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## The London Urban Jungle & Empire

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REVIEW

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

BOOKREVIEWS abbreviations account for some 75 volumes—excepting "DHL," for "Dan H. Laurence: private communication," and the book is rightly dedicated to him. The book has many features: years and months are in boldface; the first entry for each month indicates the day of the week; each year is followed by a summary of Shaw's activities; and there is a detailed 40 page index. The biographical sketches in the 55-page "A Shaw Who's Who" of over 200 people are very useful. Author of *The Art and Mind of Shaw* (1983) and *Shaw: Interviews and Recollections* (1990), among others, A. M. Gibbs has made a vital contribution to Shaw studies with this indispensable reference guide. And there is more to come: he writes that the Chronology is "a companion" to a work in preparation, "a thematic biography of Shaw" that will connect his life and his creative achievements. Shaw continues to fascinate and intrigue us. Michel W. Pharand -----

University of Ottawa *The London Urban Jungle & Empire* Joseph McLaughlin. *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000. xii + 234 pp. \$49.95 IN ONE OF THE MOST famous scenes in English literature, Conrad's Marlow sits Buddha-like aboard the *Nellie* and warns his listeners that spiritual darkness is not to be found only in the white spaces of Africa

but here, too, in the black and chartered streets of London, "one of the dark places of the earth." As Joseph McLaughlin makes clear in *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*, Marlow wasn't doing anything new when he conflated the center of the empire with its exotic peripheries. Instead, for more than a decade, late-Victorian writers had been exploring the metaphor of the "urban jungle" as an "effective rhetorical strategy for imagining the imperial center." In seven tightly constructed chapters, McLaughlin employs a variety of theoretical models as he studies works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, General William Booth, Jack London, Joseph Conrad, and T. S. Eliot. The result is a persuasive argument about how the metaphor of the urban jungle was adopted by late-Victorian and early modernist writers in their attempts to come to terms with the challenges to English identity presented by the centripetal and centrifugal forces of empire.

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McLaughlin's first two chapters are devoted, respectively, to *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*. Because McLaughlin does not dismiss *A Study in Scarlet* as a flawed work (too many readers do), he is able to note how the novel combines two nascent genres: the western and the detective story. Taking seriously both genres, McLaughlin understands how the novel not only works out tensions between civilization and barbarism but also imagines London as a place that "reflects and nurtures anxieties of the British about the encroachment of the foreign." *The Sign of Four* expounds upon this foreign threat, only in this novel the threat is firmly grounded in London (and not at a safe distance on the American frontier). Holmes emerges as the hero because, although he cannot keep the foreign out of London, he knows how to keep the foreign in its place. McLaughlin persuasively argues that the London of this novel is a jungle of "colonial encounters" centered upon "commodity consumption." Although some Londoners are destroyed by their consumptions (the Sholto brothers are the best example), Holmes is able to engage in these encounters to his own benefit (cocaine and anthropology). Holmes's role is not to rid London of colonial presences (as in *A Study in Scarlet*). Instead, his role is like that of the late-Victorian exhibitor of the exotic: he makes the foreign consumable not by eliminating it but by romancing it and straightening out the "colonial relations of English mastery and colonial subjection." General Booth, it appears, saw things differently. According to McLaughlin, "In contrast to the xenophobic scare mongering and romantic exoticism of Doyle's plots, Booth imagined London's East End as an urban jungle that signified physical and spiritual decay, deterioration, and degeneration." Working out an "imperial plot of salvation," In *Darkest England*...

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Michel W. Pharaud  
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