

The Last London: True Fictions from an Unreal City

Iain Sinclair

Oneworld Publications (Jan 9, 2018)

Hardcover \$24.99 (336pp)

978-1-78607-174-3

London has been the almost obsessive focus of award-winning author Iain Sinclair's writing for half of his life. But this city of his—with its peculiar myths and mysteries, its denizens of dark alleyways and park benches, its scholars and ghosts, its moist air and dark river currents—has stretched its known boundaries beyond recognition.

London has become, Sinclair writes, “a suburb of everywhere: Mexico City, Istanbul, Athens. The same malls. The same managed alienation. The Babel of misunderstood tongues.” Traveling its length and breadth, much of the time on foot and alone, he complains that he can no longer tell where the real London begins and ends. “London was everywhere,” he writes, “but it had lost its soul.”

Sinclair knows that his years of stalking the hidden truths of the city that for so long inspired, provoked, and sustained his writing have come to an end: “My sense was that London, my home for fifty years, was being centrifugally challenged to the point of obliteration.” Darkly, he compares its spread to that of “a single cancerous cell.” Restless, he needs to walk on but is not sure where.

Sinclair brings a rare gift for imagery and description to cap his life's work on the city that absorbs him. His book is a symphony in words, dedicated to a London where vagrants “sprawled in purgatorial exhaustion”; hotels with “suspiciously pastoral names throbbled with sullen and illicit conjunctions”; and smokers, their hands cupped around their cigarettes, “waited for death on the pavement.”

By turns majestic, poetic, angry, funny, critical, and concerned, Sinclair's prose is captivating as it laments the demise of what once made London unique among cities.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January/February 2018)

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