



# Fear, Loathing, and Victorian Xenophobia



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## Ethnicity as Marker in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*



THOMAS PRASCH

Consider the sheer, almost bewildering range of ethnic types that strut through the pages of Henry Mayhew's classic survey of the urban under-classes of mid-Victorian London, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861–1862): turbaned Doctor Bokavy, the street herbalist vending his East Indian wares; the "anomalous body of men"—Malays, Hindoos, Negroes—selling Christian tracts in the streets of London, although many "are Mahometans, or worshippers of Bramah!"; the Arab Jews from Morocco who dominated the street trade in rhubarb and spices and tortoises; the "black" servant of an Indian whose bed housed vermin the exterminator pronounced "the finest and fattest bugs I ever saw"; the Arab boys (one compared to Othello, the other labeled a "rank nigger") following the example of street Indians by playing tom-toms; Ramo Samee, the Indian who brought juggling to the English streets; the black and Indian crossing-sweeps and beggars; gypsy horse thieves; the opium-smoking Indian who, like "Malays, Lascars, and Orientals generally," brought to a house of ill-repute "the most frightful form" of sexually transmitted disease; the Chinese sailor who kept an English prostitute; and the range of Asians, Indians, and Africans resident in English casual wards.<sup>1</sup> All of these street vendors figure—along with the even more pre-

1. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (New York: Dover, 1968); Dr. Bokavy at I: facing page 197 (Dr. Bokavy appears only in the illustrations, not in Mayhew's text); the tract sellers at I: 242 (they reappear at III: 185, and, reclassified as fraudulent beggars, at IV: 423–424,

dominant Irish and Jews,<sup>2</sup> both groups seen as racially and physiognomically distinct by the English<sup>3</sup>—as markers of racial otherness in Mayhew's portrait of the street culture of mid-Victorian England.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, racial diversity was so central to some aspects of London street culture that English street artists imitated otherness, as with the tattooed man who claimed to be a New Zealand aboriginal, the street juggler who dressed as an Indian, the acrobat who Italianized his name, the white beggars who blackened their faces to cash in on sympathy for freed slaves, or the blackfaced Ethiopian bands, English street versions of American minstrel shows (as one informant told Mayhew: "Some niggers are Irish. There's Scottish niggers, too. I don't know a Welsh one, but one of the street nigger-singers *is* a real black—an African").<sup>5</sup> Clearly ethnicity could be good for street trade.

Such diversity might be taken simply as an index of London's status as metropole to a growing, and increasingly mobilized, empire. After cataloging some of the range of immigrants, for example, Adam Hansen notes: "The exploited and dejected of the nineteenth century were coming to Britain along the routes of an empire otherwise impossible without mobility."<sup>6</sup> More generally, their presence can be taken to signal the centrality of London to an increasingly world-wide nexus of trade and interchange. In combination with the wide range of other foreigners that were a part of Mayhew's London street life—the Italians who dominated the street performance and music scene;<sup>7</sup> the German bands, clock-sellers, prostitutes, and pickpockets;<sup>8</sup> the

and IV: 440); rhubarb and spice merchants at I: 452–454 and tortoise traders at II: 80; the exterminator's story at III: 37; the tom-tom players at III: 185–189; Ramo Samee at III: 62, 104; crossing sweeps at II: 185, 490, III: 428 and beggars at IV: 423–426; gypsy horse thieves at IV: 369, 376 (although Mayhew handles the racial distinctiveness of gypsies ambivalently, sometimes insisting on their tribal difference and other times noting that down-and-out English could simply join them; see also II: 72, II: 369), the Indian in the low lodging house at IV: 231–232 (the race of his companion is not entirely clear); the Chinese sailor at IV: 232–233; the casual-ward residents at III: 384–385, 406, 408, 421, with a breakdown of one ward's population by nationality in a table (406). Further references to Mayhew's text, where brevity permits, will be presented parenthetically.

2. The Irish and Jews figure prominently throughout Mayhew's text and offer subcultures distinctive enough that Mayhew devotes chapters to each (the street-Irish in I: 104–120; the street-Jews in II: 115–135—and see also I: 86–88).

3. On this point see George Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 20, 63, 213, 229–230; Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35, 125–129, 332–333.

4. The focus of this paper is the structure of racial and ethnic otherness in the final book form of Mayhew's work.

5. Quotation at Mayhew, III: 191. For the other examples see II: 90, III: 104, III: 95, IV: 425, III: 190–194.

6. Adam Hansen, "Exhibiting Vagrancy, 1851: Victorian London and the 'Vagabond Savage,'" in *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London*, 74.

7. See Mayhew, vol. 3, practically passim, but specifically 45–49, 72–73, 77–78, 90, 139–140, 155, 171–182, 199. Also I: 457 (women street vendors), 197, 470 (musicians), IV: 269 (prostitutes), 344 (burglars).

8. Mayhew, III: 163–164, 189; II: 23; IV: 228, 230; IV: 308.

French musicians, prostitutes, and thieves;<sup>9</sup> the Polish tailors, Spanish refugees, Scottish bagpipers, and all the rest<sup>10</sup>—such a street presence reflected London's place as the central metropolis for the widening sphere of English direct empire and commercial hegemony. The ethnically diverse street life of London thus underlined the centrality of the city as the cosmopolitan center of an increasingly interconnected world economy, the human side of the trading empire that brought tea, coffee, and tobacco to the city.

But for Mayhew the ethnic diversity of the streets of London had no such neutral meaning. Rather, in the structure of *London Labour*, ethnic difference, read by Mayhew as racial otherness, was constructed as a threat to English labor, which itself was imaged in terms of race (as white but "nomadic").<sup>11</sup> Thus the construction of race within Mayhew's text can be read as part of the ideological work by which, as Paul Gilroy puts it, "blackness and Englishness appear as mutually exclusive attributes."<sup>12</sup> Mayhew fashions his image of Englishness against the image of a racial other in the midst (yet at the margins) of English life.<sup>13</sup> The racial/ethnic others whose presence increasingly impinged on the truly English, however marginal, street poor of London constitute for Mayhew a new sort of threat to the traditions and stability of lower-class life, a threat working from the most marginal edges of the social order. And this construction of otherness had as well an explicitly political meaning, drawing the boundaries of citizenship through an account that equated race with culture and culture with political awareness. However marginal their lives might be, the English poor retained a sense of their membership in the political order and of the rights and privileges entailed by that membership. The ethnic outsiders who increasingly impinged on the street trades of London entirely lacked this sense of membership and remained more permanently outsiders. Mayhew thus articulates a new xenophobia (even if the term itself was not yet coined). In responding to the changing ethnic and

9. Mayhew, III: 171–173; IV: 214–215, 269–272; IV: 308.

10. Mayhew II: 333; II: 262; III: 164, 167, 169–171; see also III: 406.

11. The image of the English working class as white, despite the presence of workers of other races among them at least back to the eighteenth century (especially in London and port cities), remains deeply entrenched. Note, for example, the all-white representation of twentieth-century Liverpool labor in Terence Davies's film *Distant Mirror, Still Lives* (1988). Blindness to racial and gender dimensions of working-class identity is a troubling characteristic of the major works of, for instance, E. P. Thompson and E. J. Hobsbawm.

12. Gilroy, "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism," in *Cultural Studies* 190. Gilroy develops the countercase more fully, of course, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). A parallel argument has regularly been made by Salman Rushdie; see, for example, "The New Empire within Britain," reprinted in *Imaginary Homelands* (New York: Viking, 1991), 129–138.

13. For a parallel reading of Mayhew, which employs "nomadism" rather than race as the central term of an otherness that must be controlled through the mechanisms of social science, see Patrick Brantlinger and Donald Ulin, "Policing Nomads: Discourse and Social Control in Early Victorian England," *Cultural Critique* 25 (1993): 33–63, especially 47–61.

racial character of the urban population, which was brought about by the growing place of London in the nexus of global commerce and exchange, Mayhew's work presents a fundamental challenge to English identity and security in the presence of foreigners on the streets of London. If this challenge was felt first among the city's least secure, its most marginal and already most imperiled members, Mayhew's *London Labour* implies that the consequences of their displacement would come in time to threaten the whole edifice of the English political and social structure.

Mayhew was as interested in insisting that class difference had a racial component as he was in arguing for the racial foundations of ethnic subcultures. This produces in *London Labour* an interestingly complex—and internally contradictory—argument about race and class.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Mayhew presented London's street culture as a racially distinctive and by implication homogenous class, typified by the costermonger, "by far the largest and certainly most broadly marked class" who "appear to be a distinct race" (I: 6). The racial argument Mayhew deploys here is one of association: the costermongers are like other "nomadic" or "wandering" tribes in their habits, physiognomy, and relation to the civilized world.<sup>15</sup> This assertion of resemblance is reinforced by common bonds of blood.

On the other hand, the unitary conception of a nomadic underclass is undercut in Mayhew's own text by the sheer diversity of his representative types. This has led some commentators to underline the internal contradictions and collapsing categories of Mayhew's racial epistemology. As Tim Barringer, playing Mayhew's text against representations of Africans in travel literature, notes, Mayhew posits a unitary racial divide between the "nomad" and the "civilized," but "this absolute formulation of difference collapses under the close interrogation made possible by the revelations of Mayhew's text. . . . The unity of the urban other . . . proves to be mythical; the racial characteristics which were presented as uniting them disappear amid the disparate nature of the evidence."<sup>16</sup> A. L. Beier, while specifically focusing on the language of the underclass in his treatment, identifies a similar breakdown of any unified category: "Although Mayhew asserted that there was a single language used among the underclass of the mid-nineteenth century, his

14. The internal contradictions between these arguments are quite distinct from the sorts of contradictions between Mayhew's voice and the voices of his "nomadic" informants that are the focus in Brantlinger and Ulin, "Policing Nomads." I am proposing here an incoherence within Mayhew's voice, an inconsistency about the relationship between race and class that leads, as will be seen, to a hierarchy of marginalization that in turn allows for multiple positions in relation to "Englishness" and the English polity.

15. Mayhew, I: 1–3, 213, III: 233–234, 317.

16. Tim Barringer, "Images of Otherness and the Visual Production of Difference: Race and Labour in Illustrated Texts, 1850–1865," in *The Victorians and Race*, 50.

own evidence shows that the situation was more complex than that. This is because in the course of his many interviews Mayhew recorded the speech of representatives of many groups—ethnicities (e.g., the French, Germans, the Irish, and Italians), a variety of trades, as well as the vagrant and criminal.<sup>17</sup> In both readings, an argument for the racial distinction of the nomadic falters because of distinctions among the varied peoples who are identified as nomads.

Part of the difficulty here, no doubt, lies in the simple contradictory inconsistency of different parts of Mayhew's text. Some of the inconsistencies arise from the work's highly complex publishing history, a convoluted story of a generation buried in the familiar four-volume final form typically referenced in recent scholarship.<sup>18</sup> Mayhew's initial engagement with the subject of the urban poor began in the series of reports he penned for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849–1850,<sup>19</sup> and some of those original reports were recycled into *London Labour*, mostly in volume three. But the direction and argument of the book vary significantly from the original newspaper reports. As a book, conceptualized after Mayhew's break from the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850, *London Labour* began as a serial publication, collected into two volumes, in 1850–1851; the serial publications included an interesting feedback mechanism for his readers, printing "Answers to Correspondents" on the wrappers of each installment.<sup>20</sup> But then the work was abandoned until 1856. When work on the project resumes,<sup>21</sup> Mayhew's vision of it had broadened significantly: in 1856 he published the first (and, in the end, only) volume of *The Great World of London* (featuring a striking panoramic view of the city from a

17. A. L. Beier, "'Takin' It to the Streets,' Henry Mayhew and the Language of the Underclass in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London," in *Cast Out: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective*.

18. On the genesis of the project, the different versions, and the rather complex publishing history, the fullest explication can be found in Anne Humpherys, on whose account the following, save where noted, depends. See *Travels into the Poor Man's Country: The Works of Henry Mayhew* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), chap. 3; *Henry Mayhew* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), chap. 3. See also Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 322–323, 566n.35; E. P. Thompson, "The Political Education of Henry Mayhew," *Victorian Studies* 11.1 (1967): 41–62.

19. Some of these are reprinted in *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle, 1849–50*; some in Anne Humpherys, ed., *Voices of the Poor: Selections from the Morning Chronicle "Labour and the Poor"* (London: Routledge, 1971). There is also a six-volume complete edition: Henry Mayhew, *The Morning Chronicle Survey of Labour and the Poor: The Metropolitan Districts* (Fittle, Eng.: Caliban Books, 1980–1982).

20. One of the editions of volume 2 available through Google Books—the copy with the Cruikshank-looking drawn frontispiece, held at University of Michigan's Parsons Library—includes the "Answers to Correspondents." Humpherys draws on them extensively for her discussion (see n.18).

21. Humpherys discusses serial publication of material that was later to become volume three, but in different order, in 1856; see *Henry Mayhew*, 135–138; see also *Travels*, 107–108. She also notes that plans to reprint vol. 2 in 1856 apparently bore no fruit; see *Travels*, 106.



balloon in its opening pages<sup>22</sup>), into which it was clearly Mayhew's intent to fold *London Labour's* volumes, along with more broad-ranging perspectives. After introductory surveys, and short treatments of professional and legal London, however, the book focuses on a detailed account of the city's criminal prisons.<sup>23</sup> That work breaks off mid-sentence in a discussion of rules of the House of Detention at Wadsworth, with an added note on the final page: "A severe attack of illness rendered it necessary that he [Mayhew] should abstain from all mental exertion, and it is only very recently that he has been permitted by his physician to resume his literary labours."<sup>24</sup> The promised completion, however, would be delayed by the death of his publisher.

It is only with a new publisher, and after another gap of several years, that the familiar four-volume *London Labour* takes shape. Yet even at this final point, there are complications. As Humpherys makes clear, Mayhew was abroad when the book version of *London Labour* was assembled, and thus had little to do with the precise arrangement of contents in the four-volume form (or with the final form of *Criminal Prisons*, originally *Great World*, reprinted as something of a fifth volume in 1862). This long generation and complicated publishing history of the final work ensures above all else a systematic inconsistency in approach and argument, but to an extent that had been there all along. Mayhew's own shifting attention and focus derail anything like a sustained single argument in the final product. Categorization schemes multiply, later arguments contradict earlier assertions, and even the broad contours of the project seem both jumbled and incomplete.

The difficulties of publication are exacerbated by problems of authorship. From the outset, Mayhew makes clear his reliance on other sources for his collection of data. In the "Preface" to the first volume, Mayhew notes: "I should make special mention of the assistance I have received in the compilation of the present volume from Mr. HENRY WOOD and Mr. Richard Knight (Late of the City Mission), gentlemen who have been engaged with me from nearly the commencement of my inquiries. . . . Mr. Wood, indeed, has contributed so large a proportion of the contents of the present volume that he may fairly be considered as one of its authors."<sup>25</sup> He also depended

22. Henry Mayhew, *Great World of London* (London: David Bogue, 1856), 7–10.

23. When, indeed, the work was republished as Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London* (London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1862), to coincide with the completion of the four-volume final version of *London Labour*, it would be reprinted without a change, even though the new title made the preliminary panorama and the rest of the first eighty pages largely irrelevant. In the "Advertisement" opening the republication, however, it is noted: "The present volume completes the series of papers on the lower phases of London life, so ably commenced by Henry Mayhew."

24. Mayhew, *Great World*, unnumbered final page, dated 1 November 1856.

25. Mayhew, *London Labour*, I: xvi. The attribution appears in identical form in the 1851 edition of the volume.

heavily on work by his brother, Augustus Mayhew, in compiling material. Indeed, Augustus, who would recycle some of that material into his novel *Paved with Gold* (1858), notes in the preface to that work: "some portions of this book (such as the chapters on 'The Crossing-Sweepers' and 'The Rat Match' at the 'Jolly Trainer') were originally undertaken by me at the request of my brother, Mr. Henry Mayhew, and will, I believe, shortly appear . . . in the concluding volume of his invaluable work on 'London Labour and the Labouring Poor.'"<sup>26</sup> Mayhew may well have depended on other collectors of material as well.

Authorship becomes even more problematic for the later volumes of the final version, completed and published while Mayhew was abroad. Portions of it—including almost all of volume four—were explicitly authored by others: Rev. William Tuckniss (credited with the section on "Agencies at Present in Operation within the Metropolis, for the Suppression of Vice and Crime,"), Bracebridge Hemming (listed as co-author of the general discussion of prostitutes and sole author of "Prostitution in London"), John Binny ("Thieves and Swindlers"), and Andrew Halliday ("Beggars"). Binny would also, around the same time, complete the work on *Criminal Prisons of London*. As the publishers explain in the opening "Advertisement": "The publishers think it right to state that, in consequence of Mr. Mayhew's absence from England, they placed the completion of the volume in the hands of Mr. Binny, who has supplied all after page 498."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, not all these varied voices quite shared the same views. A. L. Beier, for example, in his discussion of Mayhew's use of the "dangerous classes" trope, implies that it figures especially strongly in material contributed by Binny and Halliday.<sup>28</sup> If one trope might figure more strongly in the other authors, others might as well.

26. Augustus Mayhew, "Preface," *Paved with Gold: or, the Romance and Reality of the London Streets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858). The preface is dated 1 March 1858, between the faltering of the *Great Worlds* project and the 1861–1862 four-volume edition. Anne Humpherys notes that Henry Mayhew was co-author of the novel in its serial format but abandoned his work on it after the fifth number; see *Henry Mayhew*, 11. Humpherys also notes the routine collaboration of the two brothers. Henry Mayhew was not above recycling material as well, not only incorporating portions of his *Morning Chronicle* journalism into *London Labour*, as noted above, but also plugging *London Labour*-rooted material (and his journalistic work on the Great Exhibition) into his comic novel *1851*. For a good example, see "Mr. Sandboys's visit to the Old Clothes Marts" in Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank, *1851: or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys, Their Son and Daughter, Who Came Up to London to Enjoy Themselves, and to See the Great Exhibition* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1851), 98–101. (Cruikshank, although credited as co-author, seems likely to have created nothing but the illustrations.)

27. "Advertisement," Mayhew and Binny, *Criminal Prisons of London*. As noted above, the published work retained the panoramic but now irrelevant frame from *Great World*.

28. See A. L. Beier, "Takin' It to the Streets': Henry Mayhew and the Language of the Underclass in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London," in *Cast Out: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective*, 94–95.

It follows that "Henry Mayhew," as author of *London Labour*, is something of an artificial construct, but one which, for present purposes, and for simple convenience, we will retain. Whatever the inconsistencies and erratic shifts in the final text, in its internal inconsistencies and contradictory classification systems, in terms of the broad issues of race and ethnicity, there remains in the whole a coherent dual argument.

The dual argument about race in *London Labour* distinguishes perspectives from outside (from the position of Mayhew himself as representative middle-class observer) and from within. Thus, in one respect, all the varied street types, insofar as they share nomadism as a defining trait (both culturally and racially), are of one race, while at the same time a range of ethnic types (read as racial and organized in hierarchies) figure within the populations of the street. And it is in that latter constellation of race as marking difference within street populations that the reactive xenophobic side of Mayhew's account can be traced.

Thus, in Mayhew's text, English costermongers—and English laborers generally<sup>29</sup>—are depicted as a class under threat, being undermined by competition from foreigners.<sup>30</sup> The foreign threat to English labor came, in Mayhew's view, at a point when English workers were especially vulnerable: when some established trades were in decline, forcing ever more workers into the nomadic "street" sphere of marginal economic activity. This side of Mayhew's argument is grounded in difference: accounts of the longstanding traditions of English street traders<sup>31</sup> (with a particular emphasis on the decline of their

29. It is undoubtedly the case that Mayhew's investigations highlight marginal laborers to the near exclusion of skilled, or even most unskilled, workers. Himmelfarb makes much of the distinction, largely in the interest of negating the claims of left historians inclined to see Mayhew as an objective observer of working-class culture; see *Idea of Poverty*, 346–355. In Mayhew's view, however, the marginal class included *both* those "bred" to it, in his language, and those forced into it by loss of more regular employment. These latter constitute, for example, an eighth of the costermongers proper (I: 7), the preponderance of traders involved in producing and selling food on the streets (I: 158), many vendors of needles to tailors (I: 340), some of the scavengers (II: 208), a portion of the city's cabdrivers (III: 351), and at least a few casual dock workers (III: 304). Pressure from foreigners operates especially to the disadvantage of those not "bred" to the business of the streets, as with the mechanic costermongers (I: 7).

30. Audrey Jaffe gets this partly right when arguing, of the foreign "false beggar" in Mayhew, that "this figure also aroused anxiety for his potential to take the place of the English or Irish laborers, thereby producing underemployment (and 'false beggars') in the native population." *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 69. But Jaffe mistakes, as I will show, Mayhew's position on the Irish, who themselves threaten native street populations.

31. See, for instance, the heritage of costermongers' cries, I: 7–8; their traditional rights, I: 58–59; the old patterer's speeches, I: 216–217; the traditional ballads, I: 273–275; or the extended history of Punch and Judy shows, III: 43–60. For a discussion of some of these forms as expressions of linguistic distinctiveness, see Beier, "Takin' It to the Streets."

trades in recent times<sup>32</sup>) is balanced against assertions about the different styles and cultures of the racially distinct others who threaten them. While the argument on difference makes use of the full range of racial others, it focuses principally on the two fully installed competing subcultures,<sup>33</sup> those of the street-Irish and the street-Jews. Taking the side of the native street traders against the outsiders, Mayhew simultaneously asserts the essential character of their labor (that they are, for instance, "the principal purveyors of food to the poor, and that consequently they are as important a body of people as they are numerous" (I: 101) and the competitive disadvantages they face compared to immigrant communities.

The English costermonger is figured both outside and within Mayhew's construction of Englishness: outside insofar as the group was a racially distinct vestige of nomadism; inside insofar as they are, at least, English nomads, their own venerable traditions linking them back to the Elizabethan age that seems central to Mayhew's conception of Englishness. The racial other against whom Mayhew shapes his Englishness is similarly both inside and outside the domestic underclass of street laborers. They are central to a range of street trades (and to Mayhew's imagistic menagerie of the street); at the same time, they remain outsiders, readily distinguishable from the "thoroughbred costers" (I: 7). These racially other outsiders become the focus of Mayhew's xenophobia, embodying both a racial threat to English nationhood and a more fundamental existential threat to established English subclasses.

Thus Mayhew establishes a hierarchy of relative membership in the English polity—the English costermonger marginally included; the Irish and Jews,<sup>34</sup> excluded but operating within their own alternative communities; the Indians, blacks, and others more marginalized still. These multiple positions of relation to Englishness end up being reflected in political attitudes as well. Mayhew's text is therefore not only about racial difference, measured in a strictly binary way (as white or other), but about racial hierarchies. This is perhaps most evident in the case of the two "Indian" (actually Arab) tomtom players. The "Othello" of the two is a "handsome lad . . . as gracefully

32. Declining trade and worsening conditions are a recurrent theme in Mayhew, especially in the first three volumes. See I: 7, 22, 53, 55, 66, 90, 94, 100, 102, 126, 139, 158–160, 170, 180, 182, 194–196, 198–200, 205, 221, 234, 239–241, 268, 272, 305, 323, 326, 338, 354, 361, 376, 377, 379, 388, 391, 398, 427, 429, 444, 450, 453, 454; II: 5, 15, 33, 45, 81, 90, 104, 118–119, 120, 228–229, 235–236, 428; III: 29, 45, 120, 162, 163, 174, 180, 181, 226, 261, 274, 329.

33. Fully installed, that is, both within Mayhew's text, each group receiving separate attention, and in Mayhew's view of English society, both groups characterized by a range of support systems and networks of kinship so as to constitute an autonomous internal community.

34. And, to an extent, in vol. III, the Italians; although they are not granted the same status in Mayhew's text (no subsection of their very own), their internal community works in much the same way. See Mayhew II: 506, III: 173–180.

proportioned, as a bronze image"; the other, "what a Yankee would call 'a rank nigger,'" offered "a comical contrast," and a face "as black and elastic-looking as a printer's dabber." Not surprisingly, the blacker boy, "Beyond 'Yes' and 'No' . . . [was] perfectly unacquainted with the English language," while his lighter, more handsome companion "spoke English perfectly." The latter, knowing his place, tells Mayhew: "The Arabs are just equally as good as the Indians at playing the tom-tom, but they haven't got exactly the learning to manufacture them yet" (III: 185). The passage provides a racial hierarchy of civilization extending downward from the Indians, with preindustrial manufacturing capabilities closest to the white race, through the Arabs, literate but unmechanical, to the African. By emplotting racial hierarchy within his account of the structure of English street culture, Mayhew could simultaneously insist on the racial gap that separated the street vendor and the "civilized" English people and, in more xenophobic terms, the racial gulf that separated the English costermongers from their (irremediably) foreign rivals.

Between Mayhew's arguments for the nomadism of English street-folk and for their difference from other racial others, his account of nomadism is the more familiar, established in *London Labour's* opening pages: "there are—socially, morally, and perhaps even physically considered—but two distinct and broadly marked races, viz., the wanderers and the settler—the vagabond and the citizen—the nomadic and the civilized tribes" (I: 1). Anchoring his account with ethnological comparisons (costermonger is to Englishman as Bushman is to Hottentot, Lapp to Finn, Bedouin to settled Arab) and citations (most crucially of ethnologist James Prichard),<sup>35</sup> Mayhew established the ground for the social-scientific categorization of street labor.<sup>36</sup> The connections between English "nomads" and the uncivilized are reinforced by repetition.<sup>37</sup> The explicitly racial dynamic of this difference is underlined by a pattern of references to miscegenation.<sup>38</sup> Thus both culture and blood marked the English street-folk as racially distinct.<sup>39</sup>

35. For discussions of Prichard, the shift from his cultural anthropology to one more rooted in physical racial difference by midcentury, and Mayhew's own position within anthropological discourse, see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 48–53, 62–64, 213–219. Mayhew misspells this name as "Pritchard." The spelling has been silently corrected in this essay.

36. On Mayhew's categorization system as science, see Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist*, 125–126, 196, 295–296; Brantlinger and Ulin, "Policing Nomads," 48–49, 52–53.

37. For example, Mayhew, I: 213, 320; III: 233.

38. Most frequently with the Irish (I: 6, 289; II: 11, 506; III: 88), but also with Indians (III: 186; IV: 231–232, 424), American blacks (III: 384–385, 421), Chinese (IV: 232–233), and the full racial range of sailors (IV: 229).

39. A range of commentators have sought to minimize the racial argument in Mayhew. Thus Himmelfarb sees in Mayhew only the "typical, loose Victorian sense of the term" race (*Idea of Poverty*, 324); Eileen Yeo believes Mayhew's use of the term "race" merely reflected his inability to develop fully an argument about subcultures ("Mayhew as Social Investigator," in *Unknown Mayhew*, 86–87);

In Mayhew's account, race is at once physiognomic and cultural. Thus, on the one hand, the street vendor is physically distinct from other English people, characterized by differences in head shape (powerfully reinforced in his text by the selection of types used for illustration).<sup>40</sup> On the page, these differences, as Beier has made clear, are reinforced as well by linguistic practice.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, racial difference marked the distinct culture of the costermonger, characterized above all by its radical difference from middle-class English conventions (thus their improvidence, love of gambling, lack of education, irreligion, and preference for concubinage over marriage).<sup>42</sup> Assuming that such cultural practices are a function of race, it should be noted, also tends to make them ineradicable.

The moral culture of the street vendors both marks the distinction between them and "civilized" English and places them at a disadvantage in the competition on the street with the more markedly different races, especially the Irish and the Jews.<sup>43</sup> Both groups had made significant inroads in the street trades of England. The Irish had become dominant in the street vending of oranges and other fruit, onions and herbs, potatoes, belts, wash leathers, lucifers, and flypaper; most hansellers, linen packmen, shoe "translators" (i.e., remakers), apparel manufacturers, crossing sweeps, refuse and dung gatherers, cigar-end collectors, and rubbish-carters, as well as many of the lower level casual laborers at the docks and most of the presumably "Scottish" bagpipers, were Irish.<sup>44</sup> For their part, the Jews had major roles in the old-clothes trade, jewelry and trinket sales, the peddling of manufactured goods, the sponge market and the sale of items like spectacles and telescopes;

Humpherys insists that Mayhew "partly abjured" racial theory (*Travels*, 72). Such arguments do not hold up against the repeated emphasis on racial difference that continued not only throughout *London Labour* but also into his next project; see Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London*, 381–383.

40. On illustrations in Mayhew, see Barringer, "Images of Otherness"; Thomas Prasch, "Photography and the Image of the London Poor," in *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and Its Contexts*, 179–186; Thomas Prasch, "Fixed Positions: Working-Class Subjects and Photographic Hegemony in Victorian Britain," 219–229.

41. This is the central argument of Beier, "Takin' It to the Streets."

42. Mayhew, I: 11–22. This set of cultural traits is what Himmelfarb terms the "moral physiognomy of the street-folk"; see *Idea of Poverty*, 323–331.

43. Missing the distinction (or not seeing the contradiction) between these two aspects of Mayhew's argument, Catherine Gallagher takes an Irish woman as representative of Mayhew's nomadism and thus insists on the indeterminacy of the "social body" in his account; see "The Body Versus the Social Body in Malthus and Mayhew," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 100–101. It is not the case that "As he details their lives, though, the charges [of promiscuity, etc.] evaporate" (100), but rather that those charges hold for English costermongers but *not* for Irish immigrants.

44. Mayhew, I: 79, 80, 82, 84, 94, 117–118, 171, 326–327, 377–378, 408, 433, 444; II: 26, 29–33, 34, 142–143, 145, 333, 337, 467, 481–484, 493–494; III: 162–164, 168, 278–280, 290, 299.



they had control over the wholesale provision of fruit and fish, pastry and cakes, as well as old clothes, and ran the "swag shops" that recirculated merchandise.<sup>45</sup> Jews controlled the street markets of Petticoat Lane (II: 36–39) and the wholesale venue of the Exchange (I: 368–369); Irish dominated the markets of Rosemary Lane (II: 39–40).<sup>46</sup> They also both contributed to the criminal culture of the street, the Jews primarily in accessory roles (as owners of houses of prostitution and receivers of stolen goods),<sup>47</sup> and the Irish as the predominant figures in prostitution and practically all the forms of sneaking and thievery outlined in the final volume of *London Labour*, on those who "will not work."<sup>48</sup>

The cultures and trading styles of the Irish and Jew were quite distinct from each other. Jews thrived by buying cheap and selling hard, and they also tended to develop control over wholesale supplies<sup>49</sup>; the Irish, in contrast, succeeded by underselling their competition and living on less.<sup>50</sup> Jews never accepted charity from others (depending, however, on the support of their own community); the Irish, unlike either Jews or the English poor, resorted without hesitancy to begging and parish charity.<sup>51</sup> In direct competition, the Irish tactic of underselling competition and living more marginally was effectively removing Jewish domination from some markets (as of oranges, I: 106–107). But against the two groups, the English trader was even more severely pinched. As one fish seller complained: "The Jews are my ruin," because they compete more cunningly on market prices; but the same tradesman also griped: "My trade has been impaired, too, by the great increase of Irish costermongers, for an Irishman will starve out an Englishman any day" (I: 68). In a wide range of other markets, as well, the English street sellers

45. Mayhew, I: 61, 79, 86–90, 107, 198, 304, 333, 346, 347, 376, 442, 443, 444, II: 13, 22, 24, 27, 103, 118, 124.

46. No other ethnic/racial group exercised such control over areas of the market, although the rhubarb and spice trade seemed to be dominated by Moroccan Jews (I: 452–455), who also had a monopoly on the tortoise trade (II: 80). Moroccan Jews are treated by Mayhew as quite distinct from other Jewish groups; he labels them Arabs.

47. Mayhew, II: 117, 124; III: 315; IV: 223, 241, 242. In these passages, Mayhew's recourse to the traditional lines of anti-Semitic argument is often quite clear. As Himmelfarb notes, this anti-Semitism in Mayhew's work can be traced back to the period of his split with the *Morning Chronicle*; see *Idea of Poverty*, 322, 344.

48. Mayhew, IV: 231–232, 238, 273, 283, 289, 297, 304, 308, 331, 344, 359, 365, 366, 373. It is worth recalling that Mayhew did not pen most of vol. 4, and this makes some difference in regard to racial type. John Binny, who handles "Thieves," for example, repeatedly refers to an "Irish cockney" class undefined elsewhere in *London Labour*.

49. Mayhew, I: 126–129, 204, 294, 336, 348; II: 29, 36.

50. Mayhew, I: 5, 68, 114, 257, 409, 460; II: 119.

51. On Jewish dependence on community support, see Mayhew, II: 126–127; III: 408. On the Irish use of charity systems, see Mayhew, I: 115, 116, 457, 462; II: 250; III: 372–375, 395–396, 400–404; see also the table at IV: 406.

were caught at a competitive disadvantage, neither as skillful at sales as the Jew nor as willing to live cheap as the Irish.<sup>52</sup>

But what put English costermongers at a particular disadvantage was precisely their nomadic culture, a culture shared by neither Irish nor Jew. Both the Irish and the Jewish immigrants were marked out by their autonomous cultural formations, morally distinct and economically different from those of the "native" trader. Morally, both Irish and Jew shared a religiosity, a respect for the institution of marriage, less love of drink (despite the stereotypes associated with the Irish), and a more provident attitude toward money than their English counterparts.<sup>53</sup> Economically, the communal ties of Irish and Jewish groups guaranteed support for members in desperate straits (I: 115; II: 127–130). In contrast, the very independence of the English costermongers, their existence outside the realm of English community, made them prey, for example, to usurious rates for rental of the wheelbarrows and carts they needed for their trade (I: 29–32).<sup>54</sup>

That same independence that put them at a competitive disadvantage in the markets of the streets, however, made English costermongers at least potential citizens. Politically, the native costermonger (in contrast even to lower elements within the English street crowd) had clearly defined views: "The politics of these people are detailed in a few words: they are nearly all Chartists" (I: 20). In contrast, Mayhew writes: "Of politics, I think, the street Irish understand nothing" (I: 109), and of the Jews he declares: "Perhaps there is no people in the world . . . who care so little for politics as the general body of the Jews" (II: 126).<sup>55</sup> As the costermongers show, poverty need not be apolitical; in the case of both Irish and Jewish communities, however, communal identity (at least in Mayhew's account) produced no political involvement.

From the perspective of a middle-class observer in the immediate wake of the major Chartist demonstrations, the Jewish/Irish indifference to the political realm might seem preferable to native costermongers' political commitment. But Mayhew makes it clear that he thinks otherwise. He develops a contrast between the "unskilled labourers"—"As yet they are as unpolitical as

52. The intermediaries in the labor market were guilty, in Mayhew's account, of magnifying the crisis by deliberately seeking the importation of foreign labor, the cheaper the better. See Mayhew, II: 316, 317; III: 294.

53. Mayhew, I: 104–105, 107–108, 110, 114; II: 124–126.

54. Given the stereotypical association of Jews with usury, Mayhew interestingly notes: "There is not among the Jewish street-traders, as among the costermongers . . . a class . . . living by usury and loan-mongering. . . . Whatever may be thought of Jews' usurious dealings as regards the general public, the poorer classes of their people are not subjected to the exaction of usury" (II: 129).

55. To an extent, at least in Mayhew's account, the Jewish community has, in the Board of Deputies, its own autonomous political body (II: 130).

footmen, and instead of entertaining violent political opinions, they appear to have no political opinions whatever"—with the more skilled labor of tailors' operatives. Among them, "there appeared to be a general bias towards the six points of the Charter"—precisely the position of the costermongers, that is—but they were also "extremely proud of their having turned out to a man . . . and become special constables for the maintenance of law and order on the day of the great Chartist demonstration." Mayhew continues, "As to which of these classes are the better members of the state, it is not for me to offer an opinion; I merely assert a social fact." But, of course, he does have an opinion, that "[t]he artisans of the metropolis are intelligent, and dissatisfied with their political position: the labourers of London appear to be the reverse." And the English costermongers, despite their position within Mayhew's scheme—marked as racially distinct and economically outmaneuvered by foreign competitors—share at least the dissatisfaction of their more skilled fellow workers. To that degree, they participate in the "political character and sentiments of the working classes," which Mayhew describes as "a distinctive feature of the age, and . . . a necessary consequence of the dawning intelligence of the mass" (III: 233). And to that degree at least, the culture of race could be overcome.

For neither costermonger nor, for that matter, skilled laborer does this dawning political intelligence constitute grounds for full citizenship. Chartism had, after all, failed, and the claim for universal manhood suffrage with it. Working-class political participation remained restricted by a property-based franchise. And insofar as full participatory citizenship remained linked to property qualifications, the vestiges of nomadism that thrived at the interstices of modern civilization were, even more fundamentally than the industrial laborers of the era, excluded from full membership. Their nomadism was a racial trait, and "those who have once adopted the savage and wandering mode of life, rarely abandon it" (I: 2). But because citizenship and political participation cannot be completely equated—because there is room for at least some claims of citizenship even for the disenfranchised—membership in the community can be construed as less monolithic in character. Like race in Mayhew's conception, it was not a simply binary relation, but a construction that allowed for degrees, for hierarchies of relatively complete or incomplete membership.

It is because, for Mayhew, the democratization of the age demanded the political participation of the worker that forms of combination, even among members of that class so different as to be seen as racially distinct, had such a central role in his agenda of reform.<sup>56</sup> It is because other even more

56. Himmelfarb, deriding Mayhew's suggestion for a Friendly Association as "hard to take seri-

distinct races had, in his xenophobic view, no such political instinct that they remained outside the pale, forever non-citizens, permanent foreigners. And it is from the ideological inscription of hierarchies of race and class in works such as Mayhew's text that we can trace both the rigidification of lines between (and even within) the English class system (in the language of race as class) and the even more solidly marked lines that kept Englishness white.

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ously," misses the point the centrality of direct political participation in Mayhew's argument (see *Idea of Poverty*, 329).



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## PART III

### The Foreign Invasion



To speak of a "foreign invasion" evokes the fearful consequences of outsiders breaking through the gate; invading against the will of those on the inside; corrupting the presumed purity of the protected center. No one welcomes the foreign invader. Indeed, the presence of the foreign is thought to exist at the peril of those deemed not foreign. The perception of an invasion, then, is more than a sign that the walls have been broken. It suggests that the body at the center will be overtaken or corrupted at the moment of contact. Depictions of these kinds of foreign invasions in Victorian culture frequently expressed fears—albeit irrational or subconscious—of cultural slaughter.

The essays in this section challenge and interrogate such xenophobic myths by focusing on the image of the invading foreigner. Imperialism, immigration, and a growing ease of travel altered the construction of English identity; in turn, writing throughout the century frequently pointed to cultural discomfort about the implications of the ways in which Englishness was reframed in light of these developments and ideologies. The following essays examine the kinds of xenophobic reactions triggered by the fear that if foreigners live in England, this must be a sign that an invasion has taken place or that English life is under siege. In some cases textual production sought to resolve the presumed problem of the other within. In other works authors or artists used the discourse of invasion to explore the sources or consequences of the fear itself or to suggest something about English insularity.