restated—the ancient sense of the "persona" as mask and the

constructed and transactional nature of the performative act as ineluctably self-foregrounding. We'd now grant the popular theatre audience considerable access to those privileged music-hall (and modernist) realms of "knowingness" about foregrounded theatrical codes: first because these were frequently the same people, and second because they weren't waiting for modernism to show them what theatre had been scandalously demonstrating for millennia. The early mass culture inhabitants' appetite appeared indefatigable in demanding of their theatre deconstructive burlesques, pantomimes and farces of the evergreen "actor of all work" or "crushed tragedian" type—performances which delighted in exposing the constructed yet compelling nature of the acts of "passing" (145) and impersonation. This "masks and faces" trope was shared with bourgeois theatre audiences (who in Australia at least were substantially the same people). Moreover, from circumtextual evidence, the overwhelming fascination of the popular press with theatre and actors—interviews, exposés, critiques, and "behind the scenes" stories—likewise indicates a mass culture thoroughly obsessed with technologies of representation and what Bailey calls the "performative exchange of identities" (8).

It seems cavalier to whinge about this single wobble in a collection which so authoritatively and—even more impressively—congenially manages and transmutes a huge array of empirical research and specialist cultural theory. It is a compliment to say of a collection such as this that the text is even better than the endnotes: this is not intended to be facetious since synthesising and ground-breaking studies are seldom accomplished with such writerly poise and lack of visible straining. Bailey is a scholar in control of his project and, appropriate to the field he loves, a great communicator creating in his reader a very knowing sense of the shared insight. Best of all he displays an enviable instinct for identifying just when the implicit—or the complicit—precisely locates something requiring elucidation through rigorous scholarly examination.

Michael Pickering

It is rather sobering to be reminded that this collection of essays has been written over a period of twenty years. I read each of them with relish when they first appeared and have admired and learnt from all of them. Their congregation between two covers offers the opportunity of assessing them as a whole, rather than piece by piece, and of considering what Bailey has brought to Victorian studies. But the span of time involved in their writing raises at least two significant issues. First, although it is conservative in orientation and slower-moving than other fields of enquiry, social history has changed appreciably in recent years and is continuing to change. Second, although his general interests are distinctive and there is a great degree of consistency in his approach and style, Bailey's own practice and thinking as a historian has clearly developed since the late 1970s, when the first two chapters of this book were initially published.

The book's introduction sketches some of the major influences on the historical study of urban popular culture and leisure, though it does little more than this and is the most unsatisfactory aspect of the book. All we are offered is a reiteration of previous judgments stretching back to the eighties and hasty accounts of some of the various contributions to cultural theory which have helped to change and reconfigure social