

The Death of Clare Market: Circulations and Intersections of Power in Victorian London from the Digitized Old Bailey Proceedings

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The resources of Old Bailey Online and methods from the creative turn in cultural geography enable novel analyses of a specific London location's imaginative identity over half a century. This paper carries these out in a piece of Deep Locational Criticism, an approach pioneered by the paper's author (2016). The digitized 'Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 1674-1913' are a 'fully searchable edition of the largest body of texts detailing the lives of non-elite people ever published, containing 197,745 criminal trials held at London's central criminal court'. Transcripts of 195 trials between 1837 and 1901 mention Clare Market, a once-notorious central London street which gave its name to a neighbourhood.

Clare Market appears in these texts in various guises: as crime-scene; as the address of victim or accused; as the site of businesses suspected of handling stolen goods. Over the period between the 1840s and the 1890s, Clare Market gradually becomes less important in central London cultures of commerce (particularly resale of second-hand items), alcohol consumption and crime, to the point at which, in the 1890s, it seems a ghostly space awaiting removal. The area around the actual street of Clare Market (today occupied by the buildings of the LSE), had utterly changed by 1905.

Clare Market's elusive personality is sought here via selected trial proceedings which reveal its unrespectable experiential qualities. Here, businesses with doubtful reputations operated. Here, dangerous pubs were situated, criminals recruited one another and late-night fights happened. This approach illuminates intersections and circulations of power, bringing class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies into relation with each other, and grasping them in a way that would have been impossible before the digital resource of Old Bailey Online was created. It is not quantitative digital humanities that is practiced here, however, but interpretative critical reading and literary urban studies.

Abstract: 299 words