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## Soundscapes

Listening to British and American Languages and Cultures

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# Loss of Identity in the Urban Soundscape of John Gay's *Trivia*

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**ABSTRACT** – Literary critics and historians have often stressed the importance of the sensory experience in John Gay's *Trivia* (1716) and have concentrated on the visual impact of the London cityscape as being responsible for the sensory impressions in the poem. But, as *Trivia*'s London is largely represented by street noise, this essay argues that it is above all sound that gives the poem this impressionistic quality. City noise is constantly present as a backdrop to Gay's eighteenth-century urban setting. Moreover, much of the text reveals social tensions in an urban setting where individual identities are effaced, and *Trivia*'s speaker is constantly at pains to preserve the integrity of his own self. But as neither silence nor distance are possible in Gay's London, there is no escape from the crowd's press or from the continuous invasion of sound. Especially the emphasis on the presence of traffic noise, and the allusions to Homeric and Biblical chariots of war, turns into a powerful symbol of fear of the city as a place of moral degradation and cultural annihilation.

**KEYWORDS** – John Gay; *Trivia*; Soundscape; City; English Literature.

John Gay's *Trivia* (1716) is more concerned with impressions than with reflections. William Bowman Piper observes that "[t]he narrator of *Trivia* is virtually a conduit [...] through which a perpetual flux of London impressions flows" (Piper 1999, 99). However, interpretations that stress the importance of the sensory experience in the poem have predominantly concentrated on the *visual* impact of the London cityscape. As a matter of fact, Piper specifies that reflection is transplanted by "the liveliest, most flexible possible responsiveness to the developing *sights* in their shifting particularities" (98). Flavio Gregori too defines the poem's observer as a man who "*sees* the town" (Gregori 2005, 72) but "*is afraid to see what his light has illuminated*" (92). Admittedly, the presence of sound in the poem is acknowledged by many literary critics and historians, but it is rarely further analyzed. Although to Anne McWhir *Trivia*'s London "*is a place of confusion and noise and danger*"

(McWhir 1983, 414), she concludes that “Gay’s georgic-for-pedestrians also teaches his readers to *see* another city” (422; all italics mine). More helpful is Clare Brant’s observation that “sound filters in people out of view” (Brant 2007, 114), but again this statement is not worked out any further. Nor does Catharina Löffler, after stating that “[w]hile sight still is the most dominant medium of perception in *Trivia*, sounds and smells, too, play a major role” (Löffler 2017, 151), expand on the omnipresence of noise for her construction of literary psychogeography. The critical approaches to Gay’s poem clearly corroborate the hegemony of the visual in Western culture (Tyler 1984). As *Trivia*’s London is largely represented by street noise – “[p]robably the most frequently used verb in *Trivia*, with the possible exception of ‘to walk,’ is ‘to resound’” (Sherbo 1970, 1068) – I will argue that, instead of the *visual* experience, it is above all *sound* that gives an impressionistic quality to Gay’s poem.

Virgil’s rural and agricultural pastoral poems shaped much of the eighteenth-century idea of nature and writers readily engaged with both the practical and the idyllic side of his *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. Joseph Addison wrote in highly enthusiastic terms of the *Georgics* in *The Spectator* as “the most delightful Landships that can be made out of Fields and Woods” (*The Spectator* 417 – 28/06/1712), and in his “Essay on Virgil’s *Georgics*” he maintained that they have “all the perfection that can be expected in a Poem written by the greatest Poet in the flower of his age” (Addison 1914, II.11). But if much neoclassical nature poetry built on Virgil’s example, so did, by contrast, John Gay’s *Trivia*, a poem of city life. In this mock georgic a walker of the streets of London is obsessed with the fear of being assaulted, being jostled by the crowd, and, above all, of being driven over by London’s fast-moving coaches.

Much of Gay’s poem concerns social tensions in an urban setting where individual identities are effaced, and *Trivia*’s walker is constantly at pains to preserve the integrity of his own self. He makes clear that he is not the vain and foolish man of fashion. On the contrary, he vehemently disdains the fop, a narcissistic creation of urban society, who wears shoes “of the Spanish or Morocco Hide” (I.30), dresses in “the loop’d Bavaroy” (I.53), and carries “Canes with Amber tipt” (I.67). The moralist Samuel Palmer had described these as men “who love to have their Persons admir’d, look as often in their Glass, are as Nice and Formal in their Dress, and as Awkard and Foolish [...] as the silliest Woman in *Europe*” (Palmer 1710, 193). Such fops travel the streets of Gay’s London in coaches and in chairs to avoid the hazards to both their clothes and health. When Sir John Foppington in Abel Boyer’s *English Theophrastus*, who normally has “A Chair [...] brought within the

door, for he apprehends every breath of Air as much as if it were a Hurrican", ventures out in the streets on foot, he has his "milk white Suit" daubed by a "saucy impudent Chimney-sweeper" (Boyer 1708, 53, 56-57). But whereas the fop and Gay's walker are equally afraid of soiling their clothes, the first is concerned with not spoiling his beautiful dress, while the walker is painfully aware of the composition of the mire that flows down the kennels or gutters, which Swift had shockingly described in "A Description of a City Shower" as "filth of all hues and odors" made up of dung, guts, blood, and dead animals. It is such sewage that Gay's walker has in mind when he refers to impeding rains that "Soon shall the Kennels swell with rapid Streams" (I.159) which "Ungrateful Odours Common-shores diffuse" (I.171).

Gay closely adheres to the early-eighteenth-century stereotype of the effeminate fop, whose vain superficiality undermined the social definition of sturdy male wisdom, stalwartness and responsibility. Gay's walker, therefore, will have nothing to do with all this: his "Rosie-complexion'd Health" (I.73) contrasts sharply with the fop's sickly constitution, and his strong cane is not for "empty Show" but "for Use" (I.68):

If the strong Cane support thy walking Hand,  
Chairmen no longer shall the Wall command;  
Ev'n sturdy Carmen shall thy Nod obey,  
And rattling Coaches stop to make thee Way. (I.61-64)

Similar manly behaviour is advised in confronting a Bully. The walker, cane in hand, should never step aside but "defie his strutting Pride" (II.61) and throw him off-course into the kennel. The bully will not dare to turn and oppose such brave masculine behaviour.

Contemporary writers often voiced their condemnation of the fop in terms of societal decline of masculine qualities. Philip Carter quotes as examples Jonathan Swift's fear that traditional education was being replaced by a mere cultivating of manners and Samuel Johnson's "Warriour dwindled to a Beau" (52-53). In a less sophisticated way, to Ned Ward he was simply a coward (Ward [1703] 1955, 296). Gay's walker makes such criticism his own and he is at pains to distance himself from the fop, as if he feared contamination. This is nowhere more clearly expressed than in his warning to avoid close contact with the fop "Whose mantling Peruke veils his empty Head [...] Lest from his Shoulder Clouds of Powder fly" (II.54, 58).

Contrasting with the walker's avowal of masculinity is his fear of bodily contact "in the mingling Press" of a city whose population had doubled

since 1650 and is estimated to have exceeded half a million people by 1700 (Harding 1990, 121-22). This rapid demographic growth of London during the second half of the seventeenth century created a situation where “tides of passengers the Street molest” (II.28, 8) and the urban scene became crowded to such an extent that different social classes could not avoid rubbing shoulders, something that proved particularly unnerving to the wealthy (Cockayne 2007, 159). Gay’s walker clearly feels ill at ease with those idlers who are socially above him as well as with the rabble below him. Alvin Kernan sees the walker’s introvert nature and his resistance to blend in with London society as a tactic which “protects him by keeping all the world outside” (Kernan 1965, 45-50). Philip Carter too notes that “the walker infuses the poem with a spirit of social mistrust” (Carter 2007, 29).

But if Gay’s walker in *Trivia* can avoid (and give advice to others on how to avoid) both the crowds and the mire that flows in the kennels, he cannot shut out the sounds of the city that assail him constantly. Like the man-produced waste in the kennels, these too are the products of human activity. On a psychological level, therefore, street noise contaminates even when physical contact is shunned, and, as the sounds that typify the urban condition become a breach of private space in the same way as physical contact, they heighten the walker’s sense of anxiety.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Londoners had become increasingly aware of the disturbance of street noise and often complained of loss of sleep, impossibility of concentration and distraction during religious worship (Cfr. Cockayne 2007, 129). Indeed, the noise of street criers and hawkers had become a commonplace in descriptions of the urban soundscape. In 1698 William King affirmed in his *Journey to London, In the Year 1698* that “there is a great deal of Noise in this City, of publick Cries of things to be sold” (King 1699, 10). King’s preposterous description of London is a successful parody of Martin Lister’s *Journey to Paris*, in which he admired that, in Paris, “there is very little noise in this City of Publick Cries of things to be sold” (22). King’s book was, moreover, ostentatiously a translation of a work by the French philosopher Samuel Sorbière. In 1664 Sorbière had caused quite a scandal by giving in his *Relation d’un voyage en Angleterre* a far-from-flattering picture of the English character and manners in his book. Thomas Spratt, fellow of the Royal Society, immediately published a lengthy reply to “this rude Satyr[’s] insolent Libel on our Nation”. As Sorbière’s book was dedicated to the King of France, the affair threatened to strain the relationships between the two countries, something that the newly instated Charles II wanted to

avoid. Further publications against the French author were therefore not allowed in England, and in France the authorities held Sorbière under arrest for four months. The target of King's pamphlet was thus both Lister's facetious concern with trivial detail in his description of Paris, and Sorbière's prejudices against the English nation. The meaninglessness of describing London in such terms is brought out by a hilarious comment that follows King's reference to street criers, namely, that "[t]he Gazetts come out twice a Week, and a great many buy 'em" (10). King's mention of the street crier thus becomes part of a satiric cliché description of the city's insignificant surface reality that does not want to probe into the deeper complexity of the urban scene.

Addison tackled the commonplace notion of the noise of street criers with congenial comedy. Perhaps with a nod to King's comment, Mr Spectator asserts that "[t]here is nothing which more astonishes a Foreigner, and frights a Country Squire, than the Cries of London" and proceeds by printing "a Letter from some very odd Fellow upon this Subject", in which an imaginary writer, Ralph Crotchet, offers his services as "Comptroller-General of the *London Cries*" to orchestrate the street noise into tunes of more pleasant time and measure. He "think[s] it would be very proper, that some Man of good Sense and sound Judgment should preside over these Publick Cries, who should permit none to lift up their Voices in our Streets, that have not tuneable Throats, and are not only able to overcome the Noise of the Croud, and the Rattling of Coaches, but also to vend their respective Merchandizes in apt Phrases, and in the most distinct and agreeable Sounds" (*The Spectator* 251 – 18/12/1711).

King's and Addison's humorous treatment of the phenomenon, however, should not obscure the fact that street noise did exist and that street cries were an important factor of disturbance in the London soundscape. Addison's Mr Spectator reminds the reader that "My good Friend Sir Roger often declares, that he cannot get them out of his Head or go to Sleep for them" (*ibid.*). Thus, it is hardly surprising that the first descriptions of *Trivia*'s London, after the invocation of the muse, are the cries of the shoeblack and the oyster sellers (I.24, 28). The London day starts "when Sleep is first disturbed by Morning Cries" (I.121) till soon "all the Streets with passing Cries resound" (II.24). Even the passing of the seasons in London is marked by street cries rather than by the signs from nature (II.425 ff):

Successive Crys the Season's Change declare,  
And mark the Monthly Progress of the Year.

Hark, how thekk Streets with treble Voices ring,  
To sell the bounteous Product of the Spring!  
Sweet-smelling Flow'rs, and Elders early Bud,  
With Nettle's tender Shoots, to cleanse the Blood:  
And when June's Thunder cools the sultry Skies,  
Ev'n Sundays are prophan'd by Mackrell Cries. (II.425-33)

In these lines Gay subverts Mr Spectator's positive picture of the early morning bustle to replenish the London markets with country goods:

[...] it was the most pleasing Scene imaginable to see the Chearfulness with which those industrious People ply'd their Way to a certain Sale of their Goods. The Banks on each Side are as well peopled, and beautified with as agreeable Plantations, as any Spot on the Earth; but the *Thames* it self, loaded with the Product of each Shore, added very much to the Landskip. (454 – 11/08/1712 – Steele)

The ideal country life (and its products), typical of the Virgilian georgic, and of which we can find trace in Steele's description of London, has disappeared in *Trivia*, where the idyllic agricultural products of the pastoral tradition are mainly present in the aural dimension of street cries and "the occupations of the husbandmen are mocked by the occupations of the city dwellers with their street cries and stalls" (Armens [1954] 1966, 75). In fact, the poem affirms that "the voice of Industry is always near" (II.100). Still, it is only the cries of those who sell that characterize the London soundscape, while the deafening clanging of those who manufacture goods are conspicuously absent. None of the acute hammering of coppersmiths, pewters and coopers that accounted for a great deal of street noise in the early eighteenth century (Cockayne 2007, 110-12) is present in Gay's London. The only sound representing honest work is that of "the sturdy Pavior [who] thumps the Ground / Whilst ev'ry Stroke his lab'ring Lungs resound;" (I.14-15). Otherwise the buying and selling of luxury has replaced honest work.

If the line "when Sleep is first disturbed by Morning Cries" in Book II seems to create the impression that daytime noise ends the peace of night, the reader is fully undeceived in Book III. It is not only that darkness accentuates sounds by the very absence of visual stimuli, but that sleep in the poem is willingly disturbed by the "shrilling Strains" of ballad singers (III.77), the racket produced by "Kindlers of Riot" (III.322), and the "screaming" cries of fire (III.353). These night sounds represent a crescendo of urban danger and fear. The apparently harmless ballad singer in reality works in close association



with pickpockets, “Confed’rate in the cheat” (II.81), and attracts crowds “To aid the Labours of the diving Hand” (III.80). Rioting at night included such “desp’rate Deeds, and Mischief” (III.329) as shattering windows, inflicting wounds to passers-by, and rolling dignified married women in barrels down cobbled streets with a thundering noise (III.330-33). The breaking out of a roaring fire goes accompanied by the beating of drums, while the sounds of explosions, with which houses are brought down “with sullen Sound”, culminate in an apocalyptic conclusion in which the city’s

[...] sap’d Foundations shall with Thunders shake,  
And heave and toss upon the sulph’rous Lake;  
Earth’s Womb at once the fiery Flood shall rend,  
And in th’Abyss her plunging Tow’rs descend. (III.389-92)

The suggestion that peace reigns during the night is clearly fallacious.

Silence is traditionally seen as conducive to, if not a prerogative of, contemplation and understanding, the “condition of piety and learning”, “the sound of authority” (Bailey [1996] 2004, 26). It is typically associated with the country and is seen as antithetical to the bustle of city life. Addison wrote in *The Spectator* that “True Happiness is of a retired Nature, and an Enemy to Pomp and Noise [...] It loves Shade and Solitude, and naturally haunts Groves and Fountains, Fields and Meadows” (*The Spectator* 15 – 17/03/1711 – Joseph Addison). Steele too argued that “To one used to live in a City the Charms of the Country are so exquisite, that the Mind is lost in a certain Transport which raises us above ordinary Life” (118 – 16/06/1711). Of course, this positive view of the country is based on an ideal construct of pastoral life that found its origins in Virgil’s *Georgics*, which linked the beauty of the country also to (moral) instruction: “It raises in our minds a pleasing variety of scenes and landscapes, whilst it teaches us” (Addison [1697] 1914, II.4).

The pastoral ideal of peace and quiet contrasted negatively with the noise of the metropolis. For those who were constrained to live in the city, edifying silence could only be found with difficulty. Mr Spectator wrote “That I might have nothing to divert me from my Studies, and to avoid the Noises of Coaches and Chair-men, I have taken Lodgings in a very narrow Street” (*The Spectator* 175 – 20/09/1711 – Eustace Budgell). Similarly, only in “close Abodes” can Gay’s walker “pensive stray, / In studious Thought” (II.273-74).

Silence also entails distance and as such it is implicit in the eighteenth-century prospect view, which offered a comprehensive view of society and engendered reflections on authority, power, order and stability. Prospect

views often involved perspectives from a high spot on a country estate. Thus, in James Thomson's *Seasons*, for example, "The estates with their prospects constitute [...] a typical eighteenth-century cluster of peace, prosperity, patriotism, and plenty, and the estates are the sources of wealth and the basis for Britain's power" (Cohen 1970, 7). For John Locke, too, distance becomes essential for a proper understanding of things. If one were sharp-sighted enough to see from a distance the detailed mechanism of a clock, one would not be able read the time the hands indicated, and, similarly, "[i]f our Sense of Hearing were but 1,000 times quicker than it is, how would a perpetual noise distract us. And we should in the quietest Retirement, be less able to sleep or meditate, than in the middle of a Sea-fight" (Locke [1690] 1975, II.xxiii.12).

But neither silence nor distance are possible in Gay's London, where there is no escape from the crowd's press or from the continuous invasion of sounds. Traffic noise is constantly present as a backdrop to the eighteenth-century urban setting, and the rattling sound produced by iron-straked cartwheels on cobbled streets became a common feature in descriptions of the city (Cockayne 2007, 106-07). Gay's repeated mention of them, however, goes beyond the mere description of such sounds as street noise. They are the main constituent of *Trivia*'s soundscape and are a constant source of anxiety. A long sequence of references to the sound of approaching cartwheels, for example, runs through the poem. Thus in Book I Gay mentions "rattling coaches" and "rumbling wheels" (I.64, 99), while in Books II and III this din intensifies in descriptions of wheels shaking the ground (II.23; II.273) and the roaring sound (III.396) is repeatedly likened to thunder (II.124-25; II.229; III.173-74). The ever-approaching coaches in the streets of London haunt Gay's walker and take on the dimensions of a frightening battle of war in which defeat and annihilation is suffered.

To appreciate the use Gay makes in *Trivia* of the rattling noise that coaches produce in the streets of London, it is fruitful to compare it to the somewhat casual presence of it in Ned Ward's *London Spy*. Ward, a London tavern owner and popular author, published a series of sketches of London life. These appeared in monthly instalments starting from November 1698 and were collected in a single volume in 1703. Ward's humorous, and often coarse, impressions of London street life are written by a fictitious reporter from the countryside, who explores the metropolis mainly on foot. Although there is obvious exaggeration in Ward's parodies, which served his purpose to expose the excesses of London life, he mentions rattling cartwheels only three times in his long accounts of walking the streets of London. Ward's country-

man is assailed by street noise upon his arrival in London: "My ears were so serenaded on every side with the music of sundry passing-bells, the rattling of coaches, and the melancholy ditties [of fruit vendors ...] that had I as many eyes as Argus and as many ears as fame, they would have been all confounded, for nothing could I see but light, and hear nothing but noise" (Ward [1703] 1955, 18). Only half a year later Ward returned once more to coach noise when his visitor comes to Fleet Street: "where the rattling of coaches loud as the cataracts of the Nile rob'd me of my hearing" (121). And again, in the last issue of *The London Spy* he remarks casually that the coaches "made such a rattling over the stones that [...] I could not have had a more ungrateful noise in my head" (319-20).

Ward's descriptions of the deafening noise produced by carts and coaches are eloquent, but they have none of the persistent nightmarish qualities noise assumes in *Trivia*, where it has constant connotations of approaching danger. The rattle of wheels on the cobbled streets goes accompanied by the cracking sounds of drivers lashing their whips. Whips, of course, are used to guide horses through fear compliance or by instilling fear of pain. Their effect in the streets of London was not limited to horses but could expose people to injury as well. The walker in *The London Spy* describes with his usual gusto how a coach traveller did not dare to put his head out of his coach window as on a previous attempt "his own coachman flinging back the thong of his whip in the act of striking the horses, gave him such a cut over the nose that he jerk'd in his head as if he had been shot" (Ward [1703] 1955, 319). The lashing of whips resounds in *Trivia*'s streets too (II.231), and Gay's walker expressly warns pedestrians to stay out of the reach of the coachman's whip:

Who knows not, that the Coachman lashing by,  
Oft', with his Flourish, cuts the heedless Eye. (II.311-12)

But the noise of approaching coach wheels embodied more significant danger. There was a hazard of being run over while crossing the streets. Reckless or drunken drivers caused coaches to overturn when corners were taken too sharply, and frightened horses might jolt coachmen into the streets or trample pedestrians. Judging from the reports in the newspapers, such accidents were fairly common. *The Ipswich Journal*, a London weekly, often mentioned traffic accidents. In 1729, for example, it reported the gruesome fate of a girl crossing Newgate Street who "was unfortunately thrown down between a Coach and a Dray, by which Accident she was crush'd in a most terrible

manner, and in particular her face, one of her Eyes and her Nose being quite lost” (*Ipswich Journal* 1729, 3). The rattling of approaching coach-wheels is unmistakably associated in *Trivia* with such dangers too. Only moments before a coach accident is described in Book II, Gay exclaims: “The rumbling Cart draws near, / Now rule thy prancing Steeds, lac’d Charioteer!” (II.527-28), while, when a chair is overturned, he rhetorically asks: “Who can recount the Coach’s various Harms? / The Legs disjointed, and the broken Arms?” (II.519-22). The story *The Ipswich Journal* gave in 1728 of a man who, “his Foot slipping [...] fell backwards into the Kennel, and the Wheel of his Cart run over his Breast, which crush’d him so that he dy’d immediately upon the Spot” (*Ipswich Journal* 1728, 3) is reminiscent of Gay’s warning: “Thy Foot will slide upon the miry Stone, / And passing Coaches crush thy tortur’d Bone” (III 175-76).

In Book III coaches come to stand for much more than a mere traffic hazard. The drivers with their cracking whips become warlords in chariots, their swearing language the war cries of an invading army:

[...] another Cart succeeds,  
Team follows Team, Crouds heap’d on Crouds appear,  
And wait impatient, ’till the Road grow clear.  
Now all the Pavement sounds with trampling Feet  
[...]  
Now Oaths grow loud, with Coaches Coaches jar,  
And the smart Blow provokes the sturdy War;  
From the high Box they whirl the Thong around  
And with the twining Lash their Shins resound:  
Their Rage ferments, more dang’rous Wounds they try. (III.35-39)

Arthur Sherbo has pointed out that Gay’s phrase “with Coaches Coaches jar” is clearly indebted to Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. He further underlines that such epic phrases occur repeatedly in Pope’s translation of *The Iliad*, and he even wonders whether it is possible that Gay’s 1716 line “And Heaps on Heaps the smoaky Ruine falls” (III.372) was the origin of the same line which appears verbatim in Book XII of Pope’s 1717 translation (XII.308). Such reciprocal borrowing indicates close interaction between Pope’s writings and Gay’s *Trivia*. This is not to be wondered at as the two writers, who were both members of the Scriblerus Club, were close friends. At the beginning of his literary career Gay even looked to Pope for recognition and Pope did everything he could to promote his “pupil’s” career (Nokes 1995, 80-81). Pope’s use of

the coaches in *The Rape of the Lock*, however, is not associated to war in the way Gay's line is. In *Trivia* the passage in which it occurs evokes, in mock-epic fashion, a Homeric battle scene which echoes the following passage from Book VIII of Pope's translation of the *Iliad*:

Men, steeds, and chariots shake the trembling ground;  
The tumult thickens, and the skies resound.  
And now with shouts the shocking armies closed,  
To lances lances, shields to shields oppos'd,  
Host against host with shadowy legends drew,  
The sounding darts in iron tempests flew,  
Victors and vanquish'd join promiscuous cries.  
(Pope [1715-1720] 1817, VIII.73-79)

As Book VIII was published in the second instalment of Pope's translation in 1716, just as Gay was working on *Trivia*, it could well have stood model for Gay mock-epic description of coaches and their "sturdy war". The chariots of Pope's Homer, in fact, are readily recognized in Gay's coaches, Pope's trembling ground in Gay's rattling wheels on cobbled streets, Pope's tumult in Gay's trampling feet on the pavement, and Pope's promiscuous cries in Gay's coachman's oaths. The epic hallmark of the repetition of nouns – "To lances lances, shields to shields opposed" – is ably reproduced in *Trivia*'s "Team follows Team", "Crouds heap'd on Crouds" and "with Coaches Coaches jar". And, as if to make sure that the reader does not miss the affinity with Book VIII of *The Iliad*, Gay openly directs the reader's attention to it a few lines later by referring to how "Jove with awful sound / Roll'd the big thunder", which refers to the moment when Zeus stops Diomedes's chariot from attacking Hector's (Pope, VIII.161-62):

But soon as Coach or Cart drives rattling on,  
The Rabble part, in Shoals they backward run.  
So Jove's loud Bolts the mingled War divide,  
And Greece and Troy retreats on either side. (III.83-86)

Of greater impact on the reader's interpretation of *Trivia*'s thundering cart-wheel noise are perhaps the rattling war sounds in the Books of Jeremiah and Nahum, which transform London coaches into Biblical chariots of destruction:

At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong horses, at the rushing of his chariots, and at the rumbling of his wheels [...] (Jeremiah 47.3)

The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. (Nahum 3.2)

In the context of the Biblical stories these passages are part of the description of the destruction of important cities in the East. The passage from Jeremiah describes the devastation of the cities of the Philistines, arch-enemies of the chosen people, while the second passage refers to the annihilation of the city of Nineveh, which is described in The Book of Jonah as “an exceeding great city” (Jonah 3.3) which has called forth God’s displeasure, “for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1.2). Although the city is spared in Jonah, Nahum details the story of its utter destruction.

Linking the noise of Biblical chariots directly to the noise of the coaches in the streets of London invites a comparison between these Biblical cities and the English metropolis and sheds light on the walker’s reluctance to be identified with coach travellers. As we have seen above, coaches are a corrupting influence. Alvin Kernan renders this idea very well: their riders sum up “all the vanity, venality, laziness and attempts to rise above man’s natural condition, which stand in opposition to the humble walking along life’s path in simple, stout clothing” (Kernan 1965, 45). The constant interplay between *Trivia*’s expressions and classical culture shows that the walker is above the foppery of those riding in coaches. Pedestrians represent the traditional virtues of the country (II.590) and are free from the immorality, vulgarity and ill-health that is associated with modern city life. Such lack of freedom and metaphorical blindness (“false lustre”, II.569) in the coach-riding fop is beautifully and emblematically captured by Ned Ward’s beau who, when he receives the whip-lash over his nose, feels “like a madman chain’d down to his seat, not daring to look out, for fear he should a second time pay for his peeping” (Ward [1703] 1955, 319). The coachman’s view is clearly limited to his boxed existence. The pedestrian is not subject to such limitations.

Gay’s text poses itself as guide to newcomers to London, he himself being an experienced traveller from the country. Travellers such as he, Susan Whyman shows, possess a freedom that city dwellers did not have (Whyman 2007, 45). Sven Armens even goes so far as to assert that “the walker is only going through the city on his way to the country, to the freedom outside the maze; the rider [in coaches] never leaves the city, but goes in circles under the illusion that he is free” (Armens [1954] 1966, 85-86). Critics have often emphasized that to maintain such freedom in the public space of the city and avoid an invasion of private space, the walker has to keep his physical, psy-

chological, cultural and moral distance (Kernan 1965, 46; Gregori 2005, 85; Carter 2007, 29, 35; Stenton 2007, 68; Löffler 2017, 135). In the metropolis's throng of people this becomes an arduous, but still possible, enterprise. By dissociating with the coach-riding fop, by keeping to the wall and circumscribing the rabble, and by clothing his observations in classical allusions, "the walker is able to disconnect from the city he describes [...] and] keep himself to himself as an act of resistance to the collective chaos of urban space" (Stenton 2007, 69).

It is, however, from the all prevailing street noise that the walker cannot escape or keep distance. It invades his mind day and night in vendor's cries, ballad singers, hooligans's pranks, and, above all, in the omnipresent coaches with their rattling wheels, cracking whips and cursing drivers. The coaches are defined by their aural presence rather than by their visual existence. The walker's, though not necessarily Gay's, fear is that they, and the moral degradation they represent, will lead to complete annihilation of culture. It is, therefore, apt that one of the Biblical allusions to chariots in Gay's text concerns the Philistines, a term which a century later came to connote materialistic, uncultured and unenlightened people.

Georg Simmel concluded his famous essay on urban society with "the individual's summoning the utmost in uniqueness and particularization, in order to preserve his most personal core. He has to exaggerate this personal element in order to remain *audible* [orig. "hörbar"] even to himself" (Simmel [1903] 1950, 422; italics mine). The ultimate fear for the walker in *Trivia* is that the haunting noise of the coaches will impede the preservation of personal integrity and virtue. Thus, it is in the hearing of noise, rather than in the perception through the other senses, that the city dweller succumbs to apocalyptic urban chaos.

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