Reading London

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Introduction

TWO CITIES, ONE LONDON

To understand how writers tried to manage London during the eighteenth century, I organize the following chapters according to the goals that distinguish early eighteenth-century writers from those who inhabit a print-saturated London of the late eighteenth century. Reading London examines not only how early eighteenth-century writers developed imaginative strategies for governing other Londoners, but also how late eighteenth-century writers reinterpreted these strategies to govern themselves. This distinction between controlling others and controlling the self appears by mid-century, and it registers an important change in the cultural problem that London presented to writers. While early eighteenth-century writers such as Gay, Fielding, and Pope addressed the problem of how a diluted sovereignty following the 1688 Glorious Revolution affected a Londoner’s perception of urban governance, late eighteenth-century writers such as Boswell and Burney addressed a completely new problem: the proliferation of print in London. To solve the first cultural problem (a problem unique to early eighteenth-century London’s history), writers developed textual techniques for governing readers; to address the second cultural problem (a problem unique to late eighteenth-century London’s history), writers reimagined textual strategies for governing the self. To clarify this distinction, the first three chapters of this book examine the innovative techniques that writers devised to manage and to conduct readers; the final two chapters show how Boswell and Burney adapted these techniques to stabilize and to shape the individual self. An interchapter punctuates these two stages of London’s history and clarifies how the proliferation of London’s print culture motivated Boswell’s and Burney’s efforts at self-government. I argue that the two tasks of governing others and governing the self respond to specific cultural problems that writers experienced during the eighteenth century.
By focusing upon these historical distinctions and time-dependent goals, I trace a critical narrative about London that involves three projects. The first project involves authors’ efforts to imagine textual techniques to manage or conduct readers and help them relate to a newly conceived, post-Fire London. The purpose of this introduction is to outline London’s unique historical and material conditions that make this first project possible. In particular, eighteenth-century London’s changing administrative geography provided writers with a cultural problem that required an imaginative solution, and this solution involved a new, textual art of government or “governmentality.” This is why conduct becomes a central concern for these writers, and I review the eighteenth-century status of conduct books to contextualize this first project. The first part of this book therefore details the solutions that Gay, Fielding, and Pope develop to address their problems with sovereignty and consensus in early eighteenth-century London.

The second project that I investigate involves readers’ efforts to master a newly complex London. By “readers’ efforts” I mean the way readers were to assume that certain textual genres constituted specific ways of interpreting, and therefore knowing, London. The second part of this book (chapters 4, 5, and 6) examines this second project by describing Boswell’s and Burney’s efforts at reading, interpreting, and relating to a London imagined by writers from an earlier generation. The third and final project that I consider involves readers’ efforts to discipline themselves. As I clarify in the second part of this introduction as well as in chapter 4, a print-saturated London caused Boswell and Burney to adapt their predecessors’ textual techniques so that Boswell and Burney could govern themselves. As exhibited by Boswell’s and Burney’s writing, the sheer heterogeneity of texts that tried to manage an individual’s experience of London threatened their development of a single identity in the city. Boswell and Burney develop self-governing strategies to combat this threat. This third project imagines the completely self-governed Londoner (a Londoner ruled by neither police nor any other external authority) as a historical possibility, and this possibility originates in textual strategies for controlling others. In my attempt to contextualize these three projects, I trace a critical narrative that identifies several historical alternatives to the types of urban authority that currently police cities. Since London’s historically specific geography was a foundational factor that enabled writers to imagine these alternatives, it is the issue to which I now turn.
Two Cities, One London

London’s Changing Geography

As the events of 1688 loosened the notion of urban authority from the Court’s sole domain, writers were some of the first Londoners to connect this loss to changes in London’s geography and the administrative tensions between the Court, Town, and City. One of the earliest writers to draw attention to London’s changing administrative geography is Abraham Cowley. Cowley’s 1668 poem, “On the Queen’s Repairing Somerset House,” adapts the seventeenth-century country-house poem to an urban setting. Cowley’s poem represents a city in transition by reinterpreting a textual tradition (the country-house poem) to suit an urban environment. Cowley personifies Somerset House, a royal property on the banks of the Thames between Court and City, by giving it a voice. This voice does not try to detail Somerset House but instead calls attention to its peculiar surroundings:

Before my gate a street’s broad channel goes,
Which still with waves of crowding people flows;
And every day there passes by my side,
Up to its western reach, the London tide,
The spring-tides of the term; my front looks down
On all the pride and business of the town.

... My other fair and more majestic face
(Who can the fair to more advantage place?)
For ever gazes on itself below
In the best mirror that the world can show.¹

Cowley focuses our attention not on the house but the house’s front entrance on the Strand (“a street’s broad channel”) and back entrance on the Thames (“the best mirror”). But Somerset House’s location is privileged in another way:

And here, behold, in a long, bending row,
How two joint cities make one glorious bow;
The midst, the noblest place, possessed by me;
Best to be seen by all, and all o’ersee.
Which way soe’er I turn my joyful eye,
Here the great Court, there the rich Town I spy;

¹
Cowley’s poem screams, “Location, location, location”; it suggests that “the midst, the noblest place,” exudes authority because it forms a type of panopticon (“Best to be seen by all, and all o’ersee”) that is unique to its location between “two joint cities.” Although Cowley seems to unify Westminster and the City in “one glorious bow,” he maintains each city’s independence later in the poem when he refers to “two vast cities, troublesomely great.” From Cowley’s perspective in 1668, the adjectival phrase “troublesomely great” highlights the revolutionary associations that people attached to the City of London after the Civil War—associations which Valerie Pearl reviews and questions in *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution.* Although Cowley’s phrase evokes the City of London’s history during the Puritan Revolution, it also gestures towards a growing perception that the geographic distance between Court and City belied an even greater political distance between the two entities. In this sense, Cowely’s “trouble” alludes to a divisive urban history that eighteenth-century writers would eventually inherit.

Cowley’s “trouble” also emphasizes the fact that what we now recognize as London began as two separate cities: the City of Westminster, which was the home of the Court and parliament, and the City of London, which was the home of the Corporation of the City of London and trade. Discussing London’s separate origins is an unusually difficult task. The names that we presently use to refer to London’s spaces retain a confusing and faded sense of their separate, eighteenth-century referents. Consider, for example, how “the City” commonly refers to the ancient walled “City of London,” but “the city” refers to Westminster and the City of London in general. Although the name “London” now subsumes Westminster, the City of London, and a number of other boroughs such as Southwark and Camden, tourists visiting London’s West-End during the twenty-first century can claim without reproach that they are in “the city”; however, they would be technically incorrect to claim that they are in “the City of London.”

Place-names therefore present particular difficulties for my attempt to discuss eighteenth-century London. For the purposes of clarity, I use “Westminster” to refer to the Court, “the City” to refer to the ancient, walled City of London, and “London” to refer to Westminster and the City of London informally combined. But this difficulty in referring to
eighteenth-century London is more than a semantic problem; the difficulty attests to the problems surrounding the history of Westminster’s and the City’s relationship to a new “London.” If language is a receptacle for cultural episodes, then by interpreting the names we have inherited to refer to London’s urban spaces, we can understand how eighteenth-century literature tried to attend to, resolve, or amplify the confusion between Westminster and the City of London. Linguistic problems can be symptoms of historical impasses.

Part of this confusion stems from modern critics’ desire to see Westminster and the City of London as the only two components of eighteenth-century London. The details surrounding Westminster’s and the City of London’s exponential growth during Charles II’s restoration, however, offer a more complicated picture. In particular, speculative builders began to bring attention to the spaces between and on the margins of Westminster and the City of London. Following the Great Fire of 1666, these spaces were waiting to be filled with not only inhabitants, but also meaning. What we now call “suburban sprawl” characterized Restoration London’s building boom. This was the age of speculative estate-projects, the planning of Bond Street, and the building of Red Lion Square. Builders were not the only Londoners who speculated about the value of the spaces between and on the margins of Court and City, however. Speculative growth affected writers as well.

The middle ground between Court and City (commonly called “the Town”) was a geographic novelty for eighteenth-century Londoners, and writers such as Cowley advertised the ramifications of this novelty. In particular, writers questioned what this novelty could do for their reputations. For example, Alexander Pope adopted Cowley’s hyper-sensitivity to the unique space between Court and City in *Windsor Forest*. In particular, Pope seizes Cowley’s “one glorious bow” to locate a new type of poetic authority:

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Behold! Augusta’s glitt’ring Spires increase,
And Temples rise, the beauteous Works of Peace.
I see, I see where two fair Cities bend
Their ample Bow, a new White-Hall ascend!
There mighty Nations shall inquire their Doom . . .
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Like Somerset House’s privileged perspective for observing and therefore indirectly controlling Westminster and the City, Pope’s poet also occupies
a privileged perspective (“I see, I see”) from which he may prophesy the British Empire. Number 454 of Richard Steele’s *Spectator* (commonly known as *Twenty-Four Hours in London*) also hinges upon a famous distinction between “two joint cities”:

> The Hours of the Day and Night are taken up in the Cities of London and Westminster by Peoples as different from each other as those who are Born in different Centuries. Men of Six-a-Clock give way to those of Nine, they of Nine to the Generation of Twelve, and they of Twelve disappear, and make Room for the fashionable World, who have made Two-a-Clock the Noon of the Day.7

Steele suggests that Westminster and the City are so different that the cities cannot even be measured by the same timepiece. We should note that Steele, as an early eighteenth-century critic, observes this distinction from a privileged perspective beyond Court and City, and he begins the paper by describing the advantages of this distanced perspective: “It is an inexpressible Pleasure to know a little of the World, and be of no Character or Significancy in it.”8 Letter five of Daniel Defoe’s *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* considers the margins of Westminster and the City to constitute a completely new realm:

> Supposing now, the whole body of this vast building to be considered as one city, London, and not concerning myself or the reader with the distinction of its several jurisdictions; we shall then observe it only as divided into three, viz. the city, the Court, and the out-parts.

> The city is the centre of its commerce and wealth. The Court of its gallantry and splendour. The out-parts of its numbers and mechanics; and in all these, no city in the world can equal it. Between the Court and city, there is a constant communication of business to that degree, that nothing in the world can come up to it.9

“A constant communication of business” marks the area “between the Court and city” for Defoe. Depending upon the degree of “communication,” this area could separate or unify London’s two authoritative poles. Cowley, Pope, and Steele rendered the space between Westminster and the City visible; Defoe went a step further, describing London in three “parts” rather than two cities.

The desire to see London as two symmetrical parts is further complicat-
ed by the fact that London never adopted French boulevards, a rectangular matrix of cross-streets, or an elaborate symmetry, and, for this reason, historians tend to view London as “a muddle that always worked.” In an attempt to understand this “muddle,” we may over-emphasize the administrative interaction between the Court and the City; in turn, Court and City come to resemble the opposite ends of a binary that serves to decode any complexity London’s muddle might present. In this binary, Westminster is the symbolic pole for Tories, tradition, and sovereign monarchy, while the City of London is the location of rebellion, Whigs, and trade. This model might look good on undergraduate classroom blackboards, but it discounts “the Town”—that marginal, third term that Restoration and early eighteenth-century writers emphasize. This literature—“Town literature,” one might call it—exposes the Court-City binary for what it really is: an oversimplification that distorts urban complexity. By understanding what this third term meant to urban writers, we may begin to witness how writers imagined themselves to be legitimate urban authorities.

Writers residing and working between Whitehall and Ludgate Hill occupied a space in which they could either promote or disassemble the informal tensions between Court and City. Their mediated residence between the poles of Court and City provided a point of entry into an administrative dialogue designed to reimagine London’s cityscape. One of the reasons writers could more easily imagine their role in this middle ground than in either the Court or City was that several of these marginal spaces were organized into an antiquated administrative unit: the liberty. According to John Strype’s updated edition of John Stow’s *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster: Containing the Original, Antiquity, Increase, Modern Estate, and Government of those CITIES*, the space surrounding the Strand—the road literally connecting Westminster to the City—was still, in 1720, referred to by its medieval title, the “Liberty of the Duchy of Lancaster.” Liberties were “formerly monastic precincts” marked by “freedom from the jurisdiction of the customary administrative unit.” Recognizing these defunct administrative spaces, writers like Boswell, Fielding, and Burney filled these spaces with new meaning. In Boswell’s case, the Town dominated his urban experiences, particularly his experiences at London’s theaters, the majority of which were concentrated beyond the walls of the City and just outside Whitehall during the eighteenth century. Boswell’s *London Journal* is filled with dramatic metaphors that actors and actresses used to define themselves onstage.

For Boswell’s particular experience of the Town, theatricality character-
ized this space. This middle ground also relates to Fielding’s Bow Street career, which aimed to police these defunct spaces. Finally, as a woman writer, Burney reconceived this middle ground as a space of possibility for women to escape the gendered voyeurism that characterized Westminster and the City.

What all of these excerpts from Restoration and early eighteenth-century literature show us is that writers were assigning a unique value to London’s geography. In particular, the areas between, beyond, and on the margins of Court and City were valuable to writers because these disparate areas (Grub Street, the Town, Holborn) appeared to require special regulation and new administrative apparatuses. I argue that writers living in or writing about London recognized these areas’ administrative particularities as opportunities for participating in and constituting Defoe’s prized “communication of business.” The kinds of topographical opportunities that writers in this book observed include: reconceiving the Town as a known space (chapters 1–2), redirecting urban projectors and funding to address this space (chapter 3), managing street-level performances between Court and City (chapter 5), and defining alternative modes of interiority to comprehend the Town’s “middling” influence on London as a whole (chapter 6). Paying particular attention to how this middle ground and the possibilities it represented affected urban writers, we may begin to unravel the sense in which London was “a muddle that always worked.”

Shaping Political Consensus in Tudor and Stuart London

If early eighteenth-century writers considered London’s administrative geography to represent a problem that needed solving, then the status of sovereignty and political consensus in late seventeenth-century London added a political element to this problem. Compared to its earlier incarnations, London was newly complex in a very specific way: London’s geography changed as seventeenth-century concepts of political sovereignty accommodated new techniques for acquiring consensus. While these changes distinguish eighteenth-century London from Tudor London, these changes did not suddenly appear in a fit of revolutionary fervor as much as the title “The Glorious Revolution” might like to suggest. Instead, these eighteenth-century changes were enabled by a history that reaches back to sixteenth-century London. This prehistory begins with Tudor London’s
transition from a late-medieval marketplace to the uncomfortable centerpiece of an absolutist state, and it ends with Stuart London’s restoration in the wake of the Puritan Revolution. I do not recount the intricacies of this prehistory here since Lawrence Manley’s *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* offers that comprehensive analysis; however, part of Manley’s thesis is worth repeating since it describes the exact nature of a “restored” London in 1660 and prefigures the changes that define eighteenth-century London:

[T]he restored order that was promised, and to some extent the one that was eventually and fitfully delivered, had more in common with the revolutionary movement toward expansion, diversity, progress, and increase than with the ancient regime that had preceded it. And not least of the enduring legacies were the ethical innovations—a cosmopolitan disinvestment in the local and “parochial,” a reliance upon reason, autonomy, and self-discipline, a self-restraint in the face of diversity—that, by linking personal liberty dialectically to new patterns of social discipline, helped to consolidate the urbanizing process. Perhaps typical of the revolutionary force of these innovations is [William] Walwyn’s view that nothing “maintains love, unity, and friendship in families; Societies, Citties, Countries, Authorities, Nations; so much as a condescension to the giving, and hearing, and debating of reason.” The emergence, from the Puritan Revolution, of views like Walwyn’s and others makes it possible to see how the historical development of sedentarism could give moral force to [Edmund] Burke’s later clam that liberty is a function of ethical maturity . . .

Manley’s point is that even after the revolutionary arguments of liberty and nonconformism that characterized 1642 to 1660, London’s most liberal and individualistic qualities relied upon a type of general consensus and restraint to make the city resemble a communal (i.e., “sedentary”) capital. After the Puritan Revolution, this new “Reason,” with its origins in absolutist consensus, appeared to balance, moderate, and check London’s civil society. Manley’s study ends at the Restoration with this conclusion, and this notion of a tempered civil society, liberated yet reliant upon shared consensus, is the context in which the 1688 Glorious Revolution, the discourse of sovereignty, and London’s literature of conduct functions.

New to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Londoners,
however, were not only the literary techniques developed by writers to
generate shared consensus but also the type of writer and genres that were
able to create these works. Whereas sixteenth-century writers distributed
their manuscripts in courtly circles as they strove to become patronized
“Courtier-Poets,” an expanding print culture during the early eighteenth
century brought about an entirely new audience of readers. New print
technologies (marked by the popularity of new literary genres such as
periodicals and novels) appeared beside the dissolution of the absolutist
state, and the result was a window of opportunity for writers to define not
simply their social value. If Manley’s thesis is accurate in claiming that the
type of absolute monarchy inherited by Restoration London rested upon
a type of civil liberty (previously associated with the City of London’s
nonconformists) that was tempered by consensual discipline (previously
associated with one’s being “subject” to the King’s sovereignty), then
the shattering of absolutism in 1688 complicated the qualities that now
constituted reasoned and enlightened discipline. At this moment, the
goal was neither to discipline oneself to be “subjects” in the same way
that Tudor Londoners were “subject” to the King, nor to discipline one’s
mind according to the reasoned standards of Court-appointed philoso-
phers, poets, and artists. Since the City of Westminster housed the Court,
and the City of London came to be associated with civil liberty after the
Puritan Revolution, writers throughout London (such as Cowley, Pope,
Addison, and Steele) were quick to sense how these abstract notions
of “reason,” “consensus,” and “liberty” easily mapped onto London’s
physical geography. And they recognized this geographic connection to
absolutism’s demise for a very specific reason. London’s geography gave
a substance to these previously inaccessible and unquestionable abstrac-
tions that organized seventeenth-century London. Geography presented
the possibility to all writers (not simply Courtier-Poets) that they could
seize these previously transparent notions of consensual rule, render them
legible to readers by means of geographic metaphor, and reimagine a dif-
ferent London. As eighteenth-century writers in London saw it (and they
witnessed it quite literally in the way London’s geography and administra-
tive boundaries were changing), consensus was now disenfranchised from
the absolutist state. Therefore, it was fair game for ownership; consensus
was now in the hands of priests, aldermen, the guilds, lawyers, politicians,
and writers—the very people who were previously “the ruled” rather than
“the ruling.”

Other recent work on London’s pre-Restoration social organization has
reassessed the nature of London’s environmental changes by questioning the binary extremes that historians and literary critics have traditionally used to describe London’s changed environment. The most familiar binaries employed by historians of seventeenth-century London include aristocratic versus bourgeois, Protestant versus nonconformist, Whig versus Tory, apocalyptic Hell versus City of God, gentry versus citizen, landed economy versus rentier economy, and Court versus City. Although these studies have tried to rebalance these generalized binaries to more accurately represent London’s growth, Ian Archer discards binary thinking altogether, arguing that “culture is best understood as a process, that people are constantly drawing upon a variety of different cultural forms, adapting them in the process to meet the needs of specific situations.” I suggest that we read London’s eighteenth-century literature to recover the imaginative terms developed by eighteenth-century humans to shape their experience amid several overlapping binaries. From this perspective, we may begin to question how these binaries have oversimplified—or even ignored—the sensitive cultural work that eighteenth-century writers imagined they were accomplishing. For instance, when I claim that London’s eighteenth-century geography was newly complex, I do not mean to polarize competing authorities for the sake of simplifying London. It is too simplistic to label the City of Westminster to be a “Tory” space and the City of London to be a “Whig” space, in the same manner that speaking of “red” and “blue” states in American elections oversimplifies political nuance and dissent. Instead, Reading London seeks to reveal the way eighteenth-century literature offers a variety of third-, fourth-, and fifth-terms that explode our preconceived binaries and allow us to sense the eighteenth-century alternatives to the terms we now use to account for urban change.

Recent studies of London’s governance have also challenged strictly deterministic (i.e., economic) views of why London looks the way it does; that is, many critics consider personal experience to be as valuable as economic and political determinants for explaining London’s changed environment. For example, J. F. Merritt’s Imagining Early Modern London stresses “the human, the particular, and the personal” motivations for social change and vows to “restate citizens as active participants in the changing city—not simply as passive observers of a developing cityscape, but as individuals making creative, pragmatic responses to a changing urban environment.” In Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London, Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner
introduce their anthology by highlighting how the essays pose “questions about how the city was experienced and about the social relations of its inhabitants.” Reading London contributes to this analysis of the ways personal experience both shaped—and was shaped by—London’s changing geography. This “shaping” and “being shaped by” are not mutually exclusive activities. Writers represented London’s geography in a way that allowed readers to experience it as the writers intended. In this sense, writers shaped London’s topography by offering mental maps that they imagined could be reproduced in readers’ minds. Writers also inevitably had to respond to London’s unprecedented growth and its growing, trade-based economy. In this sense, London social conditions shaped writers’ responses. I argue that literature about London evinces both of these activities, operating simultaneously and almost inseparably. In this way, personal experience, when recorded in printed text, can both reimagine London and be shaped by it. After the Glorious Revolution’s disenfranchisement of absolute power, carefully regulated experiences (i.e., experiences stylistically represented by writers and other previously disenfranchised professionals) became the tools for shaping consensus and shared consent in the city.

**Vehicles for Reading London: Genre and Conduct**

The second project that I examine in this book (readers’ efforts at mastering a newly complex London) invokes the eighteenth-century status of genre and metaphors since these textual conventions were accompanied by strategies for reading, interpreting and knowing previously unknown objects. For Boswell and Burney, London constituted one of these unknown objects that they could understand by carefully interpreting a writer’s metaphors and generic maneuvers. For Gay, Fielding, and Pope, the task of acquiring a reader’s consensus made it incredibly important to train readers to interpret these metaphors and generic experiments properly. Although London’s changed environment presented different writers with different generic and metaphoric opportunities, there is a common thematic element to these writers’ responses to London’s geographical changes: conduct. If the argument that eighteenth-century urban writers imagined their own authority seems abstract, it is because words such as “conduct,” “authority,” and “governing” are abstractions that require eighteenth-century contextualization—a context to which the remainder
of this introduction is devoted. Writers cast these words as metaphors and abstract personifications because they constituted valuable tools for producing knowledge about London that preceded commercially available maps, aerial photography, and other modern techniques for relating to a city. Readers with interests in literature’s relationship to cartography will be particularly interested in the review in chapter 1 of the history of map making and its status at the beginning of the eighteenth century when Gay writes *Trivia*—a poem that exemplifies how literature’s metaphoric play offered alternatives to mapping London. Eighteenth-century literature competed not only with visual technologies to represent London but also, as Hunter argues, with notions of seventeenth-century guidance: “By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the metaphor of the book as guide—a verbal map to space and time—had become fully established, words in print having replaced human leadership as the model for appropriate walking with God.” From this perspective, readers may witness how the titles of “sovereign God” and “the Poet” merge in London.

The geographic details that I have described in the preceding section were the material conditions that enabled writers to develop rhetorical strategies and, in turn, to imagine themselves governors over London’s populace. Urban authors wrote about London’s middling and marginalized areas because they experienced these environments in their daily lives. First, writers had to travel through these areas. Boswell, for example, tried to trace the footsteps of Steele’s Mr. Spectator through Court and City. Fielding’s jurisdiction as Bow Street Magistrate addressed both the City of Westminster and the middling liberties. Burney’s interest in writing for the theatre and her career as Second Keeper of the Robes for Queen Charlotte suggest that Burney was familiar with not only with the Court, but also the theatrical, literary, and musical worlds operating just beyond Whitehall. Second, many writers take pains to advertise the Town as their realm—a textual kingdom where the courtiers of Whitehall and the aldermen of the City are woefully beyond their jurisdiction. For instance, Gay uses the final lines of *Trivia* to pay homage not only to his Fleetstreet publisher, but also to the location where his poetry advertises itself to the world: “High-rais’d on Fleetstreet Posts, consign’d to Fame, / This Work shall shine, and Walkers bless my Name.” Gay’s self-referential ending is an eighteenth-century public-relations device; his poem first describes urban spaces and then guides readers to the spaces where his poem was published and advertised. Geographic citations like this example were meaningful to eighteenth-century writers and readers because
they pointed to the realm of imaginative production. In Gay’s case, these areas of production became unabashed subjects of his poem. Thus, we need to consider geographic locations in eighteenth-century urban writing not only as literal place names but also as important abstractions that writers used to moralize London and draw attention to the kinds of writing taking place there. If urban writers could utilize geography in this manner, then the tasks of “governing” and “conducting” readers through these geographic abstractions became valuable abstract tools for trying to help Londoners relate to a newly complex London. By yoking eighteenth-century London’s geography to abstract notions of morality, these writers appeared to render London less complex. For instance, in order to yoke materiality to spirituality, writers used metaphors, abstract personifications, and other rhetorical textual devices whose purpose was to fill unfamiliar abstractions with familiar meaning. In this sense, a writer’s governing takes place in the styles and rhetorical devices of printed text. Due to its figurative flexibility, conduct became one of these foundational metaphors for navigating the physical and moral treachery of London.27

Since my phrase “the metaphor of conduct” may appear strange since it no longer functions as a primary strategy for knowing modern cities, a careful understanding of how conduct could operate beyond its literal meaning is in order.

Conduct literature is a familiar topic for readers of eighteenth-century literature—perhaps too familiar. I say “too familiar” because misinterpreting conduct literature as a purely didactic form, barren of stylistic qualities, may detract readers from seeing the social ramifications of such an omnipresent genre. Dieter A. Berger attributes this absence to a modern literary perspective that refuses to consider any type of book offering “rules to realize an acknowledged cultural ideal” as worthy of literary (or stylistic) analysis.28 Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction and her introduction to The Ideology of Conduct written with Leonard Tennenhouse are some of the first examples to seriously study conduct literature. In an attempt to comprehend the variety of conduct books in terms of their political and economic agendas, Armstrong argues that “conduct books imply the presence of a unified middle class at a time when other representations of the social world suggest that no such class yet existed.”29 For Armstrong, conduct books established a “domestic ideal” that promoted “a concept of the household on which socially hostile groups felt they could all agree.”30 Conduct books accomplished these social functions because, as Armstrong and Tennenhouse claim,
these books “strive to reproduce, if not always to revise, the culturally
approved forms of desire.” Following Armstrong, critics like Berger
and Lawrence Klein consider how standards of conversational conduct,
in particular, fashioned a “culture of politeness” to promote a new type
of public gentleman (with explicitly defined political and philosophical
motivations) as the proper English citizen. In this sense, politeness does
not refer to a timeless sense of inherent virtue; rather, politeness is a time-
dependent concept shaped in part by different writers at different historical
moments for different purposes. Recalling that conversation refers to any
type of social engagement, from a mercantile interaction to a personal chat
with a lover, this concentration upon the proper conduct of conversation
suggests that writers recognized how post-1688 authority resided partly
in the ability to shape linguistic interactions among Londoners. What all
of these critics agree upon is that conduct literature is a socially engaged
and ideologically imaginative literary form; Reading London contributes
to this critical conversation by examining the conducts that were available
to eighteenth-century Londoners.

For eighteenth-century readers, conduct literature was not a new liter-
ary tradition. Seventeenth-century conduct literature consisted primar-
ily in three forms: courtesy-books (guides for accessing and perfecting
courtly mannerisms that were supposedly inherently natural characteris-
tics for aristocratic courtiers), chapbooks (dialogues or ballads that offered
standards of courtship), and phrase-books (fabricated phrases with their
attendant occasions for conversational usage). During the eighteenth-
century, however, the lines between these textual traditions blur, and crit-
ics such as Jacques Carré, Tim McLoughlin, and Georges Lamoine find
“the dissemination of [conduct literature’s] subject-matter into a broad
range of literary genres.” As this current work on conduct literature sug-
gests, the degree of this “dissemination” was so great that it is difficult
to understand what types of eighteenth-century writing are not conduct
literature. A common explanation for why conduct and issues of courtesy
seem to pervade a multitude of textual traditions during the eighteenth
century involves the perception that London transformed from a society of
well-bred aristocratic courtiers to a marketplace for middle-class profes-
sionals whose lack of breeding defined them as such. As a result, Carré
locates a “crisis of courtesy” at the start of the eighteenth century in which
the courtly connotations of “courtesy” were now in danger of becoming
prescriptive rules of etiquette, available to everyone.

Although eighteenth-century conduct books may resemble lists of rules
(and more analysis of conduct books’ stylistic strategies may dislodge this resemblance), the literature of the period adopts the task of normalizing certain standards of physical and mental activity in London. They do so because writers acknowledged that the imaginative qualities attached to reading seventeenth-century textual traditions were perfect vehicles for helping readers envision new relationships to a newly changed London. This provides a reason for why a variety of eighteenth-century texts may be discussed under the rubric of conduct literature. It also explains the heterogeneity of these forms. All of the “Town literature” examined in this book conveys a mode of writing that is neither purely creative in the post-romantic sense of castles and unicorns nor purely didactic in the sense of formulaic lectures and textbooks. Their mode is neither laughably fantastical nor sternly prescriptive; instead, they display a species of generic play that mocks our oversimplified binaries of creative imagination versus didactic prescription—a species that begs to be caught with a more contextualized critical apparatus. Partly because of its seventeenth-century and aristocratic associations, conduct has become synonymous with “proper behavior” or “mannerism.” But conduct is also a value-producing abstraction. As an alternative to Armstrong’s discussion of actual conduct books and their “ideology,” I suggest that we examine the topographical conditions that allowed the metaphor of conduct (and not just actual conduct books) to acquire social value and produce notions of morality in London.

Conduct literature was valuable to eighteenth-century writers because it was a familiar textual tradition; it brought with it explicitly defined ways of reading that emphasized the metaphysical reasoning for proper behavior and mannerism. Relying on this familiarity, writers seized conduct as a stable “known” amid the new “unknowns” of post-1688 London. And this is where writers’ metaphoric play acquires value. Metaphors were particularly valuable to these writers since metaphors familiarize the previously unknown—a function that is perfect for helping readers know their place in a newly changed urban environment. In particular, writers interpret conduct as a metaphor because a reader’s familiarity with conduct’s seventeenth-century associations could be transferred, through figurative similitudes, to refer to new, urban unknowns such as self-government (Burney and Boswell), urban space (Gay), and policing (Fielding). In other words, writers use conduct beyond its familiar, literal meaning; readers may see the word “conduct” on the page, recognize its literal meaning, but are now asked to extend its literal and familiar mean-
ing into new, unfamiliar and imaginative contexts. A metaphor that is common to twenty-first-century readers may help to clarify the familiarizing effects of metaphors. For instance, when we say “my love is a red, red rose,” we do not literally mean that there exists one rose that possesses all of our love; it would be laughable to have a rose permanently take our place in bed beside our significant other. The proclamation makes sense only if we read beyond its literal meaning. But it is an extremely valuable metaphor because it attempts to connect an intangible unknown (“love”) with a tangible known (“a rose”) and therefore familiarize readers with something previously unknown. In addition, this metaphor is so communally accepted that the roses actually acquire economic value; that is, roses are extremely expensive. Like the metaphor of the rose, writers use the metaphor of conduct to exceed literal meaning. For the writers in this study, conduct sometimes refers to instructive public behavior, and at other times it refers to a type of imaginative guidance which only a writer could provide, especially in the way John Locke uses it to title his essay, *On the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706). Sometimes conduct referred to the practical execution of a theory, and at other times it referred to what we now call the conscience. Most importantly, conduct could refer to the set of specific rules that a reader followed to make sense of, and engage with, printed text. In this sense, conduct refers to emerging theories of genre, and these examples suggest that conduct is an important metaphor to writers because it could accomplish imaginative tasks in excess of its literal meaning. That is, writers could assign new tasks to conduct’s familiar associations with social status, and in this way, they imagined they could manage London and fill the void left by the abdication of James II. By figuratively referring to conduct beyond its literal meaning and in ways that seventeenth-century writers never intended, eighteenth-century writers made conduct resemble a desirable object (almost tangible, like the cityscape) that printed texts embodied and conveyed to readers. Furthermore, writers were able to transform this abstraction into an almost priceless necessity for interpreting London properly; they did so by anchoring this abstraction to London’s literal, physical geography. In this way, the intangible (love or self-government) is rendered tangible (through the vehicle of a rose or writing in a journal).

The metaphor of conduct could also refer to a writer’s guidance for helping readers interpret new, urban spaces. Consider, for instance, how John Gay’s long poem *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* guides readers through a literal cityscape by cataloguing street names.
Readers become familiar with Gay’s London not by identifying and visiting monuments, streets, and churches but by yoking the way people act— their particular conducts, their “art of walking”— to specific named streets. Beyond referring to a literal cityscape, Gay’s poem urges readers to develop imaginative activity in order to know a new London. Gay used material conditions (urban geography) to accomplish figurative work (to know London by reading properly). Many of the writers I address in Reading London use the word “conduct” as a metaphor for textual form. Boswell’s “schemes,” Burney’s “plans,” and Fielding’s “Method” or “Conduct in Writing” are all closely related to “kind,” “species,” and the archive of words that eighteenth-century critics used as placeholders for “genre.” Invoking the metaphor of conduct, writers could shuttle value between textual authority, which was performed by the narrator’s or poet’s self-conscious entry into a work, and social authority, which was performed by the writer’s helping readers to relate to London in a new way. Interpreting the metaphor of conduct to relate to genre, we may account for the proliferation of kinds of writing about London during the first two decades of the eighteenth century and for the omnipresence of “mock” genres that translated classical Roman textual traditions into vehicles for addressing London’s local conditions. This suggests why several of the texts discussed in this book may seem generically foreign to us. For example, Burney’s Cecilia, Boswell’s London Journal, and Gay’s Trivia resist our categories of novel, journal, and poem because each is a textual vehicle designed to clarify specific traits that characterized eighteenth-century London. The idea that eighteenth-century urban writers developed textual modes that we neither have nor recognize as our own may seem strange, but it is completely consistent with writers’ attempts to reconceptualize their authority in terms of the administrative geography and notions of conduct of eighteenth-century London. Thus, writers reconceived textual modes to address specific urban problems that were unique to London.

Genre and the features that defined individual genres were not self-evident or well defined for all eighteenth-century writers; therefore, to address only one genre in this book (such as novels, poetry, or drama) would imply that eighteenth-century urban writers viewed genres as natural categories. This is simply not true. Gay’s Trivia, which could be described as a poem, a guidebook, an urban georgic, or a mock-epic, shows that the metaphor of conduct was valuable because it could shuttle value between geography and a variety of textual traditions to render a previously unknowable object, the city, familiar. Each of the following chapters suggests ways to
expand our notion of eighteenth-century conduct to understand it not only as a synonym for some abstract notion of public propriety or an ideological vehicle for refiguring subjectivity, but also, when in the hands of urban writers, as a metaphor for London’s new spaces, governance, and patterns of writing and reading. In the following chapters, the metaphor of conduct produces meaning where there previously was none. Writers in London recognize that metaphor is a crucial tool for making writers appear to be governing while they write, and making readers appear to be governed as they learn to read and interpret properly. This does not simply mean that we should interpret our city as we would interpret a book. Instead, conduct is an eighteenth-century metaphor for a complex system of knowledge production for both readers and writers.

**GOVERNMENTALITY**

By the middle of the eighteenth century, London’s problematic administrative geography had encouraged writers to generate imaginative solutions, and these solutions participated in a new, textual art of government known as governmentality. By “governmentality” I refer to an important theoretical lens that assists readers in seeing the strategies of imaginative government that writers devised after 1688. Discussions about authority in eighteenth-century London frequently invoke language derived from twentieth-century theories about eighteenth-century notions of power and authority. These theories are dominated by the words “public,” “civil,” and “governmentality,” and are generally derived from the writings of Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. The theory of liberal governmentality initially posited by Foucault and more recently examined by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Mary Poovey, and Judith Butler forms the modern understanding of the social context that enabled eighteenth-century urban writing to resemble governing. Modern critics use liberal governmentality to refer to an “art of government” that appeared after 1688 to compete with a fading monarchical absolutism. In contrast to divine right, liberal governmentality did not strictly operate “by coercion”; instead, it “elicited voluntary compliance through the mechanisms of fashion and taste.” In twenty-first-century terms, Judith Butler suggests that we are familiar with governmentality in terms of post-9/11 military tribunals and “indefinite detention”; to Butler, governmentality “denotes an operation of administration power that is extra-legal. . . . [it] designates a field of political power in which tactics and
aims have become diffuse, and in which political power fails to take on a unitary and causal form.” Although Butler uses governmentality to interpret twenty-first-century events, she nonetheless acknowledges the relationship of governmentality to eighteenth-century notions of sovereignty:

Governmentality thus operates through state and non-state institutions and discourses that are legitimated neither by direct elections nor through established authority. Marked by a diffuse set of strategies and tactics, governmentality gains its meaning and purpose from no single source, no unified sovereign subject. Rather, the tactics characteristic of governmentality operate diffusely, to dispose and order populations, and to produce and reproduce subjects, their practices and beliefs, in relation to specific policy aims.

Printed text in eighteenth-century London constitutes one of these “extra-legal” tactics for replacing a “unified sovereign subject.” From this perspective, we may consider the metaphors, rhetoric, and literary styles employed by early eighteenth-century writers as extralegal tactics for organizing London in new ways.

J. A. Pocock’s work is also important since it carefully qualifies these theorizations of liberal governmentality by injecting “manners” into these discussions of eighteenth-century civic government. In particular, Pocock traces how ancient notions of English virtue were redefined in terms of “manners,” a concept of civic regulation that negotiated England’s past with the onset of commercialism by combining “the ethical” with “the juristic.” Pocock’s point here is that a technology of manners reconciled any ethical problems that people had with London’s new materialism. While this argument offers one way to understand why eighteenth-century literature is obsessed with manners, conduct, and direction, I argue that in the way eighteenth-century writers theorized it, “conduct” was a technology not only suited for reconciling trade with an ancient regime, but also for projecting alternate futures that frequently, at least in their surface content, have nothing to do with trade. In its forward-leaning, goal-oriented movement towards imaginative speculation and projection, “conduct” is therefore distinct from “manners.” Both metaphors target discipline and consensus, but each one reaches these goals via different modes (i.e., political, aesthetic, religious) and different cultural vehicles (i.e., writing, reading, performance).

Early eighteenth-century literary writing, most notably Addison and
Steele’s *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers (published between 1710 and 1712), frequently attempts to outline an individual’s relationship to an urban community. In the shadow of divine right, textual discipline constituted a new prerequisite for a properly organized society. Conduct figured prominently in this periodical project as a monitoring device that left communal standards of taste intact, yet permitted readers to envision themselves as independent authorities. While critics such as Habermas have viewed Addison and Steele’s project as the birth of bourgeois subjectivity, I am more interested in how writers after Addison and Steele not only participated in liberal governmentality (their writings are attempts at controlling others), but also advertised printed text as a site of urban authority (their writings could govern other people in the place of divine right). Writers advertised their new method for knowing London as society’s best and only way to comprehend a city filled with isolated individuals. These writers therefore had to define their social function while performing it; for them, governmentality implied self-authorization.

Each of the following chapters frames a cultural problem in London that writers attempted to resolve by shaping consensus in a post-1688 environment. In turn, each chapter also details the textual technologies and modes that interact with, or arise from, London’s cultural geography, and it is these technologies and forms that constitute the writer’s experiment in the art of government. My goal is neither to synthesize every chapter under a grand generalization nor to discount the differences between the projects of Gay, Fielding, Pope, Boswell, and Burney. Instead, I offer five different ways in which eighteenth-century literary writing about London may be seen to be experimental and exploratory rather than prescriptive and regulatory. In addition, each writer participates in textual governmentality by means of several different genres.

The principle that has guided my selection of the writers I analyze is based on my desire to show how the stylistic and rhetorical strategies of canonically “literary” eighteenth-century texts may, with the help of different theoretical lenses, be shown to strive for cultural goals that extend beyond traditionally literary goals (i.e., to be aesthetically pleasing or reflect an authentic “reality”). For instance, although she is a writer who was irretrievably influenced by London’s physicality, Aphra Behn does not figure in the following study since she writes on the verge of sovereignty’s realignment in 1688, much of her work being swan songs for the Stuart cause before her death in 1689. Writers such as Eliza Haywood and Daniel Defoe also do not figure prominently, but their absence is not due
to their inability to imagine alternative Londons; instead, spatial limitations have caused me to test the validity of my thesis with texts that, with the exception of the past two decades, have traditionally been critiqued for their aesthetic and “realistic,” rather than cultural or political, merit. Thus, the following chapters interpret traditionally literary works in frequently nonliterary ways to offer several conclusions about the ways writers administered urban and textual spaces to readers.

Not all of the writers in the following chapters contributed to ideas of liberal governmentality in the same way. For example, Gay, Pope, and Fielding aimed to present themselves and their textual products as unquestionable social authorities. They carefully focus a reader’s attention on the new formal techniques that they were developing to guide the reader through unknown territories and textual forms. If the theory of governmentality can help suggest why writers in early eighteenth-century London were in the position to imagine themselves as authoritative figures, then this theory can also suggest how Gay’s “Art of Walking the Streets of London” participated in an “art of governing.” Boswell and Burney, on the other hand, offer detailed sketches of what should be taking place within Londoners’ minds. Their works narrate what happens when Londoners internalize the disciplinary techniques posited by Addison, Steele, Gay, Pope, and Fielding; therefore, Boswell and Burney represent a generation of writers raised on the models of an earlier generation. But Boswell and Burney’s self-governing techniques are not divorced from a specific experience of London; in fact, they are enabled by a new cultural problem that distinguishes late eighteenth-century London from its predecessor: the proliferation of print. To be sensitive to this cultural problem that distinguishes the motivations of early eighteenth-century writers from those of the late eighteenth-century, I organize the chapters of this book under two headings that refer to the changing functions that writers assigned to printed text: “governing others” and “governing the self.” The final section of this introduction reviews the problems and arguments for each chapter that I include beneath these headings. In this way, the order of the chapters sketches a developmental history of these writers’ experiments in eighteenth-century governmentality.

**Governing Others**

There are three reasons why I begin a study of how writers attempted to control others with Gay. First, Gay unapologetically anchors his poem to
the material conditions of eighteenth-century London. The hypersensitivity with which Gay details street names provides us with an idea about how meaningful eighteenth-century London’s geography was to writers. Desperate to refer to quotidian urban conditions and render them less complex, Gay also engineers over the course of the poem a powerful abstraction: urban space. In particular, Gay conceptualizes space as an archive of conduct (styles of walking, dress, and transport) each of which denotes a specific street. Another reason why a discussion of Trivia is important is that it details London’s streets and conceptualizes space in a way that Fielding, Boswell, and Burney would eventually take for granted and consider to be common knowledge. The “art of walking” that Gay’s poem describes allows us to view Tom Jones and the Epistle to Burlington as urban artifacts, even though they are not always viewed as such. My interpretation does not dispute that a work like Tom Jones, for example, may also be read as a mock-heroic Bildungsroman, but I do suggest that viewing this novel as an urban artifact reveals important facets of a shared artistic project. Finally, Gay’s poem frustrates attempts to forge twentieth-century relationships to a 1716 long poem. The work wears its alterity on its sleeve; its specificity demands that we see the poem as a document written to address local conditions and to guide readers through a moment in London’s history. Thus, I do not interpret the spaces that Gay conceptualizes in Trivia as primitive centers of modernity that reflect a modern “self.” One can only claim that eighteenth-century views of London prefigure twentieth-century perspectives on this or any other urban model by downplaying the sense of geographic and administrative specificity that Reading London strives to highlight.

I argue in the second chapter that the textual strategies Fielding used in Tom Jones to guide his readers through a new textual form (the novel) are identical to the strategies that he used in his Bow Street prose to introduce himself to the populace he governed as Magistrate on Bow Street. If we recognize how Gay relies upon the metaphor of conduct to fabricate ideas about urban space (as well as his social value as a poet), we may contextualize how Fielding’s Tom Jones helped Fielding merge the novelist with the Bow Street Magistrate. The connection between Fielding’s novel and his civil prose is stylistic; Fielding developed a specific way of guiding readers’ relationships to their proper authorities that not only helped him police the liminal districts surrounding Bow Street, but also lent writers (whether novelists or writers of social treatises) legitimacy in an urban environment.
The third chapter contextualizes Alexander Pope’s 1731 *Epistle to Burlington* in terms of London’s industry of urban projecting and improvement. I argue that by using the final eight lines to Pope’s verse-epistle as its epigraph, Nicholas Hawksmoor’s 1736 *Proposition for a New Stone-Bridge at Westminster* points to the importance of Pope’s poem for imagining London’s mid-century cityscape. In particular, Pope’s *To Burlington*, which Pope wrote to his architect-patron Lord Burlington, assigns a proper “Use” to wealth. Pope defined this use by using the poem to reinterpret the words “Taste” and “Use”; however, the way in which readers approached Pope’s Horatian epistle as well as the poem’s erratic publishing history suggests that *To Burlington* began to be read as a Humean—and definably British—essay. Witnessing the way Pope translates Roman textual tradition into a definably British form, readers were able to imagine that *To Burlington* transferred authority from Rome to London. In turn, Pope resembled a classically educated interpreter whom, in the absence of a sovereign monarch, London needed to render its social problems legible to an eighteenth-century populace. One of these problems involved the eighteenth-century competition between sovereignty and liberal governmentality. This problem of urban authority was best symbolized during the 1730s by the fervor over the construction of a bridge at Westminster that would compete with London Bridge, the City of London’s ancient viaduct for trade. As Hawksmoor’s epigraph suggests, Pope’s poem, in both its form and its content, attempted to reconcile these immediate problems that threatened Court and City.

**A New Cultural Problem: The Proliferation of Print**

In an interchapter (chapter 4) that I position between the sections entitled governing others and governing the self, I detail not only the historical conditions that gave rise to the proliferation of print in London but also several reactions to this textual proliferation that recognize it as a new problem for Londoners. Writers moved from governing others to governing the self because the proliferation of governing projects that writers like Gay, Fielding, and Pope had popularized during the first half of the century had become incredibly varied, chaotic, and seemingly unrelated. From the perspective of late eighteenth-century writers such as Boswell and Burney, these early eighteenth-century experiments in textual government had failed to cause substantive political change due to the fact that Gay, Fielding, and Pope relied upon imaginative techniques to control Londoners. The “print-
saturated London” which I outline in the interchapter therefore presents a cultural problem to late-century writers since they not only encountered early-century writers’ failure to effectively guide readers’ imaginations, but they also inherited a cacophonous number of proliferating textual voices that made urban unity seem impossible. The saturation of printed text in mid-century London therefore denies a reader’s ability to fashion a single, individual self since there were an infinite number of different texts and forms that claimed to relate readers to London in the proper way. By the late eighteenth-century, a single “London” became more difficult to imagine since there was no single textual tradition in which to imagine London. The sheer heterogeneity of textual forms that constituted a print-saturated London threatened the notion of a single self. In short, the new cultural problem that London now presented to readers and writers was that a print-saturated London blurred London’s readability.

The chapters that I devote to Boswell (chapter 5) and Burney (chapter 6) register two experiences of this cultural problem and result in Boswell’s and Burney’s developing textual modes of self-government. As a heterogeneous, print-saturated London threatens the conception of an individual self, Boswell and Burney respond by reappropriating the textual strategies that Gay, Fielding, and Pope had originally conceived to manage others. Boswell and Burney adapt these strategies to manage themselves, and as a result, they contribute to a late-century version of governmentality that involves self-government. In their self-governing responses to a print-saturated London, Boswell and Burney show how notions of private individuality both inherit and alter the terms of communal identity conceived by an earlier generation of writers.

**Governing the Self**

In chapter 5 I argue that Boswell responds to London’s incongruous textual representations and images by internalizing the modes of government that Gay and Fielding had developed to address readers. If London’s heterogeneity threatened Boswell’s sense of an individual self, then he needed a way to reimagine unity in late eighteenth-century London. In his *London Journal*, Boswell recognized that the critical unity associated with dramatic metaphor represented a way to reimagine a unified self. For example, Boswell frequently adopts other personas in “scenes,” and he introduces dialogues that contain parenthetical stage directions. To understand how Boswell’s
dramatic metaphor worked as a vehicle for recording his experiences within and between Court and City (the areas, not coincidentally, in which the majority of London’s theaters were located), I historicize the connotations that the word “dramatic” would have carried in London between 1762 and 1763. Doing so, we can see that Boswell’s use of dramatic metaphor originated in and was yoked not only to the Town’s undisciplined geography but also to post-Restoration literary and social criticism. The *London Journal* represents Boswell’s attempt to critique his every move in an effort to become, with the help of no one but himself, a proper Briton. To accomplish this feat, Boswell viewed the act of writing as synonymous with performing—and governing—the self; Boswell became both the authoritative actor-writer and the reflective critic-reader. Boswell’s *London Journal* represents in many ways a logical conclusion to Addison and Steele’s attempt to govern readers by means of printed texts.

Unlike Boswell’s experience with the endless possibilities that a print-saturated city offered him, Burney recognized that these possibilities actually limited a woman’s urban experience. Burney found that London’s heterogeneity did not offer women a variety of choices; instead, London’s endless possibilities for self-definition presented an endless number of ways to limit a woman’s agency in London and render her a passive object. In the fifth chapter, I interpret Burney’s second novel, *Cecilia*, as a sequel or attempt to recast these problems of London’s gendered spaces by reimagining the gendered literary traditions that surface in her first novel, *Evelina*. Recognizing the formal limitations that a novel of letters had imposed upon her writing about a young woman’s maturation in London, Burney wrote *Cecilia* not only to reappropriate the formal limitations that *Evelina* had allowed her to recognize, but also to write beyond the epistolary tradition so as to identify alternate sites of feminine authority in London. The forms in which male writers were producing knowledge about London frequently did not relate to women; for example, women lacking male conductors on eighteenth-century streets were considered prostitutes. Gay’s “Art of Walking the Streets” therefore addresses male readers; it does not address women who were brought to and conducted throughout London by male escorts. In response to these masculine strategies for producing urban knowledge, Burney uses *Evelina* and *Cecilia* to suggest ways in which women could reimage themselves as both the conducted individual and the conductor. One way to accomplish this imaginative task, Burney suggests, is to reject the idea that epistolary confession is the only means for knowing one’s self. Women could instead interpret their own experiences rather than waiting
for a reader to interpret and critique their urban experiences. Burney takes this suggestion to heart when she, as a woman novelist, rejects epistolary confession and reinterprets the role of letter writing in *Cecilia*.

Burney occupies the final chapter because she questions what a woman’s authentic self might resemble in London. But she was also able to exploit the metaphor of conduct in a way that male writers such as Boswell and Gay could not. In particular, her first two novels question how notions of conduct and textual form made gender meaningful. She in turn exposed the metaphor of conduct for what it really was: a rhetorical device that writers used to imagine authority. Burney, however, did not discard the metaphor of conduct as a defunct or tainted strategy of authorization. She instead reinterpreted it in order to propose an alternative (and gendered) mode of soul-searching that did not rely upon confessional tactics. Burney’s writing therefore outlined strategies of self-authorization that catered to women writers, but she continued to seize the opportunities that London’s geography and its modes of governmentality made available to writers in general.

With these concrete examples in mind, I return to my central argument: eighteenth-century urban writers advertised an authority that they never really possessed, but imagined they held. None of the texts discussed here—not even Gay’s *Trivia*—attempts to reflect London as it actually existed; instead, authors used their works to reimagine London and their roles in London’s immediate present. To the extent that the guidebooks, novels, poems, journals, brochures, plays, periodical papers, and treatises I analyze tried to imagine a credentialized role for the urban writer that did not exist, these works should be seen as eighteenth-century projects. For example, Fielding’s *Tom Jones* is just one example of what eighteenth-century novel writing looked like; Fielding had no way of knowing that his (or rather Cervantes’s) self-conscious narrative voice and style would be adopted by later novelists as a defining characteristic of a British genre. Burney never fully resolved her problems with confessional literary vehicles in *Evelina* and *Cecilia*; she used each novel to make problems visible, not to solve them. We should also remember that Boswell’s *London Journal* is not a self-contained work; it is just one volume in his recorded life. Boswell takes great pains to advertise that his *London Journal* does not end with a reformed, chaste hero. Instead, the *London Journal* tries to identify a British style of writing that Boswell could take with
him on his Grand Tour. Fielding, Burney, and Boswell wrote without knowing what the end to their projects would be; thus, their works exemplify the eighteenth-century sense of the word “project” as Daniel Defoe had defined it: “a vast Undertaking, too big to be manag’d.”51 While none of these urban writers tries to “manage” the ends of these projects, each writer imagines exerting some control over London’s present. It is not my intention to prove that Pope’s poetry actually built a bridge or to prove that Londoners actually considered space in the way Gay imagined it; instead, I stress the important roles that writers’ imaginations played in fabricating both London and the Londoner. I focus not only on textual projects that tried to clarify conduct’s role in understanding London, but also on the textual strategies and formal traditions that defined and valorized the process of “conducting” or writing in eighteenth-century London.

By focusing on conduct as an abstract yet influential “governing idea,” I offer one way to answer questions about why eighteenth-century urban writing differs from the urban writing from other centuries. I have chosen to focus on conduct because, although an abstraction, it had ramifications for London’s daily life that demand further, sensitive clarification. Describing conduct as a governing idea allows me not only to visualize its relevance to theories of liberal governmentality (“governing”) and imaginative thought (Hume’s “ideas”), but also to question the self-evident status it enjoys as a governing idea in twenty-first century criticism about eighteenth-century literature. I have not attempted to make this study of conduct the last word on the subject of eighteenth-century urban writers’ alterity; instead, I hope to provoke more questions that will render the peculiar complexities and lost subtleties of eighteenth-century writing visible to a twenty-first century audience.

The crucial characteristic about eighteenth-century urban literature that my study reveals is the experimental, exploratory tone of some of the most “canonical” works of the period. The experimental tone of these literary-urban-projects questions the post-romantic notion that eighteenth-century writing is prescriptive and unimaginative (according to a Wordsworthian definition of imagination). By closely reading the textual strategies that writers developed to contribute to London’s government, I sketch an urban history that suggests that our ideas about how to create, manage, and police centralized populations in urban settings do not have to be viewed as the culmination of an inevitable process. In other words, Reading London shows how eighteenth-century literature offers alternatives for urban governance and ultimately suggests that our twenty-first-century problems and conceptions of “the city” did not have to be this way.