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INTRODUCTION

Urbanization and English Romantic Poetry

During the three hundred years preceding the Romantic period, the portion of the population of England that lived in cities – largely in London but also in port cities, manufacturing towns, and regional trading and administrative centers – increased along with the expansion of the nation's commercial, manufacturing, and financial activity. This change in social geography shaped and was shaped by changes in the ways in which people thought about urbanization. During the eighteenth century, a discourse promoting the benefits of urbanization ascended to effective dominance in polite culture. In this discourse, developed in the work of several prominent moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, the growth of cities appeared as a natural and epochal step in the progressive development of civilization: the nation was changing from a predominantly agrarian rural society into a more advanced, more civilized, predominantly commercial urban society. This metamorphosis involved changes not only in political economy and social geography but also in culture: urbanization was understood to foster the development of more refined sensibilities and cultural practices. Conventional concerns about urban corruption, disorder, and disease persisted, but the dominant discourse represented urbanization as a sign and an engine of historical progress. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, conditions in the cities that this discourse could not adequately describe became more pressing: London's rookeries proved resistant to attempts at improvement; working-class districts in the manufacturing towns presented scenes of infernal squalor; and the possibility of uncontrollable urban popular violence – seen at home in the Gordon Riots and then indelibly associated with events in revolutionary Paris – haunted the collective imagination.

During the Romantic period changes in the conditions of the cities and in the form of urbanization provoked a reassessment of the prevailing discourse on urbanization. This reassessment involved a reexamination and revision of models of specifically urban forms of subjectivity, of the

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More Information

nature of the ties between urban society and the spirit of commerce, and of the notion that polite urban culture was the vanguard leading the advance of civilization. Out of this reassessment, alternative ways of thinking about urbanization emerged. These new ways of thinking were diverse and cohered only loosely: they did not constitute a new discourse that could succeed the prevailing discourse as dominant but rather remained emergent. They cohered negatively by responding to the established discourse and positively by sharing a common set of premises about urbanization and concerns about its present form. Among these common premises was the notion that the prevailing discourse and the form of urbanization it legitimated were not necessary and natural but historical and subject to reform. This recognition carries with it the crucial distinction between the current historical mode of urbanization and urbanization per se. Other kinds of urbanization and other kinds of cities were possible. While this emphasis on imagining alternative social structures gives the alternative discourse on urbanization an affinity with reform, the discourse was not confined to any political faction or closely associated with any specific ideology. Instead, the contest between the alternative and prevailing attitudes was negotiated throughout English culture, from the practices of everyday life to speeches in Parliament, and, in literature, from popular radical journalism to polite poetry.

The literature of the Romantic period was a forum for the explicit reassessment of the discourse on urbanization and, since urbanization was understood to have transformed the literary field, it was also one of the stakes of the debate. Urbanization changed the conditions of literary production by improving transportation, concentrating larger potential readerships in space, and fostering increased literacy rates. These changes in the conditions of the literary marketplace altered the relative standing of genres. Newspapers, journals, and magazines flourished as existing markets expanded and new markets emerged. Writers sorted out the shifting, fluid relations between genres of periodical prose, and this reworking of genres shaped prose writers' modes of articulating the alternative discourse on urbanization. The complex conjunctions of the urban environment, deep social and political transformations, and the form of the periodical essay play out in the works of canonical prose writers of the period, including Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincey, William Hazlitt, and, with a different perspective on the same questions, William Cobbett.[1] While poetry circulated more widely as the traffic in periodicals increased and while volumes by Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Robert Bloomfield were runaway commercial successes, poetic conventions

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More Information

nonetheless represented urbanization as antagonistic to poetry. By the end of the eighteenth century, the figural repertoires for the genres of poetry most used to represent social geography – such as pastoral, georgic, and locodescriptive – and the conventional poetic tropes for representing cities assumed in their organization an opposition between the conditions of urban life and the conditions for writing and reading polite, literary poetry. City life was too sordid, commercial, distracting, and alienating for poetry. Poets in the Romantic period who participated in the alternative discourse on urbanization and who recognized the historicity of forms of urbanization, however, revised these figural repertoires and distinguished between the hazards to poetry and society inherent in urbanization itself and those peculiar to the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of its current historical form. These poets imagined ways in which urbanization might be reformed, and considered not only the influence of urbanization on poetry but poetry's potential influence on urbanization.

In examining the relation between urbanization and English Romantic poetry, this book contributes to an ongoing scholarly inquiry into urban literary culture in the Romantic period. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin's 2005 collection *Romantic Metropolis* identified and encouraged this inquiry by explicitly demonstrating that several current critical methods and discourses, otherwise not necessarily overlapping, all shared an investment in urban social spaces and practices. Their introduction assembles the essays in the collection under the concept of "metropolitanism," which they define as "a sense of the urban site as at once capital to the provinces and point of contact with the wider world."[2] As it is used in their introduction, metropolitanism describes both a pattern of development in the social geography of imperial capitalism and the eclectic, bustling social environment of a major city. I aim to contribute to the lines of criticism this collection gathers together by considering different objects on both sides of the relation. Defining the object as urbanization rather than metropolitanism has considerable consequences for critical inquiry, not the least of which is its ability to describe the metastasis of urbanization in the Romantic period beyond London to the manufacturing towns and port cities. And while poets and individual poems regularly appear in studies of the Romantic metropolis, scholarly work on metropolitan culture often focuses primarily on periodical prose or on the spaces and practices of political and literary discourse rather than on the peculiar generic conventions of poetry or its place in the changing literary field.

While the concept of urbanization has rarely appeared explicitly in scholarly studies of Romantic-period literary culture, elements of the

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process of urbanization have been studied under different names. Recent work in this vein draws on two classic frameworks for describing the large-scale economic, social, and political determinations and effects associated with urbanization. First, Raymond Williams's landmark book *The Country and the City* inaugurates the project of considering the interrelations between the dynamic transformations of social geography and literary history. Williams demonstrates the utility to such a project of formations such as structures of feeling and the metropolitan pattern of development, a pattern in imperialist and capitalist development in which a metropolitan center oversees the economic, political, and cultural activity of a subordinated interior and a rural and colonial periphery.[3] Second, E. P. Thompson's *Customs in Common* describes a deep and pervasive change in culture during the Romantic period, with traditional ways of organizing daily life and labor confronting a movement toward standardization, rationalization, and the imposition of time discipline. Historians, including Peter Linebaugh, have tracked this shift in the cities in the reorganization of labor, redefinition of crime, and emergence of disciplinary apparatuses such as the police.[4] Simon Joyce's study of class and crime in London draws on both lines of inquiry, and Saree Makdisi's studies of representations of the metropolis cross the two with theories of empire. Makdisi examines how writers around 1800 redefined the discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism in mapping the different neighborhoods and social groups of the metropolis and how institutions tested "[s]trategies and tactics of discipline, surveillance, and control" on local plebeian cultures.[5] In Makdisi's work, as in Daniel E. White's study of the mutual cultural exchange between the metropolitan capital and India, the metropolis itself evolves as it approaches, but never fully realizes, the hierarchical structure between center and periphery.[6]

While this literary scholarship understands urban environments to be mutable, its focus on specifically metropolitan relations defines a different, and in crucial ways narrower, scope than that defined by the concept of urbanization. Thinking in terms of urbanization can account for other forms of urban development in addition to the metropolitan – including the emergence of regional centers, manufacturing towns, port cities, and resort towns – and for various factors on urban development such as proximity to resources and interurban competition. The crucial difference between urbanization and metropolitan organizations is that the former defines a process and the latter a pattern within a process. In literary analysis, defining the object as the metropolis has the potential to shade into a study of representations of the eclecticism and bustle of the urban

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More Information

environment.[7] As a pattern within a process, the metropolitan organization informs the scene of literary activity, structures the imbalanced exchanges between domestic and foreign publics, and appears in literature in the forms of patterns of discourse, tropes, and figural repertoires. As a broad process, urbanization influences literature in all these ways and at the level of the literary field. It has a more direct relation to the development of provincial literary markets and their interactions with the market in the capital and to the changing relations between genres of literature.[8]

These approaches study how global, systemic, and abstract forces shape urban form and literary culture; another, complementary line of inquiry, gathered and advanced by Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite's 1998 collection *Romantic Sociability*, examines the social and cultural practices that constitute urban publics and shape urban spaces.[9] In his book on the crossovers between cultures of conversation and print in the Romantic period, Jon Mee notes that "polite conversation was not just a practice, but also an influence on the physical forms taken by the eighteenth-century urban renaissance," shaping the construction of open urban spaces such as coffeehouses, ballrooms, and theatres.[10] Kevin Gilmartin has studied the different spaces of polite and plebeian political speech, and Ian Newman has related Wordsworth and Coleridge's project in the *Lyrical Ballads* to popular ballads sung in London's taverns.[11] In his study of the Hunt circle, Jeffrey Cox remarks, "It is important always to stress the urban nature of the Cockney School," since its poets were defined "as being London – as opposed to Lake District – poets," though in practice the urban quality of the poetry quickly shades into "cosmopolitan urbanity." Cox's Cockneys "sought an image in their circle of the reformed world they imagined," creating a "community not limited by the divisions of class interest and distinction" but united by "affiliative relations."[12] In these studies, the city shapes social practices and social practices shape the city, but the concreteness of the analysis often leaves relatively underdeveloped the interaction between these practices and large-scale social determinations. For a study of urbanization and literature, both the concrete spaces and practices and the critical formations informing these analyses – such as the public sphere, the configuration of its spaces, and the literary field – no longer serve as objects of analysis in themselves but must be repositioned as intermediary formations, connecting specific literary practices and figures at one pole and opening a place for an understanding of urbanization at the other pole.

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While recent work in Romantic literary studies has reexamined the relationship between urban life and Romantic literary culture from new perspectives, critical studies of representations of the city in Romantic literature, especially in poetry, have remained more or less consistent for the past thirty years. In these readings, the city appears as a phantasmagoria of sights and sounds, and this overwhelming commotion shapes distinctively urban sensibilities that anticipate Georg Simmel's diagnosis of the effect of the metropolis on mental life or the attitudes of Walter Benjamin's typical urban characters in his comments on the social and cultural logic of Baudelaire's Paris. Critics have used the same models of urban experience to discuss poetic representations of cities from the Renaissance to the present.[13] Collectively, these studies demonstrate that poetic conventions for representing cities stay remarkably consistent over centuries. But the more critics apply the models, the more the models lose their historical and local specificity and tend to naturalize a model of urban experience originally associated with specific phases of capitalist modernity. Sociologist and urban theorist Manuel Castells argues that the concept of a specific urban culture or sensibility is itself an ideological myth that naturalizes the effects of capitalism and mystifies the true source of its symptoms: "the writings on 'urban society' which are based directly on this myth, provide the keywords of an ideology of modernity, assimilated . . . to the social forms of liberal capitalism."[14] The dominance of ideologies directly implicated in capitalist modernization can by no means be assumed in the Romantic period among either radicals or conservatives; the alternative discourse on urbanization reopened the possibility of different forms of urban consciousness precisely by relating the prevailing form to present conditions.[15]

The work of literary criticism that most closely anticipates my conception of urbanization remains Williams's *The Country and the City*. Williams directly examines the dynamic, large-scale transformation of the social geography of England throughout history, connects changes in the city to changes in the country, and traces the imaginative and affective responses to these changes in literature. I aim to revise and refine Williams's reading of Romantic-period poets' responses to urbanization, a reading that in its outline of a general ambivalence still represents a critical consensus.[16] Williams sees Romantic culture simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the city. In Goldsmith's nostalgic pastoral *The Deserted Village* (1770), Williams discerns "with unusual precision, what we can later call a Romantic structure of feeling – the assertion of nature against industry and of poetry against trade; the isolation of humanity and community into the idea of culture, against the real social

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More Information

pressures of the time[.] . . . We can catch its echoes, exactly, in Blake, in Wordsworth, and in Shelley." These poets, that is, respond to urbanization with a "combination of protest and nostalgia." Yet at the same time, Wordsworth's poetry offers sharp, "direct observation of a new set of physical and sense relationships: a new way of seeing men in what is experienced as a new kind of society." Breaking from conventional perspectives on urban life, Wordsworth felt a "historically liberating insight, of new kinds of possible order, new kinds of human unity, in the transforming experience of the city."[17] The course of Romantic criticism has since challenged the representativeness and accuracy of the model of Romanticism behind Williams's description of the Romantic structure of feeling, and more recent criticism has proven that other ways of considering the relation between literature and society reveal a different sense of Romantic-period writers' relation to the urban environment.[18]

To revise Williams's analysis and develop his suggestive insights, I aim not only to use these more recently developed critical formations but also to sift the distinctions between the structures of feeling and organizing concepts that belong to a generic repertoire and those that belong to specific poetic utterances within or against that genre. The emergence of an alternative discourse on urbanization appears in poetry in part in subtle deviations from these generic repertoires. During this period of emergence, some conventional motifs, tropes, and modes survived; others were challenged or revised; and new ones were invented.[19] This balance of continuity and innovation, as Williams's argument recognizes, registers a specific affective response to the transformations in social geography and in social customs. But it also signals an argumentative and ideological response to the prevailing discourse on urbanization inherent within the configuration of conventional repertoires and shared with eighteenth-century moral philosophy, from David Hartley to Adam Smith and from David Hume to Edmund Burke. Examining the argumentative as well as the affective response allows for a fuller definition of the emergent alternative discourse on urbanization and for a finer description of those "new kinds of possible order" that Williams discovers in Wordsworth but that critics have since left unexplored.

In my attempt to reconstruct the understanding of urbanization in eighteenth-century and Romantic-period writing, I refer to and rely on modern urban theory. Modern urban theory helps to organize the often inexplicit connections within historical discourses that precede the emergence of the disciplines of urban theory, social geography, and, indeed, that precede the appearance of the word "urbanization." Genealogies of urban

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theory rarely reach back beyond Engels; in the Romantic period, scholarly interest in urban development took the form of a fashion for antiquarian histories of individual cities.[20] But the absence of a formal discipline of urban studies by no means implies that writers of the period had a naïve sense of the political, economic, and cultural determinations and consequences of urbanization. The work of David Harvey provides a framework for interrelating these determinations that can also, with a few adaptations, link a theory of urbanization to a post-Habermasian concept of publics and to Bourdieu's model of the literary field. Harvey conceives of urbanization as an inherent component and product of the process of progressive accumulation in capitalism: it both expedites the realization of surplus value by rationalizing the spatial and temporal coordination of the means of production (including labor), distribution, and consumption, and absorbs enormous amounts of surplus value into the physical and social environments of cities.[21] "Capital," Harvey summarizes, "represents itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image, created as use values to enhance the progressive accumulation of capital."[22] Far from professing a reductive economic determinism, however, Harvey regularly adverts to the complex political, social, and cultural tensions and pressures that shape conscious and unconscious decisions about social geography. Urbanization, Harvey argues, "means a certain mode of human organization in space and time that can somehow embrace all of these conflicting forces, not necessarily so as to harmonize them, but to channel them into so many possibilities of both creative and destructive social transformation."[23] This field of conflicting forces produces the historical form of urbanization. The poets of the Romantic period took up and shaped an alternative discourse on urbanization in order to help channel those conflicts creatively.

A graph of the proportion of the population in England that lived in towns would show a sweeping upward curve from the sixteenth century through the Romantic period. The curve would appear to be a sign of steady, progressive modernization. Around 1600, about 6 percent of the population lived in cities or towns, and the overwhelming majority of that urban population lived in London. Despite plagues, cholera epidemics, and the Great Fire of 1666, the population of London continued to grow both absolutely and relative to the rest of the nation. By 1700, its population had nearly tripled to 575,000; by 1800, the metropolitan area had around one million residents. Between 1801 and 1831, London gained another 800,000 people. At the same time, the populations of Liverpool, Manchester, and

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More Information

Leeds expanded geometrically, and by 1851, half the population of England lived in cities.[24] But the continuous line of the curve evens out a series of uncertain shifts and interferences between dominant modes of production and regimes of political power, each with distinctive ways of regulating social tensions and influencing cultural expression; it blends together several historical forms of urbanization into one continuous process and masks that each point along the curve represents a tenuous balance between conflicting social pressures.

In retrospect, urbanization in the Romantic period appears as part of a broader process of capitalist modernization. Yet the teleological tendency in the concepts of urbanization and modernization obscures the range of futures once perceived as possible and, in doing so, reduces the range of positions available in Romantic-period culture to a one-dimensional binary of facilitating or resisting modernization rather than an open and multidimensional consideration of alternative possibilities. To absorb the history of urbanization into a narrative of capitalist modernization would be to miss the specific value of considering the alternative discourse on urbanization and to overlook both its perceptive diagnoses of the consequences of a historical form of urbanization and its imaginative intimations of alternative ways of organizing society and alternative urban sensibilities and cultures.[25] In the brief sketch of the history of urbanization in England that follows, I emphasize the influence of the pursuit of capital accumulation on the historical form of urbanization and the complicated interrelations between the equally dynamic economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of urbanization. A change in any one dimension sets off changes in all other dimensions. The alternative discourse on urbanization emergent in the Romantic period represents this process as inequitable, prone to crises, and susceptible to active reform.

Harvey's theory of urbanization ties the production of space to the flows of capital, the evolution of the distribution of political power, and the ideological force of cultural production. In its restless motion in service of progressive accumulation, Harvey observes, capital must pass through the relatively immobile form of fixed capital. Fixed capital includes factors of production (such as heavy machinery and furnaces), the physical spaces of production (such as workshops and factories), the spaces of consumption (such as shops), and the physical infrastructure that facilitates transportation (such as turnpikes, canals, bridges, and docks). The organization of the built environment images the organization of capital circulation at a historical moment and represents the ongoing negotiations between residual, dominant, and emergent formations of economic activity.

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The flow of capital ties urbanization to the wider economic processes reshaping social geography: as Williams so lucidly reveals, urban expansion and agricultural transformation were mutually enabling parts of a single process. Two large changes in the agricultural economy fed the gradual urbanization of England from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. First, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yeoman farmers gradually but substantially increased the yield per acre of the land through intensive labor and the adoption of best practices such as improved crop rotations. Yeomen held long leases and both tenants and landlords profited from higher yields. This increase in food production supported the growing population of the nation and of London in particular, which maintained the demand for food. As yields rose and trade increased, farming gradually shifted from a relatively subsistence economy to a largely capitalist enterprise. Second, as land became more productive and more valuable, landlords raised rents and shortened leases, merged smaller farms into larger ones, and extended their holdings through engrossment and enclosure. Agricultural labor was increasingly done not by tenants themselves but by wage laborers and became more productive.[26] A steady stream of laborers migrated from the country to the cities, where expanding trade, manufacturing, and demand for personal services created opportunities for employment.[27]

The growth of London integrated the national economy. The work of supplying the busy world of the metropolis marshaled much of the country's resources. London's constant demand for provisions encouraged regional agricultural specialization; its need for labor drew in deterritorialized rural laborers; its need for goods consumed in commerce (barrels, ships, brooms, nails, bottles) and in everyday life (boots, clothes, carriages) supported large metal works in Birmingham, shoemakers in Northampton, and artisan tradesmen in London; the maintenance and development of its built environment sustained a constant demand for timber, brick, and stone, and still more materials went into massive projects such as its bridges, docks, and canals; its demand for coal for domestic heating developed the heavy mining industry.[28] London drew raw materials and unfinished goods from the provinces and returned finished goods and capital. Throughout the eighteenth century, the metropolis was also the most important port for international trade.[29] These great flows of commodities and capital were coordinated through London's commercial and financial firms, and at the beginning of the Romantic period London was still the primary site of the urbanization of capital. But by integrating the national economy, London also created

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