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AMANDA KLINGER
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NERVOUS LONDON: URBAN SENSIBILITY IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

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BY

Dr. Daniela Garofalo, Chair

Dr. Daniel Cottom

Dr. Su Fang Ng

Dr. Ronald Schleifer

Dr. Catherine Kelly

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For all of my loved ones lost, especially Dad and Rutherford.

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Abstract

Nervous London: Urban Sensibility in the Romantic Period traces a continued cultural and scientific interest in sensibility and how it shifted and developed in the Romantic period. This project explores representations of what I call *urban sensibility*, which entailed an experience of increasing nervousness as the subject became exposed to the developing urban culture and topography of London. I argue that urban sensibility was part of a medico-literary discourse that engaged medical science in literary representations of art, urban life, and modern experience. The project investigates how Romantic writers imagined, managed, complicated, and even challenged popular scientific and cultural notions of nervous sensibility and the urban body. As part of a culture of growing commodification, urban sensibility is presented by writers as a form of consumption, a way of consuming sensations and spectacles in the city. This study particularly examines how urban sensibility was depicted in Romantic-era literature through the figure of the urban pedestrian, an earlier, British version of the *flâneur*, who consumes urban experience and spectacles presented in metropolitan street scenes. The urban texts explored in this project reveal the results of bodies engaging with the commodification of sensual experience in a historical process that helped to shape our conception of modernity. In exploring urban sensibility and peregrination, the dissertation teases out multiple modes of urban, Romantic experience, including consumerism, civic engagement, masculinity, and the sublime. Moreover, this project argues that urban sensibility demonstrates the various ways that Romantic-era institutions and power structures attempt to control urban bodies, as well as the ways that writers attempt to use this expression of the body and mind to resist hegemonic

influences and reclaim agency for themselves. Beginning with a reading of Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude* and then moving to works by De Quincey, Hazlitt, Lamb, and Blake, the chapters of the study are organized to demonstrate a particular progression of increasingly liberating urban experience. As the first chapter shows, urban sensibility and the excesses of this experience offer Wordsworth an active and resistant way to react to the city, but they also remind him of how entrenched his own ideas of nature and poetics are in commodity culture. Urban sensibility thus causes for him an awakening (however unwelcome) to what is at stake in his own representations of nature and the poetic body. For De Quincey, urban sensibility and pedestrianism allow the individual to actively create new and intensely pleasurable experiences of the city and the urban body in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. In Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays, it leads away from the passive reception of city life to powerful expressions of community and civic engagement. For Blake, urban sensibility in *Jerusalem* is even more liberating in that it allows individuals to actively resist oppressive systems and leads to a revolutionary redemption of both London and England. Although the Romantics are traditionally approached as pastoral or nature poets, as this project demonstrates, exploring representations of urban sensibility reveals that an urban Romanticism developed in the period alongside representations of Romantic nature, even in the writings of pastoral works like Wordsworth's *The Prelude*.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The man must have a rare *recipe* for melancholy who can be dull in Fleet Street. I am naturally inclined to hypochondria, but in London it vanishes, like all other ills. Often, when I have felt a weariness or distaste at home, have I rushed out into her crowded Strand, and fed my humor, till tears have wetted my cheek for unutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture, which she never fails to present at all hours, like the scenes of a shifting pantomime.

~ Charles Lamb, "A Londoner" (1802)

Charles Lamb's essay published in *The Morning Post*, commonly titled "A Londoner," offers a counternarrative to dominant Romantic depictions of London as alienating and destructive. In this passage, Lamb alludes to and refutes two main (and somewhat contradictory) views of sensibility and urban life prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century: the view of city inhabitants as lacking or limited in sensibility and the view of the city as a place of excessive sensibility, experienced through nervous diseases like "hypochondria." The letter presents an alternative vision of the city as a space that promotes healthy expressions of sensibility, which allow the individual to feel pleasurable sympathies towards his fellow Londoners rather than acute nervous symptoms of "hypochondria" or melancholy. Even more specifically in this passage, the antidote for the ennui and nervous temperament of the urbanite is a peripatetic stroll through the bustling streets of the city. As such, this passage highlights three significant aspects of Romantic period culture and literature that are the focus of this project. First, it demonstrates the persistence of sensibility as a continuing discourse within the Romantic period and, more specifically, as part of discourse on the city. Secondly, the passage addresses the connections between sensibility and nervous disease. Lastly, it demonstrates the significance of urban walking and commodity culture to Romantic representations of the city and to a specifically *urban* sensibility.

Romantic-era Britons understood their culture as marked by nervousness. In a culture still dramatically exploring the concept of sensibility, nervousness was a feature of excess—particularly the excess of sensibility. A cultural trend and medical phenomenon of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nervous sensibility was influenced by one’s surroundings and experiences. This project explores representations of what I call *urban sensibility*, which entailed an experience of increasing nervousness as the subject became exposed to urban culture and topography. In the British Romantic period, urban sensibility demonstrated a specific manifestation of nervous sensibility associated with city life. I investigate how Romantic writers imagined, managed, complicated, and even challenged popular scientific and cultural notions of urban sensibility and the urban body. Entailing a theory of the body as a consumer of sensations, urban sensibility comprises representations of a particular way of consuming and experiencing the city. My approach to this phenomenon focuses on urban sensibility as expressed in the figure of the pedestrian who walks the city consuming its sensations and spectacles and who reappropriates urban experience to find a place for the artist within modern culture. Moreover, I argue that urban sensibility demonstrates the various ways that Romantic-era institutions and power structures attempt to control bodies, as well as the ways that writers attempt to use this expression of the body and mind to resist these hegemonic influences and reclaim agency for themselves.

Since G. S. Rousseau proposed a link between the literature of sensibility and eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century nerve theory in his 1975 article, “Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility,” scholars have explored connections between the literature of sensibility and representations of nervous

disease. As some nerve theorists of the Romantic era, such as Thomas Beddoes and Thomas Trotter, suggest, nervous illness afflicted urban inhabitants most aggressively.¹ In “Nerve Theory, Sensibility, and Romantic Metrosexuals,” Michelle Faubert offers an intriguing account of the connection between nerve theory, sensibility, and the city, arguing that Romantic-era nerve theorists suggested that the “boundaries” of the body became weakened in the city, resulting in feminized bodies of both men and women (9-10). According to this view, the female body, already considered to be weakened in comparison to the male body, became further attenuated and sickly within the city. Faubert examines two sentimental novels, Frances Burney’s *Evelina* and Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story*, and argues that these novels “complicate the tidy formula” proposed by contemporary nerve theorists regarding “the effects of the city on the nervous female body” (10). Instead, Faubert proposes that the fictional heroines’ “gender identities also change in London,” but these women “begin to show more masculine traits, a response to the stimulation of the city” that contradicts nerve theory of the time (10). Faubert’s article is important because it links these ideas and points to cultural and intellectual relationships between the body, gender, and the city. Moreover, the article highlights a connection between sensibility, nerve theory, and the city that formulates a common phenomenon, which I describe as urban sensibility, in Romantic-era culture and literature. However, with the exception of Faubert, critics have not fully traced this connection between nervous sensibility and the city. Moreover, scholars, including Faubert, have not explored in depth urban sensibility as a prevalent and

¹ Scholars such as George Grinnell, G. J. Barker-Benfield, and Martin Wallen have touched on this connection in their work on hypochondria, nervous disease, and sensibility. Barker-Benfield And Wallen focus on eighteenth-century representations of sensibility and nervous disorders. However, these scholars have not explored this link in depth or approached it as a larger cultural trend of the Romantic era.

recognized phenomenon of the time, nor in relation to pedestrianism and modern material culture. While Romantic-era authors do not name this cultural trend (“urban sensibility” is my term), multiple literary texts of the period nonetheless offer comparable representations of this form of urban experience. This project aims to extend our understanding of urban sensibility in Romantic-period literature as important to Romantic conceptions of the city and modern experience. In particular, I explore urban sensibility in relation to prominent medical science of the time, the development of commodity culture, and the figure of the urban walker.

Sensibility and Nervous Disease

First, I would like to address the complexities of studying the concept of sensibility in the Romantic period before attending to what representations of *urban* sensibility add to the discussion. The extensive scope of the culture of sensibility within eighteenth-century Europe, which has resulted in a proliferation of meanings and definitions of the term, renders it a challenging task to define. As a prominent cultural trend of the eighteenth century, sensibility intersected with many different facets of British culture. As Christopher Nagle indicates, sensibility was a “multivalent and shifting discursive practice,” which was “deployed in the central aesthetic, ethical, epistemological, and ontological debates of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (5). In general, the term “sensibility” alluded to the capacity for intense feeling and sympathy, which was demonstrated in a heightened sensitivity to the people, objects, and environment of one’s surroundings. In 1796, *The Monthly Magazine* defined sensibility as “that peculiar structure, or habitude of mind, which disposes a

man to be easily moved, and powerfully affected, by surrounding objects and passing events.”² Literary and cultural critics, such as Ilkido Csengei, define sensibility as

a specific way of expressing, writing, and reading affectivity that is determined by the crisis and transformation of such historical and social factors as the development of new models of human subjectivity in science and medicine, philosophical ideas of innate benevolence and sympathy, political and sexual revolutions, and the rise of the novel, together with the emergence of a largely female, middle-class readership. (Csengei 1)

As these definitions indicate, the concept of sensibility was indeed complex and its diverse connotations result from its prevalence in most fields of British eighteenth-century culture and life.

While sensibility comprises various features of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture, scholars agree that sensibility in general “impl[ies] a belief in natural goodness, benevolence and compassion,” is often associated with a “cult of feeling, melancholy, distress, and refined emotionalism,” and is frequently used as a “political and ideological tool” (Csengei 5). However, as many critics have pointed out, sensibility is an ambivalent and controversial discourse, often expressed through contradictory and conflicting viewpoints.³ As G. J. Barker-Benfield suggests, sensibility at the same time “signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion and became convention” (xvii). The concept’s production and reproduction in various fields of art, culture, and even everyday life make it a particularly important and fascinating topic to explore, even if (or perhaps especially when) faced with such contradictory definitions of the term. One way of mediating this definitional and representational challenge is to focus on specific representations and manifestations of sensibility. For

² *The Monthly Magazine* 2:706 (October 1796). John Brewer also refers to this definition in his article “Sentiment and Sensibility” (22).

³ See, for example, Csengei (1), Barker-Benfield (xvi-xvii), and Nagle (5).

the purposes of this project, I focus on representations of urban sensibility in British literature between 1780 and 1830, when sensibility had been already been re-imagined many times over and when metropolitan culture had developed to accommodate an even greater population. Urban sensibility incorporates a capacity for intense sensory experience and sympathy, while also presenting a form of modern subjectivity that participates in the medical and cultural discourse of nervous sensibility.

Although scholars pinpoint what Northrop Frye termed the “Age of Sensibility” from roughly the 1740s to the late 1770s, the literature of sensibility is not isolated within this time period. G. S. Rousseau argues that “sensibility came into its own at the moment when man became demonstrably ‘nervous’” (159). He traces the advent of sensibility to Locke's predecessor, Thomas Willis, who located the soul in the brain in 1664 (Rousseau 159). Likewise, manifestations of sensibility occur frequently after the 1770s, appearing in Gothic fiction and Romantic literature. Although Romantic writers in many ways rebelled against the earlier sensibility movement, Romanticism was, as Rousseau claims, “in turn the heir to a heritage of the cults of sensibility” (175). Some scholars have argued that the 1790s saw the demise of the cult of sensibility, due largely to the criticism it received during the Romantic period and the French Revolution.⁴ For example, Janet Todd argues that “[f]rom the 1780s onwards, sentimental literature, and the principles behind it were bombarded with criticism and ridicule [...]. By the 1790s almost all serious novelists noted the selfishness, irrationality and amorality of the cult of sensibility” (9).⁵ However, recent scholarship on sensibility has begun to reconsider

⁴ See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986) and Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s*. London: Routledge, 1993.

⁵ Due to this study's focus on “nervous” manifestations of sensibility, I find Janet Todd's description of the difference between the terms “sentiment” and “sensibility” helpful. Although these terms are often

the significance of sensibility's place in the dominant discourse of the Romantic period.⁶ In *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era*, Nagle argues that sensibility provides “the discursive infrastructure of Romanticism itself” (4). According to Nagle, “what most literary historians have come to see as Romanticism’s rather straightforward and simple backlash against Sensibility is in fact a systematic and sophisticated act of incorporation” (11-12). While Todd and others suggest that the literature of sensibility is distinct from Romantic and Gothic literature, many scholars have traced a continued appeal to sensibility in Romantic-era literature. However, Romantic literature’s incorporation of sensibility is in no way a simple integration or assimilation, which suggests that representations of Romantic-era sensibility invite further investigation. This project approaches the role of sensibility in Romantic-era thought and literature as ongoing and complex, offering representations that deviate in various ways from sensibility’s eighteenth-century predecessors.

Scholars have traced many different manifestations of sensibility over the course of the long eighteenth century, but for the purposes of this study I focus mainly on the physiological concept of nervous sensibility, which G. S. Rousseau explores in his

viewed as synonymous and used interchangeably by scholars, there is a useful distinction between them “in historical usage and reference” (Todd 7). According to Todd, a “sentiment” is a “moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct” and also “a thought [...] influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or principle” (7). “Sensibility” denoted the “faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering” (Todd 7). The emphasis on refined feeling is particularly an important part of nervous sensibility, as the nervous subject was susceptible to feeling so much that it resulted in nervous disorders.

⁶ See, for example, Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (1996), specifically pages 190-192; John Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility” (2009), 21-44; Brewer, “Sensibility and the Urban Panorama” (2007), 229-249; Nagle, *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* (2007); and Peter Spratley, “Wordsworth’s Sensibility Inheritance: the Evening Sonnets and the ‘Miscellaneous Sonnets’” (2009), 95-115.

various articles on nerve theory and the culture of sensibility.⁷ Nervous sensibility primarily dominates the representations of the literary figures of urban sensibility that I explore in this project. This form of sensibility was based on what John Brewer calls a “theory of human nervousness,” a view that “saw the self as a creature of sensibility” “whose feelings were transmitted through fibres or nerves to the mind or soul” (24). Barker-Benfield calls this form of sensibility the “psychoperceptual scheme,” which she contends explained and systematized the “operation of the nervous system,” viewed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the “material basis for consciousness” (xvii). As Barker-Benfield notes, this scheme “became a paradigm” in the eighteenth century, meaning that it not only connoted “consciousness in general” but signified a “particular kind of consciousness, one that could be further sensitized in order to be more acutely responsive to signals from the outside environment and from inside the body” (xvii). Nervous disorders were often connected to excessive sensibility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As such, they were often viewed as a direct corollary or cause of excessive sensibility. Scholars of Romantic-period literature have explored this connection, including G. S. Rousseau, Grinnell, and John Mullan.⁸ Michel Foucault has also connected nervous disease with sensibility in examining medicine and psychology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault explores “diseases of nerves” in this era as “essentially disorders of sympathy” (153).⁹ Foucault thus also points out the

⁷ For a combined version of G. S. Rousseau’s essays with his own commentary, see *Nervous Acts: Essays in Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (2004).

⁸ For example, Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1988) emphasizes the fine line between sensibility and nervous illness in his examination of the nervous disorders of hypochondria, melancholia, and hysteria.

⁹ The concept of “sympathy” was aligned closely with sensibility and sentimentality in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.

cultural connection between sensibility and nervous illness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This particular notion of sensibility in relation to the nervous system was, moreover, important to the concept of modernity in the period. According to Brewer, during the long eighteenth century, many intellectuals, including physicians and philosophers, viewed modernity as an emphasis on the “elevation of feeling and heightening of sensibility into forms that were socially and individually pathological,” and which resulted in “modern disorders” that physically manifested as “diseases of nervousness,” such as hypochondria or hysteria (Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 27-28). Philosophers and political theorists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who were concerned with the pathological side of sensibility warned that the fashion of cultivating sensibility could lead to a culture of nervous illness, a potentially dangerous result of acute sensibility that could transform “a culture of sociability into one of solipsism and isolation” (Csengei 3-4). Nervous sensibility was thus crucial to the Romantic era’s conception of modernity and, likewise, modern experience was in many ways recognized as a “nervous” experience. Nervous sensibility was a symptom of modern life and, I argue, a symptom of urban life (Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 26). My study considers the significance of urban sensibility within modernity and as a modern construct. Examining urban sensibility in depth tells us about Romantic-era perceptions of the modern city and of modern culture.

By the end of the 1790s, sensibility was often tied to the organization of the nervous system and associated with acute illness. By the time Romantic-period writers, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, were writing in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, this view of nervous sensibility was entrenched in modern culture and had become an “established object of scientific enquiry” (Riskin 4). Medical theorists, like the prominent eighteenth-century nerve doctor, George Cheyne, had already affected the novels of Richardson and others, who injected the nerve paradigm of sensibility into their works.¹⁰ In the late-eighteenth and early- nineteenth centuries, medical scientists and physicians continued to write about the causes, symptoms, and effects of nervous disease on the public. Nerve doctors Thomas Beddoes and Thomas Trotter, for example, particularly influenced perceptions of nervousness and sensibility in Romantic-era culture and literature.¹¹

To see evidence of nervous sensibility’s continued prevalence in British Romantic-era culture, one need only look to the texts, magazines, and literature of the time. For example, Leigh Hunt published an article in the *Indicator* titled “Fatal Mistake of Nervous Disorders for Insanity” (1819), in which he contends that nervous disorders and melancholy were physical rather than psychological illnesses (57). Articles and editorials of the period feature stories and discussions focused on nervous disorders and sensibility. For example, an article in *The Mirror* (January 22, 1780; Issue

¹⁰ Cheyne’s *The English Malady: Or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds; as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Distempers, &c.* was published in 1733 and had a fairly wide influence on British literature of the eighteenth century.

¹¹ Barker-Benfield also points this out (7). Beddoes’s *Hygëia: or Essays Moral and Medical, on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of Our Middling and Affluent Classes* was published in 1802 and addressed the continuing presence of nervous disease in the middle and upper classes of the British population. Trotter’s *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (published in 1808) also influenced contemporary discussions of nervous disease. Other physicians continued to research and publish on nervous disease, including, for example, Neale, whose *Practical Dissertations on Nervous Complaints and Other Diseases Incident to the Human Body; with an Historical Investigation of their Causes and Cure In which are interspersed Some Singular Cases* was published in 1796. As physicians and medical scientists continued to treat and research management of and cures for nervous disease well into the nineteenth century, we can see that nervous illness and sensibility were still prevalent cultural concerns of the Romantic era. Throughout this study, I quote specific medical physicians of the period to support my points about nervous, urban sensibility mainly because either they were widely read and recognized by the public and had an impact on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British culture and/or because they demonstrate a range of contemporary views on nervous disease.

74) addresses the link between sensibility and the nervous system: “Persons who think much, and take little bodily exercise, will perhaps be found to be the greatest dreamers; especially, if their imagination be active, and their nervous system very sensible; which last is too common an infirmity among men of learning.”¹² Even advertisements in the Classified section of newspapers and magazines marketed products that claimed to strengthen the nerves and promote a healthy sensibility.¹³ Toward the end of this period, William Hazlitt published an article in *The New Monthly Magazine* titled “The Sick Chamber” (1830), in which he relates nerves and nervousness to physical illness (174-176). Many writers of the period, including Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and Lord Byron, offered representations of nervous sensibility in their work, and many in relation to city life. One of the most famous texts of the period to address the connection between nervousness and sensibility is, of course, Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, which presents excessive sensibility and nervous illness in the character Marianne Dashwood.¹⁴ Nervous sensibility thus proved prevalent throughout the Romantic period, extending beyond the eighteenth-century “cult of sensibility” that most scholars point to as formulating “the age of sensibility.”

¹² Note that this quotation connects nervous illness, sensibility, and the imagination with members of the intelligentsia. The connection between nervous illness, sensibility, and the imagination will be explored in more depth later in this project.

¹³ For example, an advertisement for pomatum in the *General Evening Post* (January 1, 1780, Issue 7176) claims the product “strengthens the nerves, revives the spirits, [and] promotes the circulation of the blood,” all related to relieving symptoms of nervous disorder.

¹⁴ Descriptions in Austen’s text of Marianne’s “nervous irritability” (180) and experiences of “an aching head, a weakened stomach, and a general nervous faintness” (185) point to physiological symptoms of nervous illness, such as hysteria. Laurie Kaplan and Richard S. Kaplan connect Marianne’s illness in the text with nervous medical cases prevalent during Austen’s time. For more information, see Kaplan and Kaplan’s “What is Wrong with Marianne? Medicine and Disease in Jane Austen’s England,” 117-130.

Sensibility and Commodity Culture

As the prevalence of nervous diseases spread from the upper to the middle classes of British society,¹⁵ nerve doctors and medical physicians increasingly tied sensibility and nervous diseases to commodity culture, which was developing rapidly in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶ According to Brewer, “acute sensibility” was considered to be the result of modern commerce, which was supposed to create “new, peaceful forms of mutual dependence among strangers” in “webs of credit and debt, contract and exchange” that “led to the better treatment and greater regard for women, [...] encouraged the arts of politeness and refinement,” and “encouraged greater sympathy” (“Sentiment and Sensibility,” 26). Yet many nerve doctors argued that luxury, as a result of commerce, was linked to nervous ailments. In

¹⁵ Sensibility was originally considered to be an aristocratic disease, but nervous cases among the middle classes began to develop in the eighteenth century.

¹⁶ I use the term “commodity culture” here to refer to a culture focused on the production, circulation, and consumption of the commodity in its various forms including objects, spectacles, and forms of leisure and luxury. Commodity culture is similar to (and often overlaps with) consumer culture, a form of capitalism dominated by the consumption of goods and luxuries. Like the term “sensibility,” both “commodity culture” and “consumer culture” are difficult to define as both are used and defined differently by theorists and scholars. Consumer culture in general covers a group of theoretical perspectives that attend to the dynamic relationships between the marketplace, consumer behavior, and cultural meanings. Commodity culture similarly addresses the dynamic relationships between commerce, commodity production, circulation, and consumption, and cultural meaning. One of the main distinctions I make between these terms is to approach “consumer culture” as focusing on consumer behavior while I use commodity culture to more specifically refer to the prevalence of the commodity form in society. Most theory on consumer and commodity culture focuses on more fully developed versions, which occurred later than the Romantic era, as historians often locate it in Western societies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, some arguing it began in the late nineteenth century. For example, Thomas Richards argues that commodity culture developed in the Victorian era, suggesting the mid-nineteenth century marks a period when the commodity “became the living letter of the law of supply and demand. It literally came alive” (2). Richards points to the prevalence of representations of commodities in nineteenth-century texts, including those of Charles Dickens. Scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature locate a nascent consumer culture much earlier in Britain, often centered in large cities, such as London. For scholarship on the development of commodity culture and consumerism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, see Paul Langford’s *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (1989), Maxine Berg’s *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2005), Jerome Christensen’s *Lord Byron’s Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (1993), Colin Campbell’s *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1989), Timothy Morton’s *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (2000), David Simpson’s *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (2009), and Guinn Batten’s *The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English Romanticism* (1998).

The English Malady (1733), Cheyne suggests that nervous disease, which developed as a result of excessive sensibility, was primarily caused by excessive consumption and commerce with foreign nations. According to Cheyne, the middle classes would remain healthy as long as they did not “[grow] luxurious rich and wanton or [have] frequent Commerce with other Nations” (*English Malady*, 108-109). According to Barker-Benfield, this early text “was a warning: Cheyne's medical sociology was intended to establish a check on the material pursuit of pleasure” that was becoming more prevalent in a developing consumer society (13).

This view continued to be expressed by medical doctors and researchers later in the century, as well. For example, in *An Enquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Method of Cure, of Nervous Disorders* (1781), Alexander Thomson also points to “modern luxury” and the idleness of “fashionable life,” both effects of commerce and commodity culture, as resulting in a nervous constitution in many patients (8). According to Thomson, the “numerous modes of indulgence practiced in times of refinement and luxury” all share in producing a nervous constitution in patients. He specifically addresses the prevalent view of the time that drinking tea, a decided luxury that had permeated English culture, could cause or exacerbate nervous disorders in some patients (Thomson 4). Thomson states that this “celebrated exotic” “excites nervous symptoms, such as tremors, palpitations, and watchfulness” in some patients (4).¹⁷ In an even later medical treatise, *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), Trotter continues to link luxury and commerce to nervousness: “Luxurious living, joined to other causes, has a

¹⁷ Thomson also notes that in some patients tea could be taken “without any sensible bad effects, but even with advantage. It relieves a headache, dispels drowsiness, and is often observed to promote digestion” (4). He seems to have a mixed view of tea drinking and its relation to nervous disorders (though the focus seems on moderation), but his acknowledgement of this connection shows how common medical and cultural discourse linked the excessive consumption of tea to nervous illness.

manifest tendency to induce nervous and bilious derangement” (66). Trotter contends that the consumption of rich food (“high seasoned food,” which he “call[s] luxurious living” [62]) weakened the “organs of digestion” “by surplus” and excited the nervous system, which “grows highly susceptible to stimulus, and [is] easily affected in mind by pleasurable sensation” (66).¹⁸ These nerve doctors warned that excessive luxury could result in a nervous constitution and debilitating illness. As nervous diseases became increasingly common among the mercantile classes throughout the eighteenth century, hypochondria became known as a symptom of the commercial and consumer culture of modern life (Lawrence 15). It was then a well-established view in early nineteenth-century Britain that acute sensibility was a result of commerce and urban culture and the way of life they fostered.

Yet, as Barker-Benfield indicates, the “nerve paradigm” from which Cheyne and other nerve doctors worked “was itself rooted in materialism” (13). Sensibility had long “rested on essentially materialist assumptions” and was inextricably tied to a “spreading material culture of consumption” (Barker-Benfield xvii-xviii).¹⁹ Although sensibility and taste directly responded to the problematic facets of luxury in the eighteenth century, and promoted restrained consumption, both concepts were still based on

¹⁸ Trotter also addresses tea as an exotic commodity that produces a nervous effect in patients (68-69). For more on exotic commodities, see Morton, *The Poetics of Spice*.

¹⁹ Barker-Benfield astutely points out that Cheyne’s reformism and criticism of the excessive luxury of commerce were “dependent upon consumerism, not least because of his assumption that his readers had the freedom to choose a more or less frugal diet” but also because “the site for Cheyne’s religious conversion, following his falling into London’s iniquitous tavern life, had been that eighteenth-century pleasure center, Bath [...] It was there that Cheyne himself became fashionable” (14-15). According to Barker-Benfield, Cheyne “embodied the campaign for the reformation of manners *and* consumerism. At one symbolic nerve center, where the culture’s language was being generated, one finds a compressed combination of luxury and guilt, fashion and self-denial, sensuality and purgation; within such spirals, in fact, produced by them, was the elevation of ambiguously susceptible nerves, whose state could be a sign of social superiority and Christian grace, or of weakness and nervous disorder” (Barker-Benfield 15).

consumerism, serving merely to direct consumers to “appropriate” types of consumption (Smith 81). Moreover, Markman Ellis suggests that “Sensibility was one of the tools of a thorough-going and self-conscious analysis of the emergent consumer-economy of British society and culture” (17). Sensibility “was drawn into, and helped define, an increasingly open debate that identified and analysed these problems, and created spaces within public opinion for imagining and creating responses of individual and institutional reform” (Ellis 17). Thus, sensibility and commercial culture maintained a troubling and paradoxical relationship—commerce was at once sensibility’s creator and destroyer as discourse of the late eighteenth century claimed that it either annihilated or led to an excess of sensibility, manifested in acute nervous disorders (Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 41). Sensibility was deemed virtuous and good, while also “pathologized by the very forces—modernity, politeness, good taste, sociability, commerce, feminization—that brought it into being” (Brewer, “Sentiment and Sensibility,” 28). As Brewer suggests, sensibility was at once a “virtue and a source of distress, a sign of moral superiority, but also of weakness” (“Sentiment and Sensibility,” 28).

Sensibility’s complex connection to commodity culture can further be examined in its relation to consumption. I approach urban sensibility as a theory about the body as a consumer of sensations. Acute sensibility was presented in texts and Romantic-era culture as a form of consumption, a way of consuming sensations experienced from one’s surroundings. As addressed earlier, sensibility encompassed a heightened sensitivity to the people, objects, and environment of one’s surroundings. Acutely sensible individuals were intensely attuned to the sensations they experienced. Those

with acute sensibility or—in the extreme—nervous disorders were, in a way, consumers of excessive sensations. Within the concept of luxury that Cheyne and other nerve doctors posit, those with nervous symptoms have consumed in excess and their body is, in a way, experiencing overload. Their bodies cannot process the quantity or intensity of their sensations properly, so they exhibit nervous symptoms. The purpose of sensibility relies heavily on consuming; however, excessive consumption can lead to physical and psychological disorders or nervous ailments. Nerve doctors like Cheyne, Trotter, and Thomson thus suggested proper forms and amounts of consumption.²⁰ Romantic-era writers explored sensibility and what constituted proper levels of consumption in relation to art, commodities, spectacle, and culture. Urban sensibility was a specific type of sensibility consumption that explored excessive levels of sensation and spectacle in relation to the sensible body. Representations of urban sensibility provide a lens for understanding how the modern literary artist of the Romantic period understood urban subjectivity in an age of increasing material excess and commercialism.

Sensibility and the City

Nowhere was commercial culture more prevalent and nervous sensibility more acute in the Romantic period than in the city. London was the commercial and consumer center of the nation and was a bustling international city. Cheyne's *English Malady* posits sensibility and the nervous disorders associated with it as a disease that was particularly prevalent in "populous and overgrown Cities," such as London, "where nervous Tempers are most frequent" (54). According to physicians like Cheyne, the luxuriating urban consumer's nervous system when exposed too much to city life

²⁰ These physicians thus ended up participating in discussions of taste because they emphasized what forms of consumption were genteel, or *too* genteel, and the importance of moderation.

became congested, “retarding or stopping the Circulation in the small Vessels, whereby the stagnant Juices become Sharp and corrosive” and salts “crystallize or unite in greater Clusters” (Cheyne 7).²¹ As Barker-Benfield states, Cheyne describes the “nervous system of the luxuriating consumer” as “clogged and polluted as the air and streets of modern London” (14).²² This view of city dwellers as particularly prone to nervous disease continued into the nineteenth century, appearing in multiple medical treatises, including those of the nerve theorist Trotter. In *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), Trotter calls the city “a hotbed for the passions,” where excessive sensibility thrives (41). He even presents a mythical English past in which manly, vigorous men flourished, describing them as a robust race of rural farmers, herders, and hunters with strong nerves who “had few bodily disorders” but later became enervated and feminized by city life (Trotter 16-17, 22). Trotter and other Romantic-period nerve theorists like Thomas Beddoes warned that the cramped spaces, sedentary daily routines, and the stagnant air of city life caused nervous distempers in men and women.

²¹ For more on Cheyne’s description of the physiological effects of luxury on the nerves, see 5-11.

²² In addition to addressing the vast population of London, Cheyne describes the pollution of the air as a result of so many people living in close quarters and of the effects of commercial industry. He also strongly advises that nervous sufferers retreat to the country for respite from their symptoms:

To all these Considerations, if we add the present Custom of Living, so much in great, populous, and over-grown Cities; *London* (where nervous Distempers are most frequent, outrageous, and unnatural), is, for ought I know, the greatest, most capacious, close, and populous City of the *Globe*, the infinite Number of Fires, sulphureous and bituminous; the vast Expence of Tallow and foetid Oil in Candles and Lamps, under and above Ground; the Clouds of stinking Breaths, and Perspiration; not to mention the Ordure of so many diseased, both intelligent and unintelligent Animals; the crowded Churches, Church-yards and Burying-places, with putrifying Bodies, the Sinks, Butcher-Houses, Stables, Dung-hills, &c. and the necessary Stagnation, Fermentation, and Mixture of such Variety of all Kinds of Atoms, are more than sufficient to putrify, poison, and infect the Air for twenty Miles round it; and which, in Time, must alter, weaken, and destroy the healthiest Constitutions of Animals of all Kinds; and accordingly it is in such-like Cities, that these Distempers are to be found in their highest and most astonishing Symptoms; and seldom any lasting or solid Cure is perform’d ‘till the Disease be rusticated and purified from the infectious Air and Damps, transubstantiated into their Habits, by a great City, and ‘till they have suck’d in and incorporated the sweet, balmy, clear Air of the Country, and driven the other out of their Habit. (Cheyne 54-55)

But many physicians and writers also pointed to the commercial culture of the city, which bombarded the urban individual with excessive stimulation from the spectacles, commodities, and commotion of the metropolis. Sensitive beings could not handle all of the stimulation that commodity culture provided, which resulted in agitated nerves and acute nervous disorders.

It is important to note, though, that like commodity culture, the city sustained an ambivalent relation to sensibility. In many ways, sensibility was viewed and presented as being in conflict with the metropolis, which was often seen as a den of vice and frivolity where sensibility could not flourish (Todd 14). As Todd points out, sentimental novels of the eighteenth century often included heroes and heroines who had to brave the atrocities of the city while still keeping their refined sensibility intact (14). Yet the city was also considered a place of excessive sensibility, where its inhabitants were prone to nervous symptoms. The relationship between the city and sensibility was also paradoxical as the city was concurrently considered both a cause of acute sensibility and as dismantling or hindering its cultivation. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourse on sensibility claimed, in extremes, that urban life either destroyed or led to an excess of sensibility, which resulted in nervous illness.

In some ways, these views of the city are similar to Georg Simmel's later description of the fragmentation of life in the modern city in "The Metropolis and Mental Life," though Romantic-era discourse on the city predates Simmel's text by approximately one hundred years. Simmel argued that the "psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (48,

his emphasis). According to Simmel, the city deeply contrasted with “rural life” in the “sensory foundations of psychic life” (48). The urban individual was bombarded by the excessive stimulation of the bustling urban environment. Simmel then argued that the “metropolitan type of man” eventually “develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him” (48). This defense mechanism results in a numbness and intellectuality, a “blasé attitude,” that protects the urban individual from psychological destruction (Simmel 51-52). Urban sensibility in the Romantic period presents a similar “intensification of nervous stimulation” that can potentially become too much for the individual to handle. However, in the texts explored in this project, the individual has not yet developed or does not employ the type of defense mechanism that Simmel addresses in “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” For Wordsworth this could presumably be because the young Wordsworth presented in *The Prelude* is new to the city and has not become a true urbanite. For other writers it seems they work to use urban sensibility and this potential nervousness for artistic means. Essentially, urban sensibility in these texts marks a period when the metropolitan man has not yet become fully modern but is dealing with the early effects of modernity.

In this study, I examine the complex relationship between sensibility, commodity culture, and the city in the works of various Romantic-era writers. While eighteenth-century British and Romantic-era scholars have tied sensibility and commodity culture or commodity culture and the city, little has been done to connect sensibility to urban culture and experience in relation to developing characteristics of modernity, such as commodity culture. However, these three concepts intersect to create

a distinct trend in literary and cultural representations of urban sensibility. I argue that the nervous agitation of excessive sensibility that medical scientists explored and treated in their urban patients was also explored by Romantic writers. This nervous sensibility was a part of the modern urban experience. I investigate how Romantic-period writers imagined, dealt with, complicated, and even subverted popular notions of urban sensibility. This study explores the ways these writers differed from each other in how they imagined urban sensibility and how these representations reflect, diverge from, and complicate the scientific tracts of the day regarding urban sensibility.

Urban Pedestrianism and Sensibility in Romantic-Era Literature

While there are many different approaches to take in exploring urban sensibility, I am particularly interested in representations of the urban pedestrian who walks the streets of Romantic-period London and who is depicted as possessing a refined sensibility. It is my contention that these metropolitan perambulations form an important characteristic of urban sensibility in the works of Romantic-era writers, such as William Wordsworth, Thomas De Quincey, William Blake, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb. In these texts, urban pedestrianism helps formulate and create nervous experience. The urban pedestrian, open to the multitude of sensations the city offers, becomes a prime candidate for nervous experience due to his acute sensibility and developed imagination. Urban pedestrianism has a somewhat long and multifaceted history within modernity and its multiple manifestations have been explored by scholars and theorists. The type of pedestrianism depicted within Romantic-era representations of urban sensibility connects in many ways to other expressions of pedestrianism, but provides a nuanced vision of a particular type of urban experience. However, it helps to

examine the ways this form of urban pedestrianism overlaps with and diverges from other expressions and theories of urban walking.

The pedestrian is a familiar figure in Romantic-era literature. As Susan B. Rosenbaum points out, “when the figure of the poet takes center stage in the late-eighteenth century lyric, he is often walking” (27). According to Robin Jarvis, pedestrianism, as a chosen form of transportation and as a form of entertainment in travel, was a fairly new concept in the Romantic period (12). Jarvis particularly points to the 1780s and 1790s as a “crucial transitional period in which one can observe the social and ideological meanings of walking being contested and redefined” (2). Walking was no longer something to which only the poor were forced to resort, but was instead becoming a chosen leisure activity (Jarvis 18).²³ Walking was voluntary, a choice that brought the traveler into a “complex arena of social significations, and involved him/her in instabilities of identity that could be experienced either as anxiety or as liberation” (Jarvis 17).²⁴ Walking comprised a democratic sensibility in the Romantic era, one that brought all walkers down to the same level. Diverse forms of walking became more prominent at this time, demonstrating the complexity of this phenomenon.²⁵ The peripatetic tourist, for example, was a contested figure in the late eighteenth and early

²³ Anne D. Wallace also addresses the ideological shift in walking in the late eighteenth century. Wallace argues walking could not be manipulated and reshaped aesthetically until it was possible to think about it as a choice and form of leisure rather than necessity, and once it lost its deep historical association with the lower classes (see *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century*, 2-14).

²⁴ See also Celeste Langan on the ties and analogies between walking and freedom. Langan addresses the “rendering of freedom as sheer mobilization” in Wordsworth’s work (13-14, 19).

²⁵ In his examination of the development of the “misadventure” genre of travel, Carl Thompson points out three of the most prominent (and most contested) forms of popular tourism in this period: the picturesque tour, the Grand tour, and the female tourist (32). The misadventure was a form of Romantic travel developed in opposition to the figure of the tourist. A form of travel that valorizes the unpleasant, the peripatetic misadventure “underpins a Romantic desire to be [...] someone who has themselves [sic] suffered in the course of travel, since one can pronounce more authoritatively on social ills and injustices, and on legitimate and illegitimate ways of responding to those predicaments, when one has experienced them for oneself” (Thompson 108).

nineteenth centuries. It became “entangled with debates” and anxieties about modernity (Thompson 41).²⁶ In addition to a form of leisure, pedestrianism was also becoming an art (Thompson 8). Peripatetic travel possessed an “aesthetic’ dimension,” constituting a “deliberate attempt to shape both the experience and the self so that they fit a desired paradigm or template” (Thompson 8). Walking was thus a strategically selected mode of transportation and of representation in the Romantic period. The figure of the pedestrian was immersed in a larger discourse about modernity in general and about particular aspects of the modern experience.

Pedestrianism is in many ways a fitting form for the expression of sensibility. The peripatetic stroll leaves the subject open to sensations, to a full experience of the senses, as opposed to riding in a carriage where the individual is pent up, cut off from the full sensual experience of the urban street scene. The peripatetic subject also is more open to experiencing sympathy toward others by walking on ground level with them. Moreover, as Susan B. Rosenbaum suggests, the “walk embodies an ideal of spontaneous, unconstrained movement, feeling, and reflection, propelled by the poet’s autonomous powers of locomotion rather than by any external authority” (27). The walker is thus open to the possibility of poetic creation, because he is in such a vulnerable yet powerful position. Walking, furthermore, helps keep the individual connected to his body. Within pedestrianism, there is a “negotiation of the bodiliness of walking” that addresses a physiological sensibility (Rosenbaum 30). Walking offers the poet an embodied perspective in which he is highly aware of his body and sensations.

²⁶ Due to the ambivalent and often negative views of tourism, Romantic representations of travel tended to be shaped in opposition to the “tourist” (Thompson 31). For example, within Wordsworth’s representations of the pedestrian poet, we can see an attempt to distance himself from the figure of the tourist. According to Thompson, Wordsworth was particularly opposed to the simulated aspect of the picturesque and its “consumerist” view of nature (Thompson 54-55).

But walking also leads to a mental and aesthetic life “that is both distinct from and continuous with its bodily one” (Jarvis). In other words, the mind and body are connected in the peripatetic act. This is why the Imagination is so closely linked to the act of peregrination and to the figure of the pedestrian in the Romantic period. Walking was important to the cultivation of the poet. Urban sensibility highlights these features of Romantic experience through the figure of the urban pedestrian, linking a sensually receptive subject to the energies and cultural expressions of the metropolis. As this study hopes to demonstrate, urban walking takes on new roles and significance in representations of urban sensibility as it produces nervousness and generates imaginative and subversive experiences.

The Flâneur

In many ways the British urban pedestrian who leisurely strolls through the streets, observing the public spaces and spectacles of the metropolis as he develops his poetic craft, resembles the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur. Open to experiencing the variety of stimuli in the modern city, the flâneur is a figure that was particularly open to sensation and the experience of an acute sensibility. As an urban voyeur searching for new spectacles in the street scenes of the city and arcades of Paris, the flâneur, as Judith R. Walkowitz argues, was an archetypical modern consumer—“his was a quintessentially ‘consumerist’ mode of being-in-the-world, one that transformed exploitation and suffering into vivid individual psychological experience” (16). As Walter Benjamin addressed in his essay on Baudelaire and Paris (“Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”), the modern man experiences the city through a multiplicity of shocks and collisions, through a “phantasmagoria” of excess stimuli produced by the

frenetic activity of commodities and crowds of the marketplace (14-15).²⁷ Benjamin claims the flâneur “abandons himself” to the “immediacy” of the “perceptible presence” of these “phantasmagorias” of the city (Benjamin, “Paris,” 14).²⁸ Sensual experience and sensibility are thus key to flânerie, as the figure experiences the multiplicity of sensual stimuli in the city.

But the effects of commodity culture are also reflected in and important to understanding the figure of the flâneur. In examining Benjamin’s view of the flâneur, Keith Tester argues, “commodification and the circulation of commodities” impacted the “meaning of existence” in the metropolis “so that there remained no spaces of mystery for the flâneur to observe” (Tester 13; Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 58). According to Benjamin, the “flâneur is abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity...The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers” (*Charles Baudelaire* 5). As Tester contends, for Benjamin the flâneur is a “passive spectator who is duped by the spectacle of the public as the consumer who is duped by the glittering promises of consumerism” (14). The urban pedestrian in nineteenth-century England may not be presented with such cynicism toward commodity culture, but he certainly is presented as a figure grappling with the developing commodity culture of the city and where he fits in such a society. Urban sensibility provides the urban pedestrian with a sensual awareness of the flux and flow of modern city life, its consumers, commodities,

²⁷ Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* provides a fascinating—albeit fragmented—examination of urban life and the figure of the flâneur within his environment of street life and arcades (large shopping malls) that elucidates modern life and the further fragmentation of life in the industrial world of the future.

²⁸ As Benjamin’s representations of flânerie resemble the expressions of London pedestrianism addressed in this project, the experience of urban sensibility can be approached as an early and British form of flânerie. In this study, most of these writers abandon themselves in varying ways to the excesses of the modern city. Yet these peripatetic representations offer visions of urban life and experience specific to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London.

spectacles, and interpersonal interaction. As a form of consumption and of poetic expression, urban sensibility provides the writer with a rich framework for exploring these concepts. Urban sensibility demonstrates that immersive experiences of the city were important to perceptions of modernity in Romantic literature.

As a consumer of sensations, and as a bourgeois and leisure figure of the city, as well as a figure of the poet, the flâneur is particularly appropriate for comparison with the urban pedestrians of the Romantic era that I explore in this study. As Tester points out, the flâneur's "activity of strolling and looking" is a "recurring motif in the literature, sociology, and art of urban, and most especially of metropolitan, existence" (1). Despite the flâneur's placing in nineteenth-century Paris, many scholars have used the flâneur figure to explore earlier and later manifestations of urban walking in many countries.²⁹ For writers and artists, "from romanticism to Dada, to surrealism, to the situationist movement, to fluxus, to conceptual art and to contemporary work, urban roaming, drifting, or flânerie has defined a particular approach to creative practice" (Rendell 1). While the urban pedestrian of the Romantic era might not fit flânerie perfectly, specifically in its expressions of a British form of London experience, we can certainly see resemblances to the practices of the flâneur in the that the urban

²⁹ Some scholars point to the Romantic era as a period particularly receptive to a flâneur-like figure and to the panoramic mode of representation so closely associated with the modern city. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin's collection, *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840*, which demonstrates the significance of the city to Romantic-era literature, refutes Walter Benjamin's claim that Paris was the "paradigmatic center in the new metropolitan scheme of things" and instead contend that Romantic London challenges these claims (7). They claim history suggests that "Romantic London already seems to be pervaded with the 'new attitude' Benjamin associates with the panoramic impulse" (Chandler and Gilmartin 11). Chandler and Gilmartin suggest that Wordsworth's representations of the metropolis as landscape, or panorama, shows how early the "old Romantic sentiment of landscape" gave way to "a new Romantic sentiment of cityscape" (12). My study supports Chandler and Gilmartin's assertions about the significance of the Romantic city to our understanding of the modern city and the modern experience. The prominent figure of the urban pedestrian in the literary texts I explore here particularly demonstrate the prevalence and significance of the cityscape to our understandings of Romanticism, as well. Urban experience provided a new mode of experimenting with poetic and imaginative expression.

pedestrian's manner of mingling with crowds and observing spectacles in the streets of London. For some, such as Wordsworth's poet-pedestrian in Book 7 of the *Prelude*, this can be terrifying at moments, while for others, like De Quincey's urban rambler or Lamb's metropolitan pedestrian, it is an experience replete with pleasure. Indeed, the figure of the urban walker in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* very closely resembles this description of the flâneur from Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*: "For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite" (399). Like the flâneur, De Quincey's urban pedestrian at times experiences intense pleasure among the urban throng and markets of London's streets.

In using the figure of the flâneur as a lens for examining representations of urban pedestrianism in London, I do not wish to elide the differences in urban experience between this particular historical moment and that of Baudelaire's nineteenth-century Paris. However, the flâneur offers a useful model for exploring and discussing various forms of urban experience within modernity. Though separated by time and place, the Parisian flâneur and the urban pedestrian of the Romantic era grapple with similar issues, including the drive to find meaning in the rapidly changing spaces of modernity. As Raymond Williams points out in *The Country and the City*, "perceptions of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets" (233). Thus, although the figure of the flâneur was originally tied to a specific place and time—nineteenth-century Paris—similar urban figures pervaded the literature of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-

century London.³⁰ Scholars of the Romantic period have thus begun to examine representations of urban pedestrianism in literary works of the time.³¹ However, there is still much left to be explored within Romantic-era representations of the city walker. The spectatorial, aesthetic, and consumer characteristics of urban peregrination make walking an interesting topic to examine in tandem with sensibility, which was itself bound up with and structured by consumerism and spectatorship. In this study, I look more closely at Romantic representations of the urban stroller by examining the figure's ties to urban sensibility.

Urban Pedestrianism as Resistance

The importance of bodily experience in urban pedestrianism provides a place from which to explore how the body works within systems of power. Foucault's assertions concerning the body as embedded in culture have helped scholars to examine the complexities and political force of eighteenth-century perceptions of sensibility. In *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that the body is "directly involved in a political field;

³⁰ Eighteenth-century texts such as Ned Ward's *The London Spy* (1698-1700), John Gay's *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), as well as early nineteenth-century texts, such as Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1824), Jonathan Babcock's *Real Life in London* (1821), William Heath's *Fashion and Folly* (1822), and Bernard Blackmantle's *The English Spy* (1825), offer representations of urban peregrinations in the streets of London, many of them focusing on leisurely walks in the pursuit of pleasure (Rendell 32). As these texts indicate, the cultural investment in the spectacle in Romantic-period London intensified the view of the scopic pedestrian of the city. The full range of displays, exhibitions, and spectacles of London offered a visual feast for the urban walker engaged in acts of observation. This fascination with the visual marks the Romantic era as a key period for the development of early forms of flânerie.

³¹ See for example, Dana Arnold, *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840* (2000); Alison O'Byrne, "The Art of Walking in London: Representing Urban Pedestrianism in the Early Nineteenth Century" (2008); and Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (2002). Rendell examines "rambling" and the figure of the "rambler" in early nineteenth-century London, a form of pedestrianism similar to flânerie. According to Rendell, "rambling" is a form of peregrination focused on "the pursuit of pleasure, or the exploration of urban sites of leisure and entertainment by men" (4). These "sites of leisure and pleasure" included "theatres, opera houses, pleasure gardens, parks, clubs, taverns, and streets" (Rendell 24). The rambler figure is also closely connected to consumption, as he used walking to "articulate a sense of identity through distinctive consumption" (Rendell 26). Both the rambler and the flâneur closely resemble the type of urban pedestrian I explore in this project.

power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (25). This project considers how urban sensibility engaged the modern subject in the power relations of the period. Approaching the body of the urban inhabitant as a body affected by nervous sensibility (and the systems of power related to sensibility), helps to understand the implications of physical manifestations of sensibility in the city. Moreover, exploring literary representations of urban sensibility allows us to see how some writers used this figure of urban experience to challenge these systems of power. As a form of consumption, urban sensibility (especially in relation to urban pedestrianism) can be seen to both yield to and resist the systems of social and political power in the modern city.

Writers of the Romantic period presented urban walking similarly to the later concept of psychogeography, which involved the body in acts of physical and psychological resistance. In broad terms, psychogeography suggests, according to Merlin Coverley, “the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place” (10). In particular, psychogeography’s “search for new ways of apprehending [the] urban environment” resembles the way Romantic-era writers were depicting the possibilities and meanings of urban walking (Coverley 13). Urban peregrination provided the writer with a variety of different identities and perspectives from which to explore the new meanings of modern existence. According to Guy Debord in “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,”

Psychogeography sets for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the

emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective *psychogeographical* can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect upon the same spirit of discovery. (8)

In a sense, urban sensibility works as a sort of proto-psychogeography, an earlier form of peripatetic study that occurs in the Romantic city. Rather than just focusing on geography alone, urban sensibility is a product of the psychological and physiological effects of the culture and structure of the city upon the individual. This form of urban experience combines geography and place with economics, politics, social class, gender, etc., and the multitude of cultural forms and expressions of the city. Urban sensibility reveals the ways that the geography and culture of London marks and affects the bodies and constitutions of urban inhabitants of the Romantic era by creating physiological and psychological nervousness in the modern subject. The literary texts explored in this study reveal an early form of psychogeography as these writers work to understand and engage in the effects of culture and geography on the physiology and mind of the individual.

Some scholars have already compared the work of the urban pedestrian in Romantic-period literature to the work of psychogeography. For example, Coverley argues that the urban pedestrianism expressed in Blake's works participates in "a tradition of London writing that foreshadows many of the later psychogeographic preoccupations" (39). Coverley further contends that the drug-induced ramblings in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* "were given official recognition by the Situationists themselves" (32).³² Urban sensibility in Blake's and De Quincey's

³² Coverley footnotes "[t]he unnamed author of 'Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s' writes: 'Thomas de Quincey's real life from 1804-1821 makes him a precursor of the *dérive*'" (54). Coverley cites *Internationale Situationiste #3* from the Situationist International Archive at

texts connects urban geography, culture, and psychology. The Romantic city offers a complex mixture of cultural phenomena that blend together in urban sensibility. As Debord says of psychogeography, “the variety of possible combinations of ambiances, analogous to the blending of pure chemicals in an infinite number of mixtures, gives rise to feelings as differentiated and complex as any other form of spectacle can evoke” (10). I focus on examining one particular mixture, that of urban sensibility, and how this vision of the city was explored by writers of the Romantic period.

One way in which expressions of urban sensibility in Romantic literature resemble psychogeography is through an interest in subversive acts and disruption. As many scholars have pointed out, psychogeography is particularly defined by its interest and investment in subversion. Coverley further defines psychogeography as consisting of “the act of urban wandering, the spirit of political radicalism, allied to a playful sense of subversion and governed by an inquiry into the methods by which we can transform our relationship to the urban environment” (14). Urban sensibility participates in varying levels of subversion, ranging from the recognition of how our concepts of the body and of nature are socially and politically constructed, as in the case of Wordsworth’s urban sensibility, to using urban sensibility to break out of all oppressive systems and structures of power, as in Blake’s *Jerusalem*. In the latter, a similar political radicalism to psychogeography can be detected in this early nineteenth-century text. Most certainly urban sensibility encompasses an inquiry into the ways the urban

www.notbored.org/UU.html. Phil Baker also points this out in “Secret City: Psychogeography and the End of London” (326).

pedestrian can transform his relationship (and thus his readers' relationship) to the modern urban environment.³³

Michel de Certeau's theories of walking in his famous text, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, further helps frame how urban sensibility works in literary representations of London. De Certeau's project in general investigates the ways that "users," who he says are "commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules," employ "everyday practices," such as "talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc." in active and resistant ways that individualize and "reappropriate" culture and space (xi-xix). He claims that individual consumers ("users"—those who are subjugated within larger systems and institutions) employ "tactics"—minor everyday moves that work in resistance to the "strategies" employed by structures of power to control communities of people (de Certeau xix).³⁴ Walking, and urban walking in particular, assumes one of these tactical everyday practices. Institutions, governments, economic structures, etc. generate the city through shops, government buildings, typography, etc. Walking then can be a way of defying these prescribed boundaries of city life. Urban pedestrians are the "ordinary practitioners of the city"; they are "walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an

³³ According to some scholars, psychogeography is inextricably tied to the Situationist movement of the twentieth century. In "The Contemporary Dérive: A Partial Review of Issues Concerning the Contemporary Practice of Psychogeography," Phil Smith warns that the situationists' tactics "have been widely rifled and appropriated," which potentially "wrenche[s] psychogeography from its theoretical frame in the critique of the spectacle" (105). While an exploration—and at times critique or celebration of—the spectacles of the Romantic city were important aspects of urban sensibility, the "society of the spectacle" had not reached its zenith during this period, though the Romantic-era witnessed the beginnings of such a society. Despite the differences between this form of walking and urban sensibility, I see psychogeography as in many ways a useful tool for thinking about how urban sensibility works in these Romantic-era texts, and how it explores urban pedestrianism as a powerful mode of representation.

³⁴ De Certeau indicates that "[m]any everyday practices" are "tactical in character" and, as such, are "victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.): "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning,' maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike" (xix).

urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen” (de Certeau 93). De Certeau thus relates walking to writing and to speech acts: “The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other” (93). The Romantic-era authors of urban pedestrianism more fully connect walking and speech acts, using urban sensibility to act in relation to and in defiance of the culture of the city.

Urban sensibility demonstrates both the ways these institutions and power structures attempt to control bodies (or have an adverse effect on bodies), as well as the ways that writers and artists attempt to use the body and mind to resist this control and reclaim some sense of agency for themselves. Similar to de Certeau’s description of tactics by individuals, Romantic authors use urban sensibility and pedestrianism to demonstrate ways of re-appropriating traditions, art, aspects of exchange, etc. for everyday purposes. The acutely sensible urban pedestrian re-appropriates walking in the city (a seemingly ordinary aspect of urban culture) to find a place for the artist within modern, material culture. The acute sensibility and nervous experience of the pedestrian poet acts as a framework in these texts that provides a specifically marginalized perspective from which to resist, question, and re-appropriate dominant culture. Urban sensibility could be seen in de Certeau-ian terms as a tactic of consumption. It possesses the potential to be an active and resistant form of consumption that does not merely encompass a passive intake of sensory impressions, but rather can possibly operate to subvert or resist the purposes and effects of consumption. For example, for Lamb (in the

excerpt quoted at the beginning of this introduction), by addressing how his sensibility becomes stronger and his nervousness weaker among the theater crowds and streets of the city, uses urban sensibility to reappropriate metropolitan culture for the individual. As the first chapter shows, urban sensibility and the excesses of this experience offer Wordsworth an active and resistant way to react to the city, but they also remind him of how entrenched his own ideas of nature and poetics are in commodity culture. Urban sensibility thus causes, for him, an awakening (however unwelcome) to what is at stake in his own representations of nature and the poetic body. For De Quincey, urban sensibility and pedestrianism allow him to actively create new and intensely pleasurable experiences of the city and the urban body. In Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays, it leads away from the passive reception of city life to powerful expressions of community and civic engagement. For Blake, urban sensibility is even more liberating in that it allows individuals to actively resist oppressive systems and leads to a revolutionary redemption of both London and England.

It is important to note that de Certeau addresses everyday, ordinary people in his text, while the writers of the works explored in this dissertation focus on the figure of the poet, who is framed as extraordinary. This is particularly the case in Wordsworth's Book 7 of the *Prelude*. However, as this project shows, urban sensibility becomes more openly available for all urban individuals, not just for the figure of the poet (as we will see in Blake's *Jerusalem*). By choosing peripatetic practice these writers engage in the commonplace, what is part of the everyday, and reclaim it for artistic uses. Moreover, by focusing on urban peregrination, the subversion possible in the practice of urban sensibility (for urban sensibility is a performance, an exercise of a particular perspective

and form of vision) becomes potentially accessible for anyone engaging in urban pedestrianism.

Urban sensibility provides a framework in which the mind, the body, and the city meet. As a part of this particular form of urban sensibility, urban pedestrianism furthermore connects the geography and culture of the city with the physical and psychological workings of the metropolitan individual and figure of the poet. While the nervous experience of urban sensibility in many ways plays into the power structures of the contemporary culture of Romantic-era England—a culture focused on commodity consumption and preoccupied with the potentially enervating effects of commercialism and nervous illness—urban sensibility simultaneously can be subversive, providing a place or position of resistance within the bustling city. This aspect of urban sensibility further positions the city as a place of potential change, truth, and creativity, and thus makes it an environment particularly conducive to artistic expression.

The Sublime and Urban Sensibility

As an expression of physiological excess, the experience of urban sensibility is connected to the sublime and, specifically, the urban sublime.³⁵ The urban sublime typically entails the sublimity of the urban landscape and the ways it surpasses the powers of human perception. The urban sublime comprises social, spatial, and economic experiences of the city and often encompasses representations of cityscape,

³⁵ The sublime is generally defined as that which inspires awe. Burke defined the sublime as “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about a terrible object, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (36). While Burke’s definition here focuses on terror and pain, he also indicates that there exists a pleasure in this emotion, as well. For Burke, terror, which is at the core of the sublime, “always produces delight when it does not press too close” (43). As Adam Phillips indicates in the introduction to Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry*, it is this combination “that makes artistic representations, like tragedy, the tolerable and even thrilling Sublime” (xxi). The Kantian sublime relies in part on Burke’s definition of the sublime but adds the concept of transcendence and focuses on the mind and Reason.

industrialism, and crowds. The urban sublime was relatively new in this period, as cities were beginning to grow more rapidly than in previous historical eras. Urban sensibility provides a lens for and in ways becomes part of the experience of the urban sublime in the literary texts examined in this project.

Nervous urban sensibility in many ways parallels the sublime: both are defined by excess, disorder, and the rupturing of traditional experience. Both induce a new form of perception and a new kind of subjectivity in the Romantic period. The urban pedestrian explored in this project, who operates within the framework of urban sensibility, often experiences the urban sublime—the excess of the city—amid the crowded streets, abundance of buildings, and surplus of commodities. Urban sensibility also works in some texts as a form of the sublime itself, which provides the subject with an intensity of sensations, a mediated perception of the urban environment, and a unique path to the imagination.

Urban sensibility links most closely to what Alan Richardson calls the “neural sublime,” a “materialist, brain-based conception of mind” appearing in the Romantic period that diverges from the Kantian sublime which focuses on transcending the body (12). Richardson’s examination of the neural sublime as a form of Romantic-era sublime encourages us to “reconsider the competing accounts of Burke and other writers in the British tradition,” which would have been more familiar to writers of the period, not just as “stepping stones leading to Kant but as intriguing constructions in their own right” (25). Examinations of the neural sublime also challenge the typical view that the “sublime moment in canonical Romantic poetry inevitably, as in Kant’s model, ‘erases the body’” (Richardson 25). Instead, the neural sublime takes its cue

from the Burkean sublime, which locates the numinous in the physical—in the body—and takes place in “physical rapture” rather than a mental or “divine rapture” (Richardson 26). For Burke, the sublime is a bodily experience that “depends on changes in the central nervous system, a stretching and subsequent relaxation of the nerves” (Richardson 26).³⁶

While the urban sublime explored in this project formulates different types of sublimity, my study focuses on experiences of the neural sublime. The urban sublime explored here similarly emphasizes rather than erases bodily experience. The urban pedestrian experiences the sublime physically as much as mentally, as pedestrianism and urban sensibility position the body as significant to creative experience. Moreover, it emphasizes neural experiences of the city. For philosophers and writers, and specifically for Burke and Kant, “the sublime was a way of thinking about excess as the key to a new kind of subjectivity” (Phillips ix). Urban sensibility similarly addresses excess in a specific form of subjectivity—that of the acutely sensible, urban pedestrian-poet.

The city walker experiences the urban, neural sublime in two ways. First, he experiences the multitude of sensations from the urban environment upon the acutely sensitive body. This individual is positioned to constantly take in these sensations, but, in some cases, he is also positioned to navigate them. The spectacle of the city—offered in street scenes, performances, crowds, exhibitions, and advertisements—is the urban

³⁶ Richardson notes that while the neural sublime shares Burke’s interest in “physiologism,” it does not share his interest in “mental calisthenics” (28). The neural sublime rather “presents a mind stretched to and even past the breaking point,” an experience of “cognitive breakdown” that is too “intense for the ordinary mind to handle” (Richardson 28). Richardson points out that this “mental convulsion” of cognitive collapse demonstrates the neural sublime’s relations to both a Kantian sublime with “its emphasis on temporary mental failure” and a Burkean physiological sublime which takes place in the brain and nerves (28-29). Richardson suggests that the neural sublime demonstrates a “coalescing” of the two forms of sublime, which are typically viewed as incommensurable (29).

pedestrian's specialty.³⁷ Bombarded by an overabundance of images, the subject perceives and responds to an excess of neural stimulations, resulting in a sublime experience. Second, urban sensibility becomes a form of urban sublime through the excitation of the nervous system. The pedestrian is exposed to the excess of sensation experienced within the body's nervous system, which is in and of itself overwhelming and sublime. These experiences of the neural sublime in the city help to generate the imagination of the urban pedestrian-poet. Urban sensibility, like the Romantic sublime, involves new expressions and understandings of the creative process. Within this literary framework, nervous perception and energy lead to creation and the sublime through neural experience.

Urban Sensibility and Masculinity

This dissertation focuses on male writers for two reasons. Historically, women did not occupy the urban pedestrian figure to the extent that men did. As Rebecca Solnit points out in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, women “seldom walked the city for their own pleasure” until the twentieth century (182). Female pedestrians in the city were often either prostitutes or assumed to be so in the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.³⁸ Certainly, there are many examples in literature and other documents that demonstrate otherwise (consider, for example, female pedestrian characters in *Moll Flanders*, *Evelina*, and representations of pedestrianism in the works

³⁷ The excess of the urban sublime, which in some ways is experienced through the excess of spectacles in the city, is also linked to the “material excess” of commodity culture (Janowitz 248). The spectacles of the city, especially those of advertisements, crowds, and exhibitions—are integral to commodity culture and its development. Thus, the urban sublime in many of its manifestations is connected to material culture.

³⁸ Women were beginning to become more avid pedestrians at this time, but mostly their peregrinations took place in the countryside rather than in the city, as the protagonists of Jane Austen's novels, for example, demonstrate. Urban walking was still risky for women of the middle and upper classes, so the pedestrian figure of the Romantic city is often a male.

of Mary Robinson), but these women occupied space differently than the somewhat typical male urban pedestrian. However, a study on the ways female writers and characters express or represent urban sensibility is undoubtedly needed to explore these differences but it must also examine figures other than the flâneur-like pedestrian. The second reason I focus on male urban pedestrians is to examine a particular form of urban sensibility that presented and performed a certain type of masculinity, however fraught with anxiety and complexity, in the period. The male urban pedestrian accomplished a specific gender performance.

In addition, the nervous aspect of urban sensibility further associates it with a concern over masculinity. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British nerve doctors repeatedly expressed a concern over weakness and loss of masculinity brought on by nervous disorders. The excessive luxury of commodity culture that nerve doctors claimed weakened the constitution and nervous system of the patient also, according to physicians, led to a feminization in patients. Fawcett, quoting a French nerve doctor, André Tissot, emphasizes a fragility and vulnerability that accompanies nervous illness. According to Tissot, the “first symptoms which indicate a weakness of the nervous system [...] are a kind of pusillanimity we were before strangers to” (qtd. in Fawcett 4).³⁹ Multiple medical treatises on nervous diseases use words like “pusillanimity,” “delicate,” and “weak” to describe their patients.

Trotter especially addresses the feminizing effects of nervous disease upon particular types of individuals within the city. For example, Trotter describes the mercantile class as nervous. He claims the posture of these “men of business,” from

³⁹ Foucault also quotes Tissot in his analysis of nervous illness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in *Madness and Civilization* (156).

“leaning over a desk, contracts the motion of the lungs, and impedes the functions of the stomach, soft fibred, and of slender make” (Trotter 38). According to Trotter, men of business are more feminine and thus prone to nervous disease:

Not a few of them behind the counter, approach in external form towards the female constitution; and they seem to borrow from their fair customers an effeminacy of manners, and a smallness of voice, that sometimes make their sex doubtful. Such degeneracies in corporeal structure, cannot fail of engendering a predisposition to diseases of the nervous kind. It is surprising to see and hear with what address and loquacity some of these little beings in London set off their wares; as if there were a necessity for a vender of silk and muslins to be soft as the commodity he deals in. (Trotter 38)

In this passage, Trotter presents the urban businessman as feminized and weakened by his profession and way of life. Trotter lists this figure as being a type prone to nervous symptoms and disorders. According to Trotter, the shopkeeper or merchant’s profession creates a weakness of the nervous system due to his physical environment and activity and to his focus on commodities. The poet was also considered a man of acute sensibility and thus was at risk for experiencing nervous symptoms. Trotter specifically discusses what he calls “literary men,” the “philosopher and man of letters, who devote most of their time to study” and “lead a sedentary life,” as men prone to physical deterioration and nervous affliction (34). According to Trotter, artists in general were considered nervous types: “The poet, painter, and musician, may be justly styled *genus irritabile vatum*” (166-167). All of these nervous figures were at risk for being considered effeminate in addition to sickly by Romantic-era scientists and society.

The repercussions for an increasingly nervous population went beyond individual suffering for Trotter and other nerve theorists and physicians of the time. Trotter particularly addresses the significance of the effect of nervous disorders upon the nation. He argues that nervous diseases brought on by commercial society lead to an

enervation of the national character: “These alarms are to be considered as so many symptoms of a nervous temperament appearing in our national character” (148). Trotter specifically points to the Stock Exchange, which he uses to stand for the head of commercial culture, as responsible for an emasculating trend in the nation: “It is that puddle of corruption, the Stock Exchange; that Delphi of Plutus, where stock-brokers pay their own vows, and expound prophecies, that has filled the nation with degenerate fears, apprehension, and hypochondriackism” (148-149). He indicates that a “merely” “commercial people” “can never be an independent nation” because they are too caught up in debt to foreign countries and do not produce enough through agriculture to be independent of these other nations (Trotter 152). Trotter’s threats grow deeper as he continues, demonstrating how power and masculinity are significant to discussions of nervous illness. For Trotter, nervous disorders negatively affect masculinity: “[n]o truth in political economy is better proved, than that a nation of sedentary people, can never be a nation of heroes” (151). While Trotter does not specifically use the word “masculinity” here, he implies a type of masculinity associated with vigor, virility, and power. He even isolates nervous figures—“literary men” and “men of business,” for example—as unfit for political positions: “Men endued with an exquisitely nervous temperament, ought to be banished from the councils of all sovereigns, however respectable their talents; for consistency and fortitude are incompatible with their physickal character” (Trotter 164). Thus, for Trotter, men of nervous temperaments do not possess the necessary masculine traits of those who should be in power.⁴⁰ Those who suffer from an exquisite sensibility are presented as politically impotent.

⁴⁰ Sensibility and nervousness were not always seen as having potentially negative effects on the nation and its political power. Sensibility was often considered an important characteristic of a good ruler. As

Because of the contradictory representations of nervous sensibility in relation to masculinity, writers of the Romantic period demonstrate a concern for presenting “proper” forms of sensibility that do not cross into nervousness. Wordsworth, for example, seems particularly careful to develop a definition of the poet as a man of exquisite sensibility, but one that is not prone to illness or excess in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” which I explore in chapter one. If the pedestrian-poet of the city finds himself more prone to nervousness in the city due to his acute sensibility, then his masculinity may be challenged. Moreover, the political potency of the poet figure may be questioned, as well. Thus, writers of the period had to walk a fine line between representing acute sensibility without depicting the poet as a weak and feminized figure. However, other writers, like De Quincey, appear in some ways to embrace the feminization of nervousness expressed in urban sensibility, demonstrating the effects of nervousness as imaginatively stimulating.⁴¹ The urban sensibility presented in these particular texts offer an expression of masculinity particular to the Romantic city.

Expressions of Urban Sensibility

The chapters of this study are organized to demonstrate a particular progression of increasingly liberating urban experience. The first chapter begins with a complex representation of urban sensibility that is simultaneously frightening and somewhat freeing. The chapters then progress to show increasingly liberating visions of urban sensibility. While the chapters do not strictly follow a chronological progression,

Robert Markley points out, “masculine sensitivity” was often valorized “as a virtue, as an indication of a ‘natural’ sympathy possessed by men of feeling” (212). Moreover, Cheyne’s depiction of nervous disease as an “English Malady” presented hypochondria and nervous illness as a sign of wealth and something that “could be experienced with national pride” in the eighteenth century (Grinnell 18).

⁴¹ As I indicate in my reading of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, though, De Quincey consistently works to perform a certain form of controlled masculinity, too, revealing the influence of culturally dominant concepts of the “proper” body.

Wordsworth's texts serve, in some ways, as an initial foundation from which the other texts studied in this project diverge in varying ways. The first chapter, "Urban Sensibility, Commodity Culture, and the Poetic Body in Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude*," focuses on one of the most discussed texts on Romantic urban experience. I begin with an examination of Wordsworth's representation of the poet in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), in which an acute, yet controlled sensibility proves necessary to the development of the poetic imagination. Wordsworth presents this same acute, organic sensibility as it is exposed to urban experience in Book 7 of *The Prelude*. In London, the acute sensitivity of the perambulating poet intensifies amid the excesses of the commodities, crowds, and spectacles of the city, culminating in a nervous fit in the Bartholomew Fair scene. The poem then ends with a scathing critique of the commodity culture of the city, which is most forcefully portrayed in the urban fair. But this nervous convulsion simultaneously reveals to the poet that the city is the poetic imagination's unsettling double, which threatens to make him conscious of how his own concepts of the poetic body and of nature are commodities and imitations themselves.

In Chapter two, "Disordered Sensibility and De Quincey's Urban Body in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*," I investigate the potentially nervous and disruptive effects of urban sensibility and the modern city through exotic, medicinal consumption and urban peregrination in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Similar to Wordsworth's sensible poet in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, the opium-eater already possesses an acute sensibility, but it becomes excessive and demonstrably nervous amid the tumult and stimulation of the city, resulting in the development of a body of excess. *Confessions* attempts to perform

expressions of the proper poetic body, but the opium-eater's nervous temperament and indulgences in opium prevent him from every fully achieving this form of embodiment. However, De Quincey's text reveals that the sickly, distorted urban body of nervous sensibility in its very excess is preferable to proper embodiment as it creates opportunities for resistance, as well as intense physical and imaginative pleasure. In contrast to the typical representations of monstrous bodies that haunt the poets of the Romantic period, I argue that the spectre that haunts the opium-eater is that of the proper, poetic body.

For Hazlitt and Lamb, urban sensibility is liberating as well as stimulating and results in healthy metropolitan experience. Chapter three, "The City as Cure: Metropolitan Sensibility in the Essays of Hazlitt and Lamb," argues that the essays of these metropolitan writers challenge contemporary medical assumptions linking urban experience and nervous symptoms. Instead, Hazlitt and Lamb represent urban sensibility as potentially able to cure the pedestrian of his nervous symptoms and promote healthy expressions of a civic sensibility. I focus on Hazlitt's "On Londoners and Country People," which offers a complex vision of urban sensibility through the highly controversial urban figure of the Cockney, and Lamb's "The Londoner," which represents urban spectacle as an antidote to nervousness in the urban pedestrian. These texts complicated Romantic-period views of sensibility in the commercial city, as well as views of the city itself. Examining the writings of these essayists provides a more nuanced vision of urban sensibility across the different genres of the Romantic period.

For Blake, nervous urban sensibility is stimulating and liberating rather than alienating or creatively debilitating. Chapter four, "Urban Sensibility, Prophecy, and

Redemption in Blake's *Jerusalem*," demonstrates how William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* offers a radically different approach to urban sensibility, veering away from the previously addressed representations of the supposed potentially destructive nervousness of urban sensibility. In *Jerusalem*, nervous experience may also be produced by the various structures of modern society; yet the text posits a potential revolutionary purpose for urban sensibility. Blake presents nervous sensibility as crucial to poetic prophecy, redemption, and the development of community. References throughout *Jerusalem* to nerves, fibers, and threads demonstrate Blake's profound engagement with the discourse of nervous sensibility and offer a complex vision of urban redemption. The poem links fibres and nerves to the development of an England based on connections of sensibility. For Blake, the project of building Jerusalem requires human connection and a capacity for intense sympathy and self-sacrifice.

The first two chapters focus primarily on the isolated figure of the poet and his physiological experiences of the modern city, while the last two chapters focus more on a collective experience of urban sensibility and question contemporary medical perspectives of nervousness. Taken together, these chapters reveal how literary artists of the Romantic period grappled with historical conceptions of the body, urban experience, and the role of the poet in modern society. Moreover, they demonstrate urban sensibility's subversive and liberating potential to help the urban pedestrian realize how his own body is cultivated and marked in contemporary sociopolitical power structures. And in some cases, this form of urban experience provides a medium for resisting and escaping such oppressive systems.

Chapter 1:

Urban Sensibility, Commodity Culture, and the Poetic Body in

Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude*

William Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude* (1805) is often considered to be the quintessential urban text of the Romantic era, offering one of the first significant depictions of the experience of urban alienation and fragmentation in the modern city. Book 7 recounts Wordsworth's peripatetic exploration of the thrilling spectacles of London during his brief residence in the city as a young man. In this text, Wordsworth's portrayal of his rambles provides a catalogue of the chaotic elements of the city, presenting what Walter Benjamin identifies as the sensory overload of urban existence.¹ As William Chapman Sharpe contends, Wordsworth presents his younger self as a "vulnerable observer," who is overcome by the excess of the modern metropolis (16). This vulnerability of the poet, I argue, is depicted as the poet's acute sensibility, which, combined with his peripatetic experiences in the commercial city, leaves the poet susceptible to nervous agitation. Urban sensibility in the poem thus expresses a physiological response to the sensory excess of the modern city.

In this chapter, I contend that Book 7 illustrates an acute sensibility in the poet that, when confronted by the excess of the modern city, has the potential to develop into nervousness. I begin with an examination of Wordsworth's definition of the poet in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* as necessarily possessing an acute, yet controlled sensibility. The chapter then moves to an exploration of how Wordsworth represents this type of acute, organic sensibility as it is exposed to the bustling metropolis of

¹ See "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), *Illuminations*, 155-194.

London in Book 7 of *The Prelude*.² For Wordsworth, the acute sensibility of the perambulating poet intensifies amid the excess of the spectacles, commodities, and crowds of the commercial city, threatening to consume the poet and thrust him into a state of nervous agitation. This nervous reaction to the city particularly culminates in the Bartholomew Fair scene, in which the poet is unable to maintain a bodily distance from the surfeit of the fair. The speaker's representation of the nervous fit ends with a denunciation of the commodity culture of the city, which finds its most forceful instance in the urban fair. Yet this nervous fit simultaneously reveals to the poet that the urban fair (and thus the city in general) is the poetic imagination's unsettling double, which threatens to make him conscious of how his own concepts and images, both of the figure of the poet and of nature, are commodities and imitations, manufactures fully implicated in the capitalist society of his time. Moreover, the poet's urban nervousness also reveals the healthy, organic sensibility of the poet as not only ultimately *not* under his own control, but furthermore as constructed and constituted in and through historical and cultural structures. Urban sensibility in Book 7 thus questions the foundation of Wordsworth's representations of the poetic body.

While Wordsworth is typically considered a nature poet, the last few decades of Romantic scholarship have taken an interest in Wordsworth's complex representations of the city, particularly in his extensive account of the peripatetic experiences of the urban spectator in Book 7 of *The Prelude*. Examining Wordsworth's depictions of urban crowds, commodities, modern spectacles like the panorama and advertisements,

² I focus my readings on the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, as not only did Wordsworth make revisions to the 1850 edition that positioned the poem differently politically, but also the 1805 edition was written at a time more closely situated (and more fully steeped) in the culture of nervous sensibility addressed in this chapter.

the urban sublime, and aesthetics, scholars explore how Wordsworth represents the poetic imagination as it is expressed in the city rather than nature. My reading of Book 7 addresses how urban sensibility was a Romantic-era phenomenon that engaged in discourses on the sublime, artistic expression, commodity culture, and, even more so, how the body operated and performed in relation to the modern metropolis. As C. R. Stokes points out, only recently has Romantic scholarship “turned its attention to the question of the body” in *The Prelude*, “moving against the transcendentalizing impulse in [Wordsworth’s] work” (203). Focusing on representations of the body in Book 7, Stokes argues that the “poetic distance that is characteristically sought by Wordsworth to make sense of the city’s chaotic and problematic signifying regime” is “undermined by the entangling of the poet’s own body in the rhythms and tonalities of the urban space” (203). Stokes contends that Book 7 “includes a previously overlooked layer of *embodied* experience in the poem,” which “creates anxieties every bit as forceful and extensive as more familiar worries like commerce, theatricality and degraded representation” (203). My reading similarly examines a physiological presence and anxiety in Wordsworth’s representations of the city, focusing specifically on how urban experience complicates Wordsworth’s notions of the sensible poetic body acculturated in nature. Furthermore, while scholars have traced the influence of eighteenth-century sensibility on Wordsworth’s works,³ my examination of urban sensibility suggests that

³ For example, Christopher Nagle convincingly argues that the development of Wordsworth’s distinctive Romantic poetics “enacts a strategic incorporation of the ethical and aesthetic assumptions of Sensibility” (14). Peter Spratley contends that Wordsworth gradually moves away “from sentimental convention while remaining rooted in the pensive, reflective state so essential to the condition of sensibility. My reading of Wordsworth’s Book 7 of *The Prelude* (and my brief reading of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*) agrees with the argument that Wordsworth’s work demonstrates a continued influence by and investment in sensibility. In addition to the aesthetic and the reflective condition of sensibility that Nagle and Spratley point to, I argue that Wordsworth incorporates a representation of urban sensibility in Book 7 that engages neurological and physiological characterizations of sensibility in depictions of urban

concepts of sensibility play an important role in Wordsworth's visions of the modern city as well as Romantic nature.

The Sensible Poet and Mediated Experience

Although Wordsworth's literary work offers a complex and at times antagonistic relationship to the culture of sensibility and sentimental texts, sensibility is presented as a key component of Wordsworth's concept of the Romantic poet and poetics. In the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), Wordsworth defines the poet as a figure of exquisite sensibility, whose sensitivity to surroundings and sympathy toward others enhances poetic creation. Wordsworth presents sensibility itself as an extension of the nervous system and as a way of controlling and filtering consumed sensations. Poetic sensibility mediates reality through a combination of mind and body and provides the poet with an ability to imitate and express others' experiences, as well as his own. However, this mediation, as well as Wordsworth's general representation of poetic sensibility in the "Preface," also reveal both Wordsworth's awareness of medical discourse on nervous disorders and the (culturally acknowledged) fine line between a healthy, acute sensibility and a nervous one.

Reflecting contemporary concepts of neuroscience, the language employed in Wordsworth's description of poetic sensibility in the "Preface" emphasizes the significance of bodily sensation and organic experience. Wordsworth describes the poet as "a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought

experience. For other scholarship that has also addressed or touched on representations and influences of sensibility in Wordsworth's poetry and essays, see Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (1798); Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*; Daniel Robinson, "'Still Glides the Stream': Form and Function in Wordsworth's *River Dudden* Sonnets" (449-64); Duncan Wu, "Wordsworth's Poetry to 1798" (22-37); and Bishop C. Hunt, Jr., "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith: 1790" (80-91).

long and deeply” (598). In general, this quotation suggests that the poet’s sensibility must be more acute than that of the common man in order for him to develop a poetic imagination. But the use of the word “organic” here encompasses specific medical and bodily connotations related to contemporary neuroscience and a physiological brain-based theory of the mind. While “organic” suggests Coleridgean concepts of “holistic” and “systemic” unity in Romantic literary studies, Alan Richardson contends that the word “organic” here refers “not to the transcendental psyche but to the body and material organization,” the “sensory and cognitive ‘organs’” (*British Romanticism* 70). The term *organic* indicates the physiological aspect of sensibility, in which sensibility was linked in Romantic-era science to perceptual bodily experience managed by the nervous system. Multiple medical and scientific texts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries employed the word “organic” in a similar way, including Erasmus Darwin’s influential text, *Zoonomia: or, The Laws of Organic Life* (1794).⁴ As Richardson contends, the phrase “organic sensibility,” in the contemporary context of Wordsworth’s text would have overlapped significantly “with related terms like

⁴ As several scholars have pointed out, medical and scientific figures of the Romantic era, like Darwin, influenced Wordsworth’s poetry. For example, see James H. Averill’s *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, which suggests Wordsworth took an interest in Darwin and other scientific texts while planning *The Recluse* (239). Moreover, biographical evidence suggests Wordsworth requested a copy of Darwin’s *Zoonomia* in early 1798 while working on *Lyrical Ballads*. Duncan Wu, in *Wordsworth, An Inner Life*, and Gavin Budge, in *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1798-1852*, specifically point to Wordsworth’s use of this text while working on “The Idiot Boy,” “The Mad Mother,” and “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” (Wu 97-98; Budge 51). As Budge indicates, *Zoonomia* claimed to “offer a unified theory of mind and body representing the culmination of philosophical accounts of sensation in the tradition of Locke and Hume, and of associationist analyses of mental processes following on from David Hartley” (52). Budge categorizes Wordsworthian poetics stretching from 1798 to 1805 as “post-Darwinian,” suggesting Wordsworth’s poetry as both “influenced by” and “moving beyond” Darwin’s characteristic intellectual emphases and overall intellectual position (53). Furthermore, according to Richardson, Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* responds to the “brain-based approach to mental illness” popularized by Darwin’s *Zoonomia* and “embraced by contemporary ‘radical’ scientists like Beddoes” (72). Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s friendship with Thomas Beddoes in the 1790s would have also more than likely influenced Wordsworth’s awareness of Darwin’s text and of the advances in nerve science. The cultural circulation of medical ideas during this period also suggests Wordsworth would have been at least generally aware of eighteenth-century neuroscience.

Darwin's '*sensorium*' and Cabanis's "*sensibilité*," both suggesting a connection with sensation and sensibility (71). According to Richardson, the phrase "implies a mind shaped by and realized in bodily organs, though not entirely defined by them" (Richardson 71). Wordsworth's presentation of an *organic* sensibility suggests that the poet possesses acutely perceptive organs and more sensitive nerves than the average man, which allow (through the brain's ability to filter and process sensations) for deeper contemplation and more exquisite poetic expression.

The "Preface" presents this deeper contemplation and poetic expression as the result of organic sensibility and the poet's ability to control and regulate sensations through the creative mind. The passage on organic sensibility continues: "For our continued fluxes and influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts" (598). Wordsworth highlights the connection between the flow ("fluxes and influxes") of neural pathways and sensual experience ("feelings") in relation to contemplative thought. As Richardson indicates, "genuine poetic sensibility" in Wordsworth's "Preface" continually registers "the permeation of thought with feeling and remains in touch with the sensational, bodily, and emotive organs of mind" (71). Yet in this formulation, sensibility also encompasses the ability of the mind to control and regulate these "fluxes" of sensation, of biological, bodily impressions and emotions. Couched, however subtly, in medical and scientific discourse on nerve theory and a biological approach to the mind, Wordsworth's representation of poetic sensibility is simultaneously acute, yet also "modified and directed"—controlled and managed—by the developed mind. The body and mind together formulate imagination through disciplined acute sensibility.

While the text presents an enhanced sensibility in relation to the poet, this emphasis on regulation reveals a concern to differentiate between acute and nervous sensibility, as he insistently associates the poet figure with the former. This insistence stems in part from contemporary views that acute sensibility could easily transition into nervousness. The emphasis on the poet's acute organic sensibility in Wordsworth's "Preface" implies that the poet has a more developed nervous system than the common man, signifying "*more nerves, more neural pathways, more exquisitely developed fibers and muscles, capable of ever-finer gradations and distinctions*" (Rousseau 56).⁵ The medical scientist, Thomas Trotter, agrees with this neural formulation of the poet: "it is to be supposed, that all men who possess genius, and those mental qualifications which prompt them to literary attainments and pursuit, are endued by nature with more than usual sensibility of nervous system" (36-37). Wordsworth's formulation of poetic genius similarly depends upon an unusually acute nervous system and sensibility.

Moreover, Wordsworth's claim that the poet has not only a more acute sensibility, but also "more enthusiasm and tenderness," "a greater knowledge of human nature," and "a more comprehensive soul" further tie Wordsworth's discussions on the sensible poet in the "Preface" to contemporary medical ideas of nervousness (603). In studying nervous diseases in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Michel Foucault contends scientists and intellectuals believed "nervous sufferers [...] have the most sensibility: tenuousness of fibre, delicacy of organism," as well as an "easily

⁵ G. S. Rousseau here is referring to the nerve theorist, Robert Verity's conclusions about great literary figures (both men and women) of the time (56). See Verity, *Changes Produced in the Nervous System by Civilization According to the Evidence of Physiology and the Philosophy of History* (1837). This quotation would have applied to writers, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the nineteenth century. The comments in the "Preface" about the poet's acute sensibility and organic sensibility at the time would have entailed the description of an enhanced nervous system iterated here. Nerve theorists of the Romantic period described sensitive constitutions similarly, suggesting that literary figures often exhibited intensified nervous systems. For example, see Trotter (36-37).

impressionable soul, an unquiet heart,” and “too strong a sympathy for what happens around them,” characterized by a “universal resonance” that “constitutes the first determination” of nervous illness (*Madness and Civilization* 155-56). Reflecting the language of Wordsworth’s “Preface,” Foucault’s description of nervousness provides a similar definition of acute sensibility, particularly in the “delicacy of organism,” which resembles Wordsworth’s depiction of “organic sensibility.” As Foucault contends, medical discourse on nerve theory often tied sensibility with nervous symptoms.⁶ In Romantic-era medical literature, acute sensibility could easily shift into acute nervousness. The type of extreme sensibility described by Wordsworth and explored by nerve theorists could potentially leave the subject more susceptible to nervousness or agitation. This nervous agitation as a result of acute sensibility was often considered an affliction of sedentary writers, scholars, and clerics (Rousseau 56). Acquainted with the major tenets of medical science of the time, Wordsworth would have been aware of the discursive connections between acute sensibility and a potential susceptibility to nervous disease. Thus, Wordsworth is careful here to emphasize his definition of the poet as possessing a refined sensibility, but one that is regulated and maintained so as not to slip into this form of excessive sensibility.

Wordsworth reveals this tension over the tenuousness of sensibility versus nervous disease in other passages of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* as well, stressing a concern to further dissociate the poet from nervous sensibility. According to Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, this tension is revealed and the validity of this theory of sensibility (in

⁶ We can certainly see this in Romantic-era medical treatises on nervous disease. See, for example, Alexander Thomson, *An Enquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Method of Cure, of Nervous Disorders* (1781), 1-2; Thomas Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), 36-37; and Thomas Beddoes’s *Hygëia* (1802).

relation to nervous disorders) affirmed “with a hint of impatience” when the “Preface” “describes the poet as” “a man, it is true, endued with a more lively sensibility” (Roberts 123; Wordsworth 603). Roberts focuses specifically on the conciliatory phrase of Wordsworth’s text, “it is true,” which, he argues, reluctantly concedes the idea that writers and poets possessed more sensible, and therefore more susceptible, bodies. Roberts argues that Wordsworth’s notion of the poet’s “natural” sensibility in “later additions” to the “Preface” is “worked out in tension with” James Currie’s portrayal of Robert Burns’s “‘diseased’ sensibility as a hypochondriac” in his *Works of Robert Burns* (115).⁷ Recognizing the contemporary tendency to denounce poetry as the result of “diseased sensibility,” Wordsworth was thus keen to differentiate the type of poetry and poetics he espouses in the “Preface” from unhealthy forms of sensibility. The “Preface” thus admits to excessive sensibility, but tries to extricate this acute form of sensibility from the stigma of nervous disease. Wordsworth’s concept of sensibility must be positioned in such a way as to dissociate it from the excesses of sensibility prescribed in contemporary culture.

As Wordsworth’s careful positioning in the “Preface” demonstrates, writers of the period were considerably aware of their own *authority* and how this potentially could be questioned or challenged by assumptions about their physical and mental health. In *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852*, Gavin Budge argues that the “Romantic individual’s claim to possess transcendent vision is haunted by a bodily spectre: the possibility that, far from being clear-sightedly superior to modern society’s collective delirium, they

⁷ Nigel Leask also draws attention to the reading of James Currie’s text as playing an important role in the formulation of Wordsworth’s ideas in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. See Leask’s “Robert Burns and Common Sense Philosophy” (64-87).

might themselves be subject to hallucinations brought on by medical conditions” (7). For Wordsworth, this “bodily spectre” is the notion of nervous disorders as accompanying acute sensibility. As a result, Wordsworth works to dissociate his poet of sensibility in the “Preface” from nervousness by establishing a controlled sensibility that emphasized a purposeful development of the Imagination.

Moreover, Wordsworth also distances his own writing and his figure of the sensible poet from what was culturally considered the hysterical women readers and writers of “frantic novels,” as Romantic authorship was often accompanied by accusations of feminization in poetry of the period (599).⁸ Considered a feminizing disease by Romantic-era culture and some contemporary medical physicians, nervous ailments (called hysteria in women and hypochondria in men) were associated with a delicacy of constitution. Wordsworth presents a tempered and masculine sensibility, revealing anxieties concerning the emasculation of the poet through association with the feminizing effects of nervous disease. “The Preface” instead claims a healthy, masculine sensibility for the poet.

Indeed, Wordsworth’s use of the term “organic sensibility” emphasizes this healthy, masculine image and sets the poet up as possessing an ideal form of sensibility conducive to developing healthy readers, as well. According to Jerome McGann, the “Preface” presents sensibility as key to an “organic healthfulness” that Wordsworth claims has decreased in the development of modernity (121). McGann contends that by

⁸ As Nagle points out, Wordsworth’s works also reveal “anxieties faced by a male poet working to establish a niche for literary production in a field dominated both by women writers and the conventions of affective excess” (47). For more on gender concerns in Wordsworth’s texts, see Anne K. Mellor, “Writing the Self/Self Writing: William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*,” *William Wordsworth’s The Prelude: A Casebook* (293-304); James Robert Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet’s Body*; and Ian Reid, “Fathering the Man: Journalism, Masculinity, and the Wordsworthian Formation of Academic Literary Studies in Victorian England” (201-30).

“valorizing” the expression of “organic sensibility,” Wordsworth implicitly argues that “the eighteenth-century’s traditions of sensibility are in themselves healthful” and that “healthy” sensibility can help heal the nation (121). Noel Jackson similarly contends that Wordsworth presents the role of the poet as a physician in the “Preface” (and in his works in general) and evokes a movement toward healing the nation through sensibility and poetics (133). The sensible poet—through his healthy and controlled sensibility—works to heal an effeminate and sickly nation of people within a new era of modernity. In “Lyrical Bodies: Wordsworth’s Physiological Aesthetics,” Paul Youngquist argues that Wordsworth’s literary works practice “a physiological aesthetics, one that puts bodily health among its main concerns” (152-53).⁹ The “Preface” in particular demonstrates the importance of this bodily health upon the constitution and mind of the poet, and of the poet’s readers. Wordsworth thus sets up a formulation of healthy organic sensibility that responds to contemporary discourse on the tenuousness of sensibility versus nervous disease.

This contemporary concern over establishing healthy forms of sensibility demonstrates in part why Wordsworth’s “Preface” emphatically depicts the sensibility of the poet as regulated. As previously addressed, Wordsworth’s use of the word *organic* and the emphasis placed on the mind “modif[ying] and direct[ing]” (598) sensations suggests that if the poet is not to become prey to the debilitating excess of sensibility that potentially results in nervous disease, the acute sense organs of the poet

⁹ In *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism*, Youngquist also indicates that this “physiological aesthetic” “aims as much at normalizing bodies as soothing souls” (29). Youngquist argues that the *Lyrical Ballads*, both the poems and the “Preface,” “communicate a surprisingly physical sense of what poetry does”—they “speak directly to the body and seek to cultivate its health” (*Monstrosities*, 29).

must be disciplined or *organized* (599).¹⁰ The cultivated organs and organic body mediate reality, taking the raw material of sense experience and transforming it into a controlled and manufactured product suitable for consumption, keeping the supposed excesses of the world—“great national events,” “encreasing accumulation of men in cities,” “craving for extraordinary incident,” and “deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse”—removed from the poetic body (599). The poet’s sensibility can then further manufacture this regulated experience into mediated forms of poetry—produced from the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” but mediated by “emotion recollected in tranquillity” (611).¹¹ In order to produce poetry and protect the poet from environmental and philosophical excesses, the poetic sensibility must be *healthy*—acutely sensitive, but capable of filtering excess. A healthy sensibility, for Wordsworth, thus comprises constitutional fortitude and disciplined management.

Acute Sensibility and the Pedestrian in Book 7 of *The Prelude*

While the concept of the healthy, organic body of the poet is addressed throughout *The Prelude*, poetic sensibility also features prominently through the figure of the poet-pedestrian speaker in Wordsworth’s depictions of London in Book 7, which trace the poet’s past peregrinations through the city of London in his brief residence

¹⁰ Although Wordsworth does not address this here in the “Preface,” throughout his poetry, and especially in the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth depicts his own sense organs as cultured by nature.

¹¹ According to Wordsworth, within this “tranquillity,” an “emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind” (611). Here, the acutely sensible poet, through the mediation of the contemplative mind, produces poetic emotion. Furthermore, although Wordsworth does not address nature directly in the “Preface,” this representation of spontaneity in poetic creation is presented as cultivated in nature. As Susan Rosenbaum argues in *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading*, the “human propensity for spontaneous thought, feeling and movement” is depicted in Wordsworth’s work as developed and “experienced in a nonurban,” natural setting (40). Moreover, Wordsworth’s poetry portrays the poet’s sense organs as cultured by nature. The poet of nature thus exhibits healthy sensibility and produces poetry that is likewise healthy for its readers.

there as a young man.¹² Although sensibility in *The Prelude* is most often presented as cultivated in nature, Book 7 uniquely represents an acute sensibility expressed through and affected by the rhythms and sensations of the bustling city. The pedestrian-poet's peripatetic movements through urban space gradually reveal an increasing excess that inundates the acutely sensitive poet, threatening to overcome his sensibility through nervous agitation. This urban experience formulates a representation of urban sensibility in Book 7 that simultaneously correlates and diverges from the representation of poetic sensibility Wordsworth promoted in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, as the previously established acutely sensible poet experiences a loss of control amid the nimety of the urban scene. Thus, while Wordsworth's references to "strangers" and alienation in the city seem in many ways to script the metropolis as a space void of sensibility, I argue it is actually an excess of sensibility, or an excessive experience of urban sensibility, that eventually causes Wordsworth's nightmarish and nervous, yet thrilling, experiences in London.

Although urban experience in the poem eventually culminates in nervous agitation, the beginning of Book 7 represents the poet-pedestrian as enthusiastic but self-composed. Indeed, the text initially stresses the temperance of the poet when he enters the city, establishing the young speaker as emphatically *not* nervous upon arrival: "to London first / I turned, if not in calmness, nevertheless / In no disturbance of excessive hope—" (7.66-68). In this passage, the lines refer specifically to "hope" and

¹² Throughout this chapter, I refer to Wordsworth as the speaker of *The Prelude*, as the poem is presented as an autobiography of his life and growth as a poet. However, I do not wish to suggest that Wordsworth the speaker of the poem is the same as Wordsworth the poet. Indeed, *The Prelude* and other works offer a variety and complexity of poetic voices, of Wordsworths. The speaker of the poem reveals a carefully constructed image of Wordsworth. Moreover, different versions of *The Prelude* also offer different voices, as well, though, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the 1805 *Prelude*.

to the possible excitement over what the poet-speaker will find in the city. But the words “disturbance” and “excessive” also mirror discourse on illness in general and nervous disorders in particular, as a subject who possesses enhanced sensibility may experience an “excess” or “disturbance” of the nerves.¹³ Moreover, the lines are also careful to express that the young man’s excitement in visiting the city is not excessive or overly indulgent, but rather the result of a temperate yet enthusiastic youth.

The passage then continues to describe the state of the young poet as he enters London as “temperate and reserved, and wholly free / From dangerous passions” (7.71-72). While the poet is presented as eager about the prospects of his urban adventures, he maintains a composure and control—a “temperate” sensibility. Furthermore, the phrase “wholly free / From dangerous passions” also indicates a tempered mental and physical constitution. While “dangerous passions” may refer to inclinations to intoxication or gambling that could have easily led to debauchery in the city, the phrase more specifically implies intense emotions that could potentially precipitate nervous ailments. Indeed, the “passions” are often referred to in medical treatises on nervous disease, sometimes used as a name or description for the disorder itself. In *An Enquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Method of Cure, of Nervous Disorders* (1781), Alexander Thomson refers to nervous disease in women as “the hysteric passion” (1). Passion or “the passions” were also considered a cause of nervous symptoms or illness. In observing the nervous disease of melancholia, Benjamin Fawcett, drawing from the works of another physician, Dr. Whytt, contends “violent passions of the mind, in

¹³ Multiple nerve theorists described nervous symptoms as “disturbances.” For example, see Neale, who discusses “disturbances of the imagination” in nervous disorders (49). Furthermore, nervous disorders were also often viewed as “excesses” of the body that created “constitutional debility” (Thomson 9) or were the results of “excessive consumption” of luxury goods like tea (Fawcett 15).

people whose nervous system is very delicate,” may cause melancholia (10). Henry St. John Neale also addresses the passions as one of the origins of “nervous complaints” (40). Even after the turn of the century and Wordsworth’s 1805 *Prelude*, medical doctors, such as Trotter continued to list “passions of the mind” as one of the “causes of nervous diseases” (51).¹⁴ The prevalence of references to the *passions* in medical literature on nervous diseases, including the contemporary view of the city as a place full of passions,¹⁵ contributed to the cultural association between the city and nervous disease. Wordsworth’s emphasis on the young poet being “free / From dangerous passions” when he enters the city thus reveals an awareness of this discourse and an effort to stress a healthy and controlled sensibility upon arrival. The young poet enters the city with his nerves fully intact and an eager yet tempered disposition.

Initially, his enthusiasm is met with pleasurable sensual experiences of the city, as the poet expresses an openness to the variety of sensations his peripatetic explorations provide. The young poet explores the city on foot, “living cheerfully abroad / With fancy on the stir from day to day, / And with all my young affections out of doors” (7.78-80). In this passage, the young Wordsworth is out in the open, freely traversing the public scenes of the city, able to go wherever his whim takes him. The words “cheerfully,” “fancy,” and “affections” suggest a positive excitement that rouses the young man’s poetic interest through his peripatetic study of the metropolis. The beginning of Book 7 thus commences with a fervent interest in experiencing the sensations of the city, while also establishing the peripatetic mode as key to urban

¹⁴ Trotter also refers specifically to the “passion of novel reading” as leading to nervous complaints in patients, a topic Wordsworth briefly addresses six years earlier in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (Trotter 87; Wordsworth 599).

¹⁵ Recall Trotter’s quotation (addressed in the Introduction to this larger project) that the city is “a hotbed for the passions” (41).

experience in the modern metropolis. Like sensibility, pedestrianism provided a controlled means of manufacturing and consuming experience.¹⁶ As Susan Rosenbaum argues, the walk seems the “perfect vehicle for what Wordsworth called the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’” in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, as walking “embodies an ideal of spontaneous, unconstrained movement, feeling, and reflection, propelled by the poet’s autonomous powers of locomotion rather than by any external authority” (27). Urban pedestrianism potentially provides an embodied perspective of the city for the poet, which could—with the aid of the poet’s acute sensibility—generate poetic creation.

As the pedestrian-poet sets off on his urban explorations, the spectacle and sensations of the city fascinate him. Similar to the Parisian figure of the flâneur, who takes pleasure in the spectacles and crowds of the metropolis, the young poet peruses the “motley imagery” of the city “With keen and lively pleasure” (7.150, 141). When the speaker begins to describe the city, he emphasizes the visual and aural sensations the peripatetic poet experiences:

And first the look and aspect of the place—
The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
Of colours, lights, and forms, the Babel din,
The endless stream of men and moving things,
From hour to hour the illimitable walk [...]. (7.154-159)

The passage expresses an intensity of sensory impressions that the acutely sensitive poet experiences in the city streets. The spectacle of London “strikes” the young Wordsworth as bright colors and flashes of light, the noisy hum of the crowds, and

¹⁶ I refer here specifically to urban peregrination, which embraced an aimless (though not vagrant or lost) way of walking through and experiencing the city. The urban pedestrianism of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts offered a particular way of experiencing the spectacles and crowds of the modern city.

seemingly ceaseless movement of people and objects in the bustling and diverse scene of metropolitan traffic impress themselves on the young poet's acute senses. The "quick dance / Of colours, lights, and forms" calls the sensible poet's attention to the variety of visual impressions of the city. The word "dance" in this excerpt suggests the urban spectacle here is pleasurable and playful, full of swift movement and striking visual effects that rouse the sensual interest of the spectator. The words "endless" and "illimitable" also express an excess experienced in the street scene through the sensations and the walk itself. In this passage, the city provides a sense of boundlessness and limitless space, as the pedestrian routes of London are so profuse and afford such variety. Overall, Book 7 demonstrates an attuned sensibility in the pedestrian poet, while also representing the sensual excess of the city that thrills and pleurably overwhelms the young Wordsworth.

Several passages in the early sections of Book 7 offer descriptions of the exhilarating sensual rush of the city streets, representing the pedestrian-poet's keen sensory organs and the rush of urban sensations. The rhetorical devices employed in the early descriptions depict the movement and sense impressions of the city as experienced through the poet's peripatetic exploration of London. Lines 154-244 almost exclusively use present participle verb forms in order to help recreate the pedestrian experience of the city, which entails a feeling of constant movement and heightened sensation. "[M]oving things" (7.158), "glittering chariots" (7.162), "labouring hackney-coaches" (7.165), "dazzling wares" (7.173), and "dancing dogs" (7.192), for example, emphasize the continuous action and movement of objects in the city, which impact the visual and

vestibular senses of the pedestrian-poet.¹⁷ The “loud blowing” of “travelling coaches” (7.167, 166) that whirl by also depicts aural impressions and the movement of sound through the city. Furthermore, short paratactical phrases and asyndetic sequences recreate the turbulent movement of the city through their staccato rhythm (7.154, 171, 176).¹⁸ They also direct the reader’s attention to specific sights and sounds. “And first, the look and aspect of the place” (7.154) cues the reader to the visual images of the city. In addition, “Here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng” (7.171) emphasizes the ubiquitous crowd while focusing the reader’s attention in different directions. In this line and in the line, “Here, fronts of houses” (7.176), the adverbs “here” and “there” guide the reader, simulating the effect of turning the reader’s head to a new detail or scene of movement.¹⁹ Not only do we get a sense of walking movement from these lines (as the pedestrian makes his way through the crowded streets), but also of a turning head and darting eyes. In this moment, the reader feels as if she/he walks with the poet through the bustling city. These participle verb forms, paratactical sequences, and directional adverbs all work together in the passage to suggest the “multiplicity and simultaneity of occurrences, actions, and objects” in the urban streets (Gassenmeier &

¹⁷ By the “vestibular sense,” I refer to an awareness of body movement and spatial orientation that coordinates bodily movement with balance. As the formal devices and the language of these passages suggest, the early section of Book 7 examined here also represents the poet’s bodily movements through urban space.

¹⁸ By “asyndetic,” I mean sequences that do not include conjunctions where there normally would be one. For example, “Stalls, barrows, porters, midway in the street” (7.163). Parataxis includes developing short, simple sentences with coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions. See also Gassenmeier and Gurr, who also point out parataxis in these lines in the text (311-312).

¹⁹ In addition, as Michael Meyer points out, references to “here” (7.190, 209) and “Now” (7.224), joined with the use of the present tense and the imperative “see” (7.228), evoke the spontaneity, immediacy, and transience of the city, while also involving the reader in the scene (para. 6). While Meyer’s reading focuses on Wordsworth’s representation of theatrical spectacle in Book 7, the reader involvement here seems important to the sensual representation of the city that is presented in the form of the poem, as well as in the language and themes.

Gurr 312). But they also call attention to the pedestrian-poet's sensual experience of the excess and movement of the busy metropolis.

The rhetorical devices and sequences of images employed in this section of Book 7 offer an innovative perspective and palpable portrayal of the urban pedestrian's physical immersion in the crowds and spectacles of the modern city. In contrast to this representation in Book 7, many of Wordsworth's poems use what Geoffrey H. Hartman calls the "halted traveler" motif, in which poems begin "at the moment when the narrator stops his movement and assumes" a "stationed perspective looking out over the landscape" (Hartman 12; Hess 296).²⁰ According to Scott Hess, Wordsworth's tendency to compose scenes from this "stationed, individual point of view," results in an elision or erasure of his own body (294). The "viewing subject," then, is an outsider, "physically and perceptually removed from what he or she observes" (Hess 287). We can see this point of view in two of Wordsworth's urban poems, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" and "St. Pauls." In these poems, the speaker is somewhat detached from the scene, observing as an outsider the rare tranquil moments of the metropolis.²¹ However, Book 7's depiction of the city diverges from this "halted traveler" model, instead presenting the subject as fully immersed in the crowds and street scenes Wordsworth describes. As Mark J. Bruhn points out, these physically participatory scenes offer an "imitation of the phenomenal experience of London," in which the

²⁰ For more on Hartman's description of the "halted traveler" motif, see *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (12-18).

²¹ In both poems, the speaker has stopped to admire the calm landscape of the city. As the poems take place in the morning when the city is "asleep," "silent," and "bare" (13, 5), London appears similar to the natural landscapes Wordsworth represents in other poems. These representations of the urban landscape, then, capture moments when the city is at its least chaotic, least metropolitan moments. As Eugene Stelzig contends, the beauty and sublimity of the city is beheld in these poems in "its *most* natural and *least* city-like moment" when "all that mighty heart is lying still" (Stelzig 182; Wordsworth, "Westminster Bridge," 14).

reader feels “*in the midst and on the move*” with the pedestrian poet, pressing forward through a surging cityscape of people, objects, and buildings, and shifting attention to a succession of “clusters of visual and auditory images” as they would appear to someone who is actually perambulating in the city (157). These early scenes of Book 7 portray a realism through this immersive perspective of the city, but they also emphasize the sensory impressions of the city that the acutely sensible-poet figure perceives in the metropolis.

Although this section of Book 7 offers a subjective perspective that diverges from Wordsworth’s typical “halted traveler,” critics disagree on whether this perspective is disembodied and detached versus embodied and engaged. Alberto Gabriele contends that Wordsworth’s representation of the urban scene in Book 7 still maintains the detached spectator typical of his other poems: “the poet disappears from the scene, impersonally recording a flow of images, just as a technological eye would” (372).²² According to Gabriele, “the poet has no physical body that creates an urban subjectivity by moving through space” (372). Ann Mellor agrees that the self Wordsworth constructs throughout *The Prelude* is “curiously disembodied” (296). Mellor suggests that despite Wordsworth’s “myriad sensory interactions” with his environments, we never really “hear whether he is hot or cold, whether he washes himself or defecates, whether he has sexual desires or intercourse” (296). While Wordsworth’s representations in Book 7 do not give us detailed descriptions of these particular bodily functions, the body is nonetheless present, revealed through various sensations and the formal devices of the poem, which represent physical movement

²² Gabriele argues that Wordsworth’s fragmented representation of the city in Book 7 “inaugurates a new aesthetics of urban modernism that may proleptically give the impression of reality made possible by the technology of film” (365).

through the city. He is not a detached observer in the physiological sense. Indeed, Bruhn argues that the passage exemplifies a “body tour” of the city, a “mental or linguistic representation of embodied movement through a spatial array” (157).²³ Wordsworth maps the city according to its sensorial experience and his acute sensibility as the peripatetic poet. As Hess points out, in these public scenes of the poem, “there is no detached or privileged point of view from which to observe, and so the viewer himself is swept up, both bodily and imaginatively into the picture” (312). The text offers a mobile rather than stationary point of view (Bruhn 162). C. R. Stokes similarly argues that the “sense of rhythms” and movement in Wordsworth’s depiction of the city streets “create[s] a uniquely urban experience of embodiment” (209, 206). According to these scholars, embodied experience is engaged directly, though perhaps subtly, in these scenes.

As these scholars’ assessments of the early scenes of urban representation indicate, Book 7 expresses a physical experience of the city. While the poem does not offer detailed descriptions of bodily functions in the depiction of urban experience, as Mellor suggests, it still maintains bodily experience, I argue, through the physiological concept of acute sensibility. The initial presentations of urban experience in Book 7 focus on the physical perception of the rhythms and various sensations of modern urban life, and thus on the bodily experience of the nerves and sense organs, rather than on

²³ On a side note, Bruhn argues that Wordsworth’s “body tour” in Book 7 is “hardly an access of imaginative power” due to its realism (167). He further contends that this passage (and all passages about the city in Book 7) are “frankly dismissive” of the city and Wordsworth’s “London tour” (167). However, Wordsworth’s representation of the city in Book 7 is not completely dismissive, especially in the earlier passages addressed in this section of the chapter, which reveal a thrilling depiction of the pedestrian-poet’s urban experiences. This long passage may not be especially “imaginative” in the Romantic sense (though I take issue with Bruhn’s dismissal of the imaginative force at work here, as Wordsworth creates an innovative vision of London), but the earlier portions of Book 7 do not yet fully focus on the imagination, but rather on the acutely sensitive poet’s sensory experiences of the city, which will come later to affect his view of the imagination.

other basic bodily functions, such as pain, defecation, or temperature differentials. The sights, sounds, and movements of the metropolis implicitly affirm the physical experience of the senses. Bodily experience of the city in Book 7, then, comprises neural experience.

In addition to incorporating physiological presence, these representations also depict the controlled or regulated form of sensibility that Wordsworth portrays in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. As the varied readings of the presence of the body in Book 7 by scholars suggest, embodied experience is complexly depicted in Book 7. One reason the presence of the body may not be completely obvious in the text, I propose, is due to the representation of acute, poetic sensibility in the above examined lines. According to Stokes, there is a “perennial anxiety” about the body and the “value of corporeal affect” that runs throughout *The Prelude*. Stokes indicates that, despite a “privileging of flesh, blood, and heart,” Book 7 reveals a “suspicion of the body” (213). This suspicion of and, at times, distancing of the body that scholars detect in Book 7, extends, at least in part, from Wordsworth’s representation of the poet’s sensibility as acute, yet simultaneously controlled and managed. In this case, perhaps it would be more accurate to consider the text as revealing an attempt to keep the body close in order to maintain physiological control. In the depictions of the poet’s perambulations through the city, the poet is sensible to the multitude of sensations produced by his urban surroundings, but works to maintain and filter those sensations. However, as the poet is further exposed to the excess of the city, he struggles to maintain this control. Although, as Stokes claims, Wordsworth “strives to free his body from London, creating an idealized distance where he can read and make sense of the urban text,” this

distance becomes untenable—“Wordsworth’s body, and its experience of itself, is entangled in and produced by London” (203-204). As the young poet is further exposed to the excess of the city, he is no longer able to achieve this distance as he begins to experience nervous agitation.

Increasing Nervousness in the Commercial City

As the peripatetic poet moves through the various spaces of London, Book 7 presents a developing loss of physiological control through a gradual wearying of the subject’s nerves and sense organs. While the sequences of images employed in the early sections of Book 7 present an exhilarating physical experience of urban pedestrianism and sensibility, they also depict the gradually developing effects of the sensory overload of metropolitan experience upon the sensitive poet. The rhetorical devices of lines 154-244 also present an increasing agitation, as the paratactical sequences, for example, interrupt the smooth “flow of the blank verse” with “increasingly short rhythmical patterns” (Gassenmeier and Gurr 312). According to Gassenmeier and Gurr, these devices induce the reader to speed his or her reading, which recreates the frenzied experience of the pedestrian as he moves within the modern city (312). Furthermore, recurring alliterations, enjambments, and repetitions, also formally represent the agitating effects of the excessive urban stimulation on the young pedestrian. The alliteration of harsh consonants, exemplified in “strikes / On strangers” (7.155-56) and “Thence back into the throng” (7.205), marks the sensory force of the city spectacles and intense jostling of the poet as he moves through city crowds. These instances of consonance, as well as repeated instances of enjambment (7.155-56; 159-60; 163-64; 165-66; etc.), add to the impression of the speaker’s body moving in starts and stops

through urban spaces, but they also emphasize the developing agitation of the poet as these shocks of the city begin to unsettle his equanimity. The repetitions of “hour to hour” (7.159), “face to face / Face after face” (7.172-73), “shop after shop” (7.174), and “day to day” (7.244) emphasize multiplicity and the excess of city life, while also depicting a weariness of the sensory impressions of urban spectacle. The intense sensual experiences of the city, while exhilarating in parts of Book 7, also begin to gradually overwhelm the peripatetic poet. The initially enthralling flux of shifting visual and aural impressions increasingly begins to become too much for the poet to process.

For Wordsworth, much of the agitating over-stimulation of the city stems from the effects of growing commodity culture in London. In one of the first passages in which we can detect a gradual intensity and wearying, Wordsworth also introduces a representation of commodity culture:

Here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng,
The comers and goers face to face—
Face after face—the string of dazzling wares,
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names [...]. (7.171-174)

This passage depicts both a slight tiring of the pedestrian’s senses or nerves as he moves through the streams of crowds and commodities, as well as a wearying of the consumer-subjects of the crowd. The words “dazzling” and “blazoned” emphasize the bold intensity of the objects and images of commodities and shops. They not only demand to be seen, but also direct the viewer’s attention through spectacle in an effort to attract buyers. Thus, the “string” of commodities proves not only overwhelming due to sheer quantity, but also due to their gaudy display. Moreover, the repetitions of “face to face,” “Face after face,” and “Shop after shop” emphasize the overwhelming plenitude of people and shops in the city, too much for the pedestrian to take in and process

individually. The excess of the urban scene leads to a seemingly monotonous spectacle of urban crowds, but that is interrupted by “dazzling” commodities and “blazoned” signs. Repetition of faces and shops in these lines reproduces the effect of the constant flow of commerce in the city, which begins to disturb the sensible poet (accustomed to country life) through its sheer excess. But the individuals of the crowds themselves seem “weary” from the constant movement and stimulation of their consumer habits. Wordsworth here represents not only a wearying of the observing spectator, but also a tiring among the crowd from the recurring practices of a consumer existence.

The text itself here also portrays an increasing development of both intensity and wearying, formally illustrating the pedestrian’s developing nervousness. For example, the rhythm of the passage changes from iambic feet to a more various rhythm—with stresses on “here” and “there” in the spondee at the beginning of line 171—which disrupts the flow of the lines. The lines “Face after face” and “Shop after shop” begin with trochees, as well, altering the iambic flow of the passage. Moreover, excessive punctuation—demonstrated through commas and em-dashes—interrupts rhythmic flow and presents a textual impression of agitation. The rhythms of the passage appear choppy, revealing a less fluid, more agitated experience of the city. These textual agitations furthermore expose a struggle by the pedestrian-poet to maintain a composed sensibility, but this becomes increasingly difficult for the figure among the densely populated areas of the city, which are focused on commodity exchange.

The rhythms and stylistic choices of passages like this in Book 7 also reproduce the kinetic rhythms of commodity culture in the city, as they relate to wider social and economic systems, including the rhythms of commodity exchange. According to

Stokes, when Wordsworth addresses “the wealth, the bustle, and the eagerness” (7.161), he “is describing a self-reinforcing rhythm operating across different economic scales” (210). Stokes contends the “circulation of London’s commercial ‘wealth’ creates accumulations of bodies—‘bustle’—in certain spaces, convergences which throb with “eagerness” for commodity and profit on the part of individuals, thus creating wealth” (210). The passage depicting “Face after face” of urban consumer crowds and “shop after shop” of commodities (7.171-74) also represents the rhythms of capitalism and a fixation on commodity exchange, resembling the starts and stops of browsing and buying. However, in this passage, the rhythms of commodity culture are not as exhilarating, but rather begin to become wearing and even irritating for the responsive poet.

In addition to commodities and consumers, the excess of the spectacle begins to pervade the city through advertisements:

Here files of ballads dangle from dead walls;
Advertisements of giant size, from high
Press forward in all colours on the sight—
These bold in conscious merit—lower down,
That, fronted with an imposing word,
Is peradventure one in masquerade. (7.209-214)

Promoting the purchase and consumption of goods, the increasing prevalence of advertisements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries marked the beginnings of a transition to a society that stimulated individual consumer desire. This passage from Book 7 addresses the increasing pervasiveness of advertisements in Romantic-era London, but it also represents the way advertisements intruded upon the acute sensibility of the young poet. In the first line, the word “dangle” reveals the precarious and intimidating aspect of the ballads that threaten to impose upon the

spectator. In addition to the physical threat the advertisements pose, they also register a sensual threat. The advertisements appear in “files,” stressing their abundance and the visual barrage of so many images. But the ads also “Press forward in all colours on the sight” of passersby, intruding upon the pedestrian-spectator’s ocular senses. The advertisements are overwhelming in their ubiquity and variety for the young poet of the country. The “bold” and “imposing” advertisements impersonate and pose “in masquerade,” disguising the character of the goods they promote. In this way, the advertisements also trick the senses, offering false impressions and misleading messages. This passage offers an increasing sensorial deluge of the spectacles of advertisements that threatens to overwhelm the senses of the poet.

Moments like this become overwhelming enough to the pedestrian figure that he must soon after seek refuge from the excess of the city. Stylistically, the turbulent spaces of the city are rendered in the agitated, choppy rhythm addressed above, while the less tumultuous spaces are kept more in line with traditional blank verse. For example, the following passage offers an image of brief respite from the “roar” of the city:

Meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,
Escaped as from an enemy, we turn
Abruptly into some sequestered nook,
Still as a sheltered place when winds blow loud. (7.184-187)

In this passage, participles—“escaped,” “sequestered,” and “sheltered”—are presented in past rather than present tense, creating a slowed or even immobilized impression of the city as opposed to the continual movement expressed in present participles. The words “sequestered” and “sheltered” are also calmer, constructing a more tranquil scene. In contrast to the short and choppy rhythms of the more frenzied passages, the

pace of this excerpt also slows down, reflecting the relief the speaker feels in finding shelter from the hubbub of the city. The “nook” provides a temporary sanctuary, sheltering the urban Rambler from the deluge of sensory impressions, commodities, and crowds of the city. The excess of the urban scene has become monstrous and threatening (reflected in the “roar” of the city and the line, “Escaped as from an enemy”) to the poet through the flood of sensations. This moment of reprieve suggests that the excess of urban experience is beginning to overwhelm and agitate the young poet to the point that he must briefly extricate himself from the crowds and commotion of the commercial city. Here we see the poet momentarily stop to compose himself and calm his frazzled nerves.

In a later passage, Wordsworth again depicts the poet as finding refuge from the congested city, but this time in more open streets:

Thence back into the throng, until we reach—
Following the tide that slackens by degrees—
Some half-frequented scene where wider streets
Bring straggling breezes of suburban air. (7.205-208)

In this excerpt, the pedestrian rejoins the urban “throng” and is rushed along with the crowd until it disperses slowly, revealing wider, less populated spaces, but also intermittent relief from the polluted metropolitan air, brought on by “straggling breezes of suburban air.” Although this passage addresses urban versus suburban air rather than scenes of commercial exchange, it also offers an image of respite from increasing nervousness, specifically represented through nervous agitation brought on in part by urban pollution. Indeed, Trotter and other medical physicians of the period also considered “unwholesome air” to be one of the “remote causes of nervous disease”

found in “populous towns” (Trotter 43, 51).²⁴ Trotter contends that the city’s “narrow lanes, high buildings and houses, filthy kennels, small apartments, huge warehouses, manufacturing establishments, cellars under ground, consumption of fuel, and a large population, are so many sources whence the air is contaminated” (51). Due to this “impure air,” Trotter encouraged town inhabitants to spend time outside the city: “The distance from town, which may be necessary for these excursions, must be measured by the purity of the air and rusticity of the country: they must get beyond the effluvium of smoke and mud” in the city (Trotter 175; 254). Those who could not afford to leave the city, or who were necessarily confined due to business, were prescribed to travel beyond the bounds of the city proper to the suburbs, if possible.

Likewise, the passage from Book 7 suggests that the pedestrian finds relief in this moment from the nervous effects of confined air and urban pollution. The specific reference to “suburban air” particularly suggests cleaner, more “wholesome” breezes of air that can temporarily relieve the building nervous agitation of the peripatetic figure. Although urban pollution was not solely a result of increased commerce in the city, its effects on population (as an emergent location of trade), urban development, including the “manufacturing establishments” and “huge warehouses” Trotter describes, and increased consumption did contribute to urban pollution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The less populated, wider streets provide an opportunity for taking in healthier air, relieving the poet temporarily from the polluting effects of the commercial city. Similar to the previously examined passage focusing on finding respite in a “sequestered nook,” this passage is formally and rhythmically calmer, as well. These moments reveal the poet’s attempts to deal with the increasing nervousness of his

²⁴ See also Beddoes (81-82).

peripatetic experiences of the city. Yet, despite these brief moments of reprieve from urban excess, the text continues to represent an encroaching nervousness, especially in the poet's exposure to the commodity culture of London.

Nervous Intensity in Bartholomew Fair

Nowhere in Book 7 does the poet exhibit more nervousness than in the Bartholomew Fair scene. As the speaker of the poem describes the excess of the urban fair, the text presents the pedestrian-poet as overcome by the sensational chaos of the scene. For Wordsworth, the fair seems the ultimate representation of commodity culture in the city. In this setting, bodies are represented at their messiest in the text, as bodies, commodities, and commodified bodies collide among the spectacles and crowds of the fair. In this moment, the young poet strives to keep his own sensibility (and sensible body) in control, struggling to filter and manage the raucous excess of sensations that the fair produces. As a result, the poet experiences what seems like a nervous fit that is fully expressed in Wordsworth's denunciation of the city in the final stanza of Book 7. Yet, in this moment of crisis, Wordsworth realizes not only how compromised the body of poetic sensibility is in the modern city, but, moreover, the crisis precipitates the recognition of his own commodified image and identity as a modern poet.

As in the earlier sections of Book 7, the intense display of commodity culture in the urban fair particularly affects the young poet's increasingly nervous reaction to the city. In Wordsworth's representation, Bartholomew Fair depicts commodity consumption in its most intense and extreme forms. Objects and people are commodified and consumed in excess by the masses. At the beginning of the Bartholomew Fair scene, the speaker asks: "What say you then / To times when half the

city shall break out / Full of one passion—vengeance, rage, or fear—” (7.645-47).

While Wordsworth lists a few examples of what he means—“executions, to a street on fire, / Mobs, riots, and rejoicings” (7.648-49)—he offers the urban carnival as the ultimate example of the chaos of crowds in the city. This excerpt addresses the contemporary fear of mobs of people in light of the recent events of the French Revolution, but the representation of “rejoicings” in the list of other violent crowds seems out of place. The urban fair does not “break out” out of “vengeance, rage, or fear,” but rather out of celebration. However, the “one passion” of the urban fair is extreme commodification, which threatens the poet in its sheer excess of commodified sensation.

In this threat of commodified excess, Book 7 presents Bartholomew Fair as distinctly modern, influenced by the commodity culture of London. As Benjamin P. Myers contends, Wordsworth’s representation of Bartholomew Fair in Book 7 resembles Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, in which “anything and anyone can become a commodity; from wives to words, everything has its price” (Myers 80).²⁵ Both texts depict the fair in contrast to the celebratory carnivalesque of pre-capitalist periods. As Heffernan points out, the “radically egalitarian” aspect of the medieval carnival explored by Mikhail Bakhtin, as it levels “socio-economic barriers” and “undermined the cultural authority of the mind and spirit over the body” does not pervade Wordsworth’s vision of the urban carnival (441). The carnival tradition seems forsaken

²⁵ According to Myers, scholars “have long noted that Jonson’s play confronts the beginnings of England’s transition into a capitalist economy” (80). He contends that Wordsworth’s “account of London and the fair in Book 7 of *The Prelude* confronts the latter stages of this same transition, transforming the sense of fluidity inherent in the frenzied buying and selling of commodity culture into what can best be described as the *financial sublime*” (80). This frenzied and chaotic commodification presents bodies in a state of excess—either as commodities or consumers—which threatens the poet’s sense of controlled consumption.

and instead the urban fair “presents spectacles to spectators” (Heffernan 441). For Wordsworth, the “fair epitomizes what London life offers most of its inhabitants”—the flow of trivial objects and consumers (Heffernan 442). The urban fair appears mechanistic and modern, full of commodities and spectacles. The commodity culture that pervades the city has even taken hold of the traditional, annual fair. The poet becomes lost amid the wild demonstration of excessive consumerism.

The Prelude represents this commodified urban fair in distinct contrast to the rural, Grasmere Fair of Book 8. In this vision of “a summer festival” (8.10), the rural fair demonstrates organization and control. For example, the animal pens are carefully distributed and ordered:

the sheep
That have for the traffic been culled out are penned
In cotes that stand together on the plain
Ranged side by side [...]. (8.19-22)

As in this depiction of the organization and sale of domesticated animals, the spectacles and commodities of the rural fair are also measured and ordinary. The “hawker’s wares” consist of “books, pictures, combs, and pins,” domestic commodities rather than the excessive and functionless commodities of the urban fair. In the Grasmere festival, “Booths there are none,” other than a reasonable “stall or two” (8.25). As Jonathan Bate points out, “there are no freak shows and callous entertainments” as the rural fair “is not based on economic exploitation” like St. Bartholomew’s Fair (386). In contrast, Book 7 presents the urban carnival as a site of extreme commodification and exploitation, as well as intense and bizarre spectacle. Bartholomew Fair appears as a monstrous inferno compared to the tranquility of images and operations of the pastoral festival.

Moreover, the poem presents the urban fair as hellish and monstrous in comparison particularly in its chaotic overabundance of sensations.

What a hell
For eyes and ears, what anarchy and din
Barbarian and infernal—'tis a dream
Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound. (7.659-662)

The “hell” of the fair is presented as “For the eyes and ears” specifically, as the spectacles of the fair assault the visual and aural sense organs. Wordsworth represents the urban scene here as hellish and “infernal” because it has exceeded the bounds of physical (or sensual) comprehension. Moreover, the excess of sensations becomes a physical torment for the acutely sensible poet. The “anarchy” of the fair stems from the chaos of spectacles and sensations. The excess of visual sensory impressions is so intense that the speaker claims “‘tis a dream”—it has exceeded the boundaries of immediate experience and what the acutely sensible poet can readily manage. The monstrosity of the “dream” occurs due to this sensory excess.

Wordsworth’s representation of the annual St. Bartholomew Fair in London teems with depictions of monstrosity, excess, perversion, and chaos. Irregular rhythm, extensive listing, and a surfeit and variety of images stylistically illustrate the excesses of the city and of the poet’s neural response to the urban fair. The carnival of the city represents an extreme version of the excess and superficial fixations of the modern metropolis. For Wordsworth, Bartholomew Fair provides an apt vision of the urban sublime, as it comprises the way the numinous urban landscape surpasses the powers of human perception in its sheer sensual excess. Moreover, the Bartholomew Fair scene represents the neural sublime, which Alan Richardson describes as sublime experience that takes its cue from the Burkean tradition, locating the “sublime in the body” as a

“physical rapture” rather than a mental or “divine rapture” (Richardson 26).²⁶ The neural sublime particularly takes place in the Bartholomew Fair scene in the experience of nervous stimulation that overcomes the individual, culminating in a nervous convulsion.

As a poet with an exquisite, organic sensibility, the speaker of Book 7 experiences the city and the urban sublime physiologically through the sensible, peripatetic body. The numinous experiences of London are directly related to the speaker’s neural experiences of the excess of the metropolis. In London, the poet-pedestrian experiences a bodily sublime, in which he is not able to transcend the physiological. In the Bartholomew Fair scene, the urban carnival appears as, among other forms of sublimity, the neural sublime. The excess of sensual impressions, bodily perversions, and nervous energy of the fair cause the sensible poet to feel an intense nervous reaction that climaxes in a moment of neural sublimity. In the chaos and disorder of the urban fair, the nerves of the poet are agitated, resulting in a nervous fit. This nervous convulsion occurs as a direct effect of the sensual overload and monstrous sublimity of the urban fair. The mind is overwhelmed by the magnitude of disorder in the spectacle of the fair so it convulses in a nervous seizure, demonstrated at the end of the passage, when the speaker denounces the “perverted” “parliament of monsters” that pervade the fair (7.688, 692) and more generally the city itself as a site of “blank confusion” (7.696).

²⁶ My point here is not to suggest that Wordsworth held the same views of the sublime as Burke did. While Wordsworth was intrigued by Burke’s sublime, he did not view the sublime as definitively Burkean or Kantian, but engaged quite extensively and experimentally with the concept of the sublime. While the traditional view of the Romantic and, specifically, Wordsworthian sublime are aligned more clearly with a Kantian, transcendental sublimity, I argue that some formulations of the urban sublime in Book 7 derive from the physiological, nerve-based concept of the body and sublime experience.

The urban sublime of the fair is rendered in part in representations of monstrosity, which emphasize bodily and sensual excess. The monstrous excess of spectacles is presented throughout the Bartholomew fair scene, demonstrated not only through monstrous bodies, but also in metaphorical representations of the crowds, advertisements, and tents of the carnival. For example, the “open space” of the fair, observed by the pedestrian, “twinkles, is alive / With heads” (7.663-65). Wordsworth uses the familiar metaphor of the crowd as a hydra of the masses, a monster with many heads, in order to depict the animation and sublimity of the carnival throng.²⁷ The words “alive” and “twinkles” emphasize the spectacle of the energy and animation of the crowd, which moves sporadically in starts and stops. In addition to the excess and erratic movement of the monstrous crowd, the advertisements and posters also appear monstrous, as well: “the midway region and above / Is thronged with staring pictures and huge scrolls” (7.665-66). While the “staring pictures” likely refer to images of featured figures and shows at the fair, the phrase also personifies the banners of advertisements that hover over the pedestrian, creating an image of monstrous spectacles that encroach on the visual and physical space of the poet. Moreover, the “tents and booths” that “Are vomiting, receiving on all sides” the crowds of the fair also present the fair itself as a monster that swallows and regurgitates customers. As James A. W. Heffernan points out, this image of the tents and booths resemble “grotesque bodies open-mouthed to everyone,” seemingly consuming the people of the fair (442).

²⁷ The hydra metaphor for the masses was a familiar metaphor of this period due in particular to the French Revolution and the fear of the potentially violent results of mobs of people. This fear was particularly pervasive in large cities, as discontented citizens could rally more quickly and in larger numbers in urban areas. Moreover, as crowds were common in London and other cities (though more typically in markets or trafficking in streets for work, commerce, or leisure), the hydra representation of the crowd also serves in the poem as a representation of the excess of urban life.

In these images, the commodity culture of the fair—expressed in the crowds of customers, surplus of advertisements, and tents and booths, which house shows and commodities—particularly contributes to the excess and sublime monstrosity of the fair. Commercial exchange and a fixation on commodities and spectacle are the main feature and purpose of the modern urban fair, resulting in an overwhelming excess and increasing agitation for the pedestrian poet.

Images of monstrosity pervade the Bartholomew Fair passage, representing the excesses of modern society and challenging bodily norms, as well as the poet's sense of bodily control. As Denise Gigante argues, the "aesthetic definition of monstrosity changed" during the Romantic period "from an Enlightenment concept of defect or deformity to a Romantic notion of monstrosity as too much life" ("The Monster in the Rainbow" 434). In Book 7's Bartholomew Fair scene, monstrosity represents a similar bodily excess, namely through the intensity of sensibility and nerve experience, but it also depicts a loss of physiological control. The speaker presents the fair as monstrous through its excess of sensory impressions, but the urban fair furthermore reflects the poet's own bodily excesses, particularly of the body of sensibility. Paul Youngquist contends that monstrosities in the Romantic era "often trouble the operation" of the "proper body," a term he assigns to a "norm of embodiment" developed during the period (*Monstrosities* xxvi, xiv). According to Youngquist, the "traditional association between Romanticism and monstrosity" was less concerned with "psychological trauma or emotional excess than with the social project of proper embodiment" (xxix). In Book 7, the monstrosities of the fair disturb the young poet's (and the speaker's) sense of the proper poetic body—the normalizing body of poetic vision that Wordsworth so

emphatically espouses in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. The “parliament of monsters” (7.691)—the “perverted” forms (7.688) and “freaks of Nature” (7.689) of the fair—in their excess, force the poet to confront his own body, as it is also experiencing excess and a loss of control.

Indeed, the Bartholomew Fair scene represents an attempt to regain control over the profusion of images and sensations in the carnival when the speaker asks for the Muse’s aid in repositioning the spectator’s perspective from engulfed in the crowd to standing above the bustle on a platform.

For once the Muse’s help we will implore,
And she shall lodge us—wafted on her wings
Above the press and danger of the crowd—
Upon some showman’s platform. (7.656-59)

In this moment, Wordsworth attempts to place the subject over the crowd and away from the chaos of the fair in an effort to regain control. Some scholars have pointed to this particular passage in arguing that a bodily distance pervades the Bartholomew Fair scene. According to Jonathan Wordsworth, the stationing of the poet upon the showman’s platform indicates his distance from the fair and from London in general—he is “placed above it, gaining at once enjoyment and safety from turning life into art” (297-98). Yet this passage demonstrates a fear of the loss of physiological control, of maintaining composure amid the excess of the scene, as the “press and danger of the crowd” threaten further nervous agitation. The speaker not only seeks to gain creative control over the chaos of the fair, but the young pedestrian poet strives to also regain control of his nerves.

However, while Wordsworth attempts what Bruhn calls a “visual survey” from a “fixed and commanding,” and thus regulative, point of view (162), the poem is not able

to maintain the attempted distance. Rather, from this point on, the speaker's representations of the carnival offer varying points of view of the fair, some from the perspective of the showman's platform, while others reveal a point of view of the pedestrian that still seems immersed in the vast crowd. As the segment moves to describe the "chattering monkeys" (7.668) and "children whirling in their roundabouts" (7.669), and then lists the various performers and spectacles of the fair, the speaker seems again peripatetically immersed in the crowd, glancing and listening here and there and moving through the congested spaces of the scene. The repetition of the present participle verb form again recreates the various movements and sensory impressions of the carnival spectacle. Much of the Bartholomew Fair scene is composed in list form, creating a surplus of images that overwhelms the reader, as well as the spectator. For example, the list "Equestrians, tumblers, women, girls, and boys, / Blue-breeched, pink-vested, and with towering plumes" (7.678-79) not only stresses the multiplicity of people, both entertainers and spectators, and their ornate dress, but it also appears in irregular rhythm, indicating irritation from the excess of the scene. A variety of images also appear in this list that would have been present both inside and outside of the tents and booths, accessed by walking through the fair, rather than perched from one position on a platform.²⁸ Moreover, the words "grinds" (7.673) and "rattles" (7.675) illustrate the discordant and grating movements and sounds of the urban fair, but seem to indicate that the spectator is physically "rattled" and accosted by the crowds and commodities of the fair. Thus, while the speaker claims a distanced position on the showman's platform, the young poet still appears physically caught up in the waves of

²⁸ For example, the lists of monstrous spectacles includes "the invisible girl" (7.684), the "bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes" (7.685), "waxwork, clockwork" (7.686), and "puppet-shows" (7.687), spectacles that most likely would have been on display inside tents.

excess of the spectacles, commodities, and crowds. As Stokes argues, the “semiotic articulation of the body” in the Bartholomew Fair scene “abolishes that distance: what we see in both rhythm and style is the seizure of the body in the city’s very materiality” (214). The speaker’s attempt to help the young poet regain control by lodging him on a platform fails, as the excess of the urban fair overtakes the young poet anyway.

While Wordsworth may attempt to resort to his customary poetic conditions of distancing and regulation in this scene, the urban fair does not allow such distancing. Here the cultured sense organs of the poet of sensibility cannot keep the excesses of the city at bay. Instead the poet is overcome by the spectacles of the city and the “proper” poetic body is compromised. The repletion of Bartholomew Fair causes empirical, perceptive problems for the acutely sensitive poet, as well as symptoms of nervous agitation. As the dizzying lists and rhythms of the Bartholomew Fair scene demonstrate, the poet’s acute sensibility causes him to reel in the vertiginous urban scene. The sensations of the urban fair in all its surfeit of spectacle are too much for the poet to process. All the sensations of Bartholomew Fair are “jumbled up together” and become difficult for him to take in or manage (7.691). The city appears as “blank confusion” (7.696) and an “undistinguishable” scene (7.700) to the sensible poet. As Saree Makdisi indicates, Wordsworth’s London “cannot be epistemologically contained, or controlled by, or filtered through the viewing subject” (Makdisi 24). The end of the Bartholomew Fair scene speeds up and culminates in a fit of nervousness, as the speaker experiences sensual overload. The pedestrian poet of Book 7 thus experiences amid the chaos of the modern city the symptoms of excessive sensibility, manifested in its extreme form of nervous illness.

The nervous culmination at the end of the Bartholomew Fair scene illustrates what Wordsworth later says about the spectacle of London in general, that “the picture weary out the eye” and the city is “By nature an unmanageable sight” (7.708-709). This inability to manage or filter sensations and the “wearying” of the sense organs were identified in eighteenth-century medical discourse as symptoms of nervous disorders, caused by excessive sensibility. According to the eighteenth-century physician Simon-André Tissot, for the nervous subject in a state of irritation, “figures are disordered” and the nervous system “can no longer interpret them” (qtd. in Foucault 156).²⁹ The pedestrian-poet’s nervous response to the intense accumulation of sensations in the city and the urban fair results in a temporary sensual disconnect, in which the city becomes “An undistinguishable world to men” (7.700). The beginning of the last stanza of Book 7, which begins “O, blank confusion, and a type not false” particularly seems to be the climax of the poet’s nervous fit. The city appears as “blank confusion” because the nervous excess and convulsion has resulted in an inability to process or perceive the sensual impressions of the bustling city.

In this climactic moment of nervous convulsion, Wordsworth critiques the commodity culture and capitalist drive of the city, in which the excess of commodity semiotics and consumption have an immediate hold over the urban body. The speaker describes the “whole swarm” of the city’s “inhabitants” (7.698) as

The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,
Living amid the same perpetual flow

²⁹ For the original quotation, see Tissot, *Traité des nerfs et de leurs maladies* (Paris, 1778-80), Vol. 1, Part 2, 302-303. During the eighteenth century, Tissot was considered an expert on nervous disease and melancholia. Tissot’s views and theories are mentioned often in the works of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British physicians’ medical treatises. For example, see Benjamin Fawcett’s *Observations on the Nature, Causes and Cure of Melancholy...* (1780) (4-5, 10-11, and 13). In *Madness and Civilization: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault also uses Tissot’s work to address the symptoms of nervous disease (156).

Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end—
Oppression under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free. (7.701-707)

The text depicts urban inhabitants as enslaved consumers, resembling the “weary throng” (7.171) mentioned near the beginning of Wordsworth’s descriptions of his peripatetic experiences in the city. While in the earlier passage the urban crowd appears to be sensually worn by the surplus of spectacles and commodities, urban inhabitants here are portrayed as fully entrenched in the commercial-capitalism of eighteenth-century Britain. Urban consumers in this passage appear as mindless automatons, apathetically participating in the perpetual cycle of mindless consumption. The urbanites lose their individual identity, conforming to a consumer identity alone. The speaker claims that in such a commodity-driven society, the city experiences mass oppression, under which even the brightest (“highest minds”) and “strongest” are controlled. The speaker-spectator then is not overwhelmed with merely the sight of the urban crowd, but is inundated with the flow of indistinguishable commodities among indistinguishable consumers. He is disturbed by the excess of commodity consumption in the city.

But the disturbing images of mindless consumers in this segment of Book 7 also reveals a fear of the effects of nervous sensibility. “Living amid the same perpetual flow / Of trivial objects, “the urban consumer risks losing his connection to others through an overload of sensibility. According to the famous eighteenth-century physician Tissot, when the nervous system is in an extreme state of irritation it can become “incapable of

transmitting to the soul what it is experiencing” (qtd. in Foucault 156).³⁰ In this case, an excessive sensibility can result in an inverse reaction in which “a certain numbness of the sensations” occurs in order to “prevent nervous shocks from reaching the soul” (Foucault 156). The end of Book 7 expresses a fear that an over-exposure to the excess of commodities and spectacles can switch the subject’s sensibility into overdrive, causing him to be unable to distinguish sensations and thereby to become numb to his surroundings.

The preceding passage of nervous culmination in combination with the “slaves” passage reveals a vision of Londoners similar to Georg Simmel’s description of the modern metropolitan subject in “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” While scholars have frequently pointed to the resemblance between Wordsworth’s vision and Simmel’s analysis, the emphasis on a nervous reaction to the city in Book 7 mirrors Simmel’s text.³¹ According to Simmel, the “psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (48, his emphasis). In Simmel’s analysis, the excess of spectacles and sensations in the city

agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all. In the same way, through the rapidity and contradictoriness of their changes, more harmless impressions force such violent responses, tearing the nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent. [...] An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy. (Simmel 51)

³⁰ Tissot (302-303).

³¹ For examples of comparisons between Simmel’s work and Wordsworth’s Book 7, see William Chapman Sharpe, *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams* (16-17); Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (181); and Stokes, “Sign, Sensation and the Body in Wordsworth’s ‘Residence in London’” (206).

Like Wordsworth's urbanite, Simmel's metropolitan subject experiences an onslaught of sensations that agitates the nervous fibres of the body. Book 7's pedestrian-poet fears a nervous reaction similar to Simmel's description, in which the nerves are brutally torn, leaving him numb to his surroundings. Simmel's metropolitan man, then, "develops an organ for protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him" (51). According to Simmel, the body's response to nervous overstimulation constitutes the "blasé attitude" of the modern metropolitan (51). Wordsworth's urban "slaves" exhibit a similar attitude as they are "melted and reduced / To one identity," that of the automaton-like consumer (7.703-4). In Simmel's analysis the "blasé attitude" of urban inhabitants is also caused by the flow of commodities and the "money economy" (52). This attitude "consists in the blunting of discrimination" where things "are experienced as insubstantial," resulting in a feeling of self-worthlessness (52). In Wordsworth's vision of the city, the objects of consumption are "trivial" (7.703) and the act of consumption itself holds "no meaning" (7.705). The stress on "same" in line 702 also emphasizes the monotony and emptiness of consumerism. Wordsworth's vision of London at the end of Book 7 anticipates Simmel's analysis of modern metropolitan life. In both evaluations of the city, the overstimulation of the metropolis has a physiological effect on the urban subject's sensibility and nervous system.

However, despite the poet's declared fears that he will turn into an urban automaton, the city never actually creates this reaction in the poet-pedestrian.³² The young Wordsworth never develops the blasé attitude of Simmel's metropolitan man. Both the Bartholomew Fair passage and the final stanza on consumer "slaves" show

³² Presumably, at least in part, because his residence in London is brief.

that the city still disturbs him and he responds intensely to it—he certainly has not become “numbed” to urban life. The young poet resists these particular physiological implications of modern urban life. Yet, so do the bodies of the urban fair. Although Wordsworth depicts urban bodies in the final stanza as controlled and coerced by the political, economic, and social structures of the commodity culture of the city, the depiction of the fair does not seem to represent the same kind of docile bodies as the wearied, automaton-like consumers of the final passage. After all, the “blank confusion” stems from the sensible poet’s own inability to process the images of the monstrous urban carnival. The bodies of the fair are coerced by commodity culture (at least in their operations as commodities and in the excessive amounts of commodification that takes place in the urban fair), but in their monstrosity still seem to resist the regulatory norm of the proper body and thwart the operations of the proper *poetic* body Wordsworth adopts and promotes in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Prelude*. The urban fair prevents the poet from not only regulating his own body, but also the monstrous bodies resist his attempts to regulate or organize them—to, in a way, *heal* the monstrous, diseased bodies of the urban fair. Moreover, his own body’s excesses reveal the similarities between the poetic body and the bodies of the city.³³ Rather than advancing the operations of the proper poetic body as Wordsworth would have them do, the monstrous bodies of the urban fair instead call the poet’s attention to the poetic body’s own place in the historical and cultural structures of Romantic-era society. The

³³ Seeing his own body’s excesses and the excesses of urban bodies and of the city in general also suggests that “excess” is also not self-evident. What appears excessive to a poet raised in the countryside, for example, will not necessarily appear so to an individual born and raised in London (like Charles Lamb), as Wordsworth might be said to have recognized in calling attention in *The Prelude* to his biographical origins. But the text further demonstrates even the concept of excess as also socially and culturally determined or mediated.

Bartholomew Fair scene culminates in a nervous fit because it fully forces him to confront what the other disturbing doubles of the city have been gradually revealing: not only his inability to control the sensible body in the urban setting, but moreover the constructedness of that body and of his poetic identity.

Urban Sensibility and Disturbing Doubles: Compromising the Poetic Body

Wordsworth's nervous fit in Bartholomew Fair culminates from a reaction to the realization of his own complacency and participation in the very commodity culture of the city that he so vehemently critiques. In the poet's critical reactions to the commodification he sees in the fair and larger city, he does not respond to a phenomenon that is an enemy or opposite to the poetic imagination, but rather to its unsettling double. This disturbing double, in its excess and extreme commodification, threatens to make the poet aware of how his own images, both personally perceived and professionally poeticized, are also manufactures fully implicated in the commodity-focused and capitalist society of his time. As the representations of urban excess in the city and fair demonstrate, in Wordsworth's role as a poet, he actually *is* a kind of "showman," like the barkers and entertainers at the fair, performing his commodified talents (poetic creation) to a rapt audience and advertising his "wares"—his poetic imagination—to the reading public. Indeed, the speaker's request that the muse "lodge" the poet "Upon some showman's platform" (7.657, 689) particularly reveals his connection to the showman, as he poetically portrays the stimulations of the urban fair to his own audience. Moreover, the poet's physiological reaction to the sensual inundation of the city and the urban sublime in the Bartholomew Fair scene threatens to reveal nature and the healthy organic body of sensibility as manufactures, as well.

Bartholomew Fair not only reveals problems that the poetic body cultured in nature experiences in the urban setting, but also presents this sensible, controlled body as a performance—a cultural construct and a commodified product fully immersed in the cultural matrix of modernity. The poet’s loss of control over his consumption and filtering of sensations in the urban scene and carnival thus force him to understand the body as ideological, not under its own command, but rather as constituted in and through historical structures, forces, and contingencies, such as the capitalist marketplace.

The nervous climax of the Bartholomew Fair scene in this sense takes its cue from earlier representations of commodification in Book 7. The representations of the city present disturbing doubles to the poet throughout the book, appearing in the showman at the fair, but also in the panoramas, advertisements, Blind Beggar, and the prostitute, in addition to the minor figures of ballad singers, musicians, and freaks of the urban fair. These disturbing doubles remind the poet of his own commodification in the literary marketplace and reveal to Wordsworth the implications of the fashioning of his own image as a poet of regulated sensibility cultured by nature.

One such double that has particularly captured the interest of Romantic scholars in recent criticism is the panorama, which Wordsworth describes as those “mimic sights that ape / The absolute presence of reality” (7.248-49). Markman Ellis argues that Wordsworth “rewrites the delusive wonder of the panorama as a kind of painted mockery no better than the trickery of the gothic” (Ellis 145) or the advertisements that are “in masquerade” (7.214). According to Ellis, this creates an “unwelcome feeling” that “disturbs for Wordsworth the proper relation between imagination and nature”

(145). Wordsworth is disturbed particularly by the way the panorama mimics and commodifies nature. As Book 7 points out, not only are the panoramas located “Within doors” (7.246), but they are also positioned “next to” “troops of wild beasts, birds and beasts / Of every nature from all climes convened,” made accessible through trade (7.248, 246-247). For Wordsworth, the exhibitions of the museum appear similar to the advertisements addressed two stanzas before the panorama, as the encaged animals on display and representations of natural scenes in the panorama have been packaged and commodified.

Moreover, according to Wordsworth, the “commodification of nature” evident in spectacles like the panorama results in a “loss of spontaneous experience” important to artistic creation (Rosenbaum 40). As Rosenbaum points out, Wordsworth “objects to these spectacles not only because they are ‘imitations’ but because they provide vicarious experience” (40). The commodified spectacle of the panorama then, in Wordsworth’s view, cannot serve as a substitute for the real, therapeutic experience of nature. J. Jennifer Jones argues that Wordsworth’s representation of the panorama (and other forms of urban spectacle) poses the question of “what distance (or not) should art assume towards casual (mass, commercial, idiotic) enjoyment?” (357). Moreover, I argue that Book 7 also questions what distance the body should take in relation to these forms of entertainment. If the panorama presents commodified experience, it cannot provide the tempering of the proper body that nature offers. The urban body, then, is at risk of losing its connection to nature through the excesses of manufactured images (and thus of slipping into its own nervous excesses).

Furthermore, the panorama causes the poet to question his own notions of nature and poetic identity. Although Wordsworth critiques the panorama as a commodified, vicarious experience of nature, and therefore inferior and antithetical to the imaginative vision of the poet, as several scholars have pointed out, Wordsworth's representations in Book 7 resemble that of the panorama.³⁴ The mimetic, immersive aspect of the panorama particularly resembles the representations of Wordsworth's peripatetic representations of the city. But it also reflects Wordsworth's own language to describe poetry in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*. Not only does he claim that his work "imitate[s]" the language of men (600), but that the poet also "describes and imitates passions" (604). The panorama thus unsettles the poet because it calls into question how closely his own poetry resembles the mimetic, simulacral aspect of the urban spectacles of the city like the panorama. It threatens to make him consider how much his own poetic creation commodifies nature.

Wordsworth's critique of the panorama as commodifying nature moreover reflects Wordsworth's own participation in the commodification of nature. As Rosenbaum suggests, the eighteenth century witnessed an increase in commodified travel and tourism, particularly among the upper and middle classes.³⁵ By the Romantic

³⁴ For example, Tanya Agathocleous points out that Wordsworth's vision of poetry and the panorama are closely connected (92). According to Agathocleous, while the panorama is "more dependent on the visual than *The Prelude*," "its form, like Wordsworth's foregrounds an act of imaginative assimilation" (95). Ross King similarly claims that the representation of the panorama in Book 7 "purport[s] to accomplish what Wordsworth himself attempts but ultimately fails to execute," a "panoptic view" of the city of London (57). J. Jennifer Jones locates similarities between the panorama and Wordsworth's representations of the sublime. As Jones contends, while "the Wordsworthian sublime has long been understood as the antithesis of the panorama's hyper-mimetic, sensually-immersive aesthetic," *The Prelude* offers representations of "a fresh aesthetic model of the sublime, which culminates in the subversive mimicry of the very sublime aesthetic of the panorama itself" (360).

³⁵ According to Rosenbaum, tourism "had long served as a form of collecting for the upper classes in the eighteenth century, a means of marking one's class, urbanity, and taste through access to place" (41). See also Carl Thompson's *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (6-15) and Robin Jarvis's *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (18).

period, the Lake District was already becoming a tourist destination, an exhibition of commodified nature. The popularity of the picturesque in Wordsworth's time was also already manufacturing nature. As Raymond Williams indicates,

The picturesque journeys—and the topographical poems, journals, paintings and engravings which promoted and commemorated them—came from the profits of an improving agriculture and from trade... Like the landscaped parks, where every device was employed to produce a natural effect, the wild regions of mountain and forest were for the most part objects of conspicuous aesthetic consumption: to have been to the named places, to exchange and compare the travelling and gazing experiences, was a form of fashionable society. (128)

Nature was already being absorbed by the commodity culture of modernity. But Wordsworth himself was also implicated in this manufacturing of commodified nature. As Rosenbaum points out, "Wordsworth's poems and *Guide to the Lakes* were certainly part of" the tradition that Williams addresses, and "risked, like the miniature and the panorama, rendering nature an object 'of conspicuous aesthetic consumption'" (Rosenbaum 41). Wordsworth is thus disturbed by the commodified spectacle of the panorama as it threatens to remind him of how his own poetry participates in the literary market and how representations of nature are manufactured and performed, even in his own works. If Wordsworth's own visions of nature are, in a sense, manufactured—no matter how sincere they are—it could potentially destabilize his understanding of nature and his identity as a poet. If nature is a cultural construct, then it would mean the natural, organic body of the poet operates a construct, too.

Advertisements serve as a troubling double for Wordsworth in the poem, as well, as they also call into question his role as poet and healer. In an early passage of Book 7, the speaker critiques the fixation on commodity consumption in London through the description of advertisements:

Stationed above the door like guardian saints,
There, allegoric shapes, female or male,
Or physiognomies of real men,
Land-warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,
Boyle, Shakespear, Newton, or the attractive head
Of some quack doctor, famous in his day. (7.163-67)

In this passage, advertisements mimic the images of “real men,” masculine figures of moral and national consequence. As these advertisements are “Stationed above the door like guardian saints,” they are presented as though they protect or represent the inhabitants of the buildings they preside over. However, these “allegoric shapes” do not actually signify moral concepts, but rather advertise the commodities inside the shops. Their position and comparison to “guardian saints” moreover depict the buildings of commercial exchange as stand-ins for the church, and commodity culture as the new religion of modernity. As Rosenbaum and Mary Jacobus suggest, Wordsworth’s “confrontation” with advertisements that present the “physiognomies of real men” “bodes forth the threat that his own claim to sincerity will not be read as a moral, transparent use of language but as self-advertisement” (Rosenbaum 37-38; Jacobus, *Romanticism*, 234). Rosenbaum contends that “these advertisements serve as a disturbing mirror,” since “Book 7 purports to present the physiognomy of the real poet walking” (38). However, the advertisements also reflect Wordsworth’s role as poet-physician and his fears that his claims to nature and poetry as healing also will be perceived as self-advertisement, like the “quack doctor” who prescribes spurious remedies for misdiagnoses.³⁶ Rather than being associated with the “physiognomies of

³⁶ These types of questionable quack “physicians” were a common feature of the urban market, as medicine was becoming a treasured and highly-marketable commodity in the Romantic era. As Nicholas Mason points out, the patent of medicine was one of the first trades to use advertising and to begin branding (417). Advertisements for products featuring specific physician names became common in the eighteenth century and contributed to the commonality of the figure of the “quack doctor” in the

real men” like “Shakespear,” Wordsworth may instead resemble the image of the “quack doctor.” The advertisements then expose the conscious construction of the healthy, organic body of the poet as an answer to the moral and physiological disorder of the city.

The last few lines of Book 7 reveal this construction of nature as Wordsworth produces images (imitations) of nature within his own mind in order to soothe his nervous experiences of the city: “The spirit of Nature was upon me here, / The soul of beauty and enduring life / Was present as a habit” (7.736-38) and “diffused” “Composure and ennobling harmony” (7.738, 741). In this passage, Wordsworth evokes Nature as a medicinal salve that helps him to regain a mental as well as physiological “composure”—in this case, to recompose the proper poetic body of controlled sensibility. Recalling the spirit of Nature serves as a way of regaining this control over the nervous body. The poet models the operations of the sensible poetic body that has been cultured in nature—the young Wordsworth here is taking his own medicine, so to speak, while instructing the urban reader how to also control or “cure” the urban body. Yet the urban doubles of the city—the panorama and the urban fair—compel the poet to consider how his poetic constructions of nature are like the medicinal commodities of the medical market. Nature is presented then as a commodity that promises to cure the nervous, urban body. Here again, Wordsworth is at risk of being associated with the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Mason 418). According to Robert Anderson, Wordsworth’s “therapeutic concern with the ills of an emergent market culture finds an analog in ads for medicinals,” which, similar to Wordsworth’s poetics, “promised to restore ‘the Noble faculties of the Soul’ and ‘deliver a diffusive joy’” (para. 61). The passage on advertisements reveals a concern that Wordsworth could be perceived as advertising his own poetics like the ads for medicinals that Anderson points to here. The advertisement for the quack doctor, then, serves as an unwelcome doppelganger to the figure of the poet.

“quack doctor” of the advertisements in his representations of nature as a medicinal salve.

While the “quack doctor” serves as a double to the physician-poet figure, the prostitute serves as bodily double to the sensible poet figure in Book 7. As Rosenbaum contends, “Wordsworth’s anxieties about the seduction of consumer culture emerge” in the “figure of the prostitute” (44). The prostitute was a city walker, as well, whose sexualized body served as her main commodity. The figure of the prostitute is depicted at multiple points in Book 7—through the “unhappy woman” heard in the street (7.640), the prostitute of the theater, and Mary Robinson, the Maid of Buttermere (who also serves as a double for the actress and flâneuse, Mary Darby Robinson)—each time reminding the poet of his own commodification.³⁷ The prostitute reflects bodily advertisement, which Wordsworth constructs (or is worried he will be perceived by others as constructing) through the figure of the poet of organic sensibility. Wordsworth markets the healthy body and the acutely sensible body, much as the prostitute sells the sexualized body. Much like the commodified bodies of Bartholomew Fair, the prostitute serves as a bodily double that reveals Wordsworth’s own poetic identity as caught up in the commodity culture that he critiques as characteristic of urban experience.

While the panorama, advertisements, and prostitute reflect the construction of the poetic identity, the Blind Beggar appears as perhaps the most unsettling double in the text besides the urban fair. Indeed, the Blind Beggar scene is one of the most

³⁷ As Rosenbaum points out, Mary Darby Robinson, an actress and poet of the Romantic period “shadows the figure of Mary Robinson of Buttermere in Book 7,” and serves as a reminder of Wordsworth’s fear of prostituting his art (50). Like the prostitute, the poet is “part of the marketplace, an identifiable professional type” (Rosenbaum 44).

examined passages of Book 7, and scholars offer a wide variety of interpretations.³⁸ The scene is particularly important as a representation of both poetic crisis and bodily crisis. To begin with, the Blind Beggar mirrors Wordsworth's self-conscious construction of the poetic self. The Beggar displays a sign: "upon his chest / wearing a written paper, to explain / The story of the man and who he was" (7.614-16). Although the Blind Beggar is not commodified to the extent of his urban counterparts, the prostitute and the monstrous bodies of the fair, his "written paper" nonetheless serves as an advertisement, an appeal to his audience for economic sustenance. The Beggar's story is the commodity that the spectator essentially purchases. In this way, Wordsworth is more closely connected to the Beggar than to the other doubles of the city, particularly in the way his own writing offers a commodified story of himself. As Mary Jacobus indicates, *The Prelude*—and, I would add, the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*—is a "self-advertisement" (*Romanticism* 234). *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, his story of "the man and who he was," is also an advertisement, in a sense, of his role and experience as a poet. The thirteen-book poem offers an extensive and carefully constructed depiction of the poetic self. Similarly, the "Preface" in effect advertises Wordsworth as the properly sensible and constrained poet who is able to enlighten and

³⁸ As Galperin states, the Blind Beggar scene is the "most overdetermined [...] encounter in the Wordsworthian oeuvre"—"for all its demonstrable yield critically and theoretically," the encounter with the Blind Beggar "is also an exegetical dead end" (38). Lucy Newlyn claims the scene "is the most unaccountable, most traumatic, of his 'spots of time'" (181). Scholars examine the scene quite differently, too, some arguing that the scene is a positive experience, others contending that it is a traumatic experience of crisis, while others simply argue for its importance as an examination of the way the imagination works. For example, Gregory Dart argues that the Beggar is "a symbol of heroic resistance to the city," "the perfect, the only, antidote to the modern culture of self-advertisement" (142). However, Stelzig argues that the Beggar "is inflated into an apocalyptic image of the cognitive and even metaphysical limits of human understanding" that comprises "an arresting moment of stark sublimity that threatens to catapult Wordsworth right out of his account of the city" (191). Agathocleous contends that the scene "not only presents a failure of the imagination but most vividly acknowledges the relation of this kind of poetic crisis to the preponderance of difference in the city" (102). For other readings of the Blind Beggar scene, see Bruhn (176-77), Gassenmeier and Gurr (314), Stokes (215-18), King (67), Heffernan (440), Thomas Weiskel (36), Bate (385-86), Sharpe (18-20), and A. B. England (603-605).

ameliorate the “affections” of his audience (598). The Beggar’s story then mirrors Wordsworth’s own story of himself and suggests that Wordsworth has manufactured a poetic identity, which he advertises and presents in his own writing.

But the Blind Beggar scene also presents a bodily crisis that challenges the construction of the poetic body. As many scholars have recognized, the passage offers a representation of the sublime,³⁹ but it particularly presents the urban, neural sublime as the poet is “Abruptly [...] smitten with the view” of the beggar (7.612). Upon seeing the Beggar, the poet’s “mind did at this spectacle turn round / As with the might of waters” (7.617-18). In this moment, the spectacle of the Beggar creates a neurologically charged experience for the poet in which his senses reel, creating a physiological dizzying effect. While Wordsworth indicates that his “mind” reels at the sight, the passage presents a physiological reaction to the spectacle, as well. Wordsworth exhibits a brief moment of nervous response. However, this moment of neural sublimity does not necessarily come from the sensual excess of the city. Rather it originates in part from the Beggar’s lack of the functioning sensual organs of sight—his blindness calls attention to Wordsworth’s own dependence on his sight and, more generally, the organic, sensible body of the poet. The body of the beggar—one that experiences a sensory deprivation—compels Wordsworth to reexamine his own sense of self, his own organically sensitive body. As the Blind Beggar and his sign reveal a “type / Or emblem of the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe” (7.618-20), the urban body of the Beggar threatens to make the poet examine what he knows of himself, of the particular constructions of the self and the body. This moment precedes

³⁹ See, for example Bruhn (176), Stokes (215), Weiskel (36), Bate (385), and England (604).

Wordsworth's final confrontation with the urban body in the Bartholomew Fair scene. Both scenes compel the poet to reflectively examine the natural body with suspicion.

As these unsettling doubles and the disturbances of the urban sublime reveal, Wordsworth's sense of nature and of the body are constructs commodified in the literary market through poetic representation. These moments of disturbance in the urban setting threaten to reveal the supposedly healthy organic body of the poet as in fact an ideological body that is not under its own command but rather is constituted in and through historical structures, forces, and contingencies, such as the capitalist marketplace. In this case, the body is sublimely beyond the grasp of any individual. This realization alternately excites, terrifies, and overwhelms Wordsworth and creates a physiological and poetic crisis. In the neural sublime of the city the poet sees his sense organs where they really are—not contained within the body but out there in the “supernatural” social, economic, and political organs of the urban community, nation, and wider world. When examined in this way, urban sensibility and the structures it reveals throw not only the body but Wordsworth's whole sense of identity and of nature into a fit. The poet's nervous fit in the city is, in essence, both physiological and ideological.

Conclusion

Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude* depicts a manifestation of urban sensibility that threatens to *disorganize* the body amid the excess of the urban scene. If body and mind together formulate imagination through a disciplined acute sensibility in Wordsworth's formulation of the proper poetic body, then an inability to control the physiological response to the city creates a bodily and imaginative crisis, which

Wordsworth presents as a result of metropolitan life and modern culture. Although Wordsworth's representations impose a certain narrative of the city and of the urban body as chaotic, sickly, and enthralled by the commodities and spectacles of urban commercial culture, the text simultaneously reveals how Wordsworth's own sense of nature and the poetic body are compromised—both embedded and participating in the cultural forces of Romantic-era society. Thus, urban sensibility allows the pedestrian poet to recognize—however unwillingly—the power structures that control and bind the bodily and poetic self. Despite Wordsworth's fears of imaginative torpor as a result of the excesses of the city, this poetic crisis is generative, revealing the imaginative value in losing control.

Chapter 2:

Disordered Sensibility and De Quincey's Urban Body in

Confessions of an English Opium-Eater

In "Casuistry" (1839), Thomas De Quincey contends that cases of nervous disease were developing in "growing frequency" in large cities such as London and were "generated by the furnace of London life" (347, 349). According to De Quincey, "The great cities of Europe, perhaps London beyond all others, under the modern modes of life and business, create a vortex of preternatural tumult, a rush of frenzy and excitement which is fatal to far more than ever hear of as express victims to that system" (346). While he admits that nervous disease was certainly experienced in the country, De Quincey points to the increasing cases of the illness caused by modern urban life, specifically expressed and prevalent in large urban centers where excessive stimulation and excitement afflict the disposition of urban inhabitants (347-349). De Quincey's essay thus describes the urban form of nervous disease that is the focus of this study on urban sensibility. While he addresses the phenomenon in "Casuistry" with an authoritative commentary similar to the medical tracts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, De Quincey also represents urban sensibility from the interested perspective of personal experience in his earlier and more famous work, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). Moreover, *Confessions* reveals an underlying pleasure in the nervous experiences of urban sensibility.

Although most interpretations of De Quincey's text focus readings of the sickly body on the effects of opium addiction, I examine *Confessions* as rather a representation of the same urban experience of nervous disease that "Casuistry" addresses. Similar to

Wordsworth's poet in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, the opium-eater already possesses an acute sensibility, but in *Confessions* it becomes excessive and demonstrably nervous amid the tumult and stimulation of the city, resulting in the development of a body of excess. Turning to opium as a salve for his nervous complaints, De Quincey temporarily experiences a pleasurable urban sensibility that thrives in the markets and streets of London and stimulates the imagination, but that eventually becomes consumed by the excess of the city and the commodity form of opium. Complicated by addiction to opium, De Quincey's urban sensibility moreover haunts both body and mind, when the sensual impressions of the city manifest themselves in intense nervous symptoms.¹

In exploring the representations of urban sensibility in *Confessions*, I argue that De Quincey imagines an urban body, defined by an acute sensibility, but also by abjection and nervousness, which develop in the course of the writer's peripatetic explorations of the modern city. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* features a concern for maintaining and regaining what Paul Youngquist calls the "proper body," a Romantic-period "installation of a norm of embodiment" that served "to regulate the agencies of bodies in liberal society" (xx). De Quincey's depictions of the properly "English" body highlight norms of embodiment that the writer strives at times to regain. The exposition of the text presents a desire to cultivate the "proper body," to rid the body of the excesses of opium addiction and urban sensibility. Yet, *Confessions* reveals that the sickly, distorted, and nervous urban body of the opium-eater in its very excess and liminality is presented as preferable to the "proper body."

¹ Although I refer to De Quincey's body and his urban sensibility in this chapter, I am specifically addressing the figure of De Quincey presented in the text rather than the actual De Quincey. As an autobiographical narrative of the writer's struggles with opium addiction (and, as I contend, nervous sensibility), *Confessions* offers a carefully and self-consciously constructed representation of the opium-eater figure of De Quincey.

Although most readings of *Confessions* focus on representations of addiction, De Quincey's nervous, hypochondriacal body has been addressed by scholars, going as far back as Cecilia Hennel Hendrick's 1945 article, "Thomas De Quincey, Symptomatologist."² Karen M. Lever also identifies De Quincey as a melancholic and hypochondriacal figure and argues that this, among other characteristics, registers him as a gothic hero in *Confessions* and *Suspiria de Profundis* (332-33). In *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose*, Peter Melville Logan emphasizes De Quincey's nervousness further, contending the *Confessions* is a "full-scale nervous narrative—that is, one in which the nervous narrator is the central narrating voice" (3). Similarly, George C. Grinnell's *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* addresses De Quincey's representations of hypochondria in *Confessions* and other texts, including "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant," and argues that despite De Quincey's desire to cover up his hypochondria, a rhetoric of illness and well-being in these texts reveals a preoccupation with the nervous disease (120-22). Indeed, in the *Confessions*, De Quincey's preoccupation with nervousness seems as pronounced as his interest in depicting opium addiction. Moreover, as I contend in this chapter, nervous disease is also depicted as a symptom of urban life and an unlikely source of bodily and imaginative pleasure.

Cultivating Sensibility and the Proper Body

Similar to William Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, De Quincey's *Confessions* represents an ideal form of sensibility particular to the writer and defined by a sensitivity to sensory impressions and a capacity for deep sympathy toward others.

² Hendricks notes De Quincey's clinical language and knowledge in his writings, and points to an instance in which he describes his own hypochondria (830).

This sensibility is also represented as a disciplined sensibility of controlled emotion and mediated by a philosophical, scholarly mind.³ This depiction of ideal sensibility engages in concepts of the proper body, which for De Quincey comprised a middle-class, English masculinity and is represented perhaps best by the poet Wordsworth, a figure who continuously emerges throughout the *Confessions* in minor or peripheral references. De Quincey continuously attempts to lay claim to this ideal body of sensibility, but as his urban nervousness and addiction to opium progress, it slips further beyond his grasp.

In support of the narrator's claim to a healthy sensibility, the text depicts De Quincey as exhibiting deep sympathy for other human beings and an ability to develop intimate connections with other Londoners. During his first and most impoverished stay in the metropolis, he cultivates highly sympathetic relationships with what he depicts as fellow sufferers, such as the little girl and the prostitute, Ann, who both hold a substantial place in his memories and nightmares of the city. For example, in describing his interest in the poor and starving child, De Quincey indicates that she "was neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners," but that, as a person of great compassion, he did not need "the embellishments of novel-accessaries [sic] to conciliate [his] affections" (20). According to De Quincey, "plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough for me: and I loved the child because she was my partner in wretchedness" (20). This passage describes an intense empathy for fellow human beings who suffer the harsh realities of the world. But it also presents a notion of the affections of the acutely sensible subject as cultivated by a pure

³ Of course, De Quincey's formulation of this ideal sensibility is not as explicitly stated as Wordsworth's presentation of poetic sensibility in the "Preface." However, the *Confessions* nonetheless maintains this notion of the proper body of sensibility in the background of De Quincey's narrative.

and philosophical love of other human beings. Even the “plain[est]” and “humblest” of individuals can claim a right to the affection of others simply through mutual humanity. As a man with a natural, acute sensibility, he has compassion for the most normal and unexceptional of human subjects.

This notion of a profound love of others is further elaborated in De Quincey’s discussion of his friendship with prostitutes during his first excursion to London. He states, “I feel no shame, nor any reason to feel it, in avowing that I was then on familiar and friendly terms with many women in that unfortunate condition” (20). In claiming a friendship with socially rejected individuals, like prostitutes, De Quincey needs “feel no shame” because his sympathy is indicative of an elevated sensibility. By claiming a human love for individuals of destitution and unfortunate circumstance, the writer is able to express an uncommon capacity for the moral quality of sympathy while simultaneously distancing himself from accusations of carnal lust in his friendship with these women. According to De Quincey, his own body and morals have not been compromised by the improper, corrupted bodies of others. He continues,

But the truth is, that at no time of my life have I been a person to hold myself polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape: on the contrary, from my very earliest youth it has been my pride to converse familiarly, *more Socratico*, with all human beings, man, woman, and child, that chance might fling in my way: a practice which is friendly to the knowledge of human nature, to good feelings, and to that frankness of address which becomes a man who would be thought a philosopher. (20)

Reiterating a deep love of humanity and the ability to connect with other human beings, despite their social class, gender, and circumstances, this passage emphasizes a philosophical form of sensibility that comprises a love of fellow man on principle, a

moral liberalism put into “practice” through a “friendly” acceptance of others.⁴ De Quincey here claims a particular type of sensibility associated with poets and “philosopher[s],” which becomes part of his own performance as a scholar and philosopher. But this excerpt also indicates De Quincey possesses a natural sensibility, expressed even “from [his] very earliest youth.” Reminiscent of Wordsworth’s organic sensibility, De Quincey’s profound sensibility is similarly represented as occurring naturally (from birth) but also cultivated (as a “practice”). The scholar-philosopher takes “pride” in his sensibility as it demonstrates a natural capacity for sympathy and for a measured sensitivity. In this passage, De Quincey thus cultivates an authorial identity similar to Wordsworth’s sensible poet.

In addition to sympathy, another way De Quincey distinguishes his own philosophical sensibility is through an emphasis on controlled sensation and emotion. In the “Preliminary Confessions” section, De Quincey professes to maintain a sensibility that is capable of feeling intense emotion and contemplation, but refrains from the display or indulgence of that emotion as a means of constitutional moderation. For example, in recounting his memories of the prostitute, Ann, De Quincey says,

I do not often weep: for not only do my thoughts on subjects connected with the chief interests of man daily, nay hourly, descend a thousand fathoms “too deep for tears,” [...] but also, I believe that all minds which have contemplated such subjects as deeply as I have done, must, for their own protection from under despondency, have early encouraged and cherished some tranquilizing belief as to the future balances and their hieroglyphic meanings of human sufferings. (23)

The poet-philosopher thinks and feels intensely, expressing an acute sensibility, but must maintain composure, a self-possession of his emotions. The direct quotation, “too deep for tears,” from Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality” Ode, alludes to the

⁴ For more on the complexity of De Quincey’s representations of philosophical ethics and liberalism, see Laurence S. Lockeridge’s *The Ethics of Romanticism* (249-278).

same acute sensibility that Wordsworth represents in many of his poems and which he explicitly addresses in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth’s representation of poetic sensibility is simultaneously acute, yet also “modified and directed”—controlled and managed—by the enhanced mind (“Preface,” 598). De Quincey similarly presents an acute sensibility, but that is disciplined by the philosopher in order to maintain physiological and mental control.

The passage also demonstrates emotional control as an important means of keeping the nerves intact. According to the passage, De Quincey does “not often weep” because to do so would cause him to sink under his “despondency” and melancholy. He must protect his sensibility—his nerves—when he contemplates such subjects so “deeply.” Intense emotional and intellectual contemplation potentially can disrupt the physiological operations of the body’s nervous system. In this way, De Quincey also demonstrates an awareness of the cultural and contemporary medical connections of a potential susceptibility to nervous disease among those possessing an acute sensibility. In order to make sure his acute sensibility does not shift into nervousness, he must regulate his sensations and emotions. In this passage, De Quincey serves as his own physician in a way, treating and managing this enhanced sensibility so it doesn’t slip into expressions of nervous disease. The word “tranquilizing” takes on a medicinal connotation here, suggesting the philosopher’s mind possesses a therapeutic aptitude. The mind mediates the body’s sensations and manages the physiological operations of the sensible body. The words “protection” and “balances” also suggest this medicinal role of the mind. In order to protect himself from the excesses of acute sensibility, the subject must maintain a mental and physical balance.

But the need to refrain from the display of excessive emotion also reveals a fear of feminine excess—he must keep his emotions in check in order to maintain masculine composure. As Logan contends, “sensitivity to others invites the dangers of nervous collapse” because it leaves the individual vulnerable to constant impressions of suffering in the world (95). This “dangerous sympathetic ability” was the “birthright of the female” in Romantic-era Britain, which in part explains the association of nervous disorders with femininity (Logan 95). Refraining from weeping establishes and maintains a masculine, controlled sensibility akin to Wordsworth’s, while also protecting the individual from excessively indulging in intense emotions and thereby succumbing to nervous illness. De Quincey’s “solution to the problematic immersion within sensibility, then, is to maintain an intellectual detachment from his sensations and to study them from afar in order to escape their constitutive effect” (Logan 96). A *proper* philosophical sensibility maintains this balance and allows the subject to preserve the proper, masculine body.

For De Quincey, the proper body is definitively white, English, middle-class, educated, and masculine, fitting with the cultural and political power structures of Romantic-era England. While he never explicitly addresses the proper body, the text hints at this established mode of embodiment through representations of references to class and name-dropping, self-representation, and the contrast of *improper* bodies, like prostitutes and the “Malay” he encounters in “The Pains of Opium.” Allusions to the opium-eater’s access to a university education—a privilege largely reserved for the middle and upper-class males of England—appear at several points in the text, including Oxford (7, 13, 55), Eton (7, 31), and Cambridge (55). Moreover, the text

repeatedly demonstrates the narrator's extensive classical education through references to literary, scientific, and philosophic texts, philosophers, and poets.⁵ De Quincey also cultivates a language of respectability, demonstrating that he only acquires his knowledge from "respectable" individuals like the "London druggists" who, as he claims, offer credible information about the proliferation of opium use (3).

De Quincey especially addresses an English respectability at the beginning of the *Confessions* in his statement to the reader. He particularly emphasizes his own Englishness, as well as the readers', in an attempt to present himself as not only respectable like the reader, but also his literary work as a distinctly English text. But in this formulation, he also indicates the notion of the respectable English body: "Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings, than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that 'decent drapery,' which time or indulgence to human frailty, may have drawn over them" (De Quincey 1). Although he speaks of his reader's sense of propriety, he identifies himself as an "English writer with English feelings" (Jagoe 23). He recognizes the indecency of exposing moral transgression as "spectacle" and, as a decent Englishman himself, claims he would never commit such an offensive intrusion on the sensibility of his readers. As this quotation suggests, the writer recognizes the part he must perform to demonstrate to his readers his own respectability as an author. But, as Eva-Lynn Alicia Jagoe contends, De Quincey's *Confessions* also present a "nationalism [...] defined in

⁵ These references proliferate throughout the *Confessions*. For a quick sample, see references to Coleridge (5, 70), the political economist, David Ricardo (5, 65), and "Scottish Professors" (5), as well as Shakespeare (45) and Kant (51, 55). He also includes quotations by Milton (10, 30, 70), Shelley (16, 62), Juvenal (29), and Wordsworth (2, 49, 56). The text furthermore emphasizes the writer's knowledge of the Greek language (41), Greek verse—"Greek Sapphics or Alcaics" (16)—and Greek and Roman mythology (36), among other ancient civilizations.

contradistinction to the markedly different behaviors of the exhibitionist French and Germans, whose self-disclosures he finds to be shamefully indecent” (23). According to De Quincey, the French and German “confessions” in literature present “acts of gratuitous self-humiliation” and are “tainted” by “spurious and defective sensibility” (1). His own text claims to offer “confessions” that uphold a respectable, English sensibility by presenting the account for “useful and instructive” purposes rather than indulgent entertainment (De Quincey 1).

But the use of bodily metaphors for moral and ethical traits in this passage also scripts a comparison of the proper versus the improper body. De Quincey suggests that the English, as a decent people, are repulsed by the display of the excessive, grotesque body. The spectacle of this body “obtrud[es] on [the readers’] notice,” presenting its “ulcers and scars” unabashedly to the public (De Quincey 1). Although they are presented as moral scars, the text here refers to a physical disgust, as well. By “tearing away that ‘decent drapery,’” this excessive body discloses a spectacle of excess that, according to English sensibilities, should be concealed (De Quincey 1). The text reveals a cultural desire to regulate bodies toward specific norms and the indecent body represented here, through its exposed ulcers and scars, disturbs English notions of healthy sensibility and embodiment. Yet De Quincey claims from the beginning that his accounts do not commit such acts of indecency because they are the confessions of an *English* opium-eater. The grotesque, indecent body is presented as the body of the Other. As Jagoe contends, De Quincey “describes the desired literary and cultural characteristics of English identity as distinct from continental”—and, I would add, Eastern—“mores and their insidious infiltration into English sensibilities” (23). But, as

the *Confessions* reveals, the improper body is not just European or Eastern, but is also developed in the urban centers of England and, despite his efforts otherwise, develops in the opium-eater himself. In order to prevent his readers from viewing his confessions as revolting, De Quincey must perform bodily and sensibility norms, which is essentially why he repeatedly reminds his readers of his education, class, and his philosophical sympathy toward others. He must market himself carefully to his audience, using the language of propriety, but also of dominant English embodiment.

One way that the textual De Quincey performs these norms is through the initial address to the readers, which presents the narrator as engaging in a philosophically and scientifically instructive document. He begins, “I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove, not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and instructive” (De Quincey 1). The *Confessions* provide a “record” rather than a story, demonstrating the author’s moral and philosophical “application” of the information therein. The beginning then presents the text as controlled and written from an objective perspective. As Curtis Perry suggests, De Quincey’s introduction portrays the text as “a controlled, cautionary tale complete with a moral to sum up the actions presented” (811). De Quincey’s “instructive” representation of the “record” of his experiences not only demonstrates a masterly control over emotions and the body on a generic level, but it also presents his account as a sort of medical documentation that can be used to treat others who succumb to the same affliction of addiction. De Quincey even quotes medical doctors at several points in the *Confessions* to help further

establish its generic use.⁶ Thus, in publishing his confessions he claims a selfless and informative intention formed out of the best interest in his readers and maintaining the propriety of English sensibility.

Furthermore, De Quincey also performs an English masculinity as part of his sensibility in the introduction to the *Confessions*, maintaining that, despite his exposure to excessive pharmaceutical indulgences, he possesses a physical and mental vigor:

I may affirm, that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth I was made an intellectual creature: and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my school-boy days. If opium-eating be a sensual pleasure, and if I am bound to confess that I have indulged in it to an excess, not yet *recorded* of any other man, it is no less true, that I have struggled against this fascinating enthrallment with a religious zeal, and have, at length, accomplished what I never yet heard attributed to any other man—have untwisted, almost to its final links, the accursed chain which fettered me. Such a self-conquest may reasonably be set off in counterbalance to any kind or degree of self-indulgence. (2, his emphasis)

As in the passage on philosophical sensibility previously discussed, this quotation from the introduction represents an innate sensibility but that also has been cultivated by the writer throughout his life. His intellectual character is held as a guide to appropriate “pursuits and pleasures.” De Quincey’s mind regulates his baser desires. For, as he proclaims, his opium use “was not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degree” (De Quincey 6). De Quincey affirms medicinal purposes rather than the pursuit of “sensual pleasure” in his consumption of opium.

But this passage also emphasizes a masculine physiological and mental strength that enables the opium-eater to regain control of his body. As Daniel O’Quinn contends, the opium-eater’s “extraordinary resolution to free himself cancels any suggestion that he lacks the masculine resolution to control his desires” (264). According to De

⁶ For example, one such reference occurs at the end of the introduction, in which he quotes “Awsiter, apothecary to Greenwich-hospital” and his notes on opium (De Quincey 4).

Quincey, his addiction and “indulge[nce]” in opium has exceeded that of “any other man,” at least that has been recorded, suggesting that he has an exceptionally strong fortitude. The emphasis De Quincey places on the word “*recorded*” admits to an acknowledgment that there are undoubtedly others that have “indulged” as excessively as he has, but it also stresses the magnitude of such a feat of personal constitution. Addressing his ability to free himself of an addiction early in the introduction releases him up front from charges of moral or physical weakness. That he accomplishes this with a “religious zeal” further excuses him from any accusations of a lack of moral character. Moreover, O’Quinn contends that the opium-eater has released himself from the “chain” of addiction, which emphasizes his humanity and “restor[es] his dignity following a struggle of subordination, in large part to make” him “available as an exemplary figure” (264). The opium-eater’s constitutional strength in particular makes him an appropriate example for others wanting to recover from opium addiction. This claim to uncommon fortitude asserts a masculine and healthy sensibility that has enabled him to regain control. In addition to demonstrating a philosophical mind and manly physiological stamina, De Quincey’s claim of unfettering the “chain” of addiction sets up the narrator of the *Confessions* as a figure who has recovered the proper, English body and rejected the improper, abject body of addiction.

As these readings suggest, notions of the healthy body and sensibility structure De Quincey’s representation of the authorial self. De Quincey’s consistent appeals to a deep, philosophical sympathy for others in the “Preliminary Confessions” indicate his struggles to maintain a healthy sensibility and the proper body. While he tries to lay claim to them at multiple points in the text, especially the introduction, he also must

admit to a loss of these structuring principles while in the throes of addiction and nervous affliction. The urban body of the opium-eater can never fully regain or maintain the proper body or sensibility. In many ways, *Confessions* comprises an admission to the loss of controlled sensibility and embodiment and a representation of what this loss entails, namely access to the type of imaginative vision Wordsworth describes in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. In *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852*, Gavin Budge argues that the “Romantic individual’s claim to possess transcendental vision is haunted by a bodily spectre; the possibility that, far from being clear-sightedly superior to modern society’s collective delirium, they might themselves be subject to hallucinations brought on by medical conditions such as dyspepsia or overstrained nerves” (Budge 7). In contrast, I argue that in De Quincey’s text, the spectre that haunts the opium-eater is that of the “proper body” rather than the monstrous or sickly body. It provides a constant reminder of the part he must perform as a writer for the reading public. In contrast, his addiction and “overstrained nerves” represent the distorted body of the modern urban man, who has essentially been cut off from the structuring tenets of a vanishing society.

Urban Sensibility: Developing the Nervous Body

The text reveals the first descriptions of nervous affliction and of the loss of control over the body in the “Preliminary Confessions” section. For De Quincey, bodily affliction begins primarily during his residence in London. Although he presents his ailments as a result of poverty and hunger—and certainly they are also that in this early stage of his ill health—De Quincey particularly depicts these symptoms as fueled by the modern metropolis. In London, he first begins to develop his urban body—a nervous

embodiment of excess and abjection, revealed in vivid dreams, twitching, stomach ailments, and physical collapse. Rather than merely the consequences of intense hunger and penury, the intense physical sufferings of the young De Quincey are revealed to be the results of nervous disease, an illness brought on and cultivated by urban experience. While his heightened sensibility helps him to sympathize with the sufferings of other city dwellers and to form intimate bonds with them, it ultimately exacerbates his own sufferings, throwing him into a state of extreme weakness, illness, and dejection. The city distorts the sensible body. Thus, early in the text De Quincey engages the discourse of urban sensibility in a representation of the blurring borders of the urban body.

Upon running away from home to the great metropolis of London, the young De Quincey finds himself in a pecuniary pinch, and soon is penniless and homeless. In this experience of poverty, he finds he must get food and sleep where he can. During these early impoverished experiences of the city he begins to develop increasingly debilitating nervous symptoms. One of the first symptoms of nervous affliction to disturb the young De Quincey is sleep deprivation as a result of “the tumultuousness of [his] dreams,” which he describes as similar to his later opium-induced dreams, though not quite as “awful” (17). Although one of the causes of the young writer’s tumultuous dreams seems to be from “sleeping rough” in the city, the increasing frequency of these nightmares—which allow him to only sleep in short intervals, which he calls “*dog-sleep*” due to being able “to hear [him]self moaning”—suggests an increasing nervous agitation. The experience of vivid nightmares was considered a common symptom of nervous illness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷ In this passage, De

⁷ Several nerve doctors of the period address intense dreams as a common indicator of the nervous ailment. For example, Henry St. John Neale’s 1796 *Practical Dissertations on Nervous Complaints* [...]

Quincey reveals early in the *Confessions* that he experiences “awful” nightmares before he ever even tries opium, both foreshadowing these later episodes and indicating that his horrible dreams may also be caused originally by hypochondria or nervous disease. These disorderly dreams demonstrate the powerful effect of the modern city on the urban subject, as it is not long after De Quincey’s arrival in the city that he begins to experience the nervousness of urban life. Although they indicate in some ways an affliction of the mind, De Quincey’s dreams are figured more specifically as a physiological extension of the nervous body and later formulate an important part of De Quincey’s messy, abject body. Moreover, the nightmares exhibit an encroaching disturbance of bodily control in the city.

The young De Quincey experiences further nervous symptoms that dramatically begin to irritate the writer’s physical constitution, namely in the form of stomach ailments. He reveals that his increasing sleeplessness is also caused by “a hideous sensation” of “twitching” in “the region of the stomach” that “compelled [him] violently to throw out [his] feet for the sake of relieving it” (De Quincey 17). Here he describes his first experiences of stomach complaints, but as De Quincey’s time of habitation in the city increases, so do his stomach symptoms, suggesting an increasing nervousness. Many physicians and scientists of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain believed nervous diseases to be rooted in the stomach and that one of the worst symptoms of nervous disease was “a weakness of the stomach and bowels” (Thomson

contends the nervous patient often “starts in his sleep, and often wakes from his slumbers terribly affrighted with the horrors of his dreams” (48). Alexander Thomson also indicates that “the sleep is much interrupted with dreams” in nervous patients (12).

11).⁸ The stomach pains and twitching described by De Quincey in this and other passages of the text closely resemble abdominal-area symptoms of nervous illness, suggesting the text engages in the discourse of nervousness. According to Thomas Trotter, the “dyspeptick stomach” of the nervous patient exhibits a “train of phenomena,” including “spasms of the stomach” that “torment the body” (210, 213). In *Confessions*, this “hideous” twitching or spasming of the stomach elicits a “violent” reaction from the young De Quincey, as it produces intense pain (17). In this moment, the young writer’s body is physically contorted by nervous affliction.

Indeed, even after De Quincey leaves London briefly to acquire financial support, he continues to experience severe stomach complaints, despite his access to food, further suggesting this pain as the continuously nervous effects of the city on the urban body. For example, he claims to suffer from nausea and vomiting for quite some time well after he has regained access to nutrition: “This effect from eating what approached to a meal, I continued to feel for weeks: or, when I did not experience any nausea, part of what I ate was rejected, sometimes with acidity, sometimes immediately, and without any acidity” (32).⁹ De Quincey’s descriptions of his continued stomach

⁸ While certainly not every stomach ailment was attributed to nervous disease in the period, suffering of the stomach was considered a key symptom of nervousness. Some physicians claimed this was due to a copious amount of nerves existing in the stomach region of the body. Thomson argues that “a disease which depends upon irritability,” such as nervous disease, “derives its origin from the stomach and bowels,” which is “strongly confirmed by the textures and offices of those parts” (12). “Furnished with numerous branches of nerves,” the stomach and bowels “are extremely susceptible of irritation” (Thomson 12). According to Thomas Trotter, “Anatomists” “discovered an unusual share of nerves about the upper orifice of the stomach; from which it was thought by some philosophers to be the seat of the soul” (208-209). While medical scientists addressed these theories in their medical tracts, the connection between stomach complaints and nervous disease was fairly culturally accepted. De Quincey’s representations of physical illness engage in the discourse on nervous disease and present the opium-eater’s body as also demonstrably nervous.

⁹ This representation also reflects medical discourse on the symptoms of nervous illness. For example, according to Trotter, “acidity” was a problem in the stomach of the nervous patient: “the acidity will increase so as to become painful; the food will remain undigested, and uneasiness, and inflation of the stomach will succeed” (213, 211). De Quincey’s representations incorporate similar language to that of

pain indicates the unremitting effects of the city on the constitution of the young philosopher. But they also reveal the developing urban body of abjection. De Quincey's body oozes and leaks, presenting the physical "ulcers" of the urban body that could potentially be "revolting" to the sensibilities of his readers (1). His body, susceptible to the intense suffering of nervous illness, ceases to have fixed borders both physically and symbolically. Its liminality opens him to physiological excess and disorder, to the nervous effects of the urban environment. While De Quincey presents his physical symptoms in objective language, much like that of a contemporary physician, the representation nonetheless exhibits the bodily excesses of the urban subject. The descriptions of his experience reveal not only nervous illness inflicted by the city, but also that he is no longer in possession of the proper body.

Not only is De Quincey no longer in control of his body here, but he is also no longer in possession of his masculinity. Despite his persistent attempts to claim a masculine, intellectual control over the body, De Quincey's body is feminized through the experience of urban nervousness. De Quincey's most violent nervous response in "Preliminary Confessions" occurs in a near-fatal nervous convulsion. After walking with the prostitute, Ann, through Oxford Street, the young De Quincey suddenly became "unusually ill and faint," and stopped to rest on some steps (22). After falling "backwards," he felt intense "sensations" and "an inner conviction of the liveliest kind that without some powerful and reviving stimulus, [he] should either have died on the spot—or should at least have sunk to a point of exhaustion" (22). De Quincey's fainting sensations represent a convulsion or fit, an extreme nervous response to the city and

the medical physician, demonstrating not only a probable awareness of the medical discourse on nervous disease, but also De Quincey's efforts to maintain a scholarly and objective "report" of his experiences (1).

what he earlier calls the “harsh, cruel, and repulsive” “outside air and frame-work of London society” (21).¹⁰ In this scene, De Quincey describes a body of excess, of intense nervous sensibility affected by the cruelties of London environment and society. But this excessive body also appears to be somewhat feminized in De Quincey’s experiences of intense nervousness. This fainting fit creates a complete loss of control over the operations of his body, but also associates him with what was considered to be a feminine symptom of nervous disease.

While De Quincey represents an intense experience of urban nervousness in “Preliminary Confessions,” this physiological response to the city does not seem to be brought on the by the excessive stimulation of spectacles, commodities, and crowds.¹¹ Rather this nervous response seems to stem from De Quincey’s experiences of abject poverty and street life in the city. By running away to the city, De Quincey (perhaps unwittingly) takes on the form of the lower-class body, wandering the streets of the metropolis in search of sustenance with fellow dejected friends, like the prostitutes and little girl. These other improper, dejected bodies of the city mirror De Quincey’s own excessive body of nervous urban sensibility. In this early experience of the city, De Quincey is not only unable to maintain his middle-class status, but moreover a “decent,” middle-class body. Although the representation of social class is complex, especially in the relation of the opium-eater figure, *Confessions* nonetheless reveals a struggle to maintain the tempered body of bourgeois masculinity. In this section of the text, De

¹⁰ Fainting fits and convulsions were common symptoms of nervous disease in the Romantic period, to the point that they even served as an index in literature for nervous and sentimental characters. But this was also a medically-documented symptom. For example, see George Cheyne’s *The English Malady* (190; 218).

¹¹ Nor is it advanced by the effects of opium addiction that De Quincey presents as causing intense bodily agony later, as the young writer has not yet taken his first dose of opium.

Quincey instead develops the urban body, a nervous embodiment of excess and blurred borders.

The Pleasures of Urban Sensibility and the Improper Body

While “Preliminary Confessions” relates the painful experiences of the nervous urban body, “The Pleasures of Opium” presents an exuberant account of urban sensibility, shaped by leisurely peripatetic explorations of the metropolis. In this section of the text, De Quincey recounts his first experiences with opium, which, though initially administered for medicinal relief, quickly become indulgences of immense pleasure. Although De Quincey is no longer plagued by the intense pains of the nervous body, he still exhibits an urban body of excess, not only through his immoderate use of opium, but also through urban sensibility. Indeed, “The Pleasures of Opium” consistently presents moments when the urban pedestrian seeks out excessive sensual experiences in the city. Mixed with the consumption of the medicinal commodity, opium, his urban sensibility provides opportunities for sensual pleasure and the development of the imagination.

Throughout this section, opium colludes with urban sensibility to formulate an intensely pleasurable urban experience, in which the subject is more sensually open to the experience of the city and to the imagination. When De Quincey first takes opium, it not only relieves his pain, but also creates bliss:

oh! Heavens! what a revulsion! what an upheaving, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished was now a trifle in my eyes:—this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me—in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. (39)

The punctuation and language of this passage emphasize the revolutionary effects of the drug on the sickly constitution of the subject as bodily experience changes rapidly from intense pain to intense pleasure. The words “revulsion,” “upheaving,” “apocalypse,” and “abyss” register De Quincey’s own slight hesitation in fully accepting the powerful effects of the drug and the lack of personal control over physiological response. But these words simultaneously comprise positive connotations that address the potency of the enjoyment he experiences. They affirm De Quincey’s enthusiasm and the dramatically pleasurable effects of opium. As “The Pleasures of Opium” continues, we see the opium-eater let go and more fully embrace the pleasures of the narcotic and the city.

This passage also represents the multivalent characterization of opium throughout *Confessions*. Here the alleviation of pain now seems inconsequential in comparison to the opium’s ability to generate pleasures. Opium moves from medicinal commodity to an “ethereal drug” capable of generating “divine enjoyment” (Schmid 211; De Quincey 39). As Sanjay Krishnan indicates, opium alternately appears as narcotic and commodity (205). But, according to Charles Rzepka, opium also appears as “something much more than a commodity for personal consumption” or a narcotic—*Confessions* also depicts the drug as “mana to be received with gratitude” (180). De Quincey’s description of the “divine enjoyment” that the opium provides particularly articulates this representation of opium as mana or ichor, as an ethereal object of supernatural experience. De Quincey’s proclaimed inability to find the druggist from whom he buys his first dose of opium and whom he believes “to have evanesced, or evaporated” further affirms this particular mode of opium in the text (38).

Despite De Quincey's initial move from the medicinal commodity form of opium (as it has "vanishe[d]" his pains) to ethereal substance, the commodity characteristic of the drug quickly resurfaces even within representations of the supernatural:

Here was a panacea [...] for all human woes: here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket: portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle: and peace of mind could be sent down in gallons by the mail coach. (39)

As a "panacea," opium takes on both medicinal connotations, but also mythological connotations of a divine substance that could cure all ills.¹² Ecstatic pleasure could thus be purchased at the store "for a penny" and experienced at whim through its "portable" form. De Quincey calls attention to its availability as a commodity that can be transported or traded easily, "sent down" in large quantities "by the mail coach." This representation of the transportation and trade of opium also evokes its characterization in the text as an exotic commodity. As many scholars have pointed out, De Quincey's representations of opium incorporate historical underpinnings of English trade with the east, as well as imaginative expressions of Romantic orientalism in the dream sequences and other scenes of *Confessions*.¹³ According to Krishnan, opium was an "enormously profitable commodity" "produced and distributed by the English East India Company"

¹² Panacea was a goddess in Greek mythology who represented a universal medicine. De Quincey's extensive knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology suggests that he uses the term "panacea" both in this mythological sense, as well as in a divine and pharmaceutical definition. The panacea was also a cure-all elixir sought by alchemists and was linked to their quest for the philosopher's stone and elixir of life. De Quincey's reference to "philosophers" in this passage alludes to this definition of the panacea as occupying both supernatural and scientific connotations.

¹³ For more on scholarship addressing representations of opium as an exotic commodity, see Tim Fulford (249), Rzepka's *Sacramental Commodities: Gift, Text, and the Sublime in De Quincey*, Thomas Schmid's "London's Immortal Druggists: Pharmaceutical Science and Business in Romanticism" (209-222), Barrell's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism*, and Krishnan's "Opium and Empire: The Transports of Thomas de Quincey" (203-243).

and “[g]rown in the newly conquered Indian territories of Bengal and Bihan under the auspices of the company” (205).¹⁴ Opium was thus part of a global commodity market that had become particularly accessible in the imperial city of London. In this passage, part of opium’s ethereal characterization comes from its associations with the exotic. The modern city provides access to the ethereal and exotic through expansions of trade and commercial markets.

Opium also serves in this passage and others as a pharmaceutical commodity, produced in the developing medical market. De Quincey registers this characterization of opium as medicinal commodity when he describes the medical reasons he seeks out opium and his purchase of the remedy from a druggist’s shop in London (38). He also continues to address opium in medical terms throughout *Confessions*. De Quincey’s opium participates in a larger medical market that was rapidly developing in the Romantic period. As Thomas Schmid contends, the “urban landscape was populated with pharmaceutical businesses” as the Romantic “period marked the historical beginnings of a modern drug industry” (209). Rather than disappearing like De Quincey’s “immortal druggist” (38), the pharmacists “proved to be a permanent feature of the London cityscape, and their model of combining trade, manufacturing, scientific research, and retail sales persists in the modern drug corporation” (Schmid 210).¹⁵ Furthermore, Grinnell argues that “supporting and maintaining [a] Romantic medicalization of the self was an abundant marketplace of health manuals,

¹⁴ Moreover, as Krishnan indicates, the “[p]rofits from opium helped secure the precarious gains of British administration and expansion in India in the late eighteenth century” and “created conditions for a more thoroughgoing commercial penetration of Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century” (205).

¹⁵ This heavy pharmaceutical presence in London marks opium as an urban commodity in its commercial significance as a medicinal commodity of the city. But the urban classification of opium also stems from its exotic association through London’s imperial character, as well.

pharmaceutical remedies, and spa treatments, and no shortage of personal instructors in the calisthenics of health”—“[m]edicine and consumerism were sister vocations of a nervous age” (8). Opium takes part in this medical market and commodification of pharmaceutical remedies. For De Quincey, opium’s commodity form makes the “divine” effects of the drug accessible both in price and in portable form. Moreover, as a medicinal object, it can be integrated into or disguised as part of the health economy and maintenance of healthy bodies.

In this role of maintaining health, De Quincey also describes opium as a medicinal commodity that helps regulate sensibility and bodily control. He particularly addresses this in a comparison between the effects of wine versus opium upon the constitution of the subject:

The pleasure given by wine is always mounting, and tending to a crisis, after which it declines: that from opium, when once generated, is stationary for eight or ten hours: the first, to borrow a technical distinction from medicine, is a case of acute—the second, of chronic pleasure: the one is a flame, the other a steady and equable glow. But the main distinction lies in this, that whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary (if taken in a proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession: opium greatly invigorates it. (40)

De Quincey purposefully employs medical language here—and calls attention to this in the passage (“to borrow a technical distinction from medicine”)—to address the normalizing effects of opium on the body. While wine causes a “disorder” and loss of control of physical and “mental faculties,” opium produces not only “chronic pleasure,” but also “exquisite order, legislation, and harmony” of the body. It (at least temporarily) allows the subject to regain bodily self-control. The drug takes on similar qualities to the role of proper organic sensibility addressed by both Wordsworth and De Quincey.

Opium appears here as possessing the ability to normalize and order the body while also enhancing “self-possession” and pleasure. Yet, as the text reveals in the opium-eater’s rambles through the city, the enhancing effects of the opium create acute sensual experiences that expand the borders of the body and result in excess and immense pleasure.

After discovering the “immensity” of the pleasures of opium, De Quincey addresses the way the drug enhanced his already acute sensibility through extensions of sensory receptivity in his experiences at the London opera (39). According to De Quincey, opium increases sensibility through enhancing the mind and thereby the pleasures of sensation: “Now opium, by increasing the activity of the mind generally, increases, of necessity that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure” (45). In addressing the forces of an enhanced mind in combination with augmented sensual receptivity, De Quincey describes opium as enhancing organic sensibility. This is particularly pleasurable for him when he attends the opera. For the opium-eater, this increased sensibility stimulates the imagination, recalling “an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music” and creating new expressions and images of memories that are now “exalted, spiritualized, and sublimed” (45-46). The opium blends with the intensity of the sensations of the opera to produce a sensibility that recreates and enhances rather than merely recalls memory. In this account, the mind and body are both extended, exceeding the typical bounds of sensory and mental experience. The urban body here exhibits a sensual excess but that is exceptionally enjoyable.

In addition to visits to the opera, De Quincey's pleasurable experiences of the effects of opium even more often include peripatetic explorations of the city. In these scenes, the opium-eater wanders through the city markets and streets, enjoying the spectacles and sensations of the metropolis. In one of the text's most interesting illustrations of peripatetic exploration, De Quincey claims that on Saturday nights, after taking a recreational dose of opium, he would "wander forth, without much regarding the direction or distance, to all the markets and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages" (47).¹⁶ According to De Quincey, these excursions were purely for the sake of "witnessing, upon as large a scale as possible, a spectacle with which [his] sympathy was so entire" (47). Like the Parisian *flânerie* of the later nineteenth century, De Quincey's urban rambles in this section are characterized by a mobile and leisurely gaze, focused on consuming the pleasurable spectacle of the urban metropolis. Rather than commodities and advertisements, it is the spectacle of the urban crowd, and particularly of individuals within the market crowds, that garner his attention.

For De Quincey, the urban market is a place where the pedestrian can cultivate sensibility through sympathetic interactions with others. In this scene, De Quincey does more than just voyeuristically observe these lower-class families: "whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without being intrusive, I joined their parties; and gave my opinion upon the matter in discussion, which, if not always judicious, was always

¹⁶ As John Barrell points out, those that De Quincey names the "poor" here are most likely "working poor, probably largely employed as outworkers, and paid only on Saturday afternoons, or evenings when they take their work to the warehouse" (2). According to Barrell, the "market-traders must therefore work late on Saturday nights (and also on Sunday mornings) if the poor are to be able to purchase the necessities of life" (2).

received indulgently” (47). The urban pedestrian here is not a detached observer, but personally and physically interacts with the people of the streets and markets. Interaction here is important to De Quincey’s sense of urban sensibility. He is able to sympathize with others more easily, but is also able to take in a more intimate experience of the city crowd. But the people of the crowd here also reciprocally interact with him in a friendly and courteous way. Their indulgent reception of his advice suggests, in part, that not only are the individuals of the urban crowd friendly, but they are also courteous, demonstrating social mores indicative of English respectability. Indeed, De Quincey contends that “the poor are far more philosophical than the rich”—they demonstrate a philosophical sensibility more akin to what De Quincey identifies in himself (47). The urban crowd in this depiction is not out of control or threatening. Instead of scripting the city as a place of alienation, De Quincey thus presents the urban markets in this passage as a space where the pedestrian could sympathetically connect with others. Tim Fulford contends that De Quincey’s *Confessions* offers a “vision of the city as hell” (55). However, while the representations of bodily pain featured near the beginning of the *Confessions* fit this description, the text also offers positive representations of connection and enjoyment in the city. De Quincey’s depictions of his urban rambles particularly demonstrate a pleasurable experience of the city through urban sensibility.

Moreover, while markets and commodities certainly have their mysteries and problems in *Confessions*, the market scene in “The Pleasures of Opium” provides an opportunity for a brief connection between the spectator and consumers. In the

descriptions of the market, the opium-eater particularly pays attention to the economic transactions of the families he observes:

Many a family party, consisting of a man, his wife, and sometimes one or two of his children, have I listened to, as they stood consulting on their ways and means, or the strength of their exchequer, or the price of household articles. Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. Sometimes there might be heard murmurs of discontent: but far oftener expressions on the countenance, or uttered in words, of patience, hope, and tranquility. (47)

Here the market provides a lens to the daily lives—the struggles and joys—of the urban inhabitant. De Quincey's observations of the lower-class families at the market reveal to him an underlying humanity in the city. The consumers of De Quincey's London market are presented as working and spending to maintain the health and welfare of their families. In this representation, their frugality, perseverance, and mutual love are revealed in their economic consultations and transactions. The reader can detect an admiration in De Quincey's representation of these lower-class market experiences, which are marked with an English decency and sensibility themselves. The market provides a lens to the hopes, desires, and worldview of the common Londoner, but also to the dynamics of the urban community, which the text explicitly depicts admirably and sympathetically. The pedestrian's urban sensibility allows him to be open to the spectacle of the lower classes here. By enhancing both the sensations and the workings of the mind, the opium channels the pedestrian-writer's sensibility into positive experiences of urban life. Although the *Confessions* represents the violent effects of the city on the body of the writer, it also offers glimpses of pleasurable urban experience and embodiment in the city, suggesting the possibilities of the modern metropolis. Urban sensibility can potentially connect the inhabitants of the city.

While De Quincey is able to cultivate sympathetic experience from urban sensibility in the market, this is still primarily an individual experience. Several scholars have questioned De Quincey's sincerity and connection to the members of the market crowd, and rightly so.¹⁷ The reception of De Quincey's friendly suggestions to members of the market crowd regarding their expenses does carry a tinge of class difference, hinting that their tendency to receive them "indulgently" may have been out of social deference to someone of a higher social class (47). Though earnestly and kindly intended, the opium-eater's interference can, in some ways, be perceived as presumptuous and condescending, and actually is so, in a sense. De Quincey's narration does mark social difference. As Barrell contends, the pleasure of the pedestrian opium-eater in this scene "is not at all to pretend to be *one of* an inferior class; it is to pretend to be *like* them, fundamentally the same, but different in all that really concerns one's sense of identity and self esteem" (2). In this scene De Quincey presents himself as middle-class, no longer sleeping rough and experiencing abject poverty in the city.¹⁸ De Quincey himself indicates that he is much more interested in "sympathizing with [the] pleasures" of the poor rather than their poverty, as he had "lately seen too much of" the "pains of poverty" (46). Yet the opium-eater is still able to identify with the lower-class crowd, particularly in relation to their embodiment. As De Quincey still exhibits an improper body here through the excesses of his sensibility and indulgence in opium, he identifies with the working-class crowd's marginality. Although De Quincey represents

¹⁷ For example, see Barrell's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (2-4) and Grinnell's *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* (126-127).

¹⁸ And it is important to note that he always performs a middle-class identity. Even when he is impoverished and starving in London, he still strives to present a proper philosophical and middle class sensibility. Moreover, the constant allusions and objective observations incorporated into De Quincey's relation of his urban experiences also performs this role.

a philosophical sensibility in the working poor, their bodies are nonetheless not the quintessential “proper” body that he presents throughout *Confessions*.

We can particularly see De Quincey’s connection to the London poor in the representation of the spectre of the proper body that subtly arises in this scene. While De Quincey enjoys the pleasures of his enhanced sensibility, he also expresses a fear of the nervous body returning. For example, as he observes the economic fluctuations of the market, he becomes emotionally engaged in the families’ comforts and anxious over their disappointments: “If wages were a little higher, or expected to be so, or the quartern loaf a little lower, or it was reported that onions and butter were expected to fall, I was glad: yet, if the contrary were true, I drew from opium some means of consoling myself” (47). In this moment, the pedestrian turns to his opium as a means of controlling his physiological and emotional responses to the suffering of others. But he also uses the opium in an effort of regaining control of his sensibility and body.¹⁹ As De Quincey earlier indicates, his own need to sympathize with the pleasures of the poor rather than their “distresses or sorrows” recalls painful memories of his own experiences of poverty (46). Sympathizing with their sorrows would have been “oppressive to contemplate,” unlike observing their pleasures, and could potentially thrust him into a state of nervousness (46). In this sense, he fears the return of his nervous symptoms brought on by intense empathy with the lower-class crowd and desperately resorts back to the authority of a healthy, measured sensibility and body. De Quincey uses opium in this passage to control his excessive sensibility in an effort to prevent a nervous response to the scene. The opium serves to calm his heightened

¹⁹ However, as addressed above, De Quincey’s opium reveries, while providing intense sensibility and some control over nervous symptoms, still creates an improper embodiment of excess. He may not experience the painful symptoms of nervous disease, but he still has not attained that of the proper body.

sensibility and to numb his sensations and emotions.²⁰ He can then return to the enjoyable spectacles of the scene.

But the concern over bodies extends further than the opium-eater in this scene. As Grinnell points out, De Quincey's attention to the market prices of basic commodities demonstrates an interest in "record[ing] the effects of poverty upon [the] health" of the poor (126). According to Grinnell, by engaging in the "discourse of political economy" here, De Quincey registers "considerations of the health effects of a capitalist system of wage labor" (246). As Grinnell's interpretation suggests, De Quincey is still playing the role of the scholar here—objectively examining and recording his observations of the lower-class markets and crowd. He distances himself by assuming the role of an economist or medical scientist who studies the effects of the market economy on the health of urban bodies. In this sense, his friendly suggestions on how to divide wages at the market also appears as the advice or prescription of a physician. But this distancing demonstrates De Quincey's own concern over not only maintaining the proper role of the writer (like the physician-poet Wordsworth represents in his poetry and in the "Preface"), but also that of the proper body. The close resemblance between his own improper body of excess and the bodies of the working poor (in their marginality and in the physical effects of poverty) reminds the opium-eater of his own compromised health and struggle to maintain a proper sensibility. He

²⁰ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, opium was sometimes administered to patients struggling with the symptoms of nervous disease. In *A Compendious Medical Dictionary* (1798), Robert A Hooper describes opium as acting "directly upon the nervous power, diminishing the sensibility, irritability, and mobility of the system" (201). De Quincey appears to take an extra dose of opium in this moment for this same purpose of decreasing or altogether preventing an intense nervous reaction. The use of opium to treat nervous disease was controversial, though, as some medical doctors like Trotter noted that initially opium could "suspend pain" but eventually would "feed the disease" of nervousness, creating addiction and exacerbating nervous symptoms (136-137). Opium is presented as having a similar side effect in "The Pains of Opium" section of *Confessions*.

distances himself objectively and philosophically in order to distance himself bodily (or at least in the way he wants to identify himself physically).

But as De Quincey's disclosure at the end of the quotation—that he “drew from opium some means of consoling [him]self”—suggests, he is unable to maintain this objective distance. To begin with, his sympathies with the working-class families and individuals cause the news of any potential economic distress to affect him emotionally, so he consoles his own sorrows with opium. But admitting to having to calm himself also reveals his recognition of the precariousness of his own bodily health. His intense sensibility bears the threat of slipping into nervousness at any time through emotional or physical overstimulation. In these moments, the desire to maintain bodily control overcomes his urban sensibility. The proper body haunts his pleasurable urban experiences. De Quincey therefore turns to opium to regain a sense of control. According to De Quincey, opium can “overrule all feelings into compliance with the master key” (47). While the opium is the “master key” controlling the body here, there is also a sense that, at least in this moment, the opium creates bodily compliance to the power structures that employ the notion of the proper body. De Quincey is still swayed by the force of cultural norms.

Yet, despite these moments when the spectre of proper embodiment emerges, the market scene still reveals the pleasures of the excessive body and undercurrents of subversion. Although De Quincey cannot completely relate to the working poor of the London market—as he can never fully let go of his performance of the proper body (for perhaps authorial and subjective reasons)—the text notes the commonality of their urban experience. The opium-eater connects to them through the experience of the

improper urban body. As he indicates, he frequents and participates in the working-class market because he sympathizes with them—and perhaps vice versa.²¹ Throughout the text, De Quincey consistently seeks out or engages with other improper bodies, such as prostitutes, the Malay, or the working class. Connecting with other individuals like him provides the possibility of subverting the dominant modes of embodiment and indulging in the improper body. He can savor the excesses of opium, but more generally the heightened sensations and sympathetic experiences of urban sensibility. For De Quincey, this leads to expansions of the imagination. Although he experiences a brief moment of anxiety, the market provides sympathetic and sensual pleasures that allow him to feel connected, even if briefly, to other Londoners.

In addition to his visits to the opera and market, De Quincey's opium-led ramblings through the streets of London particularly provide subversive and imaginative opportunities. In these moments, the opium-eater is fully engaged in the excesses of the urban body as the combination of opium and pedestrianism results in pleasurable expressions of urban sensibility:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances: for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares, as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (47-48)

²¹ And it is worth noting that he indicates that he chooses to sympathize with their pleasures rather than sorrows for precisely this reason—he does not empathize merely out of moral charity.

In this passage, the peripatetic strolls of the opium-eater are aimless and seemingly random. They have “led [him] to great distances,” but he never actually states where or how far, suggesting that the pedestrian himself has lost track of his route.²² He goes wherever he wants, guided by the opium, which opens him up to sensory and imaginative experience. The rambler loses track of time and space here, too caught up in his explorations to be limited by either. The excessive body of urban sensibility, fueled by his indulgences in opium, provides an autonomous mode of exploring the city that temporarily allows the pedestrian to circumvent the historical structures of time and space. As streets mark a structured method of moving subjects through spaces in specific ways, the typographical organization of the city can potentially mark and control the urban body. De Quincey’s peripatetic mode of improper embodiment through urban sensibility provides a way of defying the prescribed boundaries of city life. De Quincey’s opium rambles here resemble Michel de Certeau’s description of “tactics”—small, ordinary moves that can potentially help the subject resist the structures of power systems and “reappropriate” culture and space (xi-xix). In this description of urban peregrination, De Quincey’s indulgences in the excesses of the urban body are pleasurable not only in the intensity of sensations he experiences, but also in his ability to briefly resist (or exceed) the boundaries of the city and the spectre of the proper body.

In the moments when De Quincey recovers himself and determines to find his way home (thereby recovering an aim to his rambles), he finds the city disorienting and overwhelming. The opium-eater’s perception of the city itself here is also excessive and

²² The lack of place and street names that were before a part of his descriptions in the city in the “Preliminary Confessions” (such as the Pantheon and Oxford Street) emphasizes the aimless meanderings of the opium-eater’s strolls through the city.

monstrous, reflecting the urban subject's own embodiment. For example, the labyrinthine streets and passages are presented as a deformed, monstrous body. Its "knotty problems of alleys," "enigmatical entries," and "sphinx's riddles of streets" are not only mysterious but figure the city as monstrous in its excess and disorganization. Indeed, this last reference, which alludes to the mythological monster of the sphinx, evokes a sense of bodily monstrosity, as well as mysteriousness. One of the reasons the pedestrian seems to have lost track of how far he has traveled (represented in the undefined "great distances" of his rambles) is because the city seems to have no clear borders. In this passage, the metropolis seems to simultaneously expand and contract—leading him to extended distances, but also enclosing the pedestrian in the tight spaces of alleyways. Even the city seems to resist the power structures of the modern world. The medieval aspects of the city—represented in the labyrinthine streets and "knotty" alleys—seem to resist the urban development of modern capitalism that seek to restructure the city in order to facilitate commerce and trade.²³ Even the "porters" and "hackney-coachmen" who taxi people through the city are—to the opium-eater's conception—"baffle[d]" by the medieval construction of the city and unable to accommodate the flows of urban inhabitants and modern commerce. In this passage, De Quincey depicts the city as an amalgamation, a mixture of the historical identities of London. The monstrous body of the city thus reflects the improper urban body of the opium eater in this scene, both consisting of resistances and submission to the new modes and structures of modernity.

²³ De Quincey's reference to "thoroughfares" particularly represents the city's own resistance to such development, as thoroughfares were a typical form of urban development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which consisted of widening streets to accommodate traffic.

Although the city is figured in this passage as itself a monstrous body, this is exhilarating rather than frightening for the urban pedestrian. He finds the excesses and complexities of the city fascinating and imaginatively stimulating. The use of nautical imagery and language particularly reveal this and suggest that the heightened urban sensibility of the opium-eater allows him to explore what he perceives as a new geography of the city. That his own visions of the geography of the city have potentially never “been laid down in the modern charts of London” suggest the resistance of the city itself to modern development, but also that the urban pedestrian imagines the city in ways never conceived of or measured before—he creates his own vision of London through these peripatetic rambles. In this scene, enhanced urban sensibility and urban embodiment provide exhilarating expressions of the imagination for the opium-eater as he engages more fully in the excesses and resistances of urban experience.

Urban pedestrianism forms an important part of De Quincey’s urban sensibility and of expressions of the urban body in *Confessions*. The peripatetic mode, mixed with the stimulation of the medicinal and exotic commodity opium, provides a means of developing the imagination as it opens the subject to sensational experience and to the expressions of the urban, improper body. The aimless and spontaneous movements of the peripatetic mode work with the excesses of the improper body and the body of the city itself to create an autonomy of locomotion, opening the subject to artistic creation. In these passages, the ineffability of the city is generative, particularly in the way that it reflects the modern urban subject’s own bodily experience. As the representations in “The Pleasures of Opium” demonstrate, the excesses of the city and of the urban body are pleasurable and exciting, expressing a generative nervousness that, rather than

overtaking the subject, lets him exceed the bounds of the healthy body—both physiologically and imaginatively. De Quincey thus challenges the notion of the proper body in these passages, offering representations of the urban body of the opium-eater as fluid and open to sensation and immense pleasure.

The Pains of Urban Sensibility and the Nervous Body

Although the text expresses pleasurable moments of urban sensibility in the “Pleasures of Opium,” *Confessions* presents De Quincey as becoming the most demonstrably nervous in the section, “The Pains of Opium,” when he no longer resides in London and struggles the most with his opium addiction. This section of the text depicts a disordered, nervous body and mind that have been greatly affected by the vast amounts of opium he has consumed. But *Confessions* also presents his extreme nervous agitation as, in large part, a result of his experiences in the metropolis. Despite his residence primarily outside of London in this section, I contend that the nervous illness described here is still an urban nervousness, an expression of the urban sensibility and body further developed through opium use and peripatetic explorations of the city. Even though he resides outside of London, the text presents De Quincey as still possessing an urban body that has become fully subjected to the excesses of urban sensibility and addiction. These representations of his rural experiences of nervous illness demonstrate the lasting effects of the city’s thrilling yet distorting influence on De Quincey even after he leaves the city, but also reveal a continued interest in, and even preference for, the warped and nervous urban body.

Although “The Pains of Opium” claims to describe his later struggles with opium addiction, it simultaneously depicts the writer’s experiences as the symptoms of

nervous disease. De Quincey's body is "agitated, writhing, throbbing, palpitating, shattered," depicting the palpable intensities and extreme pain of nervous illness (79). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nerves were often described as "shattered" and "agitated" in patients who suffered from nervous disease.²⁴ Physical convulsions—sometimes manifested in the physical effects of "writhing," "throbbing," and "palpitating"—were also indicative of the nervous body. De Quincey's body in this section is demonstrably nervous, disordered by extreme sensibility and the effects of opium consumption. His body has become even more excessive and abject as his nervousness reaches its peak in this section of *Confessions*. He appears throughout much of this section to be in a general state of nervous convulsion, depicting the urban body at its most nervous and excessive.

Indeed, De Quincey's nervousness becomes so much more intense that he claims it begins to obstruct his writing and creative powers. In trying to record his experiences with opium, he reveals his struggles to manage the sensations of his memory: "I could not, without effort, constrain myself to the task of either recalling, or constructing into a regular narrative, the whole burthen of horrors which lies upon my brain" (62). De Quincey's inability to work on his writing in any sort of organized manner reflects the creative torpor and occupational debilitation typical of nervous illnesses.²⁵ But the excerpt also addresses the intensity of both his experiences and his imaginative interpretations of those experiences, which, for De Quincey, exceed his

²⁴ In "Casuistry," De Quincey himself describes "shattered nerves" (347). For examples of descriptions of nervous symptoms, see the following: "agitations" (Trotter 187) and "palpitations" (Thomson 3-4, Trotter 212).

²⁵ Several medical physicians of the period address the debilitating effects of nervous illness on the ability to conduct business or engage in intellectual work. For example, Neale contends that within nervous patients, "the disposition becomes indolent to do any kind of business" (45). See also Trotter who addresses particular kinds of nervousness in "sedentary" types such as scholars, writers, and clerics (34-35)

immediate ability to render through composition. He must attempt to process the chaotic images for the reader, though, as we see in De Quincey's chosen narrative form of *Confessions*, this narrative never achieves the regularity De Quincey claims to be trying to attain here. The use of the word "brain" in this passage furthermore emphasizes an organic, physiological aspect to the creative process, which is mediated by urban sensibility. As the opium-eater's sensibility has developed into nervous experience in this section of the text, the excesses and intensities of this experience are not processed easily or typically.

In another passage addressing the mediation of nervous urban sensibility on the mind and the imagination, De Quincey addresses the origins of his vivid dreams. He notes that the first significant change in this part of his "physical economy" manifested "from the awakening of a state of eye generally incident to childhood, or exalted status of irritability" (67). This quotation addresses the connection between the mind and the body in nervous sensibility, as the "state of eye" registers imaginative vision. De Quincey represents the child as having a more acute sensibility, a notion that echoes medical theories of the time. As Foucault points out, the nerve theorist Simon-André Tissot "explains that the child has more sensibility than anyone else because in him everything is lighter and more mobile" (155). This suggests that in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical theory, the child was considered to be more susceptible to an irritability of nerve fibres, which manifests itself in intensely vivid dreams or images of the imagination. According to De Quincey, he experiences this same extra irritability of the nerves, indicating that this is the main cause of his opium nightmares.²⁶

²⁶ Many nerve theorists also address vivid dreams and nightmares as a symptom of a nervous constitution. For example, Thomson indicates that "the sleep" of a nervous patient "is much interrupted with dreams"

In addition to nervous sensibility, *Confessions* also reveals that the city contributes greatly to the opium-eater's nightmares. Despite the young De Quincey's attempts in "The Pleasures of Opium" to console and numb himself with opium during his peripatetic explorations of the city, the heightened sensation and empathy he experiences in London have lingering effects that later cause him nervous symptoms and vivid nightmares. According to De Quincey, the Saturday night "rambles" that led him "to great distances" through the labyrinthine streets of London, led him to pay "a heavy price in distant years, when the human face tyrannized over [his] dreams, and the perplexities of [his] steps in London came back and haunted [his] sleep" (47-48). Here, De Quincey indicates that his pedestrian rambles through the city are a key cause of his nervous nightmares described in "The Pains of Opium." The faces of the people of London that he was so receptive to in his rambles in the markets and streets come back to haunt him physiologically, even when he no longer resides in the metropolis. These nightmares serve as extensions of urban embodiment. While the opium eater has left the geographical confines of the city, London continues to affect the body of the writer. Later in the text, De Quincey more fully describes the ways "the tyranny of the human face began to unfold itself" in his dreams, causing extreme agitation ("my agitation was infinite") (72). Pedestrianism and opium lead him to be more open to sensual impression, but this also causes him to be more susceptible to nervousness. Even later, when he is no longer in London, his mind still cannot filter or sort through the many sensations he experienced in his late-night urban strolls. The text represents London as

(12). Neale also contends that the nervous patient "starts in his sleep, and often awakes from his slumbers terribly affrighted with the horrors of his dreams" (48). Trotter further describes the sleep of the nervous subject as "disturbed and harassed by dreams of the most frightful sort" as the "power of the imagination" and "sympathy" in the patient intensified, causing their "deluded and vivid imaginations" to conjure up active dreams and visions (190).

one of the main sources of De Quincey's nervous state. The city continues to have a nervous effect on De Quincey's mind and body, exacerbating the sickly, agitated body of the writer.

De Quincey's experiences of opium and the city also result in thrilling and terrifying nightmares of exotic images. According to De Quincey, these dreams are largely caused by his encounter with what he calls a "Malay" in an earlier scene of "The Pleasures of Opium."²⁷ During De Quincey's residence at Dove Cottage—Wordsworth's former Grasmere home—a "Malay" knocks on his door looking for a short respite from his journeys. De Quincey's encounter with the Malay—a fellow opium-eater—represents the confrontation of the proper and improper body in the text. This encounter and De Quincey's later exotic nightmares also emphasize the continuing effects of the city on De Quincey. In this scene, the Malay mirrors De Quincey's own improper, urban body, both as a figure of nervous illness and as an opium-eater. As Grinnell indicates, De Quincey "anxiously abjects specters of hypochondria" or nervous disease in his portrait of the Malay and other characters in *Confessions* (26). Grinnell specifically refers to hypochondria not only as a form of disease, but also encompassing an element of "somatic expression" and pathology (1). As an "avatar of pathological hypochondria," the Malay, then, is another expression of the anxiety of well-being and health that proliferates throughout De Quincey's text (Grinnell 26). But the Malay also serves as a representation of urban nervousness and embodiment. The Malay's body is

²⁷ As Krishnan addresses, the term "Malay" had a "narrow definition" in the nineteenth-century colonial context, referring to "those groups residing in the Malay Peninsula and the eastern coast of Sumatra and parts of Borneo—and a broader [definition] referring to the different peoples in the archipelago" (206). But Krishnan suggests that De Quincey's Malay may represent a more general definition of "'Chinese' (or 'Indian' or 'Dayak,' etc.)" (206). For more on the various meanings of the word "Malay" in De Quincey's text and in historical context, see Krishnan's "Opium and Empire: The Transports of Thomas De Quincey" (203-234).

abject and marginalized: he is an Oriental Other, who breaks through typical English boundaries by intruding not only within the English countryside, but also by crossing the threshold of Dove Cottage, the quintessential English home, once domesticated by the model English poet, Wordsworth. As many scholars have pointed out, De Quincey's fear of and fascination with the Malay certainly have much to do with his Oriental identity and Britain's imperial conquests.²⁸ But the Malay also mirrors De Quincey's urban embodiment, reminding him of his own inability to maintain a "proper," normalized English body.

Like the opium-eater, the Malay is a figure of the city, and specifically of London. While De Quincey assumes the Malay to "possibly" be on his way "to a sea-port about forty miles distant" (thus presenting an Eastern identity), he also imagines him to have "travelled on foot from London" (55, 57). The Malay is a pedestrian figure, much like the opium-eater, but he also hails from the capital city, like De Quincey. The association between the Malay and London indicates a city of empire and trade, much as the opium itself calls attention to this characterization of the nineteenth-century metropolis. Yet the Malay's recent residence in London also echoes De Quincey's own experiences in London, marking the exotic Other's body as also urban. Both the opium-eater and the Malay exemplify the extension of the city into the country and the blurring of borders between urban and rural. Moreover, the Malay's intrusion reminds De Quincey that he cannot escape the effects of the metropolis and his own urban sensibility and nervousness.

²⁸ See, for example, Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* and Krishnan (203-234).

In accord with his own body, De Quincey also characterizes the Malay as a figure of urban nervousness, as well. The juxtaposition of the Malay with the robust English servant girl in particular exemplifies the contrast of healthy and sickly bodies in *Confessions*: “a more striking picture there could not be imagined, than the beautiful English face of the girl, and its exquisite fairness, together with her erect and independent attitude, contrasted with the sallow and bilious-skin of the Malay, enameled or veneered with mahogany, by marine air, his small, fierce, restless eyes, thin lips, slavish gestures and adorations” (56). The passage depicts the girl as the picture of English health—she is beautiful, fair, and vivacious. The Malay, on the other hand, appears dark and sickly. The description of his “sallow and bilious skin” emphasizes not only what De Quincey depicts as his ethnic features (like the “mahogany” color of his skin), but also suggests illness. Moreover, his “restless eyes” indicate anxiety and a nervous constitution. The Malay possesses a sickly, nervous, “improper” body contrasted with the “proper” body of the English servant girl. This comparative description also features the contrast of the rural versus the urban body. The robust health of the rural servant girl contrasts sharply with the sickly body of the Malay who has recently traveled from London.²⁹

The gift of opium also associates the Malay with nervous disease and De Quincey’s anxieties about health. He indicates that he offers the Malay some opium “in compassion for his solitary life” and in hopes of “giving him one night of respite from the pains of wandering” (57). He assumes the Malay suffers from a similar disease,

²⁹ While De Quincey still performs a proper sensibility in this scene through the representation of his interactions with the Malay, he does not contrast his own body with the exotic Other’s, which suggests that De Quincey seems to somewhat recognize that his own body is more aligned with the Malay’s sickly body than with the healthy body of the young girl.

which might benefit from the opium De Quincey possesses. In this moment, De Quincey takes on a double role, as both physician and as sickly body. He diagnoses the Malay as suffering from melancholy and illness typical of nervous disease and prescribes a calculated amount of opium (“divided into three pieces” [57]). The Malay’s ingestion of the entire amount of opium, thus ignoring the organized amount, demonstrates a resistance to the regulation of bodies that discourses on health sought to prescribe. His monstrous body exceeds the boundaries of the proper body and resists De Quincey’s own sympathetic attempts to administer self control. In this way, the Malay reminds De Quincey of his own improper body. Not only are the Malay and De Quincey both urban pedestrians, but they are both marked as nervous. The Malay’s ingestion of a large quantity of opium, which De Quincey claims is “enough to kill three dragoons and their horses,” does more than cause the opium-eater to fear for the Malay’s life (57). It also asserts the Malay’s bodily excess and improper embodiment as rejecting prescribed bodily norms and experience. De Quincey is fascinated by this form of embodiment, though he is never able to fully embrace his own urban and improper body. Instead, the Malay’s bodily similarity to the nervous De Quincey creates fear and anxiety that manifests in nightmares characterized by orientalized images.

De Quincey particularly blames the Malay for wild and “Asiatic” nightmares that affect him for long periods of time (72). As discussed earlier, *Confessions* presents De Quincey’s nightmares in general as symptoms of nervousness and acute urban sensibility. His exotic nightmares do the same, expressing the conflicts of the opium-eater’s body with the “effects of normalizing discourses of health or disease” (Grinnell

142). While De Quincey's nightmares offer many interpretive possibilities, they also emphasize the presence of the improper, monstrous body. According to De Quincey, the "Asiatic scenes" and "oriental imagery" of his dreams provide "monstrous scenery" and "unutterable monsters and abortions," impressing "mythological tortures" upon him (73, 74). Monstrous animals—"ugly birds or snakes, or crocodiles"—and filth pervade his descriptions of these dreams, overwhelming and disgusting the opium-eater (74). He describes being "laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud," each representations of abjection and objects of De Quincey's disgust (74). The "cursed crocodile" particularly haunts his nightmares—becoming "the object of more horror than almost all the rest" (74). He recounts being "kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles," which represent the monstrous body and evoke notions of disease and excess (74). These monsters and abominations reflect De Quincey's own diseased body, which is particularly terrifying to him. In the dream sequence, his own excessive body is also worshipped: "I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed" (74). The opium-eater resembles the other monstrous gods of his dreams, amalgamations of bodies presented in the figures of Vishnu, Brama, Seeval, Isis, and Osiris (74). He recounts in his dreams being "buried for a thousand years, in stone coffins" with other monsters, "mummies and sphinxes" (74). These images suggest De Quincey seems to at least on some level recognize his own diseased and excessive body as resembling the monstrous bodies of his dreams.

The terror expressed in these exotic dreams indicates a resistance to modernity and the effects of the urban body. According to Alina Clej, the "intoxication" of opium furnishes "a means both of breaking the modern subject's resistance (to modernity) and

of preserving this resistance by the constant displacement and reconfiguration of experience that occurs in opium dreams” (13-14). These monstrous dreams represent De Quincey’s own fear of the improper body created by the modern city and his desire to resist its distorting effects by maintaining a proper sensibility and body. But the orientalized dreams simultaneously demonstrate the opium-eater’s resistance to the proper body. Bodily norms are constantly displaced in these dream sequences, resulting in both terror and pleasure, particularly in the stimulation of the imagination. While he claims that he “loath[es]” the images of his nightmares (like the crocodile), he also reveals that he is “fascinated” by them (74). The enthusiasm with which he describes these terrors also reveals a relish and enjoyment in the very images that horrify him. For De Quincey, it is precisely because he cannot transcend the nervous body that his dreams are so imaginative. The disordered sensibility of urban experience serves as a conduit to the imagination. Although he claims the spectre of the Malay generates these dream sequences, the text reveals that the spectre of the proper body also creates such nightmarish experiences. *Confessions* reveals an intense pleasure in these dreams and in the experiences of opium-enhanced urban sensibility. But the spectre of the proper body causes him to view and present these dreams as nightmares and prevents him from fully enjoying the ecstasies and resistances of the improper body.

“The Pains of Opium” reveals intense experiences of nervous symptoms as remnants of De Quincey’s residence in the city. Opium no longer appears in this section as an effective medicine, or as a means of extreme pleasure, but rather as a commodified agent that threatens to thrust him into a nervous fit. In De Quincey’s orientalized dreams, the exotic commodity of opium evokes intense nightmares of the

monstrous and excessive body, reflecting, as in the Malay scene, De Quincey's own monstrous body. The spectre of the proper body looms throughout "The Pains of Opium," creating nervousness and anxieties for the opium-eater. Yet, despite the opium-eater's terrors and pain, the section reveals an intense pleasure in the stimulation of the imagination that the urban body provides. Although this section emphasizes the pains of the excessive body, it nonetheless reveals De Quincey's own underlying preference for the nervous urban body.

Disrupting the Spectre of the Proper Body

De Quincey's preference for the disordered body of urban sensibility is revealed in the ending of *Confessions*. Here De Quincey is still beset by the excesses of urban experience and opium addiction. He describes himself as "still agitated, writhing, throbbing, palpitating, shattered," still experiencing intense symptoms of urban nervousness (79). Furthermore, his "dreams are not yet perfectly calm: the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided" and his "sleep is still tumultuous" (80). Despite De Quincey's claims to have "untwisted [...] the accursed chain" of opium addiction and nervousness that "fettered" him, he remains in the end to still be a fully nervous urban subject (2). As Perry contends, the "autobiography never really comes to an end" because De Quincey is "never in fact free of his addiction" (811). But, according to Perry, the "project inaugurated" at the beginning has not been finished as the "autobiographical project itself has the structure of addiction" (811). I would add that the project itself also comprises the nervous sensibility of the urban body—the text itself is fractured and nervous, never fully focused nor definite.³⁰ But the opium-eater

³⁰ Several scholars have addressed the textual inconsistencies and fracturing of *Confessions*. For example, Perry notes that the text "consistently undermines the validity of interpretive ordering" (809). Rzepka also

has not fully recuperated because, ultimately, he does not want to. The beginning of *Confessions* presents the text as a “record” for “application”—to be “useful and instructive” to those who are also distressed by addiction to opium (and to the more general audience of an English nation grappling with such new phenomena) (1). Instead of addressing how to cure the diseased body (or denouncing this body), the text serves instead as a celebration of it and instructions on how to form one’s own urban body. For De Quincey, the instability of the improper, urban body proves much more fascinating and generative.

De Quincey attempts to regain control of the body, but it ultimately does not work. He even flees to the country and actually lives in Dove Cottage to do so. As Fulford points out, De Quincey “recognizes himself as a guilty embodiment of the perverse pleasures and pains of the city” and he aims “to convert addiction and alienation to redemption and forgiveness” (56). Unable to “do this by himself,” he turns to Wordsworth’s vision of proper poetic sensibility and attempts to recreate this in the very home of the sensible poet (Fulford 56). But Wordsworth’s home and imaginative vision fails for the urban De Quincey. He is not cured by exposure to Nature or by the Wordsworthian influence of proper poetic sensibility. The opium-eater appears as a “perverse” subject, “crippled by the city experience that speaks through him but that he cannot transcend” (Fulford 59). However, De Quincey does not really wish to transcend this body—he repeatedly seeks out opportunities to regenerate the nervous body or sympathize with other improper bodies. His need to regain his health and sensibility

suggests that De Quincey’s texts resemble his conception of the “human mind as a medieval palimpsest,” “littered with vestigial terms, phrases, and locutions, with shadowy characters and scenes, with smudged images and emblems that invite interpretive retracing” (ix).

rather originates from the spectre of the proper body that haunts the opium-eater throughout *Confessions*.

This spectre of the proper body is particularly manifested throughout the text in the figure of Wordsworth. The Wordsworthian spectre is especially present in the Malay scene as it takes place in Dove Cottage. De Quincey is continually held in check by his aspirations to achieve the proper poetic sensibility espoused by Wordsworth in his poetry and prose. The guilt that Fulford argues resonates in *Confessions* particularly stems from this spectre of healthy sensibility and proper embodiment (56). References and allusions to Wordsworth proliferate in the text, even appearing on the first page through a direct reference to “Mr Wordsworth” (1). De Quincey’s admiration for the Lake poet was well known and has been addressed by Romantic scholarship. As Vincent de Luca contends, “[h]undreds of Wordsworthian quotations [...] found in De Quincey’s writings testify to the extent of” the poet’s “influence” on De Quincey throughout his life (239-240). De Luca suggests that De Quincey was even influential to Wordsworth, as well (240).

But despite Wordsworth’s lasting influence on the prose writer, *Confessions* reveals a radical undercurrent that complicates what Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts call De Quincey’s “often truculent Toryism,” as his “narrative celebrates both power and defiance” (*De Quincey* 10). Barry Milligan also notes the “dissonant counterpoint of radical sentiment” of De Quincey’s work, which is “woven into his otherwise supposedly conservative ideology” (45).³¹ Indeed, as Julian North contends, while De Quincey’s work “shows significant debts to Wordsworth’s,” his text is

³¹ Morrison also points out that “De Quincey’s delighted confidence in his own Englishness is frequently undermined” in *Confessions* by “sympathies that disrupt the political and social ideologies he is ostensibly bent on affirming” (“Radical Energies,” 64).

“characteristically more subversive than subservient” (572). In particular, De Quincey subverts the notion of the proper body through his own representations of the excessive, improper body of urban sensibility. *Confessions* subverts Wordsworth’s privileging of the organic, natural body over the urban body through representations of the imaginative stimulation and immense pleasures of opium and urban sensibility. De Quincey’s representations of the delights of the disordered urban body in “The Pleasures of Opium” and (more subtly) in “The Pains of Opium” disrupts the Wordsworthian spectre of the proper body and sensibility. The monstrous, urban body troubles the proper body and vice versa in De Quincey’s *Confessions*. The improper body of the urban opium-eater provides opportunities to resist the power structures of nineteenth-century England and to develop the modern imagination. In the end, De Quincey clings to those exciting and generative expressions of the nervous urban body, even if he is never able to fully sever the hold of the proper body.

Conclusion

Urban sensibility in De Quincey’s *Confessions* forms an urban body marked by acute sensitivity, excess, and disorder. This urban body becomes increasingly distorted and abjected through nervous disease largely caused by urban experience. Yet De Quincey presents the improper body of urban sensibility and opium addiction as capable of creating intense bodily and imaginative pleasures. Urban sensibility also provides opportunities of resistance and appropriation for the modern subject. While he repeatedly attempts to claim possession of the proper body, De Quincey exposes this as a performance. Despite this performance of proper embodiment, *Confessions* reveals that De Quincey prefers the disorderly body of the nervous, urban addict. The urban

body of the opium-eater calls attention to the proper body as a construct enforced by the dominant culture and power structures of nineteenth-century England. While De Quincey is never able to fully shake the hold of the proper body, the text maintains an interest in the resistances of the improper body that suggests *Confessions* provides an alternative vision to the Wordsworthian and conservative representations of the Romantic city.

Chapter 3:

The City as Cure: Metropolitan Sensibility in the Essays of Hazlitt and Lamb

A study of urban sensibility would not be complete without an examination of the metropolitan writers of the Romantic era, who were known for their championing of the city and their representations of urban life and culture. Writers such as William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Pierce Egan, and others offered an alternative vision of the city to the anti-metropolitanism often associated with Romantic writers like Wordsworth.¹ While scholarship tends to view Wordsworth's vision of London in Book 7 of *The Prelude* as the typical Romantic vision of the alienated modern city, the urban essays and visions of Hunt, Egan, Lamb, and Hazlitt demonstrate that a counter narrative of city life existed and thrived in literature of the period, particularly in the periodical essay.² As Gregory Dart suggests, this "Romantic Metropolitanism," fostered by Lamb, Hazlitt, and others in essayistic form and the periodical press, offers a response and counter vision to the "Romantic Primitivism" and "rural solipsism" of the Lake School of poets, namely Wordsworth (143, 180). I contend that these writers also offer expressions of urban sensibility and urban spectacle that diverge from and respond directly to the Lake School's critical depictions of the city.

In this chapter, I focus on representations of healthy urban sensibility in specific essays written by two prominent metropolitan writers, Hazlitt and Lamb.

¹ It is worth noting, though, (as chapter 1 addresses) that even Wordsworth's representations of the city are themselves ambivalent and complex.

² Moreover, since Wordsworth's *Prelude* was not published publicly until 1850, the urban essays of these metropolitan writers were more widely circulated and read than the representation of the city in Book 7. In other words, Romantic-era readers would have been exposed to multiple visions of city life.

Representations of metropolitan life, nerves and nervousness, sensibility, and pedestrianism appear throughout the essays of both Hazlitt and Lamb, revealing a profound engagement with concepts of metropolitan experience integral to urban sensibility. However, this chapter focuses on specific essays by these writers, which work seemingly in conversation with one another to address urban sensibility in a particularly metropolitan way that celebrates the effects of the city on the constitution of the urban subject. In the first section of the chapter, I examine representations of Cockney sensibility in Hazlitt's "On Londoners and Country People," which offers a complex vision of urban sensibility through the highly controversial metropolitan figure of the Cockney. I argue that the essay presents the Cockney as an urban pedestrian character with nervous sensual tendencies, but who, by the end of the essay, is depicted as channeling this acute sensibility into constructive and healthy forms of civic community and responsibility. The second section of the chapter explores the work of Hazlitt's friend and colleague, Charles Lamb, whose earlier essay, "The Londoner," represents urban spectacle and experience as an antidote to nervousness in the metropolitan pedestrian. Lamb's depiction of urban sensibility thus responds to and rejects notions of nervousness as a physiological reaction to the excess of the city and instead emphasizes connection and sympathetic civic engagement in a determinedly metropolitan version of urban sensibility that celebrates the material and urban culture of London. Both Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays work against notions of urban nervousness posed by eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century physicians. As in the previous chapters of this study, urban sensibility appears as a form of consumption in

these texts; however, these essays portray metropolitan sensibility as providing stability, identity, and unity for the modern subject.

Recent scholarship has begun to take an interest in exploring representations of the city in the works of these metropolitan writers, as well as reconsidering the essay as a more prevalent and influential literary form in the Romantic period, and, particularly, as an urban form of writing. Gregory Dart's *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* is one of the few scholars to address how both Hazlitt and Lamb represent the city in his study of the development of the Cockney character and metropolitan movement in Romantic-era literature. According to Dart, metropolitanism and the particular manifestation of the Cockney held implications that were "at once social, spatial, formal and professional," and serve "as a powerful tool for exploring the dynamic relationship between early-nineteenth-century notions of class, the city, artistic identity and aesthetic form" (27). Moreover, Dart offers readings of both Hazlitt's "On Londoners and Country People" and Lamb's "The Londoner" as significant formulations of metropolitan literature and the Cockney figure.³ Considering only the works of Hazlitt, Kevin Gilmartin's article, "Hazlitt's Visionary London," argues that the metropolitan writer's representations of life in London were "powerfully inflected by his own public commitments as a radical journalist," and focuses on political readings of some of Hazlitt's essays, including "On Londoners and Country People"

³ Furthermore, although their critical works do not particularly focus on the essays examined in this chapter, several scholars have also explored how Hazlitt and Lamb responded to each other in their various essays in the *London Magazine*. For example, Mark Schoenfield's "Voices Together: Lamb, Hazlitt, and the London" (1990) argues that Lamb and Hazlitt engage in conversation with one another in their essays, resulting in a rich intertextuality that, when read together, "increases the complexity of voices in each" (272). Heather Stone's "William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb and the *London Magazine*, 1821" also touches on the "collaborative" and sometimes "oppositional" relationship between Hazlitt and Lamb in their essayistic work (43).

(42). While scholarship on Hazlitt tends to focus on political readings,⁴ studies of Lamb's work concentrate on his periodical persona, Elia, and the essayistic form.⁵ In *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783-1834*, James Treadwell, in his exploration of the *Essays of Elia* as autobiographical texts, argues that Lamb displays his metropolitanism not only in his expressed "urban attachments" to the city of London in particular but in the design, style, and mode of his writing, which assimilates the city and urban experience (218). As Treadwell claims, Lamb's "world is miscellaneous, heterogeneous, ordered not by the sequences of narrative or chronology but by the multifarious accidents of a crowded city" (216). Treadwell's reading further suggests that the format of the periodical essay, particularly as formulated in the *London Magazine*, assumes a uniquely urban form of writing in its fragmentation and heterogeneity (216). In *Charles Lamb, Elia, and the London Magazine*, Simon Hull takes this even further in his extensive examination of the Elia essays to argue that "Elia's desultory observations and fragmentary or disjointed narrative style, as an articulation of the essay form itself, therefore capture the very dynamic of urban spectatorship" (6-7).⁶ Treadwell's and Hull's assertions indicate that Lamb's essays

⁴ An interest in Hazlitt's political affiliations and representations has resulted in a resurgence of Hazlitt studies, beginning primarily with Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (1981), which figures Hazlitt as a radical journalist engaged in the political discourse of a post-revolutionary England. Other studies of Hazlitt's radical political perspective include Seamus Deane's *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832* (1988); Jon Kinnaird's *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (1978); Tom Paulin's *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (1998); Simon Bainbridge's *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (1995), and Philip Harling's "William Hazlitt and Radical Journalism" (1997), to name a few. However, Gilmartin's article works to situate Hazlitt's urban representations within his radical political arguments and vice versa, offering a political component to Hazlitt's metropolitanism.

⁵ Elia is a pseudonym and figure created by Lamb—though widely recognized by contemporary readers to be Lamb himself—for his essays in the *London Magazine*.

⁶ See also, pages 9-10. In general, Hull contends that Lamb fully participates in the "metropolitan spirit of the age" and argues that his Elia essays situate him "at the centre of a Romantic metropolitan genre" (179).

took on a perambulatory form, much like the peripatetic explorations of the city of London featured in those essays.

Although these studies have been helpful in developing an understanding of the metropolitan literature of Hazlitt and Lamb, the complexity of their works and the relative scarcity of scholarship on this topic calls for further exploration of these writers' depictions of the city, especially in light of the recent critical interest in studying representations of urban culture, spectacle, and consumerism in Romantic-era literature.⁷ This chapter extends the scholarship on Hazlitt and Lamb's metropolitan representations and urban essays by considering how they engage in discourse on nervous sensibility and the city. In contrast to contemporary medical science and to the urban representations of Romantic-era writers like Wordsworth, Hazlitt and Lamb present an alternative form of urban sensibility that challenges the view of modern urban experience as resulting in nervousness and alienation. This metropolitan sensibility posits healthy expressions of sympathy and urban connection instead. Moreover, I contend that not only do these writers' metropolitanism influence their vision of metropolitan sensibility, but also that this alternative vision of sensibility in the city likewise informs their metropolitanism.

This chapter also considers how urban spectacle formulates a key aspect of metropolitan sensibility in Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays. Much of the work on spectacle

⁷ As Hull points out, despite the growing scholarship on representations of the city in literature of the period, this research is lacking in studies on both Lamb and Hazlitt (3). Hull attributes this lack to a "traditional bias against the city in Romantic studies" that is "bound up with an equal prejudice against periodical writing, as criticism until the late 1980s *uncritically* inherited the Romantics' own sense of unease over the genre" (3). According to Hull, this "anti-metropolitan tendency in criticism proves a further example of Jerome McGann's oft-used notion of the 'Romantic ideology,'" in which Romantic scholarship "and its works are dominated [...] by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (Hull 3; McGann 1). While Hull's assertions may indeed be true, his own study, as well as the study of others like Dart, demonstrate a renewed interest in these metropolitan writers that will hopefully continue to gather momentum in Romantic scholarship.

in these writers' works so far has focused on the theater. In "Creative Spectacle: Hunt, Hazlitt, and De Quincey," Melynda Nuss examines theatrical production and spectacle in the Romantic era, and argues that the theatrical criticism of metropolitan writers, such as Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, offers a counter-tradition to the typical contemporary condemnation of spectacle in theatrical production. Nuss contends that these critics held a common interest "in creating a theory of spectacle that rejects the idea that spectacle overwhelms the viewer and turns its watchers into mindless and vacuous subjects" (144). Instead, Nuss suggests that these writers "see spectacles as a creative force which cannot only improve the minds of the audience, but can also bring them together as a nation" (144). While I do not examine the stage in this chapter, I find Nuss's arguments about spectacle helpful and argue that the metropolitan essays examined in this chapter take a similar view of the urban spectacle in general. Rather than causing nervous symptoms in the urban pedestrian and observer, as represented in the previous tradition explored by writers like Wordsworth, the urban spectacle of consumer crowds and commodities in these metropolitan texts work as a creative force and uniting agent. These aspects of the urban spectacle help to generate a form of metropolitan sensibility that is able to transcend the "nervousness" of modernity and to unite the citizens of London in sympathy and civic love. This particularly occurs in Lamb's essay, in which urban spectacle helps to cure the pedestrian of nervous symptoms and gives rise to intense sympathy. In Hazlitt's essay, while he initially critiques urban spectacle, he shifts to address the benefits of urban spectacle on the individual citizen. Metropolitan spectacle in both essays provide a generative path for creativity and collectivity.

Before delving into each text, I think it important to define the difference between “metropolitan” and “urban” in the Romantic period, as this helps in understanding more clearly the critical distinction of Hazlitt and Lamb as “metropolitan” writers. As addressed in the introduction to this project, I approach the term “urban” as relating to the culture and geography (space and place) of a particular city. The term “metropolis,” meaning “mother city,” refers typically to a city that is a significant cultural and economic center for an area or country. A metropolis, moreover, usually includes a cluster of interconnected cities (suburbs) grouped around a chief urban center (the city proper). In this sense, a metropolis is a form of the urban center, in which continual economic and populous growth causes the city limits to stretch and develop. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, London developed into a modern metropolis, which developed and expanded exponentially within a relatively short period of time. In *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London, 1800-1840*, Dana Arnold argues that the city of London experienced a metropolitan reorientation that resulted from a refashioning of the “fabric of the capital city” through aristocratic influences as Westminster became a critical center of the metropolis (43). Moreover, the social and political rise of the middle class created new economic and structural developments in London during this period, as well. Arnold further argues the changes in the city also resulted from the development of London as the “first city of Empire,” as London was self-consciously constructed as the center of the nation of England and as a hub of international trade (*Re-presenting the Metropolis*, 43). By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, London was a fully metropolitan region of commerce, trade, and rapid urban development.

The inclusion of suburbs in the definition of a metropolis is also of importance to the character of the city that Romantic-era metropolitan writers represented in their texts. During this period, the expansion of London (the City of London on its eastern side, the City of Westminster on its west, and the Borough of Southwark on the south bank of the Thames) changed the city and “redefined its entrance points” (Arnold xvi). As Arnold contends in *London Landscapes in the Early Nineteenth Century*, the “insular garden squares” and “pockets of tangled medieval street plans” opened out to new roads and connected the City to suburbs, resulting in a “re-orientation of circulation and vista” (xvii). The geography of London began to change, as did its culture and economy. This opening out of the city resulted in a more fluid and common commute between the city center and its surrounding suburbs, resulting in a blurring of boundaries between country and city.⁸ Metropolitan experience for these writers included frequenting the city proper, as well as the suburbs around London, which combined the urban and the pastoral with its mixture of country and city life. The culture of the city began to influence the suburb, which had previously been characterized by pastoral and rural life,⁹ especially as many suburbs had once been small towns independent of the metropolis. Likewise, the pastoral character of the suburbs began to trickle into urban culture, resulting in an amalgamation of urban and rural life.¹⁰ For metropolitan writers like Hazlitt and Lamb, urban development and

⁸ According to Dart, by 1815, “Clerkenwell, Islington, Pentonville, and Camden Town were suburbs now swollen with clerks and attorney’s apprentices who commuted to the City every day” (9). Commuting from suburban homes to city jobs became increasingly more common in the nineteenth century.

⁹ By “pastoral,” I refer to the idealized and nostalgic representation of bucolic life—shepherds, pastures, and open, gentle land—that emphasized natural beauty, simplicity, innocence, peace, and romance.

¹⁰ Dart’s description of the first Cockney Moment beginning in Leigh Hunt’s jail cell in 1813 demonstrates this blending of the urban pastoral (or pastoral urban) in Romantic Metropolitanism. Beginning a sentence in January 1813 to two years in prison for libeling the Prince Regent, Hunt gave his two jail cells a suburban makeover by papering “the walls with a trellis of roses,” coloring the ceiling

sprawl were new features of the city and the blend of suburban character influenced urban experience.

Metropolitan literature of the period celebrates this burgeoning and changing metropolis, supposedly leaving the “true” metropolitan man with no need or desire to leave the limits of his metropolitan domain. The city of London, then, could accommodate both pastoral and urban culture through geography and spectacle. Metropolitan representations of the city complicate traditional stereotypes of the city as corrupt (and the country as virtuous), as well as notions of strict borders between the two.¹¹ Hazlitt and Lamb’s responses to the Lake School of poetry were not entirely oppositional, even if they were offering alternative urban visions. Influenced by urban sprawl, suburban character, and imperial urbanism, the metropolitanism of Hazlitt and Lamb’s texts for the most part celebrated commodity culture, urban spectacle, and the growing bustle of city life. This metropolitanism helps shape the urban sensibility expressed in the essays of these writers, just as urban sensibility helped shape their conceptualizations of metropolitan life. Thus, in this chapter, I contend that the form of metropolitanism expressed in these particular texts of Hazlitt and Lamb is influenced by their response to discourse on urban sensibility.

“with clouds and sky,” screening the windows “with Venetian blinds,” and decorating with “book cases,” “busts,” “flowers,” and a “piano forte” (Hunt, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, p. 292, qtd. in Dart 6). As Dart points out, Hunt’s prison makeover was decidedly “suburban,” blending urban culture (through an emphasis on learning and art) and pastoral ideal (through an emphasis on natural landscape and beauty, peace, and innocence) (6). According to Dart, “the overarching joke about Leigh Hunt in this piece is not just that he is a Cockney jailbird dreaming of the countryside, but that the only countryside he can conjure up for himself is the already suburban and semi-domesticated landscape of Hampstead” (6). For Hunt, metropolitanism comprised the best of both suburban and urban culture.

¹¹ Raymond Williams famously addresses these traditional stereotypes in *The Country and the City*, arguing that a “contrast between country and city, as fundamental”—or fundamentally different—“ways of life,” persists in culture and literature, despite historical reality and variety (1, 289). Yet Williams points to those writers, like Blake, whose literary representations transcend the “simplifying contrast between country and city (149). I argue that Hazlitt and Lamb’s essays offer a similar complication to the traditional representations of the city.

Hazlitt and Cockney Sensibility

As one of the most prominent metropolitan writers of the Romantic period, Hazlitt presents an urban Romanticism that actively engages in the changes of modern metropolitan life. In *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, Duncan Wu argues for the importance of Hazlitt studies, naming this metropolitan writer as the “most articulate spokesman” of the modern age (xxii). Hazlitt’s writings stretched across a wide range of topics, and his knowledge of the contemporary movement and concerns of the Romantic period was unsurpassed. His clear awareness of contemporary artistic and poetic concerns establishes Hazlitt as a writer closely engaged in Romantic writing, positioning his metropolitan essays as Romantic metropolitan texts, not merely essays written in simple opposition to the Romantic movement. Hazlitt’s 1823 essay, “On Londoners and Country People,” which was first published in the *New Monthly Magazine* under “Table-Talk No. VII,” offers a significant sample of his Romantic metropolitanism and depictions of a particularly metropolitan form of sensibility.

Hazlitt’s representation of metropolitan sensibility in “On Londoners and Country People” focuses on a specific and controversial figure of urban life in the early nineteenth century, the Cockney. The essay begins with an entertaining and satirical critique of the Cockney’s metropolitan mindset and its propensity for vanity, presumption, and selfishness. The text then softens its representation as it moves from abstract descriptions to more personal and individual accounts of the Cockney. After briefly considering the contrast of a rural worldview, which he finds especially lacking, the speaker finally returns to the Cockney to reconsider his initial caricature of the metropolitan figure, reworking these previously criticized characteristics into civic

virtues. As my reading of the essay argues, the metropolitan sensibility of the Cockney, set up in relation to the discourse of urban sensibility addressed in this larger project, creates the potential for civic participation and collective citizenship.

Hazlitt's ambivalence in this essay comments on the historical position of the Cockney as a contentious urban figure in the early nineteenth century. The concept of the Cockney figure was itself complex and multivalent, caught up in the social and political discourse of the period. As Dart points out, the term "Cockney" has a complex past, including shifts in definition and cultural significance, especially in the Romantic period.¹² While today we typically envisage the Cockney as an urban character associated with a unique dialect and entrenched within a lower social class, the term "Cockney" has held various associations—including aesthetic, political, and social connotations—at different times in history and in a range of cultural contexts, though it was always associated with the city of London and a particular experience of urban life. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as Dart suggests, the word "Cockney" had "not attained that low dignity with which it was imbued in the late Victorian" period, but was rather an "affectionate and even sentimental term for the East End working classes" (8). However, as the term developed in the eighteenth century, the Cockney occupied a wider topographical range of London, as well as a broader status and professional scope. According to Gareth Stedman Jones, London's unique distinction as a city of commerce, known more for its "office workers, cleaners,

¹² As Dart suggests, the diverse ramifications of the concept of Cockneyism "makes it a suggestive, if occasionally somewhat slippery, object of study" (26). However, according to Dart, "it was primarily a way of thinking about an interstitial class that was, or seemed to be, on the rise during the Regency, but which was later to find itself in a kind of political no man's land after the Great Reform Act of 1832" (26). This chapter focuses on Hazlitt's representation of the Cockney in and around 1823, when the figure was becoming more popular.

domestic servants, rentiers, public employees, sellers of professional services, porters, day-labourers, and traders” than for industrial professions, resulted in the Cockney being associated with a range of occupations, but “rarely if ever as a maker or producer of things” (274). In this case, although the Cockney’s social class was fairly wide in range, it nonetheless maintained a specific type of London employment and status. However, according to Dart, during the 1810s and 1820s, the Cockney character began to be associated even more specifically with the shop-keeping class, an occupation where “its peculiar mixture of pertness and illiteracy, dullness and vivacity, was most fully expressed” (8). In Hazlitt’s essay, the Cockney is certainly associated with the shop-keeping class—and the particular attitude Dart addresses here—but Hazlitt’s representation expands the term to occupy a middle class or petite bourgeois connotation in general, which I will return to later in this section of the chapter.

In addition to a specific social range, the Romantic-era Cockney also underwent a “geographical expansion” in character in comparison with seventeenth- and earlier eighteenth-century versions of the figure (Dart 8). Just as urban life was changing to a metropolitan experience, so, too, the Cockney began to lose an exclusive association with the “City proper” alone, and increasingly became connected with both old and new suburbs, as well (Dart 8).¹³ Thus the Cockney began to take on a decidedly metropolitan character, occupying both urban and suburban space. Yet, as Jeffrey Cox argues in *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, despite their ability to inhabit both spaces, the Cockneys of the Romantic period remained politically marginalized, “both removed from the established centers of London’s power and considered beneath the urbane

¹³ Some of the older suburbs consisted of Southwark and Clerkenwell, while newer ones began to be encompassed within the metropolitan reach of London, including Islington, Pentonville, Camden Town, and Dulwich (Dart 9).

culture of the elites” (12). According to Cox, the Cockneys considered themselves ““in and out of place””—or even displaced—which ensured their “resistance to established power” (12). The Cockney, then was both urban and suburban in character, as well as marginalized and modern *avant garde*.

In discussing this marginalized group of urbanites, Cox is referring specifically to the unwillingly dubbed Cockney School of writers, an intellectual and literary group that concentrated around Leigh Hunt and included John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Hazlitt, and others. Furthermore, it was in response to this particular group of intellectuals and writers that the Cockney image of the 1820s was formed by those who opposed them politically and socially. As Dart contends, in the 1810s, conservative journals like *Blackwood's Magazine* published essays critiquing the urban Cockney as a symbol for the corruption of modern life, emphasized in the figure's “promiscuous straddling of the city and suburb, old and new, vulgar and genteel” (9). *Blackwood's*, widely known to be affiliated with Tory politics, published essays ridiculing Cockneys in attacks on Whig and liberal periodicals, like *The Examiner*, which was edited by Hunt.¹⁴ Through these critical representations and broader discussions of the metropolitan figure, Cockneyism also developed aesthetic connotations, especially in reference to excess and urban perception. According to Dart, it came to signify “anything that seemed out of scale, significance or perspective” (26). The Cockney came to embody an urban aesthetic, largely shaped by the commodity and consumer culture of modern life. Moreover, the word “cockney” carried connotations of “sexual libertinism and effeminacy,” which became a key aspect of the conservative assault on

¹⁴ Although they were defined and attacked by conservative journals like *Blackwood's*, the Cockney School of writers, as Cox argues, was a “self-consciously” formed coterie, “defined both internally and externally as a group working to reform culture and society” (4-5).

Hunt's literary company (Cox 24). This became part of the politicized representation of the Cockney intellectuals—they were depicted as weak libertines, incapable of effective leadership or constructive deliberation. While the conservative journalism of periodicals like *Blackwood's* helped to politicize the Cockney phenomenon, the debate on the metropolitan figure was part of a larger cultural discourse on politics, social class, and modernity. In engaging the discourse of this controversial metropolitan figure, Hazlitt's essay takes up cultural, aesthetic, social, and political arguments concerning metropolitanism and modern life in general.

The Cockney of Hazlitt's essay, "On Londoners and Country People," explicitly responds to the caricature of the metropolitan figure shaped by *Blackwood's* and by these broader debates. Hazlitt himself was not necessarily a fan of the controversial figure, nor the negative characteristics of urban life that the Cockney came supposedly to represent, but he found the sensibility of the Cockney preferable to the politically conservative stance that *Blackwood's Magazine* championed and the rural sensibility espoused in the work of Wordsworth. Hazlitt's depiction of metropolitan, Cockney sensibility responds to both figures, but it also responds to Romantic-era discourse on nervous sensibility and the city. Although he offers an ambivalent depiction of the Cockney, by the end of the essay he presents a Cockney sensibility that celebrates modern metropolitan vision and experience.

Cockney Geography and London Place

Throughout the essay, Hazlitt provides his own definition of the Cockney, rhetorically set up in proclaimed contrast to the conservative *Blackwood's Magazine*. The essay particularly begins with the geographical and cultural influence of London: "I

do not agree with Mr. *Blackwood* in his definition of the word *Cockney*. He means by it a person who has happened at any time to live in London, and who is not a Tory – I mean by it a person who has never lived outside of London, and who has got all his ideas from it” (82). On the one hand, this passage challenges the *Blackwood* definition of the Cockney by reducing it to brief urban exposure and petty political difference. Hazlitt thus begins by criticizing the Tory characterization of Cockneyism as narrow-minded and diminutive in scope.¹⁵ But, on the other hand, Hazlitt’s classification also emphasizes the excess already associated with the urban figure by taking his description of the Cockney to even further definitional extremes than *Blackwood’s*. The Cockney must be fully immersed in and influenced by London geography and culture. Hazlitt’s Cockney is intensely metropolitan.

This metropolitan character is further emphasized in the next paragraph of the essay, which draws on London experience by naming specific places in the topography of the developing metropolis: “A true Cockney has never travelled beyond the purlieus of the Metropolis, either in the body or the spirit. Primrose-hill is the Ultima Thule of his romantic desires; Greenwich Park stands him instead of the Vales of Arcady” (82-83). The devoted Cockney never (physically, mentally, or spiritually) travels beyond the confines of the city because he believes he has all that he could possibly desire within the resorts of London—he has plenty to feed his imagination amid the topography and diversions of the city. The second sentence mocks the limited imaginative fancy of the Cockney, which only allows him to experience romantic adventures within the confines of the city and imagines nothing else worth exploring beyond the limits of his beloved

¹⁵ This challenge is particularly interesting since Hazlitt offers his own entertaining critique of the Cockney figure in the first portion of the essay. The challenge seems to suggest, then, that as ridiculous as Hazlitt’s portrait of the Cockney is, *Blackwood’s* is even more ridiculous and reductive.

metropolis. Primrose Hill, a tract of land offering a vista of the city and located on the north west edge of Romantic-era London, serves as the “Ultima Thule,” the farthest land and utmost limit of travel.¹⁶ Serving as the “Vales of Arcady,” and therefore as much romantic interest as far away lands for the Cockney, Greenwich Park represents another edge of the city and the extremes of the Cockney’s geographical explorations, as it is located nearly opposite of Primrose Hill in the far south-east corner of the nineteenth-century metropolis of London.¹⁷ Both Greenwich Park and Primrose Hill offer panoramic hilltop views of London and its suburbs, and both places—particularly Primrose Hill—were famous for these specific vistas of the city. The panoramic vista of these locations is significant, as it suggests that even when the Cockney reaches the edges of London, he still focuses his gaze on the metropolis of London. This panoramic gaze moreover provides a particularly urban vision of London—one that engages thematically in the urban sublime and the manufactured spectacles of London art. Both places are also suburban in location and character—they are located on the edges of the city, amidst the suburbs of London, and both are parks, offering a pastoral and natural landscape within the modern metropolis. In this passage, by naming specific London places, Hazlitt emphasizes the significance of London geography and location to the focus and sensibility of the Cockney. Metropolitan place is not only integral to the Cockney’s imagination, but in this passage is its focus and limit.

¹⁶ Primrose would have been geographically about as far north as the metropolis of London stretched during Hazlitt’s time.

¹⁷ Greenwich Park would have also been about as far south east as London would have reached geographically at this time. The Vales of Arcady refer to Arcadia, a mountainous region of ancient Greece.

Emphasizing London place also suggests that London location is integral to the Cockney's sense of identity. In a slightly later passage, Hazlitt describes the Cockney's social presumption in terms of place:

‘He is the owner of all he surveys.’ The Monument, the Tower of London, St James's Palace, the Mansion House, White-Hall, are part and parcel of his being. Let us suppose him to be a lawyer's clerk at half-a guinea a week: but he knows the Inns of Court, the Temple Gardens, and Gray's Inn Passage, sees the lawyers in their wigs walking up and down Chancery lane, and has advanced within half-a-dozen yards of the Chancellor's chair. (84-85)

In this passage, the list of place names emphasizes how London topography and the cultural and geographical associations of place form an important aspect of Cockney character, identity, and sensibility. Each of the places named in this passage is located in the older part of London and closely connected to the history of the city. For example, the Tower of London, located in the city of London, represents the political power of the monarchy in relation to the city, while the Monument, also located in the old portion of the city proper, commemorates the tragic fire of London that destroyed much of the city. St. James's Palace, the Mansion House, and White-Hall are also historical institutions of London that represent the power and opulence of the state, both monarchical and municipal.¹⁸ As “part and parcel of his being,” these London locations and monuments serve as an integral part of Cockney identity because they are so tied to the history and culture of London. The Cockney is not just any urban figure, but is specifically a Londoner. Urban place, and particularly the geographical places and spaces of London, are key to the Cockney's imagination and perception of the world.

¹⁸ St James's Palace, built by Henry VIII, was a Tudor style place of royal residence in Westminster. Whitehall is also a palace in Westminster, in which Tudor and Stuart monarchs resided. The Mansion house is the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London. It is located in the heart of London, near the Bank of England. While St James's Palace and Whitehall were older buildings during Hazlitt's time, the Mansion House was newer, built in the eighteenth century. For more on historical London places, see Max Byrd's *London Transformed: Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century* and Arnold's *Representing the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840*.

Yet, what is striking about the mention of these places and of the list of places following is that they address early on the Cockney's sense of identity as particularly a civic one, invested here in the interests of government. The initial list of palaces and the official mayoral residence indicate the larger systems of government in London, which the Cockney feels connected to, even if only through a civic imagination. But Hazlitt's subsequent list of the Inns of Court, Temple Gardens, Gray's Inn Fields, and Chancery Lane further relies on the reader's knowledge of London's judicial institutions and locations.¹⁹ The Cockney, though not a barrister or judge himself but rather a lawyer's clerk, takes a keen interest in the local judicial proceedings and possesses a familiarity with the area and Inns of Court as if he were a top barrister.²⁰ One of Hazlitt's main criticisms (and later admiration) of the Cockney is his presumption and tendency towards social leveling, which, in this excerpt, is performed through a knowledge of London place and history. As a citizen of the city, the Cockney feels that he is just as important as the government and judicial officials of London and considers himself as a citizen with institutional power. At this point in the text, Hazlitt presents this presumption and social leveling as ridiculous. The city influences the Cockney's imagination to the point that he has delusions of grandeur and power. Yet the text

¹⁹ Gray's Inn is both a road in central London and the name of a professional society for barristers and judges in London, presumably named after the road where this association is located. The Inns of Court refers generally to the four professional associations for barristers and judges: The Honorable Societies of Lincoln's Inn, the Inner Temple, the Middle Temple, and Gray's Inn. Temple Gardens refers to a garden in the city for members of the Inns of Court. Chancery Lane was named after the High Court of Chancery, which was located on that street and housed court records. Thus, each of these places mentioned in Hazlitt's list relate to the workings of judicial court in London proper. For more on the history of the Inns of Court in London, see John Fraser Macqueen's *A Lecture on the Early History and Academic Discipline of the Inns of Court and Chancery* (1851) and James Podgers's "Walk Through History in Legal London" (2000).

²⁰ It is important to note that Hazlitt's readers would have also been at least somewhat familiar with these key London places—as would *Blackwood's* readers—and likely would have understood the general connotations of each. The reader then participates in Hazlitt's derision of the Cockney figure, but is also, in a way, compromised by this, as well, in his identification with London and its places.

simultaneously reveals why a Tory publication like *Blackwood's* would find the Cockney figure threatening: this presumption could be seen as potentially powerful politically. For the Cockney, his metropolitan identity and familiarity develop a sense of civic place and identity, which Hazlitt explores more thoroughly at the end of the essay.

These excerpts from early in Hazlitt's essay emphasize the importance of London geography and place to the Cockney's imagination, identity, and sensibility. References to London places pervade the rest of the text as well, stressing the continued significance of urban and metropolitan place to the figure of the Cockney. Moreover, the social leveling and presumption addressed in the quotation above is played out later in the essay, as well. While Cockney presumption is ridiculed at the beginning of the essay, this early representation in the text connects social leveling with an intimate knowledge of the city, its environs, and its people. This intimate familiarity is also an important component of metropolitan sensibility as it emphasizes the significance of London character to sympathetic unity.

Acute Sensibility and the Cockney Consumer

In addition to establishing the importance of metropolitan place to the sensibility of the Cockney, Hazlitt's essay sets up the metropolitan figure in direct relation to urban sensibility, presenting him as possessing an acute sensibility that responds to the excess of the city. As a metropolitan pedestrian who wanders London in search of new urban delights, the Cockney revels in sensual consumption:

He sees everything near, superficial, little, in hasty succession. The world turns round, and his head with it, like a roundabout at a fair, till he becomes stunned and giddy with the motion. Figures glide by as in a *camera obscura*. There is a glare, a perpetual hubbub, a noise, a crowd about him; he sees and hears a vast number of things, and knows nothing. He is pert, raw, ignorant, conceited,

ridiculous, shallow, contemptible. His senses keep him alive; and he knows, inquires, and cares for nothing farther. (Hazlitt 83)

In this passage, the Cockney hastily consumes the sights and sounds of the city in order to move on to the next sensual experience. He is an expert urban consumer here, “giddy” with the motion and nimety of the urban scene. Yet Hazlitt also presents the Cockney as a figure of acute sensibility, tuned in to and focused on the excess sensations he experiences from the surrounding urban environment. The first line of this excerpt especially indicates the Cockney’s intense sensibility, as it suggests he perceives even the minutiae of his surroundings. The use of the word “everything” implies that the Cockney is keen to experience all sensations around him, leaving no spectacle or sound unconsumed. Furthermore, the words “near” and “little” suggest the Cockney loses sight of the big picture, focusing closely on the sensual details immediately around him. The word “superficial” also offers multiple connotations, including a suggestion of acute sensibility and sensitivity. While “superficial” in this context undoubtedly refers to the Cockney’s focus on the trivial and inconsequential sensations around him—thus, in part, suggesting that the Cockney himself is superficial, possessing no philosophical or emotional depth—the word also suggests sensations felt on the surface of the body and a sensitivity of the sense organs.²¹ The text thus presents the Cockney as possessing an abnormally acute sensibility. Although the term was often used to describe arteries, veins, and nerves, particularly as positioned close to the surface of the skin, in Hazlitt’s text it suggests sensations are experienced intensely from minimal exposure. An alternative definition of superficial as cursory—not detailed

²¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “superficial” also means “located close (or closer than a related structure) to the surface of the body or of an organ.” Multiple medical physicians of Hazlitt’s era use this connotation in reference to veins, nerves, and arteries. For example, William Cruikshank’s *The Anatomy of the Absorbing Vessels of the Human Body* (1790) refers to “superficial vessels” (185).

or thorough—also suggests that the Cockney experiences these sensations, but does not process them completely, as he consumes them “in hasty succession” (Hazlitt 83). The Cockney, then, in his acute sensibility, experiences a deluge of sensations, greedily taking them in but, due to their excess, not fully processing them mentally.

The excess of sensations experienced by the Cockney in the urban scene results in a nervous reaction. Hazlitt’s essay depicts the sense of disorientation caused by the movement of crowds and the quick succession of glaring sights and jarring sounds as the Cockney perambulates through London streets: “The world turns round and his head with it, like a roundabout at a fair, till he becomes stunned and giddy with the motion” (83). The extreme spectacles and inundation of sensations in the city cause him to reel. The image of the world spinning around the Cockney suggests his acute sensibility causes him to take in too much resulting in an intense dizziness, which, along with fainting, was a common symptom of nervous disease.²² The connection between this reaction of dizziness and the deluge of sensations the Cockney experiences indicate that this is a particularly nervous physiological reaction. The mind cannot process all of the sensations that the acutely sensitive body perceives, resulting in an experience of vertigo.

However, this nervous reaction is enjoyable to the Cockney. He revels in the moment like a child at a fair and is “giddy” with the experience. The excess of the city provides entertainment and pleasure for this urban figure. His mind cannot process the city, but he doesn’t seem to want it to—he delights in the vertiginous urban scene. The

²² In *Practical Dissertations on Nervous Complaints and Other Diseases Incident to the Human Body* [...], Henry St. John Neale lists dizziness as one of the symptoms of nervous disease: “When the disease has been of any considerable standing, a vertigo, dizziness, and faintness, are inseparable symptoms” (48).

passage does not describe the Cockney as overtly nervous as the characters in other texts of urban sensibility, like De Quincey's opium eater, for example. Any nervous symptoms displayed are brief (such as dizziness) and seem completely pleasurable to the Cockney rather than a source of distress. However, Hazlitt's Cockney at the beginning of the essay exhibits a reliance upon the nerves, sensation, and bodily experience typical of the nervous experience of urban sensibility. And the Cockney's positive reaction to nervous experience emphasizes how metropolitan he is—unfazed by the excess of the city and delighting in it. This formulation of metropolitan excess provides a representation of the urban sublime. Yet rather than terrifying the Cockney, the urban sublime is simply pleasurable and exciting.

The exhilaration of the Cockney in his urban environment and his enthusiastic absorption of sensations set him up as a keen consumer-pedestrian. Exhibiting an acute sensitivity to his surroundings and an eager desire to take in the sights and sounds of the city as quickly as possible, the Cockney's metropolitan sensibility situates him as a modern consumer of urban commodity culture. The Cockney in this passage—and in other sections of the essay—appears as a sort of proto-flâneur, thrilled by the spectacle of the city. Although it is not explicitly stated, the language used in this passage and others implies the Cockney explores and experiences the city by foot, thrilled by his immersion in the crowds of urban consumers and continual flow of bodies and commodities. His perambulations through the city are conducted for entertainment purposes, to derive pleasure from sensually consuming the city. Several scholars have compared Hazlitt's Cockney in "On Londoners and Country People" to a flâneur.²³ Indeed, Hazlitt's Cockney resembles the flâneur in striking ways, specifically in the

²³ See, for example, Dart (80).

consumer character of his urban rambles. But pedestrianism and this flâneur-type of enthusiasm for the spectacles of the city also formulate part of the representation of the Cockney's metropolitan sensibility. Like the other figures of urban sensibility explored in this study, Hazlitt's Cockney cultivates urban consumption through peripatetic explorations of the city. Yet Hazlitt's urban figure more closely resembles the Parisian flâneur than Wordsworth's pedestrian poet, for example, as the Cockney is much more pleurably immersed in the excess of the city than the speaker of Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude*.

However, Hazlitt critiques the Cockney's consumer-pedestrian sensibility. Not only are the spectacles of the city pleasurable for the Cockney, but they also appear fantastical, creating a romanticized vision of the city, but one that is revealed as mere simulation. For example, in describing the Cockney's urban rambles amid the bustle of the city, the text reveals that "Figures glide by as in a *camera obscura*" (Hazlitt 83). Like the Cockney, these figures are presumably other pedestrians moving through the busy city. This comparison of the movement of urban sights to a camera obscura emphasizes not only the visual movement of the city and peripatetic movement of the Cockney, but also the way this metropolitan character views city spectacle as entertainment. Urban spectacle is enchanting, mysterious, and somewhat surreal for the fervent Cockney. Yet it is also simulated. Latin for "dark room," the camera obscura generated the projection of images upon a screen, which was often used for entertainment and illustrative purposes and was a precursor of photography. As the camera obscura produces an image, a copy of a real object, Hazlitt's metaphor stresses the simulated aspect to the modern city and of the Cockney's fascination with urban

simulacra. While the city spectacles are exciting and mysterious, they also have a fabricated character to them. This representation formulates part of Hazlitt's critique of the Cockney, who is too engaged in the superficial, simulated aspects of the urban landscape.

Hazlitt's critique of the sensuality and consumer aspect of the Cockney continues in the following lines, as well, which present the intellectual problems of the Cockney's sensual preoccupation: "he sees and hears a vast number of things, and knows nothing. He is pert, raw, ignorant, conceited, ridiculous, shallow, contemptible. His senses keep him alive; and he knows, inquires and cares for nothing further" (Hazlitt 83). Like the previously examined passages, this excerpt emphasizes the Cockney as an intensely sensual creature, exceptionally tuned in to his nerves and senses. The intensity of sensation revitalizes him—" [h]is senses keep him alive"—and he feels he needs nothing else to sustain his pleasure. The essay continues here to present the Cockney as possessing an acute sensibility, fixated on the excess sensations of the city that envelop him. But this sensibility does not take him to new intellectual or spiritual heights—he "knows nothing" and "inquires" for nothing. Instead it keeps him fully immersed in the bodily experience of the city. He is "raw" like the nerves of his body—crude and intellectually unrefined. According to this portion of the essay, the Cockney's heightened sensibility cuts him off from the development of the mind, as he is fully invested in nervous experience.

Hazlitt critiques this emphasis on the nerves and stasis of the mind, presenting the Cockney here as "ignorant, conceited, ridiculous, shallow, contemptible." Dart argues that the Cockney is the "epitome of all that Hazlitt hated about the Hartleyan

philosophy in this respect: he does not think, but simply picks up ideas by sympathetic vibration, reverberating with associations culled from his environment” (62-63).²⁴ The Cockney at the beginning of Hazlitt’s essay is a being of nerves and vibrations, as Dart suggests, and, I argue, that this is what makes him a “nervous” figure. As a figure thriving on nervous vibrations, he is a full consumer of sensations, and specifically of urban sensations, focusing on nothing but the sensual experience of the city. In Hazlitt’s representation of the Cockney, sensations are felt, but are not processed or intellectually examined. Cockneyism operates here upon a consumer sensibility, infatuated with urban sensations, but not with the development of the mind through sensation.

Metropolitan Imagination and Cockney Pride

This sensual consumerism is further critiqued in Hazlitt’s representation of the Cockney’s consumer imagination, which is in many ways a product of his urban sensibility. The representation of the Cockney’s imagination at the beginning of the essay emphasizes a sensual experience that results in urban social leveling but that Hazlitt presents as misused. In the following representation, the figure takes the spectacles he sees in his urban strolls and participates in them imaginatively:

He meets the Lord Mayor’s coach, and without ceremony treats himself to an imaginary ride in it. He notices the people going to court or to a city-feast, and is quite satisfied with the show. He takes the wall of a Lord, and fancies himself as

²⁴ Dart is referring here to David Hartley’s developments in neuroscience, specifically addressed in *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749). In the *Observations*, Hartley presents a “theory of vibrations” in relation to sensation and how the nerves and brain interact with Newton’s physical universe. According to Hartley, nerves and the white medullary substance of the brain vibrate (on a molecular level, not “like musical strings”), change their frequencies of vibration, and transmit vibrations to other nerves. Hartley argues that the “white medullary substance of the brain, spinal marrow, and the nerves proceeding from them, is the immediate instrument of sensation and motion” (Prop. 1, 7). Furthermore, Hartley claims that “Sensibility, and the Power of Motion, seem to be conveyed to all the parts, in their natural State, from the brain and spinal marrow along the nerves” (7). Thus, sensation is the result of a vibration of “infinitesimal” particles of the medullary substance of nerves and the brain (12). Hartley takes this further to contend that pleasure is the result of moderate vibrations, pain of vibrations so violent as to break the continuity of the nerves.

good as he. He sees an infinite quantity of people pass along the street, and thinks there is no such thing as life or a knowledge of character to be found out of London. (Hazlitt 83)

In this passage, the Cockney's observations—his sensual experiences—in the streets of the metropolis are no longer simply urban sensation, but take on a social character. Here the metropolitan figure strolls through the streets of the city, appropriating the sights for his own entertainment and self-aggrandizement. In the first part of the excerpt, the Cockney's consumerist imagination leads to a social leveling, where the figure finds himself in the place of or at the same level as the Mayor of London or a Lord. He consumes the spectacle of upper-class commodities (a coach, for example) through a sort of sensual ingestion, leading him to appropriate upper-class consumption for himself imaginatively. Due to the Cockney's consumerist imagination, the Lord Mayor's coach has now become his own and he envisions himself riding in it.

But the Cockney also acts on his imagined social presumption, as well. In taking “the wall of the Lord,” the Cockney walks on the same path as the aristocrat, acting as though he is one himself. This passage mirrors aspects of John Gay's *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, in which Gay addresses the various strategies of walking through the city in order to keep oneself physically and socially clean. Hazlitt's representation alludes to this text and to the act of “taking the wall,” suggesting, however, that the Cockney develops his own “art of walking” in the metropolis, which consists of cheeky appropriation and social leveling, of ignoring social guidelines (or modifying them) for his own benefit.²⁵ In the first sentence he imagines himself riding

²⁵ At the very beginning of Book I of Gay's *Trivia*, the speaker asserts the purpose of the text, which references asserting “the Wall,” much like Hazlitt's Cockney:

Through Winter Streets to steer your Course aright,
How to walk clean by Day, and safe by Night,

as Lord Mayor in the official coach, but here he actually walks the same path as a Lord, appropriating social space in his own “fancies” that he is “as good as” those of the aristocracy. This social presumption is an important part of the Cockney’s character and imagination. As the text asserts, “*Your true Cockney is your only true leveler. Let him be as low as he will, he fancies he is as good as any body else*” (83). References to the imagination (*imaginary*) and fancy (*fancies*) in these passages emphasize this social leveling as one of the main focuses of the Cockney’s imagination. The Cockney presumption depicted here would have been precisely one of the aspects of the Cockney character that *Blackwood’s* ridiculed, but also viewed as a threat.

The beginning of Hazlitt’s essay carefully expresses a disapproval of these forms of imagination and of those exercised in general by the Cockney, revealing that the figure’s sensual and social preoccupations diminish the Cockney’s imagination. The imagination of the Cockney is wasted on shallow preoccupations: “His personal vanity is thus continually flattered and perked up in to ridiculous self-complacency, while his imagination is jaded and impaired by daily misuse” (Hazlitt 83). This sentence rhetorically links to the earlier statement about Cockney presumption—that he thinks he is “as good as any body else,” no matter how lowly he is socially or personally (Hazlitt 83). The Cockney’s sensual consumerism, then, flatters his personal vanity, but does nothing to develop his imagination. The Cockney’s imagination is “jaded and impaired

How jostling Crouds, with Prudence, to decline,
When to assert the Wall, and when resign,
I sing: [...] (Gay, I.1-5)

Yet Hazlitt’s Cockney possesses a bolder version of urban walking in which he jostles with crowds and chooses to “assert the Wall,” whether he socially should or not. Gay’s *Trivia* makes further references to “command[ing]” the wall in other passages, as well as “surrender[ing]” it to others, such as ladies. See I.61-62; I.200; II.46; II.55; III.140; III.153-154; III.205. Furthermore, the amount of references to taking or surrendering the wall in Gay’s text suggests that not only was this a common aspect of London pedestrianism, but also that Hazlitt would have most likely been familiar with Gay’s references to this particular pedestrian act.

by daily misuse” because he focuses on consumption and social status. This line implies that the Cockney has the potential to develop his imagination, but that he instead uses it solely for entertainment and egotistical purposes rather than intellectual or spiritual development, which results in a creative torpor. Moreover, the Cockney’s inability to focus on anything for more than a fleeting moment, due to his focus on the hasty consumption of urban excess, is particularly to blame for his “jaded” imagination: “Every thing is vulgarized in the mind. Nothing dwells long enough on it to produce an interest; nothing contemplated sufficiently at a distance to excite curiosity or wonder” (Hazlitt 83). This excerpt ties directly to the paragraph’s earlier depiction of the fleeting succession of images that whirl around the metropolitan character as he rambles through the city. The Cockney does not focus on anything long enough to contemplate deeper meanings of culture, philosophy, life, or the self. His acute, urban sensibility here negatively affects the imagination, preventing him from developing creatively or intellectually.

However, while Hazlitt critiques the consumer imagination of the Cockney, the essay begins to shift its position on this aspect of Cockney sensibility, revealing a general softening towards the metropolitan character. As Dart suggests, this tempering of Hazlitt’s critique occurs when the essay moves from abstract depictions of the Cockney to a “series of concrete personifications” that flesh out the “caricature of Cockneyism” and, as I argue, present a more complex and ambivalent representation of the Cockney’s metropolitan sensibility (62). The specific personifications begin with the figure of the shopman, a man tied to economic exchange and commercial labor: “He is a shopman and nailed all day behind the counter: but he sees hundreds of gay, well-

dressed people pass – an endless phantasmagoria – and enjoys their liberty and gaudy fluttering pride” (Hazlitt 85). The shopman-Cockney here is figured as an integral part of the commercial culture of London—participating in commodity exchange with customers—yet he, too, is an urban consumer. Although he is stationed behind the counter at his place of employment, the shopman shifts his gaze beyond the store in which he works to the spectacle of the procession of well-dressed Londoners outside. The shopman here cannot quite be like the flâneur, perambulating through the streets consuming urban spectacles, but he still enjoys the spectacle of the city from a voyeuristic perspective inside the shop. The Londoners that pass by provide an “endless” procession of entertainment for the interior observer of urban life. But the passage is careful to point out a particular aspect of the urban pageant that the shopman enjoys: their “liberty” and “gaudy fluttering pride.” The Cockney admires in the passing crowds what he admires in himself—civic liberty as a citizen of London and ostentatious pride. The shopman-Cockney’s metropolitan sensibility thus encompasses a civic pride, as well as a consumer character.

Directly after this representation of the voyeur shopman, the passage describes another form of the Cockney: “He is a footman – but he rides behind beauty, through a crowd of carriages, and visits a thousand shops” (85). The footman here, rather than watching the crowds from his shop window, actually becomes a moving part of the crowd and bustling motion of the city. Although he rides “behind beauty” rather than in the carriage with his upper-class employers, he still “visits a thousand shops,” participating vicariously in the commercial luxury of London, even if only through observation and distanced admiration. The text yet again portrays consuming the

spectacles of the city—crowds, shops, commodities, advertisements, architecture, etc.—as key to the Cockney’s sensibility. Even if he cannot afford to purchase the goods and fashions of those he sees, he can still consume them as spectacles. Thus, in both depictions of the shopman and the footman, Hazlitt’s essay represents the Cockney’s leisurely consumerism, experienced and participated in even while he is working. In both instances, the spectacles of the city serve as a creative force that momentarily allows the Cockney to lose himself in the phantasmagoria that the city constantly provides.

The essay then quickly moves from the shopman and footman to describe more Cockney-types of the city, though in an increasingly middle to lower class register, offering a dark yet simultaneously ambivalent view of the London Cockney:

Nay, the very scavenger and nightman thinks the dirt in the street has something precious in it, and his employment is solemn, silent, sacred, peculiar to London! A barker in Monmouth Street, a slop-seller in Radcliffe Highway, a tapster at the night-cellar, a beggar in St Giles’s, a drab in Fleet-Ditch live in the eyes of millions, and eke out a dreary, wretched, scanty, or loathsome existence from the gorgeous, busy, glowing scene around them. It is a common saying among such persons that “they had rather be hanged in London than die a natural death out of it any where else” – such is the force and habit of imagination. (Hazlitt 85)

As this passage demonstrates, the essay moves from Cockneyism as a semi-genteel phenomenon through the leisure of urban pedestrianism to decidedly middle-class in character through the shopman and now to a petit-bourgeois or lower-class milieu. This progression suggests that Hazlitt extends his definition of the Cockney to include a wider range of social classes and professions, but it moreover emphasizes the Cockney’s unflagging metropolitan pride. On the one hand, the passage harshly critiques the inhumane conditions of a capital city that is supposed to protect and

support its citizens, even those of the lower class. The lower-class figures of the city each “eke out” a miserable and “loathsome existence,” forced to endure poverty in the face of the ostentation of extreme wealth in the city. Yet the passage also humorously represents the perseverance of pride and personal connection between the Cockney and his beloved city. The scavenger, nightman, barker, slop-seller, tapster, beggar, and drab all exhibit a Cockney sensibility, keen to sensually consume the magnificence of London despite their harsh and oppressive living and working conditions. But they also appreciate even the filth of the city. For example, the scavenger and nightman take on a Cockney-style, leisurely approach and appreciation (even admiration) of the very filth of London that they clean.²⁶ Cockney imagination and consumerism persists even in its lower-class manifestations and in the filthiest of conditions.

The representation of the Cockney’s pride in the city despite its filthy and wretched conditions continues and is further emphasized in the integration of place names referenced in relation to occupation. While the references to the barker in Monmouth Street and slop-seller in Radcliffe Highway mostly emphasize highly-trafficked commercial areas, St Giles’s and Fleet-Ditch evoke a seedier side of London and more miserable conditions.²⁷ The beggar’s station in St Giles’s would have

²⁶ A “scavenger” in Romantic-era London was a person who cleaned the streets for employment, while a “nightman” removed waste matter from the city at night. Both were very filthy forms of employment, especially the latter, but were also integral to keeping the city inhabitable for its residents.

²⁷ The word “barker” in this passage most likely refers to a person peddling wares in a street market, who “barks” or yells out to passersby in an attempt to draw in customers. A “slop-seller” in Hazlitt’s time was a person who sold second-hand clothes, mostly to the petit-bourgeoisie. Monmouth Street, connected to the barker in this passage, was part of the seven dials (a central, well-known, and busy place in London near Covent Garden where seven streets converge) and received large amounts of commercial traffic. It also consisted of a market known for second-hand clothes and various other shops (Waller 172). Radcliffe Highway was famous for its street markets, which largely sold second-hand clothing. In *The Night Side of London* (1861), J. Ewing Ritchie describes the market commodities of Radcliffe’s Highway as consisting of “boots,” “oilskin caps, and coats and trousers, or rough woollen shirts,” all “piled up in gigantic masses” (103). Although Ritchie’s text describes the market at a later time than Hazlitt’s text, the street had long been associated with second-hand clothes markets and with the circulation of large

provided for contemporary readers a very distinct and infamous area of disrepute and filth.²⁸ St Giles's also had a long history of mendicity, going back to the sixteenth century when a local hospital was closed down and "lepers and local people were left to fend for themselves" (Fitzgerald 106). According to Fitzgerald, by 1816, the squalid conditions and "high crime rate of the area had become so notorious that Parliament commissioned an official enquiry into the area" (111).²⁹ In addition to the beggar in St Giles's, the "drab in Fleet-Ditch" is associated with wretched living conditions, as well. Fleet-Ditch in early nineteenth-century London was an open sewer that flowed through the center of the metropolis.³⁰ Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Fleet Ditch was a filthy stretch of London in which prostitution was prevalent. According to Jerry White, clusters of "bawdy houses" existed in "relatively large numbers" along the banks of Fleet Ditch (361). The "drab" mentioned in Hazlitt's text most likely refers to a prostitute, although the word could also mean a physically dirty woman (as in soiled clothing, etc.).³¹ Hazlitt's careful attention to both urban place and occupation helps to emphasize the harsh working conditions of the petit-bourgeoisie and lower classes, while also opening up the leisurely, consumer sensibility of the Cockney to the working classes. For, although these lower-class figures live a dreary

quantities of goods. For more on lower-class occupations in London during the nineteenth century, see Michael Fitzgerald's *Ragged London: The Life of London's Poor*.

²⁸ Indeed, William Hogarth produced several paintings and engravings based on the St. Giles area, including his famous "Gin Lane," which depicts a particularly filthy and squalid urban scene.

²⁹ In this enquiry, Fitzgerald claims that they "found that 11,000 Irish people lived there, as well as many more English poor" (111). The large numbers of poor Londoners in this area would have made St Giles's an area most likely full of beggars.

³⁰ Fleet-Ditch originally was part of Fleet River, a free-flowing stream before London was densely populated. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the river became very polluted and eventually became a sewer.

³¹ The word in Hazlitt's essay most likely takes on both connotations. Interestingly, the drab is also considered part of the Cockney population, even though she is a woman, revealing Hazlitt's representation of the Cockney as consisting of a wide range of characters. However, while Hazlitt includes the drab in his coverage of Cockneyism, the majority of his representations are male.

life in the city, they still take pride in their urban existence and partake in its spectacular luxuries.

While the passage points out the wretched conditions of the petit-bourgeois and lower-class Cockney, the presumption of these poor, yet independent workers to assume a Cockney pride in the city is depicted as admirable here, evoking a sympathy for the Cockney. As Dart contends, Hazlitt's move from abstract definitions of the Cockney to concrete personifications begins a rhetorical move to expressing sympathy and (later) identification with the Cockney character (80). But it also shows that the Cockney's focus on spectacles and sensations not only makes him acutely aware of his urban surroundings, but also is quite progressive, instilling a sense of pride, self-worth, and collective identity in those of the lower classes. Cockneyism instills a sympathy with other urban inhabitants and a confidence in one's sense of self. Metropolitan sensibility is thus depicted in this passage as not only encouraging social leveling, but also developing an imagination that increases sympathy.

Cockney Sensibility and Metropolitan Citizenship

While Hazlitt hints at admiration for the Cockney figure here, the end of the essay completely shifts to present a positive representation of this urban character. Several scholars have taken note of the essay's end as a *volte face*, a turn from critiquing to fully defending and praising the metropolitan figure, but I argue that this shift in representation specifically emphasizes a metropolitan sensibility as generating the conditions for acceptance and admiration of the Cockney character.³² For Hazlitt, the aspects of acute metropolitan sensibility that he initially critiques—his sensitivity,

³² For scholars who address this shift, see, for example, Dart (81-83) and Gilmartin (48-50). Dart also addresses the *volte face* of the essay in *William Hazlitt: Metropolitan Writings*, a collection of Hazlitt's work introduced and edited by Dart (82).

sensual consumerism, social presumption, vanity, and fixation on the urban geography and culture of London—become virtues as these traits lead to powerful sympathy and to a sense of civic connection between members of the urban community. Thus, what was previously presented as socially suspect or flawed about the metropolitan sensibility of the Cockney figure is at the end presented as politically powerful, leading to a civic freedom and a stronger sense of communal belonging. Metropolitan sensibility generates eager citizenship.

In exploring representations of civic identity and citizenship in this chapter, I refer to a citizen generally as a subject legally recognized by a state or commonwealth, in the case of the Cockney, belonging both to the national state and to the municipal state of London. The word *citizen* also means an inhabitant of a town or city, signifying a geographical tie to a municipality.³³ In general, citizenship often entails the status of being a full member of a community, and in the latter case, of an urban community. In Hazlitt's text, citizenship entails certain civil, political, and social rights as a member of the nation of England, but more specifically as a member of the city of London. Hazlitt's emphasis on the position of Cockneys as "citizens and freemen of London and Westminster" by "the right of their birth-place" speaks to the significance of municipal citizenship in the text (94). The status of urban citizenship holds a heavier social and political weight in the essay as compared to subjects in the country, particularly because, as Hazlitt claims, London citizens are more aware of and able to execute the advantages of citizenship.

³³ Indeed, the word citizen derives from the Latin word for city (*civitas*) and in earlier forms of the word signified an inhabitant of a city rather than of a country or nation. Hazlitt's use of the word draws from both the more specific municipal connotation, as well as the national one. Yet, for Hazlitt, the Cockney's civic identity is particularly developed from his status as a citizen of London, not just the larger nation of England.

In addition to municipal connotations, the word citizen, by the Romantic period, furthermore carried a broader social range, referring more generally to anyone who was born in England or in the jurisdiction of any of its imperial colonies or protectorates and was able to exercise individual rights afforded by the state. This definition, of course, diverges from previous historical periods in which only certain individuals from particular socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds (i.e., white, upper-class males) held the status or rights of a citizen.³⁴ Moreover, it was expanded to encompass an imperial economy and state, although Hazlitt's text seems mostly to focus on the municipal and national connotations. While citizenship was a complex concept in the British Romantic period and Hazlitt's essay certainly offers engaging and complex claims about citizenship in relation to political power, my interest in Hazlitt's representation focuses on the way that urban (and metropolitan) sensibility is figured as generating an engaged and even ideal citizenry, in which democracy is promoted and thrives.³⁵ The shift at the end of the essay emphasizes this metropolitan citizenship and sensibility.

Hazlitt begins the complete shift at the end of the essay with a reference to Wordsworth's views of the city that situates his own response about Cockney sympathy

³⁴ And certainly this term still carried restrictions in the Romantic period, as individuals of marginalized groups still did not have the same rights as those of the dominant group (primarily white males). For example, women were not afforded equal rights to men in many circumstances. Moreover, citizenship still did not cover equality of social, economic, gender, and ethnic privileges. I do not intend here to elide the complexity of this term during the period nor ignore the various peoples marginalized and disenfranchised by the social and political status of citizenry. (Nor do I wish to ignore the complexities of citizenship in previous eras.) Rather, my examination here focuses on how Hazlitt depicts the notion of the citizen in relation to the Cockney in his essay. Hazlitt's essay prescribes an ideal citizenship and an optimistic vision of democracy that supports individual and communal rights and privileges, and that encompasses a definition of citizenship that includes members of the urban lower classes. For Hazlitt, the Cockney's metropolitan sensibility encourages him to formulate such a vision of community.

³⁵ For a more historically political reading of Hazlitt's essay, see Gilmartin (40-62), Dart (81-84), and Marcus Tomalin (21-40).

and civic participation within the discourse of urban sensibility and in direct contrast to Wordsworth's representations of nervous sensibility in the city:³⁶

It is a strange state of society (such as that in London) where a man does not know his next-door neighbour, and where the feelings (one would think) must recoil upon themselves, and either fester or become obtuse. Mr Wordsworth, in the preface of his poem of the 'Excursion,' represents men in cities as so many wild beasts or evil spirits, shut up in cells of ignorance without natural affections, and barricadoed down in sensuality and selfishness. The nerve of humanity is bound up, according to him, the circulation of the blood stagnates. (93)

The opening of this last paragraph of Hazlitt's essay specifically alludes to Wordsworth's Preface to *The Excursion* (as the essay states) but also to Wordsworth's representation of London in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, in which the speaker claims to experience alienation and nervous symptoms amid the excess of the city.³⁷ Referring to the urban alienation Wordsworth claims takes place in the city, Hazlitt addresses this opposing view that the "feelings" and sensibility are damaged or even nonexistent in London. He sets this up in order to counter its representation and show a different, sympathetic side to the urban inhabitant. But Hazlitt's interpretation of Wordsworth's depiction of London focuses specifically on the idea of nervous sensibility in the city. The passage directly addresses the link between nerves and sensibility prevalent in the medical discourse and culture of the time and presents Wordsworth's representations of the city as a nervous response, a physiological reaction of nervous symptoms to the excess of urban life. In this excerpt, the symptoms of the individual expand to affect the community as a whole—the "nerve of humanity" is restrained and the "circulation of

³⁶ A few scholars have addressed more thoroughly Hazlitt's response to Wordsworth. For more on Hazlitt's textual responses to Wordsworth on a political level, see Christina Root, "Jacobin Poetics and Napoleonic Politics: Hazlitt's Critique of Wordsworth" (227-245). My reading here focuses solely on his response to Wordsworth's characterization of urban sensibility.

³⁷ Hazlitt's reference to the urbanite not knowing his neighbor moreover directly alludes to Wordsworth's observation in Book 7 (1805) that men in the city live as "next-door neighbors [...], yet still / Strangers, and knowing not each other's name" (7.119-120).

the blood” of the entire city “stagnates.” The inhabitants of London in the Wordsworthian view experience a communal torpor that leads to ignorance, alienation, and vice. Hazlitt’s description of Wordsworth’s view of urban life furthermore acknowledges aspects of his own earlier critique of the Cockney figure, in particular his “sensuality and selfishness.”

However, Hazlitt establishes a new voice in the discourse on urban sensibility by offering a divergent perspective of metropolitan sensibility through the figure of the Cockney. The essay rejects nervous sensibility as a result of the city and presents a metropolitan, Cockney sensibility that presents the virtues of urban perception, particularly its ability to unite Londoners rather than alienate them. Hazlitt briefly acknowledges what he sees as Wordsworth’s (incorrect) opinion: “And it would be so, if men were merely cut off from intercourse with their immediate neighbours, and did not meet together generally and more at large” (93). He then refutes this notion by contending that the public nature of urban life instead leads the metropolitan person to experience sympathy and intimacy with others. Here Hazlitt suggests that Wordsworth does not really know or understand the urbanite, for “man in London becomes, as Mr Burke has it, a sort of ‘public creature.’ He lives in the eye of the world, and the world in his” (93). The urban man is not cut off from others, but instead is united with others through a mutual acknowledgement and civic sympathy.³⁸

Hazlitt’s essay depicts this civic sympathy as particularly developed through the Cockney’s acute sensibility and sensitivity to his urban surroundings. The Cockney’s

³⁸ By “civic sympathy,” I particularly mean sympathy based on a mutual connection to a municipal area and its cultural characteristics and administration. As a “public” person, the Cockney both belongs to and serves the larger community of London and the nation as a whole. His civic sympathy connects him to other members of the community.

sensual immersion in London's streets and crowds leads to a better recognition and understanding of his fellow Londoners. As he walks through the streets of London, the Cockney "sees the stream of human life pouring along the streets – its comforts and embellishments piled up in the shops – the houses are proofs of the industry, the public buildings of the art and magnificence of man; while the public amusements and places of resort are a centre and support for social feelings" (93). Sensually immersed in the urban experience of the public streets and businesses of London, the Cockney, according to Hazlitt, "has better opportunities of observing its large masses and varied movements" (93). His acute sensibility causes him to be more sensually open to his surroundings and to fellow human beings in the city. In these passages, what was once depicted as the shallow and passive enjoyment of the excess of stimulation in the city here becomes an acute and sympathetic awareness of the varieties of life around him. In contrast to the potentially nervous acute sensibility at the beginning of the essay, metropolitan sensibility here produces a healthy civic sympathy that helps the Cockney recognize the rights of others.

Moreover, this passage also emphasizes the importance of commodity culture and spectacle to the civic sensibility of the urban Cockney figure. Hazlitt presents exposure to the spectacles and commodity culture of the city (through crowds, advertisements, buildings, and commodities) as important to the cultivation of sympathy and civic engagement. Commodities here show man's desires and comforts, providing an intimacy and understanding of other Londoners to the astute and sensitive urban walker. In addition, the buildings reveal the result of communal and civic imagination and participation, while public amusements foster sympathy between groups of people.

Rather than arguing that the modern city alienates, isolates, and debilitates the urban observer, Hazlitt shows that the city instead holds the potential to connect others and to demonstrate man's accomplishments. The spectacles of the city thus function generatively to bring the urban inhabitants together as a public community. Rather than debilitating the mind and creativity of the Londoner, urban spectacle enhances a civic creativity based on a consumer imagination.³⁹

The consumer imagination explored in the previous section of the essay is here reevaluated and found to be beneficial to a healthy civic participation. The beginning of "On Londoners and Country People" expresses a disapproval of the consumer imagination of the Cockney indicating that his sensual and social preoccupations diminish imaginative creativity. Blinded by his metropolitan-centric vision of the world, the Cockney imagination is limited to the city and preoccupied by personal vanity and social preoccupation. However, the end of the essay subverts this claim and reveals the consumer imagination of the Cockney, developed through metropolitan sensibility, to be crucial to his civic sympathy and connection to other members of the London community. The Cockney's capacity for "abstraction," which was critiqued and ridiculed in the first part of the essay, at the end is presented as crucial to sustaining the ideas and "conditions of an ideal urban community," as Gilmartin suggests (50). But, as I contend here, this abstraction is particularly presented as a result of the excessive sensuality of the Cockney's metropolitan sensibility. The Cockney's imagination, fed through his perambulations amid the crowds and commodities of the city, focuses on

³⁹ This argument also recalls and stresses the idea of citizenship in which even those of the petit-bourgeoisie and lower working class understand that they have rights and are part of a larger community. They can admire the buildings, houses, streets, and amusements of London, too, because they recognize their own part in the management of the city.

the excess of individual sensations. In the earlier section of the essay, this abstraction is represented as creating fragments of sensation detached from one another, experienced randomly by the Cockney. In contrast, the end of the essay depicts this abstraction as unifying, as the stream of human life that he observes through fragments of sensations among the streets of London, joined with the houses, public buildings, and amusements, unite to provide a sense of community for the Cockney.

The essay expresses this praise of the Cockney imagination especially strongly in the latter part of the last paragraph, which emphasizes the collective experience of the city as generating a democratic awareness:

We comprehend the vast denomination, the *People*, of which we see a tenth part daily moving before us; and by having our imaginations emancipated from petty interests and personal dependence, we learn to venerate ourselves as men, and to respect the rights of human nature. Therefore it is that the citizens and freemen of London and Westminster are patriots by prescription, philosophers and politicians by right of their birth-place. (Hazlitt 94)

In this passage, the abstraction of the metropolitan imagination, in which the external world was perceived by the Cockney in a random experience of sensual stimulation, and which Hazlitt initially criticizes for fostering selfishness and vanity, here transforms into an abstraction necessary to the freeman and political citizen, in which an intimate experience of the urban crowd and culture forms a self confidence and respect, as well as the foundation for concepts like “the *People*,” liberty, and individual human rights (Dart 81).⁴⁰ As Dart argues, the “egotism of the Cockney,” expressed in “his overweening pretension” and social presumption, “is precisely what makes him a good

⁴⁰ It is at this point in the text, as well, that Hazlitt shifts from the third person when discussing the Cockney to the first person plural, aligning himself (or at least the speaker) with the metropolitan figure (Dart 81). As Cox, Dart, and other scholars have pointed out, Hazlitt himself was accused of being a Cockney by conservative periodicals like *Blackwood's* (Cox 4-5; Dart 67). By the end of “On Londoners and Country People,” Hazlitt fully embraces this character and his identification with the Cockney, demonstrating solidarity with and support for the form of metropolitan sensibility explored in the essay.

citizen, fully conscious of his own rights and privileges” (83). But the passage also reveals that this egotism and abstraction comes directly from the Cockney’s metropolitan sensibility and consumer imagination, which, through an intense sensualism and consumer focus, lead to a capacity for and tendency toward the civic awareness of the ideal citizen. For what begins as a solipsistic and selfish pretension generates and expands outwards to a better sense of community and the rights of others. Through the Cockney’s peripatetic mingling among the crowds and commercial life of London, he participates in and develops a democratic view of the city that privileges the rights of the urban citizen and results in a strong sympathy with others.⁴¹ Thus, the spectacles of the city, rather than causing nervousness through excess, in Hazlitt’s later formulation of Cockney sensibility, actually improves the civic and political mind of the Cockney and results in an urban unity.⁴²

In addition to the Cockney’s consumer imagination, his fixation on urban geography and history—also part of his metropolitan sensibility—contributes to his

⁴¹ In “Reading One’s Own Mind: Hazlitt, Cognition, Fiction,” John Savarese addresses Hazlitt’s representations of sympathy and “social feeling” in his “Essay on the Principles of Human Action,” and argues that Hazlitt makes sympathy central to the mind and to even ordinary daily activities (438). While Savarese’s argument focuses on a different Hazlitt essay and describes a different phenomenon than the types of sympathy we see in “On Londoners and Country People,” I find Savarese’s article helpful in considering the centrality of the “sympathetic imagination” to interpersonal interaction, as the imagination here serves as the channel through which “we feel our way into the mental existence of those around us” (438). Similarly, I argue that Hazlitt presents the consumer imagination promoted by and developed through metropolitan sensibility as also leading to a sympathetic understanding of others, especially in such a closely interacting community, such as London.

⁴² The urban sublime of this metropolitan text then also results in a democratic and civic admiration rather than alienation. In “The Artifactual Sublime: Making London Poetry,” Anne Janowitz argues that there are multiple pathways of the sublime in literary representations of the city. One “announces the alienated self of modern spaces, and tells its sorry story of a personal identity which has been, previously or elsewhere, coherent and rooted, but is now set adrift in the too-muchness of urban traffic” (Janowitz 246-247). This pathway draws upon the “self-preservative aspect” of urban sublimity that Janowitz argues works to protect the subject from the “urban rush” (247). In contrast, Hazlitt’s essay presents an urban sublime—emphasized in urban excess—that is characterized similarly to what Janowitz addresses as the sublime pathway that “offers a route for a self both complete and expanding into auto-construction; a self who finds in the city an invitation into identification and solidarity and, at times, exhilaration” (247). I contend that Hazlitt’s essay offers a representation of the urban sublime more akin to this latter characterization, but that particularly is characterized by civic unity and cohesion.

civic sympathy. At the beginning of the essay, the Cockney's interest in urban place and history was based on an egotistical sympathy with power and its structures, and is thus ridiculed by the speaker of the essay. The metropolitan figure seemed to want to partake in and pretend he was part of the power systems of the city and nation. But this same egotism is later presented as a "result of his intense immersion in his own history" through his peripatetic explorations through the city and developed familiarity with urban history (Dart 82). In this sense, the place names and specific knowledge of urban geography, character, and history actually give the Cockney recognition of his own importance as a citizen of the city. By offering a detailed account of the history and geographical organization of London, Hazlitt inserts or rewrites London and Londoners into a historicized political tradition of England that focuses on citizenship. The Cockney's imagination—developed through his metropolitan sensibility and love of London—generates a civic identity and powerful sense of citizenship for the metropolitan figure.

While Hazlitt's representation of metropolitan sensibility engages the Cockney figure in notions of citizenship and civic participation, seemingly presenting a submissive role for the metropolitan subject, I argue Hazlitt's representation of Cockney, metropolitan sensibility works to subvert formulations of authority by instilling a sense of individual and communal power in the urban individual. The Cockney's peripatetic rambles through the city expose the individual subject to the diversity of human life and a variety of perspectives and promotes a liberality that advocates for pluralism and heterogeneity of public expression.⁴³ The Cockney thus

⁴³ Tomalin contends that liberality is presented in some of Hazlitt's other work as a "desirable quality," "associated directly with the ability to perceive a range of contrasting perspectives – a stance which is

experiences a connection to other London inhabitants through their mutual participation in urban citizenship, while also recognizing diversity among the individuals of the city. The urban inhabitants and Cockneys are connected in the city, but this unity still allows for individual expression and creativity. The Cockney's emphasis on the self thus helps preserve the rights and individuality of others. In this way, the people of the city are not automatons, working to support political institutions, nor are they passive subjects of these institutions, but are individuals working collectively to have a say in government and civic administration. Londoners seek to protect the rights of everyone and accept a multiplicity of voices within a political collective. This metropolitan citizenship is presented in contrast to citizens of the country, who "have no idea but of individuals, none of rights or principles – and a king, as the greatest individual, is the highest idea they can form" (Hazlitt 94). The Cockney, in contrast, can form and entertain the idea of a democracy.

This democratic sensibility and metropolitan citizenship furthermore present a form of masculinity in the essay that counters the *Blackwood's* characterization of the Cockney as effeminate and weak. As Cox argues, the word Cockney was linked to "weakness" and effeminacy in the 1820s by conservative periodicals that strove to discredit metropolitan writers and Whig sympathizers in an effort to minimize their political and social power (26). Hazlitt's essay responds to this characterization of the Cockney figure and offers a counter-representation that reveals a civic masculinity even within an urban and commodity-culture characterization. While the essay admits to a

presented as being diametrically opposed to narrow-minded bigotry and blinkered intolerance" (29). While this point parallels Hazlitt's point about the heterogeneity of metropolitan life in "On Londoners and Country People," Tomalin here focuses specifically on a reading of Hazlitt's "Character of Lord Bacon's Works." Furthermore, I contend that this type of liberality in "On Londoners and Country People" is figured as particularly deriving from metropolitan sensibility.

“shallowness,” “conceit,” and “extravagance” in Cockneyism, it presents the metropolitan figure as “a man of spirit, of attention to business, [who] knows how to make out and get in his bills, and is far from being hen-pecked” (Hazlitt 90-91). Here he possesses a firm masculinity conducive to civic participation and productive industry, establishing him as “true Englishman and loyal subject” (Hazlitt 91). In this passage and the final paragraph of the essay (examined above), we detect a resistance to the alleged feminization of men in a commercial, modern culture. The Cockney possesses every ability for constructive citizenship as the conventional Tory. Yet the Cockney’s imagination further incorporates a creativity beneficial to civic development. Nervous sensibility thus does not necessarily indicate weakness but rather a generation of creative power. Hazlitt leaves the reader with a depiction of metropolitan sensibility providing an autonomy that is at the same time linked to a sense of belonging to a collective voice and that carves out and reformulates urban space as a place of civic power and expression.

Lamb’s Londoner and Metropolitan Sensibility

Similar to Hazlitt’s essay, Lamb’s representations of the city depict a metropolitan Romanticism that actively engages in the culture of modern metropolitan life. Lamb’s works also present an urban figure immersed in the street scenes and commercial flow of London. While, as Dart argues, the “Cockney Moment” in literary culture was not really established until the 1810s, depictions of a new metropolitan figure similar to the Romantic-era Cockney began to develop around the turn of the century, as well (1). According to Dart, this new “Romantic Metropolitanism” was born in Lamb’s article, “The Londoner,” which was first written in a series of private letters

to Wordsworth (shortly after the first appearance of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*) and then later published in article form in the *Morning Post* (1 February 1802) (Dart 143). While Lamb’s essay does not represent the Cockney figure, it is nonetheless written from the perspective of a metropolitan, London character that in many ways resembles Hazlitt’s vision of the Cockney, especially in its formulation of metropolitan sensibility.⁴⁴

Like Hazlitt, Lamb was closely engaged in the Romantic literary movement, as his friendship with other writers of the period, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hunt, and Hazlitt, positioned Lamb’s metropolitanism as his distinct response to the same issues and culture as other Romantic literary works. Similar to the other texts explored in this project, urban pedestrianism and nervousness are both key features of Lamb’s metropolitan essays.⁴⁵ Rather than offering a reading of multiple Elian essays by Lamb, as other scholars have done, this chapter focuses on Lamb’s pre-Elian essay, “The Londoner,” which offers a particularly rich depiction of metropolitan sensibility and pedestrianism that responds to the contemporary discourse of the era on nervous sensibility and the city. Just as Hazlitt offers an alternative vision of urban sensibility (in his case through a Cockney sensibility), so too does Lamb, who defines a form of metropolitan sensibility alternative to contemporary representations of urban nervous experience. While Hazlitt shifts his critique of Cockney nervous sensibility to a celebration of the figure’s metropolitan sensibility as generating civic engagement,

⁴⁴ While Hazlitt’s essay focuses on the Cockney figure, the title “Londoners and Country People” recalls Lamb’s characterization of “The Londoner” in his own essay and suggests Hazlitt’s essay may have been influenced by Lamb’s earlier essay.

⁴⁵ Urban rambling is addressed in many of Lamb’s essays, but features more prominently in “The Superannuated Man” and “In Praise of the Chimney Sweepers.” Likewise, representations of nervousness appear throughout much of Lamb’s periodical work, figuring most significantly in essays like “The Convalescent,” “Confessions of a Drunkard,” and “The Londoner.”

effectual citizenship, and brotherly love, Lamb's essay offers an even more celebratory portrayal of metropolitan sensibility in London as working to cure the urban pedestrian of his nervousness.

As in other formulations of urban sensibility, Lamb's essay represents acute sensibility as a characteristic or quality that the pedestrian-poet possesses—an acute sensual openness of the subject to his immediate environmental surroundings. This sensibility is also characterized by a sympathy felt and expressed for others. However, rather than presenting urban sensibility as a nervous experience that becomes more intense for the pedestrian poet amid the excessive sensations of commodity culture in the city, thereby threatening to thrust the subject into a nervous fit, Lamb's "The Londoner" depicts urban spectacle and metropolitan experience as producing the opposite effect—it provides an antidote to modern nervousness. Urban peregrination cures the subject of nervous symptoms and opens up the individual to deeper sympathy toward his fellow urbanites. In this way, Lamb's metropolitan sensibility represented in the essay responds to and rejects typical contemporary notions of urban nervousness, which were posited as a physiological reaction to the excess of London, and instead emphasizes a metropolitan version of urban sensibility that celebrates the commodity culture of the city and emphasizes connection and civic engagement. Thus, metropolitan sensibility in Lamb's text is still presented as a form of consumption, but one that provides stability, identity, and unity for the urban individual.

This reading seeks to extend the scholarship on Lamb studies in general and on scholarship on this particular essay in multiple ways. To begin with, examining Lamb's representation of metropolitan sensibility provides further understanding of how Lamb

engaged in contemporary discourse on urban sensibility and on the city. Secondly, this chapter's exploration of the way urban spectacle functions in relation to metropolitan sensibility helps provide another lens for examining the significance of spectacle and commodity culture to Lamb's presentation of the city and of urban experience.

Moreover, the metropolitanism espoused in Lamb's text is largely informed by his unique formula for metropolitan sensibility. While there is still only a modicum of scholarship on this essay, the critical work done by Dart and Hull have provided a careful and insightful look at the essay's urban representations and significance. My research here hopes to extend Dart's and Hull's readings further. For example, Dart points out that "The Londoner" counters Wordsworth's representations of the city and nature and "celebrates the spectacular nature of London life as a cure for self-absorption and melancholia" (143-44). I agree with Dart's point here, but take this a step further to argue that Lamb claims the metropolitan life of London more specifically offers a cure for nervous disease in particular, not just melancholia. Thus, I contend that Lamb's representation of the city as cure participates in a larger discourse (simultaneously cultural, medical, and literary) concerning nervous sensibility and urban experience.

Metropolitan Sensibility as Cure

Lamb's most unique contribution to the discourse of urban sensibility is his depiction of the city as curing the pedestrian of nervous symptoms. This most important part of Lamb's representation of metropolitan sensibility, rhetorically positioned in approximately the middle of the essay, emphasizes urban pedestrian experience and spectacular consumption as creating intimations of sympathy and diminishing nervous symptoms:

The man must have a rare recipe for melancholy who can be dull in Fleet Street. I am naturally inclined to Hypochondria, but in London it vanishes, like all other ills. Often, when I have felt a weariness or distaste at home, have I rushed into her crowded Strand, and fed my humour, till tears have wetted my cheek for unutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture, which she never fails to present at all hours, like the scenes of a shifting pantomime. (162-163)

Similar to other representations of urban sensibility and the urban figure, this passage also depicts the Londoner as exhibiting an acute sensibility—an intense sensual awareness and openness to the individual’s environmental surroundings—that responds positively to the excess of the city. Physically immersed in the bustle of the city crowd, the Londoner experiences and is openly receptive to an excess of bodily sensations that rapidly change with the constant variation of the scene. The “multitudinous moving picture” of the city particularly emphasizes this sensual excess, but the comparison of the city streets to “the scenes of a shifting pantomime” indicate that the speaker takes pleasure in the excess of this spectacular entertainment. As a theatrical form of entertainment in which meaning is expressed through facial expressions, gestures, and music rather than through vocal articulation, the pantomime provides an image of a scene emphasizing leisurely amusement and sympathy.⁴⁶ The excess of the city in this scene is based on an emphasis on the emotions and expressions of others, as the “moving picture” of the city here provides an image of concentrated humanity through facial expression and bodily movement. Metropolitan excess in this passage generates intense sympathy with others that causes the pedestrian-speaker to experience

⁴⁶ For more information on pantomime in the Romantic era and in representations in Lamb’s work, see Peter A. Brier’s “The Ambulent Mode: Pantomime and Meaning in the Prose of Charles Lamb.” Brier contends that Lamb’s prose is theatrical rather than dramatic (like the “major Romantic poets”) and that “pantomime in particular becomes a vehicle in [Lamb’s] familiar essays for transforming image to symbol” (227). While Brier offers an interesting analysis of pantomime in multiple essays of Lamb’s prose, I am more interested in how Lamb uses the image of the pantomime in his representation of the city scene in “The Londoner.” This metaphor presents a gentler representation of urban excess as opposed to the commonly used “phantasmagoria” metaphor for the city scene. See, for example, Walter Benjamin’s comments on the phantasmagoria in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (14-15).

“unutterable sympathies”—too intense to express verbally—with others in the urban crowd. His own acute sensibility causes him to feel intensely the emotions of those in the crowd and also to feel an intimate connection with them. While he reacts physiologically to this through tears, this is a pleasurable experience—the powerful sympathy he feels in response to the urban crowd is emotionally, physically, and intellectually gratifying. He experiences an intense connection to fellow Londoners. Metropolitan sensibility in this passage is characterized by an acute sensual receptiveness and intense sympathy with others. This results in an exuberant and invigorating peripatetic experience of the urban crowd for the pedestrian-speaker.

Moreover, unlike the urban sensibility of Wordsworth’s and De Quincey’s texts, this acute sensibility and intense sensual experience of the city does not generate a nervous response or symptoms in the metropolitan subject. Indeed, this urban experience not only fails to develop into nervousness, but it, moreover, works to relieve or cure nervousness in the urban pedestrian. The speaker admits, “I am naturally inclined to Hypochondria, but in London it vanishes, like all other ills” (162). Rather than developing nervous symptoms, the spectacles and excess of the urban streets and crowds dissipate such extreme physiological responses as nervous disease. As addressed in previous chapters, “hypochondria” was considered a nervous disease in Romantic-era England.⁴⁷ Lamb presents hypochondria here as originating from

⁴⁷ “Hypochondria” was a name for nervous disease that was most typically diagnosed in males, as hysteria was typically considered a female version of the disease, and was often viewed as more severe. Multiple medical texts on nervous disease present hypochondria as a nervous disease, and use the term as a general terminology for nervous symptoms and temperament. Hypochondria is even more closely associated with nervous disease than melancholia, which was also often classified as a nervous disorder. For examples of medical texts that examine hypochondria as a nervous disease, see Andrew Wilson’s *Medical Researches: Being an Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Hysterics in the Female Constitution, and into the Distinction between that Disease and Hypochondriac or Nervous Disorders* (1776) and Thomas Trotter’s *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808).

“natural” tendency rather than being environmentally or culturally developed among the streets of the city, as it is in other Romantic-era texts. Lamb’s claim that the man “who can be dull in Fleet Street” “must have a rare recipe for melancholy” further emphasizes an individual and personal tendency toward nervous dejection.⁴⁸ While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical scientists often presented nervous disorders as stemming from a natural or hereditary inclination, nervous symptoms and disorders were also considered to be exacerbated within the commodity culture of large cities like London.⁴⁹ Lamb’s essay presents an opposite effect, in which the individual, who suffers in general from nervousness experiences a lessening of these symptoms in the bustle of city streets. The text thus suggests that nervous disease is neither created nor exacerbated by the excess of urban spectacles and sensations.

Instead, Lamb presents the Londoner as possessing a natural tendency towards nervousness that seems to worsen within the close confines of the home rather than in the excess of the city streets. The domestic enclosure of the home is presented here as stifling and isolating, causing a “weariness or distaste” that aggravates his hypochondria.⁵⁰ But the Londoner treats his hypochondria by immersing himself in the urban crowd and spectacles of the city, which suggests that London public space

⁴⁸ Melancholia was also categorized as a nervous illness in the Romantic era. For example, Benjamin Fawcett’s *Observations on the Nature, Causes and Cure of Melancholy* (1780) addresses melancholia as a symptomatic indication of a “weakness in the nervous system” (4). See also Henry St. John Neale’s *Practical Dissertations on Nervous Complaints and Other Diseases Incident to the Human Body* (1796) (36-37).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Alexander Thomson’s *An Enquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Method of Cure, of Nervous Disorders* (9, 11-12), Trotter (41), and George Cheyne’s *The English Malady* (108-109).

⁵⁰ In this excerpt, Lamb’s representation of nervous disease seems aligned in one way with contemporary medical views of the causes or worsening of nervous symptoms. Lamb suggests that confinement within the home creates this within the speaker of the essay. As Thomson, Fawcett, and Trotter argued, a lack of exercise and confined spaces were main causes of nervous illness. They prescribed exercise and visits to the countryside (as a way to consume fresh air) as treatment. See, for example, Trotter (254). Lamb’s text, in contrast, prescribes exercise and company in the hurried and excessive commotion of the streets of London as a remedy for hypochondria.

provides an environment and venue that is healthy for the constitution and encourages sympathetic connection. Rather than creating nervousness, the excess of the city cures his nervous symptoms. This excerpt provides Lamb's most powerful vision for an alternative metropolitan sensibility that rejects the cultural views of the nervous effects of the modern city and its crowds and spectacles upon the individual subject. This alternative sensibility proposes a consumer pedestrianism that potentially provides a medium for physiological wellbeing and civic sympathy.

The text offers a similar representation of nervous cure at the end of the essay, as well. In this final passage, Lamb again includes a reference to nervous disease while emphasizing that the city provides a sustenance that feeds and maintains a healthy disposition for the Londoner: "Where has Spleen food but in London? Humour, Interest, Curiosity, suck at her measureless breasts without a possibility of being satiated. Nursed amid her noise, her crowds, her beloved smoke, what have I been doing all my life, if I have not lent out my heart with usury to such scenes!" (163). In this excerpt, the text refers to nervousness specifically through the reference to the "Spleen," which Lamb claims maintains a healthy sustenance in London. Ancient and medieval systems of medicine considered the spleen as one of the humorous organs, and associated it with the melancholic temperament. Lamb, in part, refers to this older (though no longer considered scientifically accurate by the Romantic period) meaning, suggesting that the city in a figurative sense provides the sustenance that the spleen needs, causing happiness and contentment.

However, "spleen" here also carries connotations of nervous disease. Early medical science on nervous disease regarded the spleen as the origin of melancholy, as

well as hypochondria and hysteria (all of which were considered nervous diseases, even in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). While hypochondria and hysteria were more generally considered nervous diseases by the Romantic period, in earlier periods the symptoms that accompanied these diseases were called “vapours” and “spleen” and were associated with this organ. Richard Blackmore discusses the cultural and previous medical connection between these two in *A Treatise of the Spleen and Vapours: Or, Hypochondriacal and Hysterical Affections* (1725), though his treatise claims to see no real link. Blackmore addresses this association between hypochondria, “vapours,” and the spleen as “primitive Practitioners” ascribing “Hysterical Passions to noxious Fumes and Vapours, ascending I know not how, from the Womb, so they fancied that Hypochondriacal Affections have their Rise from dark and windy Steams and Exhalations elevated from the Spleen” (1).⁵¹ While the scientific connections between the spleen and nervous “vapours” was antiquated by the early nineteenth century, the terms were still prevalently used in cultural references to nervous disease. In the quoted passage from Lamb’s essay, “Spleen” refers to contentment, but it also holds connotations of physical health and nervous symptoms. According to “The Londoner,” the spleen is revitalized in the street scenes of the city, providing healthy conditions of stimulation for the constitution that prevent the development of nervous symptoms. Moreover, Lamb’s reference to “spleen”—an outmoded medical term for nervous disease—seems to question the validity of connections between increased nervous

⁵¹ In addition to Blackmore’s treatise, John Midriff’s *Observations on the Spleen and Vapours* [...] (1721) and Nicholas Robinson’s *A New System of the Spleen, Vapours, and Hypochondriack Melancholy* [...] (1729) also link spleen and “vapours” to hypochondria and nervous disease. Each of these texts offers early eighteenth-century concepts of nervous disease that were largely outmoded by the Romantic era. However, the language to discuss nervous diseases still employed terms like “spleen” and “vapours” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and these words took on more cultural than medical or scientific associations with nervous disease.

symptoms and city life espoused by contemporary medical science and culture. By concluding the essay with a further emphasis on the city's ability to cure or ameliorate nervousness, Lamb leaves the reader with a fully metropolitan vision of London street scenes as providing a stimulating and healthy environment for the metropolitan subject.

Commodity Culture and Metropolitan Imagination

While this passage concludes the essay with a representation of a healthy metropolis, it also emphasizes the importance of commodity culture to the Londoner's good humor and constitution. Here the city provides constant entertainment and pleasure for the metropolitan individual who frequents its streets and sites of leisure and amusement. But the language employed in this passage emphasizes the influence of commodity culture upon the pleasure of the metropolitan subject. The use of the word "food" in relation to the spleen, given the spleen's connotations of humor and of nervousness, also implies sensual consumption. The spleen is fed by the commodities and spectacles of the city, resulting in contentment and a healthy constitution. Moreover, the humor, interest, and curiosity of the city are largely and continuously supplied by the spectacles, crowds, and street scenes of the commercial metropolis. Finally, the last sentence presents the Londoner as developing an affection for the city through a metaphor of financial transaction and capital gain. The "noise," "crowds," and "beloved smoke" of London—all prominent aspects of the city's character and all developed in part by the commercial culture of London—contribute to the metropolitan figure's love of the city and of his fellow Londoners. Here "usury" is figured positively, as a testament to the extreme pleasures and imaginative possibilities of the city, as well as to its ability to develop his sympathy. This passage concludes the essay with an

emphasis on the characteristics of metropolitan sensibility—having been raised and “nursed” in the excessive sensual stimulation and commodity culture of the city, the Londoner has all that he needs to feed his imagination and to keep him healthy.

As this reading reveals, in the last paragraph of the essay, Lamb reworks metropolitan sensibility to address how urban culture feeds the spleen and creates good humor rather than causing nervous symptoms. The text thus uses the language of urban sensibility and nervous disease espoused by contemporary physicians and subverts it by representing the commodity culture and street scenes of the city as ameliorating nervous symptoms and providing the foundation of a healthy constitution. This celebration of the commodity culture of the city is expressed throughout the essay, as Lamb’s representation of metropolitan sensibility stresses the significance of commodity culture to the experience of the city and to the development of the Londoner’s imagination. The metropolitan sensibility represented in Lamb’s essay is strongly characterized by urban pedestrianism and a sensual consumption of the spectacles of the city, as it is through walking amid the crowds and spectacles of London that the subject experiences a physiological and sympathetic rejuvenation. In “The Londoner,” the pedestrian-speaker’s pleasure in mingling with the urban crowd and consuming urban spectacles sets him up as a flâneur-like figure.⁵² In particular, Lamb’s representation of urban

⁵² Several scholars have also connected the representation of the Londoner in this essay with flânerie. For example, Dart suggests that the essay reveals “the nineteenth-century’s first formulation of the writer as flâneur” (143). Hull also briefly mentions conceptual and thematic connections between the Londoner and the flâneur (59). Furthermore, scholars have examined Lamb’s Elia essays in relation to flânerie. For example, see Deborah Epstein Nord’s examination of Lamb’s work and theatrical spectacle in “The City as Theater: From Georgian to Early Victorian London” (170) and Felicity James’s point about the “joy of flânerie” in Lamb’s writings in *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (212).

pedestrianism incorporates a celebration of commodity culture, an emancipatory spirit, and a consumer imagination similar to later nineteenth-century flânerie.⁵³

We can particularly see this flâneur-like emphasis on commodity culture and consumer imagination explored in the passage examined at the beginning of this chapter's reading of Lamb's essay. Although the passage addresses the city's ability to rid the Londoner of his hypochondria, it also presents a consumerist mode of urban peregrination and imagination as important to a metropolitan formulation of sensibility. Physically immersed in the movement and spectacle of the crowd ("Often [...] have I rushed into her crowded Strand" [Lamb 162-163]), the pedestrian fully experiences the city sensually rather than merely observing the scene. While the Londoner does not consume commodities in typical produced object form, he luxuriates in a consumption of the spectacles of the city, a form of urban leisure that provides a metropolitan consumer experience through pedestrianism. The language used in this passage, as well as the images portrayed, particularly emphasizes the flâneur-like relish and consumerism that the urban pedestrian experiences in the crowded streets of London. The depiction of the crowded Strand as having "fed" the speaker's "humour" presents his sensibility as a form of consumption that affects the pedestrian's constitution—in this case providing pleasurable physiological and emotional sustenance (Lamb 163).

⁵³ While Lamb's metropolitan perambulator resembles the flâneur in multiple ways, the text offers a presentation of urban walking that differs in important ways from the Parisian pedestrian. For example, Dart suggests that the formation of flânerie in Lamb's essay "looks forward to" the flâneur figure of later urban texts like De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* or Edgar Allen Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*, both of which influenced Baudelaire's later representation of the urban walker (and Benjamin's discussions of the figure) (143). Dart especially points to the essay's formulation of the "street as a site of strange transformations and alienations" as an early representation of this aspect of flânerie (143). However, I argue that Lamb's text does not present the city as alienating, as Dart suggests. Rather, as my reading of metropolitan sensibility hopes to show, the essay presents an exuberant representation of the city that counters contemporary representations of urban alienation and instead offers a depiction of sympathetic connection between members of the metropolitan community.

The “multitudinous moving picture” of the city consistently (“at all hours”) feeds the imagination of the pedestrian-spectator through its ability to stimulate new spectacles for the metropolitan figure to consume. In this passage, metropolitan sensibility presents a possibility of consumption that neither corrupts, nor produces guilt. Instead, urban spectacle stimulates the imagination and rouses sympathy for others.⁵⁴

The commodity culture and excess of the city develop this consumer imagination in part through the urban sublime. The Londoner’s intensely emotional experience of connecting to the members of the urban crowd suggests not just refined sympathy, but also a sense of being overwhelmed by the sublimity of the urban crowd. In addition, the experience of metropolitan sensibility is itself numinous, as the consumption of excess sensations and feeling of intense sympathy move the metropolitan subject to tears (“till tears have wetted my cheek”). The acute sensitivity of metropolitan sensibility in the pedestrian provides a perception of the city mediated by the urban sublime and material culture. In this sense, the sublimity of the urban crowds and spectacles (accentuated in the essay in city street scenes) offers a distinctly metropolitan and consumerist path to the imagination. However, the urban sublime in Lamb’s text does not create nervousness in the subject, demonstrating that the commercial culture of the modern metropolis is conducive to a healthy sensibility.

Similar to Hazlitt’s essay, Lamb’s “The Londoner” thus presents a consumer imagination generated and supported by metropolitan sensibility. This imagination and sensibility, rather than acting to isolate the metropolitan subject, instead acts to connect

⁵⁴ In “Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb’s Consumer Imagination,” Karen Fang argues that Lamb’s Elia essays depict a guilt-free consumption that also is not corrupting (818). Fang especially refers to Lamb’s essay “Old China” (1823). However, as I argue here, we can see this form of urban consumerism being expressed in earlier essays of Lamb’s, and especially as part of the pedestrian-speaker’s metropolitan sensibility.

the pedestrian-speaker to others and helps to stave off nervous symptoms. The Londoner's delight in the excess of the city is akin to the flâneur's relish of the spectacles of the commercial city. The excess of the city created through its commodity culture does not alienate the urban pedestrian from his fellow Londoners but rather connects him more intimately to them. And his sensual stimulation amongst the crowd helps to develop this connection rather than developing alienation or resulting in a nervous torpor. Urban spectacle and consumer culture are figured as creative forces that help to develop the imagination and sensibility of the urban pedestrian.

Lamb's representation of the significance of commodity culture to metropolitan sensibility and to generating a healthy, non-nervous experience of the city is presented in direct response to other contemporary formulations of urban experience. In one particular passage, Lamb responds in detail to other views of the city as disgusting or corrupting:

The very deformities of London, which give distaste to others, from habit do not displease me. The endless succession of shops, where *fancy, miscalled folly*, is supplied with perpetual gauds and toys, excite in me no puritanical aversion. I gladly behold every appetite supplied with its proper food. The obliging customer and obliged tradesman – things which live by bowing and things which exist but for homage – do not affect me with disgust; from habit I perceive nothing but urbanity, where other men, more refined, discover meanness. (163)

In this passage, the city's "deformities"—its aspects that repulse others (presumably non-Londoners)—are specifically products of urban commodity culture. The "endless succession" of shops and commodities (presented playfully and harmlessly as "gauds and toys") are thrilling and pleasurable to him rather than distasteful and corrupting. In addition, the act of commercial exchange (carried out by the "obliging customer" and "obliged tradesmen") represents a mutually beneficial interaction between members of

the urban community. The customer receives the item he needs or desires and the tradesman is compensated and later able to contribute his own purchasing power to the commercial economy.

This excerpt presents commodity culture as providing an economic system that unites members of the urban community and cheers the spirits of the Londoner, rather than creating a corrupting excess of appetite and consumption. The use of the words “gladly,” “obliging,” and “homage” highlight a positive vision of commodity culture as beneficial to the individual urban subject and to the community as a whole. Lamb thus addresses and rejects the notion of the city as abject and corrupt. In contrast, Lamb represents the opposing view, which posited the city as a din of vice and destructive excess, as itself excessive. The “distaste,” “puritanical aversion,” and “disgust” that these “others” exhibit towards metropolitan culture and life offer extreme views of the city, hardly tempered by a moderate or fair perspective of urban life. Furthermore, Lamb implies that the fear of the commercial culture of the city experienced by others stems merely from a lack of exposure and urban ignorance.⁵⁵ His own “habit” of being exposed to and participating in the spectacles and commercial exchange of the city prevents him from being shocked by the excess of the city. For the metropolitan figure accustomed to the stimulating experiences of the city, urban commodity culture contributes to a healthy metropolitan sensibility rather than to corruption and vice.

⁵⁵ While Lamb does not explicitly address Wordsworth in the way that Hazlitt’s essay does, Lamb’s references to “others” in the passage quoted above seems directed specifically toward the Lake Poets, especially Wordsworth. As the essay was developed from a series of letters that Lamb wrote to Wordsworth, scholars often approach the essay as a response to the Lake Poets’ representations of urban life.

Nervous Nature: Lamb's Response to Wordsworth

While Lamb depicts the city streets as cultivating healthy sensibility and sympathetic connection, he also offers an alternative representation of the countryside as cultivating nervousness instead. After emphasizing that the Londoner was born “in a crowd” in the central parts of London at the beginning of the text, he reveals that this “has begot in [him] an entire affection for that way of life, amounting to an insurmountable aversion from solitude and rural scenes” (Lamb 162). The Londoner, in contrast to Wordsworth, is put off by country landscapes and life, particularly because he argues they cultivate a nervous constitution. But the Londoner first admits that he at one time did experience an attraction to rural scenes, though only because he was in love:

This aversion was never interrupted or suspended except for a few years in the younger part of my life, during a period in which I had set my affections upon a charming young woman. Every man, while the passion is upon him, is for a time at least addicted to groves and meadows and purling streams. During this short period of my existence, I contracted just familiarity enough with rural *objects* to understand tolerably well ever after the *poets* when they declaim in such passionate terms in favour of a country life.

For my own part, now the fit is past, I have no hesitation in declaring a mob of happy faces crowding up at the pit-door of Drury Lane Theatre, just at the hour of six, gives me ten thousand sincerer pleasures than I could ever receive from all the flocks of silly sheep that ever whitened the plains of Arcadia or Epsom Downs. (Lamb 162, his emphasis)

I quote this passage at length because it not only critiques the Lake Poets' argument for the superiority of nature and country life, but also because it offers a representation of the country that uses the language of nervous illness. For example, Lamb uses the words “passion” and “passionate” to describe love (here in reference to his affections for a woman) and poetic descriptions of nature and “country life.” In the latter usage, Lamb specifically refers to the Lake Poets (addressed in the italicized “*poets*”) and their

enthusiastic representations in favor of rural over urban scenes. However, while “passions” indicates these more emotive connotations, they also indicate a physical response. Jon Cook contends that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the passions “were bodily events,” considered “physical movements” within the body (44). Passions were thus regarded as “physiological” as well as emotional or spiritual expressions. As indicated in the chapter on Wordsworth, the “passions” are often referred to in discussions of nervous disease in medical treatises of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵⁶ Medical physicians named the “passions” as one of the origins of nervous illness, as well as a demonstrated symptom of nervous disease (Neale 40; Trotter 51). Therefore, while Lamb’s comment that every man loves nature and the countryside while the “passion is upon him” refers on the surface to amorous love creating this interest or to the temporary love of nature as itself a “passion,” the phrase also carries an undertone of nervousness, in this case suggesting that the love of the countryside is akin to a nervous fit. An affection for rural life then can potentially create the same nervousness that Wordsworth claims attends urban life.

This idea of passion as a nervous fit is continued in the next paragraph, in which Lamb actually equates the love of country life as a “fit.” For the Londoner, the brief sojourn to the country and subsequent captivation with “groves and meadows and purling streams” was a temporary “fit” that now “is past” so he can return to his beloved urban life. Like “passions,” the word “fit” was often used in medical literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe nervous convulsions or episodes of

⁵⁶ See, for example, Thomson (1), Whytt (10), Neale (40), and Trotter (51).

illness.⁵⁷ According to nerve doctors of the period, hypochondria and hysteria often were accompanied by nervous fits, which could range from episodes of increased melancholia to crying, fainting, or even to physical convulsions and spasms (Neale 37-39). Lamb's representation of an affection for rural scenes and life as a "fit" offers a humorous suggestion that such dedication to nature and pastoral isolation is itself unhealthy. Furthermore, the use of the verb "contracted" as a description for developing a "familiarity" with rural life carries an underlying connotation of "contracting" an illness. The notion here that a "passion" for rural landscapes can be "contracted," suggests country life may not be as healthy or superior as the Lake Poets claim. Furthermore, Lamb also employs the word "addicted" to describe an eager interest in pastoral landscape, which suggests an unhealthy obsession. The notion of addiction implies physiological as well as psychological compulsion (much like some contemporary views of hypochondria itself). Thus, while Lamb does not explicitly state that the country causes or increases nervousness in the same way that he openly contends that the city eases nervous symptoms, the language used in this passage implies a certain nervousness that develops in the country. This reading of the excerpt reveals a response to Wordsworth's representation of country versus urban life and to the contemporary cultural view of the modern city as creating or exacerbating nervous illness.

In addition to presenting the country as potentially nervous, Lamb's essay also critiques the isolation of rural life, presenting it as resulting in alienation. In the first paragraph of the excerpt quoted above, Lamb's Londoner claims he has developed

⁵⁷ The word "fit" is used quite frequently in medical treatises on nervous disease to describe periods of increased symptoms. For examples of how "fit" is used in reference to nervous symptoms, see Thomson (12), Neale (36-52), and Trotter (82, 182, and 188).

enough familiarity “with rural *objects* to understand tolerably well” the Lake Poets’ fixation on nature (162). On the surface, the essay suggests that the Londoner spent enough time in the country charmed by rural landscape to understand their love of nature. But the emphasis placed on the word “*objects*” through italicization stresses a focus on objects rather than people. Lamb presents the cityscape in contrast as presenting “a mob of happy faces crowding up at the pit-door of Drury Lane Theatre” rather than “groves,” “meadows,” “purling streams,” and domesticated animals like sheep (162). This representation of the mob greatly differs from Wordsworth’s descriptions of the urban mob (7.645) and from the contemporary fear of mobs in response to the French Revolution. For the Londoner, the crowds of people joining together to watch a play provide “ten thousand sincerer pleasures than I could ever receive from all the flocks of silly sheep that ever whitened the plains of Arcadia or Epsom Downs” (Lamb 162).⁵⁸ According to Lamb, the city allows for more and better opportunities for human connection. Lamb presents an ideal urban moment in which the crowds gathering together to see a play will share similar emotions and connect empathetically. In London, the individual can connect to other city inhabitants in a moment of mutual sympathy and emotional experience, while the country landscapes offer isolation and a focus on objects rather than people. By referring to sheep, Lamb also evokes the shepherd image/figure that Wordsworth represents and exalts in his poems. Thus, not only does Lamb’s representation here suggest that urban life is more pleasurable than country life, but also that the kind of rural scene Wordsworth promotes is isolating and even alienating. The rural subject focuses on “*objects*” rather than on

⁵⁸ Here we can see the same reference to Arcadia as is included in Hazlitt’s text. This is one of the many parallels between these texts that suggest Hazlitt’s essay alludes to Lamb’s representation of the Londoner.

other human subjects.⁵⁹ In this sense, it is the country that can potentially prompt alienation rather than urban life.

Metropolitan Sensibility and Civic Connection

The city's ability to promote sympathetic connection between the metropolitan pedestrian and other urban inhabitants serves in direct contrast to this depiction of the country as alienating. According to Lamb's essay, the Londoner's metropolitan sensibility allows him to see an underlying connection that links the members of the city in a mutual bond. Like Hazlitt's representation of the Cockney, Lamb's representation of the Londoner reveals that the aspects of the urban figure's metropolitan sensibility explored in the essay—his identification with urban culture and geography, acute sensitivity, and consumer imagination—in addition to staving off nervous symptoms also work to connect the Londoner to the urban community. This connection is presented in the text as not only a general affinity and unity, but also as a civic, metropolitan citizenship.

The essay positions the metropolitan figure's identity as a true Londoner due to his geographic location of birth and life as forming a part of his civic connection to others. The city geography and culture thus cultivates this civic identity: "I was born under the shadow of St Dunstan's steeple, just where the conflux of the eastern and

⁵⁹ While the essay's mention of "silly sheep" suggests that Lamb is in some ways mocking the Wordsworthian glorification of nature, the passage moreover presents Lamb's challenge of "the idea that such objects have an innate value, or that they should be read in the same way by all" (James 196). In *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s*, Felicity James contends that Lamb presents city scenes in contrast as "exert[ing] the same shaping power" for him as Wordsworth's images of the countryside. James further argues that Lamb's "vision of London actually enacts Lamb's criticism of the 'Preface,' while simultaneously putting into practice ideas explored in *Lyrical Ballads*" (198). By continuing and extending "the argument for the power of personal sympathies and affections made in both poems," James claims that Lamb's essay reveals his interest in Wordsworth's claims, as well as his critique of them (198). While I agree that Lamb's essay does not fully reject Wordsworth's notions of sympathy and affection, Lamb clearly contests Wordsworth's critique of the city and of urban sensibility, offering a counter vision and critique of rural sensibility.

western inhabitants of this twofold city meet and jostle in friendly opposition at Temple Bar” (Lamb 162). In this passage, London place is featured prominently, demonstrating the Londoner’s sense of identity as dependent upon, at least in part, a central London geographic location. The urban figure brags that he was born in the city proper of London, among the city center’s prominent landmarks and culture. But the emphasis on urban place here also reveals the flow of London life and community—the interaction between Londoners as they move through the city. The reference to St Dunstan’s Church, located approximately half way between London Bridge and the Tower of London (both prominent historical fixtures of the city) on the north side of the River Thames, emphasizes the central location of the Londoner’s place of origin and his early exposure to the vast crowds of the city.⁶⁰ The mention of Temple Bar further positions the Londoner within a central location of the city, but also in a busy thoroughfare of the city, where the inhabitants of both the City of London and the City of Westminster congregate.⁶¹ London places here establish a centrality both geographically and culturally—a meeting of boroughs, minds, and people. The familiarity developed by being “born in a crowd,” as this description establishes, helps to condition him for the civic connections cultivated later through metropolitan sensibility.

In addition to the Londoner’s identification with urban geography, his consumer sensibility and familiarity with the culture of London also cultivate a sense of

⁶⁰ St Dunstan’s Church was also designed and constructed by Sir Christopher Wren, the same architect and engineer who designed St Paul’s Cathedral and the Monument. The church then is not only a prominent feature of the city, but it is also culturally connected through its architect to other key landmarks of London.

⁶¹ Temple Bar is the official gated entrance to the city of London from Westminster. It thus symbolically joins the larger portions of the metropolis of London (Westminster and old London) and, during Lamb’s time, hosted large amounts of urban traffic. It furthermore is centrally located near St. Paul’s Cathedral.

connection within the metropolitan figure. Similar to Hazlitt's Cockney, Lamb's Londoner exhibits a consumer imagination through presumption:

The same day which gave me to the world saw London happy in the celebration of her great annual feast. This I cannot help looking upon as a lively omen of the future great good-will which I was destined to bear toward the city, resembling in kind that solicitude which every chief magistrate is supposed to feel for whatever concerns her interests and well-being. Indeed, I consider myself in some sort a speculative Lord Mayor of London; for though circumstances unhappily preclude me from the hope of ever arriving at the dignity of a gold chain and Spital sermon, yet thus much will I say of myself in truth, that Whittington with his cat (just emblem of vigilance and a furred gown) never went beyond me in affection which I bear to the citizens. (162)

In this excerpt, the Londoner exhibits presumption and social leveling similar to Hazlitt's Cockney—he compares himself to a chief magistrate and to the Lord Mayor of London. Yet Lamb's representation here focuses on civic figures of urban management and government rather than figures of great wealth or fashion, demonstrating a communal interest in and care for the city rather than a presumption of mere social leveling. The imagination of the metropolitan figure allows him to identify with his fellow Londoners as an equal and as a caretaker of the city. The cultural references to the city feast and Whittington and his cat moreover present an intimate knowledge of London culture and community that contribute to his affection and care for the city.⁶² Moreover, the “citizens” that the Londoner claims to bear such “good-will” toward here represent a similar concept of citizenship to Hazlitt's essay. The metropolitan figure himself, as well as his fellow Londoners, participate in a communal investment in and affection for the city that provides them with a sense of identity and civic engagement.

⁶² The medieval merchant Richard Whittington was one of the most famous Lord Mayors of London, who financed multiple civic projects during his four terms as Mayor of the city. Whittington was so famous for his development of London that he gets multiple mentions in the first volume alone of John Stow's *A Survey of London* (see 16, 28, 37, 108, 153, 208, and 318, for example). Whittington was the basis for folklore ballads and plays called *Dick Whittington and His Cat*, which Lamb references here suggesting a cultural and historical knowledge of London and its mayoral characters.

What is particularly interesting about this passage is that Lamb presents a metropolitan sensibility and urban connectivity that participates in imaginatively appropriating the systems of policing and management in the city. Comparing himself to the “chief magistrate” and “Lord Mayor of London” aligns him with the systemic management of London. The Londoner imaginatively engages in the power structures of the city and thereby not only feels a connection to other Londoners, but also is empowered by his metropolitan sensibility. Although he claims that he can never hope to ever actually “arriv[e] at the dignity” of the office of Lord Mayor, Lamb’s Londoner can imaginatively participate in the management of the city. The metropolitan figure thus appropriates the power of the city through imagination and affection for the city with which he so closely identifies.⁶³ In this way, by rejecting the contemporary formulation of urban nervousness and presenting a civic engagement prompted through metropolitan sensibility, Lamb’s essay also presents a form of urban masculinity that is not weakened by a nervous constitution or reaction to the city. The Londoner is instead constitutionally bolstered by the excess of urban spectacles and propelled to act as an engaged citizen of the city. While Lamb does not refer to masculinity as explicitly as Hazlitt does in his essay, “The Londoner” nonetheless represents a form of metropolitan masculinity that rejects the view of male urban inhabitants as weak, effeminate, or nervous. Rather, the text presents a robust masculinity that is cultivated in the crowds and commodity culture of London and that promotes duty to his community, fellow citizens, and self.

⁶³ Lamb’s representations of civic participation and sympathetic experiences in the city streets furthermore presents a vision of metropolitan sensibility that promotes the urban individual’s participations in the structures and systems of the city and proposes that those systems themselves can be uncorrupted and beneficial to the city if they are participated in and appropriated correctly.

By rejecting the model of nervous sensibility in relation to urban culture, Lamb's essay posits a subversive form of metropolitan sensibility that invigorates the urban figure while also connecting him to others in the city. As this study has revealed, urban sensibility was a concept maintained and supported in the medical literature and culture of the period, as well as in representations of the city in literary texts. Urban sensibility, as a form of urban experience and consumption participated in what George Grinnell calls a "Romantic medicalization of the self" and of the body in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British literature (8). According to Grinnell, this cultural phenomenon of increased medicalization comprised a "heterogeneous set of tactics that sought to police and consolidate middle-class bodies as objects of regulation" (8). Contemporary cultural notions of urban sensibility then encompassed a mode of attempting to understand and control the urban modern body and how this body interacted with the commodities and spectacles of the modern metropolis. Lamb's formulation of metropolitan sensibility, by rejecting the city streets as a place and urban experience that creates nervousness and hypochondria, works to resist this policing and regulation. This representation allows the urban body to be a consumer of spectacle and to develop a metropolitan sensibility without leading to an impotent sickliness. Lamb's text thus resists the notion that urban culture creates sickly middle-class bodies and instead posits that urban pedestrianism creates healthy bodies, minds, and communities.

Conclusion

Hazlitt and Lamb offer subversive representations of urban sensibility that contend the city creates opportunities for civic engagement and sympathies with fellow urban subjects rather than resulting in expressions of nervous symptoms and urban

alienation. While Hazlitt begins his essay with a critique of the metropolitan figure of the Cockney, who is characterized by his presumption, vanity, and consumerism, and who exhibits nervous tendencies, “On Londoners and Country People” shifts to reconsider these characterizations of the Cockney as promoting civic virtue and political inclusion. Lamb’s “The Londoner” similarly presents a form of metropolitan sensibility that promotes collective unity in the city, but that moreover claims to cure rather than cause nervous symptoms. Both texts, and especially Lamb’s essay, offer alternative visions of metropolitan sensibility that seek to function outside the confines of the medical and social discourse of the time regarding nervous disease and the modern city. Moreover, in both texts, urban spectacle serves as a creative force that provides the potential for imagining an ideal community of mutual respect and care and with the potential to rebuild the structures of the city in an inclusive and cohesive way.

Both writers offer a presentation of metropolitan sensibility that allows the Londoner to appropriate and subvert the power structures of the city. While urban sensibility, as a form of consumption, encompasses the body in the power structures of Romantic-era England and entails a way of regulating bodies and individuals, Hazlitt and Lamb offer representations of a form of sensibility that appropriates the structures of commodity culture and urban modernity for the metropolitan individual. Both texts deconstruct dominant cultural notions of urban sensibility while also providing a counter-narrative that encourages the urban individual to participate in the power structures as a citizen rather than being controlled by them. The metropolitan figure is not enslaved within commodity culture as the end of Wordsworth’s Book 7 of the

Prelude contends. Rather he is freed to experience the city and express his own subjectivity within it in relation to others.

Chapter 4:

Urban Sensibility, Prophecy, and Redemption in Blake's *Jerusalem*

This chapter focuses on representations of urban sensibility in William Blake's epic poem, *Jerusalem* (1804-1820?). In contrast to Wordsworth's and De Quincey's depictions of urban sensibility as a form of consumption that results in a potentially diseased nervousness and agitation, Blake's representations of urban sensibility are not diseased and sickly, nor do they result in alienation. Rather, Blake presents urban sensibility as key to his vision of redemption within the city. While Blake critiques material aspects of sensibility, *Jerusalem* also offers a depiction of sensibility that channels the excess of urban experience into prophecy and redemption. In this text, urban sensibility creates a possibility for liberation that develops even further than Hazlitt's and Lamb's version of urban experience. In *Jerusalem*, nervous fibres connect people and spaces (in both a physical and visionary geography of the city) and shape urban sensibility and prophecy. The excess of the city leads to a physiological excess that results in agitated bodies and nervous energy. But nervous agitation and energy work to develop an enhanced imagination that continually creates new possibilities and connections. This enhanced imagination rouses subjects to extricate themselves and each other from coercive and oppressive power structures to engage in a collective redemption. Blake thus presents urban sensibility as essential to building and creating London as the city of art, Golgonooza, and eventually, the city of liberation and redemption, Jerusalem.

Sensibility takes on multiple forms in Blake's work, offering complex representations of sympathy, perception, and sensitivity. His work portrays highly

sensitized characters, speakers, and poet-figures, who are astute enough to see the ways structures and institutions shape and control individuals.¹ Blake's characters and speakers are often distinguished by their responsiveness, both physiologically and mentally. Blake has long been considered by scholars as a poet of the age of sensibility. Northrop Frye's 1956 essay, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," indicates that Blake (at the least) engages with the culture of sensibility in his literary works (see 147 and 149-152).² In addition, Harold Bloom's *Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961) indicates Blake's works respond to a "heritage of sensibility" (7).³

More recent scholarship continues to take interest in exploring the various facets of Blake's representations of sensibility, with some scholars focusing on how Blake critiques sensibility. For example, Mary Kelly Persyn focuses on representations of women and sensibility in Blake's poem in "'No human form but sexual': Sensibility, Chastity, and Sacrifice in Blake's *Jerusalem*." Persyn argues that Blake "associates the law of chastity with the culture of sensibility, which he sees as a particularly damaging infringement on female liberty" (56). Other scholars argue Blake offers a complex vision of sensibility, which he both critiques and reclaims for visionary purposes. For example, although Justin Van Kleeck focuses more on sentimentalism in Blake's work,

¹ In *Selfhood and Redemption in Blake's Songs*, Harold Pagliaro addresses this sensitivity of characters and speakers specifically in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (7), but this statement applies to the rest of his work, too.

² Frye addresses the difficulties of determining a set definition or label of the age of sensibility, or even a set distinction between Augustan and Romantic literature, indicating a fluidity of sensibility in the eighteenth century. Blake's texts likewise offer a complex vision of sensibility, at once critiquing and reclaiming it in his poetry.

³ Bloom also looks specifically at the figure of the poet of sensibility in "Blake's *Jerusalem*: The Bard of Sensibility and the Form of Prophecy" (1970). Here Bloom argues that Blake responds to the culture of sensibility by satirizing the "poet of sensibility" (9).

he argues that Blake “frequently uses sentimental conventions both to characterize fallen disorder and to show how it can be healed when incorporated into spiritual vision” (60). In “Enlightening the Fibre-Woven Body: William Blake and Eighteenth-Century Fibre Medicine,” Hisaoy Ishizuka closely examines the medicocultural aspect of nervous sensibility in Blake’s works, which Ishizuka links to specific fibre theories of Romantic-era medicine. Although Blake draws from contemporary “fibre medicine,” Ishizuka argues Blake “inverts” this discourse “for his own purposes” (76). In “Blake and the Web of Interest and Sensibility,” Dennis M. Welch examines the “commercial and political elements of Blake’s response to sensibility,” which, he contends, Blake represents as entwined with economic and self-interest (33). Yet Welch argues that Blake represents sensibility’s potential, as well as critiquing its dangers (33). These articles, and others that touch on the topic tangentially, explore Blake’s complex engagement in the discourse of sensibility.⁴ However, as Welch suggests, more work is needed to explore Blake’s “response to sensibility” (32).

This chapter works to further examine Blake’s representations of sensibility, specifically in his intricate poem, *Jerusalem*. I argue that this poem offers a complex version of sensibility, one that critiques sensibility but also develops and reworks sensibility in the city as liberating and redemptive. As with most Romantic-era writers, Blake’s engagement with the discourse and culture of sensibility in his works was not a simple acceptance or appropriation. Scholars such as Welch contend that Blake

⁴ See, for example, Steven Goldsmith’s *Blake’s Agitation: Criticism & the Emotions* (226-227; 246-247); Tristanne J. Connolly’s *William Blake and the Body* (71); Harold Pagliaro’s *Selfhood and Redemption in Blake’s Songs* (3, 45); Nelson Hilton’s *Literal Imagination: Blake’s Vision of Words* (79-80; 93-96); Vincent De Luca’s *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Politics of the Sublime* (63); and Katey Castellano’s “‘The Road of Excess Leads to the Palace of Wisdom’: Alternative Economies in Blake’s Continental Prophecies” (17).

understood sensibility's dangers, but he also understood its potential, which, I would argue, is certainly part of its importance and appeal (33).⁵ Furthermore, critics who focus on Blake's representations of sensibility tend to ignore his depictions of sensibility in relation to the city and vice versa. Analyzing Blake's connections between sensibility, nerve theory, commodity culture, and the city in *Jerusalem* addresses how Blake imagines and represents redemption and how he integrates the visionary with the historical.

Several scholars have already addressed the connections between Blake's work and the medical science of nervous diseases in relation to his representations of fibres. Nelson Hilton, for example, examines Blake's representations of fibres and nerves in part in relation to sensibility and nerve theory (79-82). Ishizuka's article offers one of the most thorough investigations of Blake's use of the fibre in relation to eighteenth-century medical science.⁶ He contends that Blake's depictions of the "fibre-woven" body and universe announce a "dreary vision" of humanity as "entangled in a destructive 'Web of Life'" (Ishizuka 78).⁷ Ishizuka argues that by engaging the language and pathological concepts of the eighteenth-century medical idea of the fibre, Blake critiques Enlightenment thought, particularly its dependence on material

⁵ In particular, Welch's article focuses on creative feminine labor and how it could counter the damaging effects of sensibility culture. While this chapter does touch on labor, it does not address labor in depth nor does it focus on women.

⁶ Ishizuka proposes that "Enlightenment medicine can be explained in terms of the fibre and fibre theory, rather than the nerve and the nervous system" (73). According to Ishizuka, the fiber was widely acknowledged by many anatomists as the basic structural unit of the human body by the end of the seventeenth century (73). While this chapter agrees with Ishizuka's arguments in many ways, it focuses on fibres as representations of nervous sensibility in Blake's text. Blake's use of the words "nervous" and "nerves" at multiple points throughout the work also suggest that he represents the nervous body, not just the fibred body.

⁷ The quotation, "Web of Life," in Ishizuka's statement is from Blake's *Milton* (plate 6, line 28).

experience (87-88).⁸ According to Ishizuka, Blake integrates the fibred body into his spiritual cosmos by converting “the cultural myth that the finer the nerve fibres are the more distinguished and the more refined [the person] into the crude dictum that the finer the fibres are the more hysterical and fallen they are” (78). Yet Ishizuka also contends that Blake’s “complex and sustained engagement with fibre language and metaphor cannot be summarized in a simple formulation,” for Blake also “exploits more positively the other two functions of the fibre: mediation and spiritualization” (87).⁹ My study of Blake’s work in many ways agrees with Ishizuka’s reading of Blake’s engagement with fibre theory; namely, that it indicates Blake’s critique of Enlightenment thought, as well as his appropriation of the fibre for his own uses. However, while Ishizuka focuses on how Blake’s fibres participate in discourse on fibre medicine, I contend that Blake’s representations of nerves and fibres contribute to a vision of urban sensibility that integrates urban culture into a psycho-physiological and spiritual representation of nervous sensibility. This chapter particularly examines how urban sensibility forms an integral aspect of (and impetus for) prophecy and redemption.¹⁰

Redemption in *Jerusalem* entails a liberation from sin and from the destructive psychological and physical coercion of systems of power. In Blake’s poem, redemption

⁸ As Persyn suggests, “To Blake, eighteenth century dependence upon Lockean models of sense perception in combination with the images of nerves and fibres would unquestionably have indicated enthrallment to the material, ‘natural’ world” (58).

⁹ And, as Ishizuka admits, fibre medicine was itself “not a monolithic movement but accommodated different theories that often vied with each other” (83). Thus, according to Ishizuka, Blake’s complex representation of the fibre engages various strands of medical theory on the fibre and works within “the formal fibre medicine of the Enlightenment” (83).

¹⁰ The epic form and denseness of *Jerusalem* has made it difficult for scholars to assert a definitive argument about the poem and about its representations of London. This project does not claim to have a definitive or monolithic reading of *Jerusalem*. Rather, I hope that using urban sensibility as a lens for examining this monumental text will help us see how Blake experimented with and depicted these ideas in relation to his representations of imaginative and prophetic vision and redemption.

takes place physically and spiritually through the restoration of the city of Jerusalem in London and Albion.¹¹ According to Harold Pagliaro, Blake presents redemption as individual experience, emphasized through “Selfhood,” “Self-examination,” and eventually “Self-annihilation” (Pagliaro ix).¹² Mark S. Ferrara further argues that redemption in Blake’s *Jerusalem* is an “individual-religious” experience rather than “collective-political,” as it features an “ultimately subjective nature of apprehension of the Divine Vision” (20). However, in contradiction to scholars emphasizing Blake’s individuality, I argue that multiple passages throughout the poem indicate Blake’s vision of redemption in Jerusalem is also collective, compelling human connection as imperative to physical, mental, and spiritual liberation. Urban sensibility, which is typically experienced and expressed individually (as in the previous chapters of this study), takes on a collective character in Blake’s poem, experienced through physiological and spiritual connection.

This collective redemption, experienced through bodily and spiritual connection, is rather complex in Blake’s *Jerusalem*. According to Ferrara, redemption in Blake’s work is “at once transhistorical and universal,” its “universalism” stemming from “the fact that the possibility of awakening remains open to all people at any time” (20).¹³ But

¹¹ The poem presents Jerusalem as the city of redemption and liberation. As David Punter points out, Jerusalem is depicted “not only as a character, usually confined to a yearning limbo during the course of past and present history, but awaiting resurrection” (55). According to Punter, Jerusalem is Blake’s “partly secularized version of the city of God,” a city of harmony, creativity, and “social unification” (55). Jerusalem is also the figure most directly connected to the figure of the Savior, Jesus. The connection between redemption and liberation can also be seen in the following quotation about Jerusalem: “And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion” (54.5). Jerusalem is linked to liberation throughout the poem, as well.

¹² Pagliaro specifically examines redemption and representations of the self in Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, but representations of selfhood are also significant to Blake’s representation of redemption in *Jerusalem*.

¹³ Ferrara offers a fascinating reading of what he calls “perennial utopia” in Blake’s *Jerusalem*, in which time is not linear but rather provides a simultaneity that opens up the possibility of redemptive experience (20). According to Ferrara, “the door to salvation opens not ‘in a future utopia’ [...] but, rather, in a union

the potential for collective redemption does not rest in universalism (and the universal possibility of individual awakening) alone, as Ferrara contends. Rather, *Jerusalem* reveals a potential for collective awakening through nervous sensibility, as individuals can be connected both spiritually and physically through nervous fibres and can reach a redemptive state through channeling a collective nervous energy.

Furthermore, although Ferrara argues redemption in Blake's works is "transhistorical," redemption in the poem *Jerusalem* is in several ways situated within the historical. Representations of specific places, each couched in their own histories and mythologies, abound in Blake's text. But the poem ultimately centers redemption in London. The poem recounts the redemption of Albion (a figure for Britain), which is aided mostly by Los, the artistic creator and figure of the poet. This redemption occurs through the reinstatement of the city of Jerusalem in London. As several scholars have pointed out, all four of the major cities in *Jerusalem* are forms of London.¹⁴ According to David Punter, "London, Golgonooza, Jerusalem, and Babylon are not different cities" in the poem, "but the same capital city modified by different processes of perception and work" (63). The city of sin, Babylon, the historical city of London, Los's city of art, Golgonooza, and Jerusalem's restoration are all positioned physically and spiritually over the historic city of London. This layering of cultural and geographical place in Blake's vision—Jerusalem's very positionality as a city rebuilt upon the historical city of London—suggests redemption is not completely detached from history. While the

with the immediate present" (20). Ferrara's interpretation is insightful and offers an interesting take on the presentation of time in Blake's text. While I find Ferrara's argument helpful, I do not fully follow his contention that redemption is individualist in nature, only opening to a collective through the universality of the possibility of "awakening" through personal experience (20). As this chapter hopes to show, *Jerusalem* presents redemption as a simultaneously individual and collective experience, which is revealed through representations of the connective fibres of urban sensibility.

¹⁴ See, for example, Punter (63) and Michael (23). Mark Lussier suggests that Blake's love of London is shown through his transformation of it into Golgonooza, the city of art (200).

historical city of London is transcended in a sense when Jerusalem is rebuilt, the historical city is not completely erased.¹⁵ Blake's poem imagines redemption complexly, as simultaneously individual, collective, and universal, transhistorical and historical.

In addition to its collective and historical characteristics, redemption in Blake's text is also characterized by an enhanced perception, as this chapter will explore. An acute sensibility, on one hand, augments prophetic ability in the figure of the poet. But it also enhances the ability for human and spiritual connection and, eventually, redemption. Individuals potentially can connect physically and metaphorically (as well as intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually) through nervous fibres, leading to a collective redemption. Urban sensibility thus provides an increased perception that is necessary to redemption and salvation. In particular this enhanced perception was also characterized by an urban perception. Although *Jerusalem* is a poem about Albion, it is at its heart a poem about London and its development and redemption, as well. As Welch indicates, Los's "attempt to keep in touch with the absent Jerusalem," to work towards the rebuilding of the redemptive city, does not take place "through abstract contemplation or through rural retreat but through, to use a modern term, urban development" (13). Urban culture and imagination are thus integral to rebuilding the redemptive city of Jerusalem and thus to the redemption of Albion.

¹⁵ However, it is important to address that history is also not presented as set in Blake's poem. As Punter contends, London in Blake's text is not a stable, "fixed and final form, but the site of imaginative and practical activity, itself a place in the process of becoming" (63). Just as time does not progress linearly in *Jerusalem*, neither is London the site of a set historical form. Rather London, as well as history and historical places in general, change and transform in the poem. Thus, while Blake's form of redemption in the poem is not detached from history, neither is that history completely fixed. As with most of Blake's work, the imagination interacts with history in complex ways.

The last few decades of Blake scholarship have worked to situate Blake in his urban context, separating Blake's works from other Romantic-era writers, such as Wordsworth, who, for the most part, expressed an aversion to the city. While Blake certainly was one of the greatest critics of the modern city and urban culture, he also admired the city and found in it sustenance that other Romantic poets did not. As G. E. Bentley suggests, in Blake's works, "the city was a symbol not only of cynical despair but of the greatest hope of man" (37). This hopeful vision of the city situates Blake, as Kathleen Raine argues, as "before all else a poet of the city," who offers a unique vision of the metropolis (75). The excess of the modern city and modern urban experience are instrumental to redemption in *Jerusalem*. As this study addresses, urban perception (through urban sensibility) is key to accessing and comprehending divine vision and to reawakening and re-envisioning London and England. In *Blake and the City*, Jennifer Davis Michael argues that the various "embodiments" of the city in *Jerusalem* "offer a commentary on the limits of perception and the need for a vision that sees within as well as without" (26). According to Michael, "this act of seeing constitutes the intellectual labor that ultimately 'builds Jerusalem'" (26). I argue that urban sensibility provides this vision and ultimately leads to the building of the redemptive city. As a poem focusing on the transformation of the city of London to the city of redemption, Jerusalem, Blake's *Jerusalem* uses the city as both framework and vision. While rural landscape certainly formulates a significant part of the setting of the poem, the metropolis is its key site for liberation and redemption, its key region of visionary geography.¹⁶ However, it is important to note that Blake's text does not emphasize the

¹⁶ I would also like to note that studies of urban poetry often choose between the "physical city" and the "city of imagination," as Michael calls them (26). Yet, as Michael argues, in Blake's works these two are

city as superior to the rural landscape. Blake's views of the city were complex, offering neither full praise nor complete condemnation.¹⁷ As Michael argues, the city is not set up in opposition to nature in Blake's works: "the city for Blake is not the absence or the negation of nature, but rather an unstable synthesis of human artifact and organic environment, both imaginatively constructed" (19). For Blake, both the city and nature are human constructs.

Nervous Bodies and Collective Redemption

Nervous sensibility is depicted prominently and variously throughout *Jerusalem*. References to "nerves," "fibres," and "threads" and images of nerve-based bodies, the "trembling" body, the "woven" body, and the "sensitized" body occur throughout Blake's *Jerusalem*, and his prophetic works in general. The prevalent use of these words provides images of the nervous body and mind throughout the poem, developing a vision of nervous sensibility through the characters and spaces of the poem. Repeated references to "tender nerves" (11.7; 68.26; 80.64) and "nervous fibres" (98.37), "nervous limbs" (87.6), or "nervous form" (38.25) emphasize the sensitive, nervous body as the principal bodily form in the poem. Even cities are depicted as nervous bodies of perception and sensibility. For example, the four points of Golgonooza are defined by the sense organs: "And the Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East, / And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North" (12.59-60). Oxford exhibits nervous behavior: "Oxford trembled while he spoke, then fainted in the arms / Of

not mutually exclusive, but actually overlap and work together in various representations (26). I follow Michael's insightful guide, and approach Blake's cities as the physical cities of Romantic-era Britain and as cities of imagination.

¹⁷ For example, as a new wave of "green" criticism has developed in Romantic studies, scholars such as Kevin Hutchings have challenged the claim of Blake's antipathy to nature showing Blake did not simply favor the city over the country, but rather revealed and denounced the constructedness of nature. According to Hutchings, both nature and the city are redeemed at the end of *Jerusalem* (4-36). Indeed, while Jerusalem is positioned over the site of London, all of Albion (and the world) achieves redemption.

Norwich” (46.17-18). London is also anthropomorphized as a nervous body, presented as a “nervous form” of “veiny pipes” and “blood-vessels” (38.35; 38.36; 38.34). Blake’s persistent references to nerves, fibres, and veins indicate a representation of nervous sensibility and that Blake engages eighteenth-century nerve theory in his poem.

In addition to “nerves” and “nervous,” the persistent use of the image of the “fibre” demonstrates the significance of acute sensibility to the poem. The word “fibre(s)” is used repeatedly in *Jerusalem*, and images of fibres and threads dominate Blake’s illuminations of the poem.¹⁸ Fibres and nerves have many nuances in *Jerusalem*, including sexual, vegetable (or environmental), and sympathetic connotations.¹⁹ Yet “fibre” is also closely connected to nervousness and the depiction of the nervous body in the text. According to Ishizuka, the fibre was believed to epistemologically and ontologically mediate body and mind and served as a physiological and pathological foundation for medical concepts of the body. The fibre substantiated the “medicocultural concept of nervous sensibility” (Ishizuka 72). While Ishizuka focuses on fibre medicine as being more prevalent than nerve theory in eighteenth-century medical theory, I read representations of the fibre in Blake’s work as participating in discourse on nerve theory. For example, the creator Los’s body is depicted continually as nervous, as his “wild fibres shoot in veins / Of blood thro’ all [his] nervous limbs” (87.5-6). This particular quotation demonstrates that the fibre was an integral part of Blake’s presentation of nervous sensibility as the fibres course through “nervous limbs.” Blake’s representations allude to similar discussions by

¹⁸ “Fibre” is also prevalent in Blake’s other prophetic works, such as *Milton* and *The Four Zoas*.

¹⁹ For more on sexual connotations, see Hilton (92) and Connolly (20). On the links between fibres and vegetative matter/environmental readings, see Connolly (48), Paley (“Continuing City” 93), and Hutchings (158).

medical doctors and nerve theorists, who linked the fibre to nerve theory. For example, in *The English Malady*, a text focused on the prevalence of nervous disease, George Cheyne actually refers to “sensible *Fibres*” that were made up of smaller fibres “plated and twisted together” and that were related to manifestations of sensibility (62, his emphasis).²⁰ Blake’s consistent references to “fibre” similarly are linked to representations of nerves and demonstrate Blake’s profound engagement with the medical and cultural discourse of nervous sensibility.

While the bodies of *Jerusalem* are textually presented as nervous, made of threads of nerves, “muscular fibres” (65.78), “fibrous veins” (47.3), fibred “loins” (86.51), and “nervous fibres” (98.37), the images of bodies in the illuminations of Blake’s poem also visually show fibrous, nervous bodies. Most of the images emphasize sinewy muscles, but the bodies often appear woven and have strings of fibres or threads that extend across and out from them into space. For example, in Plate 25, a thread or fibre extends from just above the male figure’s loins, while a woman gathers this thread into a ball. Another woman appears above the male figure with her arms stretched out and extensions of fibres of nerves distending beneath her arms. Both this female figure and the male figure below her possess nerves and fibres that extend out from, yet are clearly connected to, their bodies. For these characters, their nervous systems extend beyond their bodies into the physical world around them. Moreover, many of the figures throughout the illuminations of *Jerusalem* are made up of parallel and sometimes perpendicular lines, appearing like fabric (for example, the figure in the

²⁰ Later theorists make this connection, too. For example, Foucault, in his story of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century nervous disease in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, identifies the “nervous fiber” with irritation, which was “understood as the pathological state of an organ aroused by prolonged stimulus” (155).

bottom right hand corner on Plate 31). These bodies themselves seem to be woven, consisting of a fabric of nerves.²¹ In Plate 57, all three female characters extend into space through fibres that stretch out and expand. Plates 91, 94, and 95 include more images of extending bodies.

These external extensions of nerves and fibres visually emphasize excess. As, during Blake's time, nervousness was considered to be an excess of sensibility, these extending nervous fibres suggest an excess of sensibility in the characters of the poem. By externalizing the fibred and nervous body, Blake presents an extreme nervous sensibility as the main bodily mode of the text. These extended nerves moreover represent a physiological and material excess, in which the nerves and fibres cannot be contained within the typical corporeal form. The agitated nerves project outward into the physical world, extending physiological experience. The individual can connect with others and objects outside of him/herself. *Jerusalem* thus presents the nervous, physical body as fluid, unencumbered by the usual boundaries of the body. Furthermore, considering nervous sensibility is often presented as a form of consumption in Romantic-era texts, as I have argued in earlier chapters of this project, Blake's depiction of the physical extensions of the nervous body also suggest that these excessively fibred bodies are also open to enhanced perception and consumption of sensations. The distending nerves protrude to increase the individual's ability to consume or absorb more of the surrounding sensations.

In several passages, we can see how these extensions work to critique sensibility and the material aspect of sensibility culture in early nineteenth-century England. The

²¹ As Connolly notes, textual and visual images of "fibres" and "threads" "evoke Blake's concept of the woven body" (59). These images demonstrate Connolly's point while also presenting the body as a sensible body comprised of a network of nervous fibres.

extensions of the nervous body can potentially allow for the manipulation and, in a sense, consumption of others. Externalized nerves and fibres can be used to bind others and control them. For example, although his efforts to manipulate Los ultimately fail, Albion “Bend[s] the fibres of Brotherhood,” “Inclosing Los,” in an attempt to control him (30.18-19). In this short passage, Albion uses fibres that could potentially connect the two figures to instead enclose Los and cut him off from external influence. Here Los is in a sense consumed by Albion’s fibres as he is “Inclos[ed]” within Albion’s “Central Void among his Oaks” (30.20). The passage provides a textual image of Los being, in a way, swallowed among Albion’s trees. In addition to Albion, many other characters “cut” and tie fibres, manipulating and controlling other characters and geographical places (for example, see 15.22-24 and 66.46-49). Weaving is also a form of manipulating fibres in the text. For example, in one scene, Enitharmon declares to Los, “No! I will seize thy fibres & weave / Them, not as thou wilt but as I will” (87.12-13). In the poem, fibres can be woven at will by the individual self and others. In this passage, the weaving of fibres has a violent effect, as Los’s fibres are seized, controlled, and manipulated by another. Blake’s illuminations also illustrate fibrous extensions of bodies being manipulated by others. As addressed above, Plate 25 portrays a male figure’s fibre being manipulated by a woman, who rolls the fibre into a ball of thread. The image on Plate 85 depicts a woman collecting and weaving three fibres extending from a male figure’s body. Both of these images represent the manipulation of nervous fibres. They also represent the consumption of others, as the fibres are being gathered by another figure. These representations of fibre manipulation critique the material characteristics of sensibility, both its emphasis on physiological perception and material

existence (as extensions of the sensible body open the individual to sensual manipulation) and the emphasis on material consumption (as these fibrous extensions intensify the consumption of sensations and promote the consumption of others).

Fibres and nerves not only allow manipulation and spread deception, but they also allow connection and spread love between lands and people. As Connolly suggests, bodies and humans in Blake's works are "composed of fibres, and fibres are also the conduit for physical and mental connection between people" (58-59). The fibrous extensions of the nervous and sensible body in *Jerusalem* reveal the potential for neural, physical, and mental connection with others and with geography. A nervous body from which the fibres extend outward signifies potential human and environmental connection, as these fibres can connect to other fibres in the surrounding environment, whether from the land, which is also presented as fibred and nervous, or from another being. In multiple images of the illuminations to *Jerusalem*, the bodily figures connect to the land or ground beneath them through their extending nervous fibres. In the images of Plates 45 and 57, fibrous threads extend from the bodies of the figures and physically connect to each other. The image at the bottom of Plate 15 shows fibres that extend in branch-like patterns from one of the figures into the air and into the ground in root-like extensions. Similarly, in Plate 45, fibrous threads extend from the figure in the top left to another figure and into the ground, as well. While these images can potentially represent negative connection—i.e., how individuals are connected to each other in controlling, manipulative, and systemic ways—they also reveal the potential for positive connection—i.e., love, creative energy, and collective redemption.

Blake textually represents this type of creative and positive fibred connection, too. For example, the poet/prophet/speaker of the poem also imagines the possibility of connecting bodily fibres: “I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine: / Fibres of love from man to man thro Albion’s pleasant land” (4.7-8). Fibres not only connect the nerves and parts of the individual sensible body, but also work metaphorically and physically (as in Romantic organicism, or a sort of proto-superstring theory) to connect fellow human beings to each other in the physical world. Yet, in this passage, fellow human beings connect spiritually, also, through fibres of love. Nervous sensibility thus takes on a deeper and more expanded meaning beyond physiological sensibility to encompass the physiological and the spiritual, resulting in a mutual sympathy. This sympathy is emphasized as a physiological phenomenon in Blake’s text, stemming from the sensations and neural experience of a sensible body.

The concept of sympathy as an experience linked to the nervous system was not isolated to Blake’s work. Steven Bruhm points out that some branches of eighteenth-century nerve theory approached the nervous system as a “network linking body and soul, possessing attributes of both” (12). Bruhm specifically quotes Robert Whytt, an eighteenth-century physician who specialized in studies of sympathy and pain, and who argues that a physiological sympathy continues into a sympathy between and among separate individuals (14). According to Whytt, “there is still a more wonderful sympathy between the nervous systems of different persons, whence various motions and morbid symptoms are often transferred from one to another, without any corporeal contact” (Bruhm 14; Whytt 583). Blake’s *Jerusalem* represents a similar phenomenon, but depicts physical, mental, and emotional connection through fibres and nerves. In

Blake's text, physiological representations of nervous sensibility become spiritual representations through nervous connection. Representations of "fibres of Brotherhood" (30.18), "fibres of love," which are sent "From Golgonooza with sweet visions for Jerusalem, wanderer" (86.40-41), and the "mingling of soft fibres / Of tender affection" (90.9-10) demonstrate the ability of fibres to connect people with each other and places through sympathy and affection. As Connolly points out, these illustrations of nerves and fibres emphasize "the usually hidden organ of sensitivity, the nervous system which links body and mind, and in turn links people with each other, keeping the individual from being a prisoner of his own body" (64). In *Jerusalem*, acute sensibility opens up the body, allowing for physiological and sympathetic connection. The fibred body of nervous sensibility is necessary to this physical and spiritual connection and liberation. Acute sensibility holds the potential to connect the inhabitants of the city, the nation, and the world, if wielded correctly.

This connective nervous sensibility presents a sympathy that shifts from the material to the transcendent. The material character of sensibility that is expressed through excess is re-appropriated in Blake's text by removing the economic emphasis and instead channeling excess to a collective energy and salvation. In "'The Road of Excess Leads to the Palace of Wisdom': Alternative Economies in Blake's Continental Prophecies," Katey Castellano argues that Blake "creates the basis for an alternative, non-utilitarian model of economy based on excessive generosity" (10). The collective sympathy addressed above is in some ways a form of the excessive generosity that Castellano discusses here. Through fibrous extensions, humanity experiences an intensified mutual love. Yet Blake's incorporation and appropriation of excess extends

further in the text than just developing extreme generosity. I argue that Blake takes the character of excess that extends from the material and modern aspects of sensibility and uses it to create a path to redemption.²² As Castellano contends, Blake's representations of excess do not "encourage an endless indulgence of appetites, nor is a 'diseased' type of sensual excess socially healthy" (19). Rather, Castellano argues that Blake's excess extends "from 'healthy,' community-building generosity" (19). Indeed, Blake's excess of sensibility here is not presented as sickly, but rather as community-building. Blake takes what could be perceived as diseased—acute and excessive nervous systems—and extends it to connect individuals within a community. But this excessive sensibility also leads to a collective redemption. By connecting the people to each other and to the earth, fibres can spread love, sympathy, and understanding through the city, the nation, and the world, resulting in a collective liberation. Once humanity is "mutual in love divine," it can begin its spiritual redemption. In this way, the fibred body of acute sensibility also leads to redemption through liberation. Here, nervous fibres are linked to the development of an ideal, redeemed England based on connections of sensibility and nerves.

London as Nerve Source

Jerusalem presents London as the nerve source of all connection, of all fibrous extensions of nerves, and of the spread of sympathy and affection. For Blake, the project of building Jerusalem (and redeeming Albion) requires connection and a capacity for intense sympathy, for everyone "Mutual shall build Jerusalem: / Both heart

²² Not only does my argument here take Castellano's assertion a step further, but my reading of Blake's text diverges from hers in other ways. For example, Castellano argues that Blake's representations of excess reveal Blake's conservatism. My readings do not address whether Blake was conservative or radical, though I tend to agree with other scholars who see Blake's work as in many ways revolutionary and radical for his time.

in heart & hand in hand” (27.87-88). Among Blake’s bleaker depictions of London are still brief moments of promise, where London possesses the potential for human sympathy, affection, and redemption, namely because London itself is presented as a nervous body. London, described as a “Human awful wonder of God,”²³ says

Return, Albion, return! I give myself for thee:
My streets are my Ideas of Imagination.
Awake, Albion, awake! And let us awake up together.
My houses are Thoughts: my inhabitants; Affections. (38.29-33)

As Mark Lussier points out, in this passage, London is portrayed as human; its streets are fibres and “veins of imaginations,” its homes are dwellings of meditation, and its inhabitants are currents of “fellow feeling” (200). London itself possesses a sensible, nervous body, full of sympathetic and connective potential.²⁴ Here, the streets and houses of London hold the tools of imagination and love that are needed to redeem England. The image of Albion and London awakening together further stresses the need for collective affection. As redemption is dependent upon imagination in Blake’s works, the imagination must be reawakened, as well. London’s description of his streets as “*Ideas of Imagination*” suggests they possess the potential for imagination, but that imagination currently lies dormant (my emphasis). Thus London has the potential for awakening but in this passage has not yet generated imaginative vision. In the midst of chaos and suffering, London is set up in Jerusalem as a potential place of redemptive urban sensibility. London and Albion must wake up the imagination together and reclaim the people and land for Jerusalem.

²³ The word “awful” at this time did not have the same negative connotations as it does today. During Blake’s time the word was used to describe the sublime, and was more akin to “awe-inspiring” than to something negatively terrifying.

²⁴ Recall also the line “Shut from my *nervous* form,” which London states a couple lines after this excerpt (38.35, my emphasis).

Jerusalem not only presents London as a figure of nervous sensibility, but also as the nerve source of all fibred extensions throughout the world. The sites of London, Babylon, Golgonooza, and Jerusalem—all figures or manifestations of London—dominate the text and serve as the center of the poem’s mythic universe. Throughout the poem, Blake depicts fibres as connecting characters to each other, and then to Golgonooza and Jerusalem, two different forms of London. In a passage addressing the various counties and cities of Ireland and Scotland, the text indicates London as the center and source of all nations:

All these Center in London & in Golgonooza, from whence
They are Created Continually, East & West & North & South:
And from them are Created all the Nations of the Earth,
Europe & Asia & Africa & America, in fury Fourfold! (72.27-31)

In this passage, London is the center of the world, and the geographical and spiritual center of its redemption.²⁵ Moreover, the text depicts London (and one of its manifestations, Golgonooza) as generative geography, continually creating the parts of Albion and Ireland listed extensively in the stanzas preceding this excerpt, as well as the other continents, countries, and regions of the world.²⁶ London acts as the nerve center

²⁵ London is the main site of *Jerusalem* and, as Punter claims, “site of the entire action of the Prophetic Books” (10). London, presented as itself in Blake’s text, includes historical place and space particular to Blake’s time. Yet Blake’s representation of London is specifically Blakean, presented at times in an approximately accurate topography that engages London as Blake imagines it. London is thus semi-historical, and imaginatively fluid in Blake’s poem, integrating London’s historical character with images of what it could possibly be, combining the historical and mystical vision of the capital city. As Punter suggests, Blake’s London is the “city of possibilities, an undetermined image which contains within itself opportunities for both degeneration and fruition, creative fulfillment or the irrevocable loss of the spirit of social unity” (Punter 10-11). I find Punter’s description of each of the cities accurate and helpful for understanding the differentiations between the different manifestations of the city of London in Blake’s work.

²⁶ Blake depicts Golgonooza as the city of art in the text, the alternative vision of a London built with imagination and creative energy. Yet again I turn to Punter for a succinct description of how Golgonooza is figured in *Jerusalem*: Golgonooza “is clearly more of a Blakean invention” and “stands in complex relation to the other cities” (10). While Los awaits the return of Jerusalem, he struggles to construct a city “which will serve as a continual reminder of the harmony which is within eventual human reach” (13). Furthermore, Raine suggests that the city of Golgonooza was an “interior London,” and that the name of

of Great Britain and the rest of the world, represented in the continents listed in line 72.31 (Europe, Asia, Africa, and America). While nerves and fibres are not specifically addressed in this passage, the extensive depictions (both visually and textually) of fibred bodies and lands suggests the connection between London and the rest of the world is also a fibred connection. London is the source of connection and creation that emanates outward to the rest of the nation and world.

This depiction of London as the nerve source of Albion and the world presents an urban neural sublime that also highlights the imagination. Blake scholars have traced many different representations of the sublime—some overlapping and simultaneous—throughout Blake’s works.²⁷ Although scholars point out that Blake critiques eighteenth-century and Burkean notions of the sublime,²⁸ Morton Paley argues “Blake drew upon the eighteenth-century notion of the sublime with sophisticated awareness,” and developed a unique sublimity “characteristic of Blake alone” (*The Continuing City*

the city is based in the root word *golgos*, meaning skull, “because the city’s existence is not outside but within us, in the human brain” (76).

²⁷ For Vincent De Luca, the sublime in Blake’s works is in many ways Kantian, favoring the mental over the material sublime (25-26). Steve Vine agrees that “Blake inherits Kant’s valorization of the mental over the material sublime” (2389), but Vine traces the development of the material sublime in Blake’s works, arguing that, for Blake, “the sublime inheres in the particular, the material, the singular, the minute, rather than in the transcendent mysteries of what *Jerusalem* calls ‘Abstraction’ [74.26]” (242). According to Vine, “inscribing the mind in matter, Blake’s material sublime also [...] installs itself in history” (242). Anne Janowitz argues that the urban poetic of Blake’s *Jerusalem* “takes up a more bracing interrogation of the material sublime” and examines an “artifactual sublime” “aesthetically companionable” to luxury (247-248). Other scholars focus on other prevalent manifestations of the sublime in Blake’s works. Morton Paley demonstrates that Blake’s recurring apocalyptic representations position him as a key writer of the “apocalyptic sublime” (*Apocalyptic Sublime* 71-100). As Paley argues, “Blake’s imagination is by definition apocalyptic,” and since the sublime is so inextricably tied to the imagination, Blake’s sublime is almost always apocalyptic (13). Paley also argues that we can even detect a “kind of anti-sublimity that is assigned to demonic figures like the Spectre(s) and the giant Sons of Albion” in *Jerusalem* (*Continuing City* 65).

²⁸ For example, Hélène Ibata points out that Blake rejects the then prevailing theory of Edmund Burke, with its foundation of the sublime on an empirical basis” (30). In *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Wieskel states, “Blake hated the indefinite, rejected the numinous, and insisted on the primacy of the imagination. His work makes a profound critique of the natural sublime” and the “inscrutability which always attends the numinous” (7).

57).²⁹ While *Jerusalem* arguably presents multiple manifestations of the sublime, I contend that the text depicts an urban, neural sublime that is linked to urban sensibility. By “neural sublime” I particularly refer to Alan Richardson’s definition of the neural sublime (defined in the introduction of this project) as a “brain-based conception of mind” and which takes place physically in the nervous system (12, 26). Blake’s work connects the neural sublime to the urban sublime. The urban sublime, also previously addressed in the introduction, typically encompasses the sublimity of the urban landscape and the ways it surpasses the powers of human perception. The urban sublime often comprises social, spatial, and economic experiences of the city and encompasses representations of cityscape, industrialism, and crowds. The urban sublime was still relatively new in the Romantic period, as cities were beginning to grow geographically and in population more rapidly than before. Combining these two forms of the sublime, the urban, neural sublime presents the city as a vast and interconnected web of nerves, bodies, and spaces that exceeds human understanding and can only be envisioned through prophecy and enhanced urban sensibility. The neural sublime of *Jerusalem* is a nerve-based sublime that emphasizes the physiological and the transcendent experience of the numinous. The urban, neural sublime thus presents a unique path to the imagination, as it emphasizes body and mind in urban experience as key to creativity and redemption.

In the passage quoted above, London’s position as the nerve center of the nation and world portrays the significance of the urban, neural sublime to the development and exercise of the imagination. This passage portrays the neural sublimity of London as the

²⁹ Paley goes on to say that many “passages could be cited to show how, despite Blake’s ‘Contempt & Abhorrence’ for Burke, the sublime moments of *Jerusalem* often manifest the characteristics of the Burkean sublime” (*Continuing City* 61).

center of human Imagination, as well, as it continually creates itself, the nation, and the greater world. The text presents London as generating a cyclical and interwoven influence that stems out to other regions and to individuals, connecting them with the city. This influence has the potential to be redeeming, as it is in the end of the poem, as it can connect individuals to the imaginative energy of the city and to each other. Furthermore, the text associates London with the sublime figure of the imagination, Jesus. Plate 77 emphasizes that London is the place Jesus will return to: “And now the time returns again: / Our souls exult, & London’s towers / Receive the Lamb of God to dwell / In England’s green & pleasant bowers” (77.85-88). The Lamb of God is received first by London to remain in England. In other words, the passage does not describe Jesus returning to London after it has been transformed into Jerusalem or even the city of Golgonooza. Rather the historical city of London, emphasized in the reference to “London’s Towers,” receives him.³⁰ As the city of the sublime savior’s return, the city of London is thus presented as the center of Albion and geographically and spiritually crucial to Albion’s redemption.

In a later passage, the poem again emphasizes the significance of London in relation to redemption and the building of Jerusalem. Jerusalem says,³¹

London cover’d the whole Earth, England encompass’d the Nations,
And all the Nations of the Earth were seen in the Cities of Albion.
My pillars reach’d from sea to sea; London beheld me come
From my east & from my west, he blessed me and gave
His children to my breasts, his sons & daughters to my knees. (79.22-26)

³⁰ “London’s Towers” most likely refers to both the buildings of London (which at this time would have included St. Paul’s Cathedral and Parliament, for example) and to the Tower of London, a castle and fortress of the British kingdom dating back to 1078. The phrase “London’s Towers” thus emphasizes London’s history.

³¹ The poem depicts Jerusalem as both an actual physical city and as a character (both serve as a physical embodiment of redemption). In this quotation, Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman.

In this passage, yet again, London is depicted as the center of the world and the geographical core of its redemption. Jerusalem's "pillars" spread across the world, but she focuses her attention on London as the center of the world's redemption, as she suggests that the children of London were given her blessings, which emanate outward to the rest of the nations. The nations and continents of the world are again depicted here as connected through their central source, London. Moreover, the redemption of Albion and these other nations is dependent upon the redemption of Albion's principal city, London. The passage represents London and Britain as the hub of the earth. The text establishes London as the center of action and perception—the vast web of connection originates in this capital city.

These passages depict what in some ways seems a vision of empire. Line 23 of Plate 79 ("And all the Nations of the Earth were seen in the Cities of Albion") certainly in part refers to the increasing population of foreign peoples in the major cities of England (especially London) due to the spread of Britain's empire and to international trade. London was already an international city by the Romantic era and was populated by many people from foreign nations. Moreover, the spread of London and Albion to other nations in the passage resembles the spread of British empire and power. As Saree Makdisi indicates in *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity*, the "space of London is not limited to the city of London, even though it is anchored there, at the core of the commercial networks spanning the British empire" (157). London in these passages radiates and extends outward to other nations. These other nations are created continually from and by London itself through what Blake envisions as a fourfold map. The quaternary of London, which consists of Finchley

(north), Blackheath (east), Norwood (south), and Hounslow (west), corresponds with the extended quaternary represented in Plate 72: Europe (north), Asia (east), Africa (south), and America (west). The London quaternary, according to Makdisi, can be “endlessly extended or contracted, superimposing on and being superimposed upon by” extended quaternaries, like the one represented in Plate 72 (167). London, which is the “center” of other nations (72.27) and “cover[s]” the earth (79.22), in these passages serves as the capital city of Albion and of what Blake calls in his prophetic works the “Universal Empire,” a “spatial system of unequal and exploitative relations and exchanges gradually overspreading the four continents and thirty-two nations of his world” (Makdisi 157). Makdisi suggests the “spatio-temporal experience of London” is “carried through the sinews and tissues of those and other networks,” and “spread out from the city of London” (Makdisi 157). I argue that the “sinews and tissues” Makdisi refers to are, in particular, the nervous fibres that connect people and lands. These fibres can also be seen as representing imperial networks that bind peoples of all nations in one united, but oppressive and imprisoning system. These nervous fibres in part represent the extension of trade routes, emphasizing the import and export of commercial goods, and extraction of foreign goods within Britain’s imperial expansion. The sublimity of London, then, resides to some extent in its terrifying imperial extent and power.

However, while these passages employ the language and image of empire, they actually offer an alternative vision to empire, an alternative possibility to the spread of imperial power and destruction. Instead, they emphasize the possibility of human connection, beginning in London and emitting in nerve-like fibres throughout the world.

The current Albion and London emanate and grow power, but they can potentially be subverted to spread love and human connection, which in turn can potentially help the world achieve redemption. As a creative source, London can potentially generate love and redemption (once its children have been given to Jerusalem) and spread them through nervous connections to the world. Urban sensibility, represented in fibres and connections here, remains a crucial component of Blake's vision of connection and the redemptive city.

For Blake, resistance to systems of power (such as imperialism) require imitation and subversion. As Makdisi argues, in the redemptive process, the systems which are to be "overcome and overthrown" have to be "imitated to a certain extent" and the system's "tools, apparatuses and discourses have to be used against it," eventually to be destroyed themselves (164). In Blake's prophetic poems, redemption involves first the "creation of a new System" which entails a "replication of those systems which are to be destroyed" (Makdisi 164). In *Jerusalem*, a "new" system of urban sensibility, which imitates oppressive systems such as capitalism and empire (through excess, consumption, and imperial domination of the capital city London), first must be built to unite everyone through nervous fibres and urban perception. By shackling everyone together in oppressive and imprisoning systems (united within the "Universal Empire"), humanity has been united and can turn this domineering feature against itself to liberate each other. Once this unity takes place, the world can be redeemed and all systems can be destroyed. According to Makdisi, it is "precisely in the darkest and most terrifying visions of this cruel system that Blake sees hope" (171). These passages thus employ the tools and features of empire in order to subvert

domination and liberate the peoples of the world. The fibres that connect the world with London, visually similar to the maps of trade routes, connect the world through an alternative urban sensibility that appropriates imperial connection and turns it into a redemptive rather than destructive connection. But it is particularly important to take from this that the city of London serves as the nerve source – as the place in which imperial power and the power of imagination merge, a place where love and sympathy unite to rebuild Jerusalem. Here one can find the “antidote” to the disease and destruction described in Blake’s earlier poem “London” (Lussier 201). Urban sensibility formulates a crucial part in the prophecy and redemption of London and Albion. Fibred bodies, cities, and nations, in connecting with the nerve source of London, provide a potential conduit for the spread of this redemptive urban sensibility.

The Agitated Body and Prophecy

Acute Sensibility and the Poet-Prophet

In addition to fibred bodies, *Jerusalem* emphasizes nervous sensibility through depictions of the agitated body. In particular, the physical expressions of prophecy resemble symptoms of nervousness associated with sensibility in the text.³² For

³² Prophecy in Blake’s work does not simply comprise divinely-inspired prediction. As Ronald Schleifer points out in “Simile, Metaphor, and Vision: Blake’s Narration of Prophecy in *America*,” “[p]rophecy for Blake entails more than simple prediction: prophecy is an imaginative engagement with history in which the vision of outward things, historical events, is joined with inward vision, which is imaginative and value-laden” (569). While Schleifer refers here to Blake’s first prophetic work, *America*, I find this definition applicable to Blake’s later prophetic poem *Jerusalem*. Schleifer also points out Blake’s own notes about prophecy, which appear in the marginalia to Watson’s *An Apology for the Bible* (the note is from 1798, six years before Blake began work on *Jerusalem*):

Prophets in the modern sense of the word, have never existed. Jonah was no prophet in this modern sense, for his prophecy of Ninevah failed. Every honest man is a Prophet; he utters his opinion both of private & public matters. Thus: If you go on So, the result is So. He never says, such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator. (Schleifer 570; Blake, *Blake: Complete Writings*, 392)

Blake presents modern prophecy in *Jerusalem* similarly, as imaginative engagement and honest insight. An acute sensibility is significant to prophecy precisely because it opens the poet-prophet to outward and inward sensation and engages him in the imagination. Blake’s quotation here and his representations of

example, in *Jerusalem* prophecy is often characterized by physical agitation and trembling, which, in nervous illnesses, was considered by physicians and medical scientists to be a manifestation of the irritation of nerve fibres in the body.³³ The prophet/speaker of the poem depicts himself as trembling and agitated at several points in the text. In these moments, the speaker specifically describes the process or task of prophecy. In the beginning of the poem, the speaker says, “Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonish’d at me, / Yet they forgive my wanderings, I rest not from my great task!” (5.16-17). The “great task” addressed here refers in particular to writing this prophetic poem. The act results in the nervous physical manifestation of trembling (and perhaps insomnia) and requires a mental and physical fatigue that worries the speaker’s friends. The physical (and perhaps mental/emotional) trembling reveals a physiological reaction to prophetic vision. The speaker’s later imperative line, “Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly” (5.23) further links trembling with prophetic creation and writing in the poem. In these passages, trembling and nervous physical symptoms signal excess—Blake even uses the word “exceedingly” in this last passage. The poem presents a physical, emotional, and intellectual excess in the spiritual experience of prophecy. In these passages, Blake takes the excess resulting from material culture manifested in nervous sensibility and appropriates it for divine vision, reversing its destructive effects into creativity and liberation. Instead of oppressing and controlling individuals, excess is used to set them free. This excess,

prophecy in *Jerusalem* also indicate that the prophecy is not isolated from history, as it originates in the prophet’s “opinion” of “public matters.”

³³ Janet Todd describes trembling as a physical manifestation of nervous sensibility that was often represented in sentimental novels (8). In *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), Thomas Trotter addresses the physical irritability that accompanies nervous disorders, often characterized as trembling, spasms, convulsions, and muscle contractions (181-184; 187-188).

moreover, depicts the act of prophetic writing as a form of the neural, urban sublime, which expresses and generates imaginative creation.

The excess and nervous trembling associated with prophetic experience in these passages presents the prophet-speaker of the poem as possessing (and fully experiencing) a heightened sensibility and sensitivity. His nervous symptoms imply an acute sensual receptivity that generates enhanced perception, which allows the prophetic vision of the poet. The references to trembling and receptiveness indicate that a heightened sensibility in the poet provides a conduit for prophecy. The excessive mystical stimulation results in sensation that becomes too much for the physical body to handle, resulting in physical agitation and movement. By being open to sensation, the speaker is open to spiritual and prophetic perception. On a physical level, the text (which emphasizes fibres and nerves) suggests the highly sensitive nervous fibres open up the poet's body and mind to physical and metaphysical experience. By being open to sensation, the speaker is receptive to spiritual and prophetic perception.

Moreover, being open to sensation and prophecy in the text means possessing an open, transparent sensibility and sense organs. According to Connolly, Blake transforms the "natural senses" to "enable spiritual perception" (196). The "nervous fibres" of the sense organs extend spiritually as well as physiologically and the transparency or obscurity of nerves (and whether they are contracted or expanded) affects the ability to access divine vision (Connolly 196). I contend that we can extend Connolly's point to argue that possessing an acute nervous sensibility, in particular, is crucial to being receptive to divine vision in Blake's text, as it opens up the nerves and expands sensual perception.

In contrast, those who do not cultivate a nervous, receptive sensibility remain closed off to spiritual vision. At multiple points throughout the text, *Jerusalem* describes clouded and “opaque” senses in which the nerves are too dense and the individuals are thus closed off from prophetic revelation. In these instances, the characters are not able to perceive divine vision and therefore (at least temporarily) cannot experience redemption. Depictions of opacity and cloudiness often relate to a closing off of sensual perception in the poem. For example, at the beginning of the poem, London is darkened and clouded resulting in despondency and isolation: “THE banks of the Thames are clouded! The ancient porches of Albion are / Darken’d! they are drawn thro’ unbounded space, scatter’d upon / The Void in incoher(er)ent despair!” (5.1-3). Perception is darkened and muddled, resulting in blurred and ambiguous forms of sensation. This obscured perception here signals danger and desolation, emphasizing the need to open the senses and perception to divine vision. Furthermore, dark characters, such as Los’s Spectre, who are portrayed as hostile to redemption and divine vision, are described as blackened and “Opaque” (6.1-2, 5; 7.8). “Opakeness” is also associated twice in the poem with Satan, who is particularly interested in obstructing prophecy and redemption (42.30-31; 73:27-28). Moreover, opacity is related to nerves and fibres, representing dense and closed off nerves as sensually numb. Blake depicts insensible numbness as destructive, resulting in Albion’s darkness and despair and in the representation of London as falling in to Babylon, a city of fallen and closed perception.³⁴ Opacity in general limits the individual and keeps the characters and

³⁴ Nelson Hilton suggests Babylon is a shortened version of “Baby London” in the text (241). As Punter points out, Babylon “is the shape which the city may take” if Jerusalem is not rebuilt in London (10). The text depicts Babylon as “the shadowy form of a city of evil which hovers over present action and infects the social life of a fallen London” (Punter 10). It is worth noting that, as Punter contends, Blake’s

places in the text deceived, enslaved, and divided. This is particularly emphasized in Plate 49, which focuses on the perceptive consequences of selfishness:

The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark,
Scarcely beholding the Great Light, conversing with the ground:
The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out
True Harmonies, & comprehending great, as very small:
The Nostrils, bent down to the earth & clos'd with senseless flesh,
That odours cannot them expand, nor joy them exult:
The Tongue, a little moisture fills, a little food it cloyes,
A little sound it utters, & its cries are faintly heard. (49.34-40)

Again, the closing of the senses, emphasized here in the words “narrow,” “clos'd up & dark,” “small,” “very small,” “clos'd,” and the repetition of “little,” illustrates the significance of urban sensibility and open senses/sense organs to divine vision.

Vigorous and open senses enhance the ability to see beyond the ordinary worldly sensations to divine vision. Here all the senses are closed up, cutting off the individual from love, human connection, and vision.

Instead, the poem calls for transparent and clear senses and nerves that flow and expand. Nervous sensibility provides the individual with the bodily ability to achieve immanence and redemption through connection. For example, the following stanza emphasizes the necessity of fluidity of nerves and receptive sense organs: “If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of Perception seem to vary: / If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also” (34.55-56). Open and varied perceptions thus allow for multiple imaginative possibilities, while closed perceptive organs close off the individual from these possibilities. But remaining cut off from the possibilities of varied

Babylon is not presented as a “city of disorder and naked desire, but rather one characterized by the ‘Moral Law,’ the ‘Watchman’ and the ‘Judge’—the law, the police and the courtroom” (15). As Punter indicates, the “doom which Blake thinks awaits” London and Albion “is not the creation of a city of dangerous chaos, but rather the outright domination of rigid law and order” (15). Some scholars contend that Babylon is a figure for the present, fallen London, but I argue that Babylon can be read at times in the text as a figure for the present London, as well as a figure for a past and (potential) future London, if unity and collective redemption are not reached.

perception also means remaining cut off from divine vision, as developing an open and acute sensibility leads to prophecy and eventually redemption. In addition, Blake's text also represents open senses in relation to visionary geography. For example, in one passage, sense organs form part of the topographical description of Golgonooza, showing the city of art as more open and perceptive than Babylon or London: "And the Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East, / And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North" (12.59-60). The significance of Golgonooza's sense organs here are echoed in the previously quoted passage, which emphasizes open and varied perceptive organs. As the city of imagination and art, Golgonooza's open sense organs allow for the flow and cultivation of the imagination through varied perception. At the end of *Jerusalem*, the sense organs are again described as forming part of the visionary geography of the new Jerusalem:

According to the Human Nerves of Sensation, the Four Rivers of the Water of Life.

South stood the Nerves of the Eye, East in Rivers of bliss the Nerves of the Expansive Nostrils, West flow'd the Parent Sense, the Tongue, North stood The labyrinthine Ear[.] (98.15-18)

In this passage, the nerves of the sense organs are no longer closed off, opaque, or immobile, but appear fluid, "Expansive," and "labyrinthine." In this moment, Albion has been recovered and Jerusalem restored, enabling divine vision and redemption. The text's emphasis on nerves in relation to sense organs here especially demonstrates the significance of acute nervous sensibility to imaginative, prophetic vision and redemption.

An acute sensibility entails open senses and a varied perceptivity to the world and imaginative vision. Jesus's speech to Albion asserts similar arguments: "Mutual in

one another's love and wrath all renewing / We live as One Man: for contracting our infinite senses / We behold multitude: or expanding, we behold as one" (38.16-18). In this passage, contracting the senses limits the individual because it causes a vision of disparity. Expanding the senses causes the individual to see that he is connected with everyone else, united in mutual love. These words are depicted as the "Eternal Vision, the Divine Similitude" (38.11). Thus, for the poet-prophet, possessing an acute sensibility with open senses will result eventually in redemption and "Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine / Of Human Imagination" (98.31-32).

Urban Perception and Prophecy

In addition to an acute sensitivity, a specifically *urban* sensibility is key to prophetic vision, as well. To begin with, the speaker's visions take place in London, where the poet-prophet writes. The poet's urban location when creating is significant here, as it suggests urban vision opens up the writer to extra sensual experience and prophecy. The speaker's declaration, "I heard in Lambeth's shades" (38.40), emphasizes the significance of urban location to poetic prophecy, as he claims he receives prophecies in his home in Lambeth, which at the time was considered part of the metropolis of London.³⁵ Lambeth's close proximity to the heart of London, the Thames, and Parliament made it a key area of metropolitan London life and culture. During Blake's time, Lambeth was still a relatively new district and site of urban development. Although the Lambeth Walk streetmarket was not a fully established market until approximately 1840, the market was beginning to develop earlier in the

³⁵ Lambeth is a borough of London located on the south side of the Thames, across from Chelsea. The main way to reach Lambeth is by Westminster Bridge. The Blakes lived in Lambeth (at 13 Hercules Building) from 1791 to 1800 (Damon 232). According to S. Foster Damon, Blake "spent some of his happiest and most productive years" at this residence (232).

nineteenth century. The development of Lambeth increased trade as it served as a link between Westminster and the South Bank. Thus, the Lambeth of Blake's time was characterized by urban development, commercial markets, and trade, establishing it as a burgeoning area influenced by and in turn influencing the growing commodity culture of London. In addition, the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens were located in Lambeth and served as one of the leading venues for public entertainment in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century London. Vauxhall represented London's growing obsession with spectacle and extravagant consumption, as its famous rotunda, attractive walks, and spectacular entertainments, such as fireworks, concerts, and balls, attracted large genteel crowds.³⁶ Urban place is significant here, not just because Blake actually lived and created his art and poetry in Lambeth, but also because Lambeth symbolizes urban development. The speaker receives and develops his prophecies in "Lambeth's shades" because Lambeth allows urban perspective, including the potential of urban development, as well as the vision of the minute particulars of London life. The prophet here is a Londoner with urban perspective.

The speaker's London identity is further marked in textual references to London locations. In the next couple of lines, the speaker continues, "I write in South Molton Street, what I both see and hear, / In regions of Humanity, in London's opening streets" (38.42-43).³⁷ Similarly, the location of South Molton Street places the speaker-prophet

³⁶ Many texts of the eighteenth century and the Romantic period feature Vauxhall in scenes of genteel luxury and socializing. For example, Pierce Egan's *Tom and Jerry; or, the day and night scene of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* includes a chapter in which the trio visit Vauxhall Gardens (see Chapter 14). Frances Burney's novel, *Cecilia*, also includes scenes in Vauxhall. Later Victorian texts also include mentions of or represent scenes in Vauxhall, including Dickens's *Sketches of Boz* and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

³⁷ Blake lived at 17 South Molton Street upon "his return from Felpham in the middle of September 1803, until 1821" (Damon 379). Blake wrote *Jerusalem* (1804-1820?) while he lived at this residence. South

yet again within a key region of urban development.³⁸ South Molton Street's location in the West End of London, near Oxford Street and Hyde Park, positions the prophetic action within a bustling and developing part of London, an area of luxury and commerce in the city.³⁹ Blake's specific naming of both Lambeth and South Molton Street suggest these areas are significant to prophetic vision, not just because he resided there, but because they are charged with specific geographical and cultural contexts and provide urban vision. In this passage, Blake refers to prophecy in relation to the senses—what he sees and hears—suggesting sensory experience and acute sensibility are important to what he writes. But this also suggests that the sensory experience presents a particularly urban perception, as the speaker relates what he sees and hears in London's streets. London's streets are described here as open, like the sense organs of the prophet. Unlike the clouded and closed off Thames (addressed earlier), the streets of the city are potentially open and receptive in this passage as the poet-prophet is receptive to the sensations of the urban environment. London is also described here as a region of humanity, which holds the potential for human connection.⁴⁰ Thus, the poem

Molton Street is located in the West End of London—the “fashionable” part of London—near Hyde Park and Grosvenor Square. South Molton Street was also located in close proximity to Tyburn Tree, the infamous gallows of London, which were associated with political and religious executions. Tyburn Tree appears as a recurring symbol throughout *Jerusalem*.

³⁸ Other references to Oxford Street (38.57)—a street that connects to South Molton Street and was one of the main thoroughfares of London, extending from Holborn to the northeast corner of Hyde Park (Damon 315)—and more references to South Molton Street (for example, 74.55) further emphasize the continual significance of urban place to prophetic vision in *Jerusalem*.

³⁹ South Molton Street's close proximity to Westminster moreover recalls the political state and its influence over urban development and systems of control. *Jerusalem* addresses the violence of the state, particularly in its references to Tyburn Tree and Tyburn Brook, both of which are located near South Molton Street. In this case, urban perception entails seeing the systems of oppression in the city in an effort to break out of them and liberate the population of London and England through collective redemption.

⁴⁰ Although “region of humanity” could seem like a negative description of the city (as in the city is earthly and material rather than spiritual), it has another connotation here, suggesting the potential for human love and connection. As a “region of humanity,” London holds vast amounts of potential, both to fall into the vice and systemic destruction of Babylon and to ascend to the artistic heights of Golgonooza or spiritual release of Jerusalem.

emphasizes urban sensibility in particular as a formative aspect of poetic prophecy. Moreover, the significance of urban development and material culture to these prophetic locations also suggests Blake presents the act of prophetic creation as drawing from urban excess and perception, subverting it to enhance creative energy and potential redemption rather than destruction and violence.

Nervous Energy and the Prophetic Imagination

Urban perception and acute sensibility experienced in the city causes the poet-prophet to be vulnerable to excess sensations and stimulation, which results in trembling and agitation. Yet the text depicts part of this agitation as nervous energy necessary to prophecy and enacting change and redemption.⁴¹ In *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought*, Morton D. Paley examines the significance of the “redemptive force” of energy to Blake’s poetic works, arguing “Blake was the first critic of civilization to endorse the *subversive* nature of the claims of energy” (1, 3). Makdisi contends that the “only possible lines of escape” and liberation in the poem “are opened up by Energy” (*Eternal Delight*), which if spread or “generalized throughout the world,” would result in the destruction of oppressive systems and the creation of the “redemptive and liberatory space[s] of Golgonooza” and Jerusalem (163-64). Additionally, Punter suggests that Jerusalem, the city of redemption, represents “the goal which can be reached by a correct and humane deployment of energy” (Punter 10). As these scholars point out, energy assumes a subversive, liberating role in *Jerusalem*, as it is harnessed by channeling the excess of modernity into potentially redemptive energy. While these scholars address energy in

⁴¹ By the term “energy” I mean the general definition in physics, which entails the transferability of energy, which can be converted into various forms. More specifically here, I consider energy in relation to writing, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “force or vigour of expression.”

relation to redemption in *Jerusalem*, I contend that this redemptive energy in the poem is particularly a *nervous* energy significant to the generation of prophecy, redemption, and the imagination. Moreover, as part of urban sensibility in *Jerusalem*, nervous energy and agitation represent potential change and subversion, emphasizing the significance of urban sensibility to prophetic vision. By “nervous energy” I mean that the text presents a form of energy that comes from (or originates in) the nervous system, textually and graphically presented in the threads and fibres that entwine and extend beyond bodies (addressed in a previous section of this chapter). The poem presents nerves and the nervous system as producing a form of energy that manifests in nervous symptoms, such as trembling, insomnia, and mental and physical agitation, but that has the potential for change and redemption as it can lead individuals to connect to each other and geographical place to become “mutual in love divine” (4.7-8). This collective love is then crucial to the redemption of Albion and the restoration of Jerusalem in London. Blake thus presents nervous, urban sensibility as curative in the text rather than diseased.

As addressed above, the poem often characterizes prophecy by physical expressions of agitation and trembling, which, in nervous illnesses, was a manifestation of the irritation of nerve fibres in the body. Yet trembling and agitation are associated with other bodies, places, and objects in the text, presenting a nervous energy that pervades the characters and forms of Albion and London. Variations of the word “tremble” or “trembling” appear even more than “fibre” in the poem, emphasizing the image of individual physical and nervous agitation in the text. Many of the major figures of the poem are described as trembling at various times, including Los (32.3,

40.3, 91.53, 91.58), Vala (20.11, 22.1, 29.43, 65.73), Albion (23.13, 32.13, 34.3), Los's Spectre (10.59-60), Jerusalem (19.46, 36.21, 80.9), and Enitharmon (82.48, 86.52). In addition, minor characters, such as the daughters of Beulah (48.39, 51.18), Albion's Sons (65.48), Albion's children (23.34), women (56.39), men (59.51), Gwendolen (80.85), Cambel (82.57), and Amalek (83.15), are also depicted as trembling in the poem. Nervousness pervades the characterizations of the poem, depicting Blake's visionary world as marked by agitation and nervous energy. In addition, cities, geographical landmarks, and objects also tremble in *Jerusalem*. For example, London and Canterbury tremble (33.12), and Oxford is later depicted trembling, as well (46.17). Moreover, the Thames is portrayed as trembling at multiple points in the text (16.1, 31.67, 47.1, 83.83), while deserts (82.50) and buildings/rooms (18.24) tremble, too. Los's hot globe (17.51, 55), the moon (66.79), and stones (90.59) also tremble in *Jerusalem*. As these extensive lists clearly indicate, trembling is ubiquitous in the poem, representing a wide array of expressions, including pain, fear, pity, sorrow, exhaustion, and power. Yet throughout all of these representations, trembling is linked to urban sensibility and nervous energy, connecting all of the characters, places, and objects of the poem.

Trembling is also particularly linked with vision and energy in representations of the London Stone.⁴² While London Stone combines “dark connotations of sacrifice

⁴² London Stone is a historic landmark, currently “set against the south wall of St. Swithins, Cannon Street, London” (Damon 245). London Stone during Blake's time was (and still is) located in the older city of London, approximately half way between the Tower of London and St. Paul's Cathedral, a central and thus symbolic location in the city. The stone is presumed to be a milestone from the Roman city of London, known as Londinium, which associates the stone with London's expansive history and is described in multiple texts as a definitive icon of London. For example, John Stow mentions London Stone and its supposed history in his famous *Survey of London* (1598). Urban legend suggests the London Stone was venerated and associated with the occult. Blake's *Jerusalem* presents the stone in relation to

and of mathematical measurement” in the text (Michael 135), it also serves as a position of surveillance and, at times, a prophetic perch for characters like Los and Reuben. For example, Los sits on London Stone in Plate 31, listening to Jerusalem speak with Albion (31.43). Los exhibits “astonishment & terror,” as he “trembled sitting on the Stone / Of London” (32.3).⁴³ The stone serves as an observation platform, where Los is open to perception and emotion. From this position he participates in both transparent and prophetic vision, seeing both the current violent horrors of London and Albion, as well as the potential collapse or redemption of Albion in London. Moreover, this excerpt reveals the sublimity of Los’s urban visions, which irritate his nervous system resulting in physical agitation. Trembling here expresses the build-up and release of nervous energy that occurs through the process of prophetic vision. Los’s trembling thus resembles the trembling of the poet-prophet, as both experience physical agitation in response to prophetic vision.

It is also worth noting here that the references to London Stone emphasize the historical in Blake’s vision of collective redemption. According to Michael,

The inclusion of sinister names, such as Tyburn and London Stone [in the text], both embeds the poem in England’s bloody history and redeems that history by incorporating those places into the new Jerusalem. To “build” Jerusalem using named places is not to contaminate it, but to rescue it from abstraction and to make it ultimately inseparable from contemporary London and its environs. (141)

the occult as an object of urban power that unlocks an urban sublime. He also associates it with Druidic sacrifice, linking the London Stone to Tyburn Tree.

⁴³ Depicted as a foundation of urban sublimity in the poem, London Stone produces trembling in those who use it for observation and those who look upon it. For example, Los appears mightier and more sublime to the Spectre as he stands on London Stone, threatening him: “He saw that Los was the sole, uncontrol’d Lord of the Furnaces, / Groaning he kneel’d before Los’s iron-shod feet on London Stone” (8.26-27). Los appears more sublime in this passage in part because he stands on the foundation of London Stone. The poem also portrays the stone as a site of the sublimity of Divine Justice, as Los says of Albion, “Bring him to justice before heaven here upon London Stone” (42.50). London Stone is also repeatedly paired with Stonehenge as a sublime “site of human sacrifice” (57.6-7, 58.46, 66.57, 94.24).

The use of historical places and landmarks positions the contemporary city of London as integral to Blake's representation of the neural, urban sublime and urban sensibility. Blake thus engages London Stone within various epic events and prophetic experiences in *Jerusalem*, in part, as a way of embedding prophetic vision and redemption within the physical, historical city of London. In this way, historical place is also entrenched within the experience of urban sensibility and nervous agitation that are so significant to redemption in Blake's *Jerusalem*. Representations of nervous agitation in relation to London Stone, Tyburn Tree, Lambeth, and other places and landmarks in London emphasize the city of London as crucial to divine vision and salvation.

The recurring representations of nervous agitation addressed above have further implications in the text as potentially subversive energy. In *Blake's Agitation: Criticism & the Emotions*, Goldsmith argues that "agitation" has two main meanings in Blake's work: one is an "interior, affected state ('to feel agitated')" and the other is "a political intervention, often connoting activism, sometimes even criminality ('to agitate')" (43). Energy provides the potential for change and transformation in *Jerusalem*, whether in political or spiritual form. On a more earthly level, urban sensibility and nervousness allow for political engagement and action. According to Goldsmith, agitation was also used as a political term: "By the seventeenth century, 'agitation' could be used as a nearly technical term for Parliamentary debate" (54-55). Nervous agitation, as part of urban sensibility in the text, can also be read as encouraging political engagement and action, in order to cause or create political change. The image of Los in the frontispiece to *Jerusalem* looks as though "he has been caught in an act of transgression" (Goldsmith 44). As Goldsmith contends, Los is presented as seemingly "[s]neaking

about in the dark, with one foot on either side of a threshold someone doesn't want him to cross, wanting little effort to conceal an explosive device (his 'globe of fire')[;] Los is on a self-appointed guerilla mission to agitate" (Goldsmith 44). In this image, the intention of agitating could be seen as a form of rebellion, political or otherwise. Considering the historical proximity of the French Revolution, nervous agitation in early nineteenth-century Britain would have been confronted with much suspicion and anxiety. However, Blake represents nervous energy and agitation as healthy and necessary to the commonwealth. Possessing an acute urban sensibility then leads to change, whether it is a political, social, psychological, or metaphysical transformation.

While agitation causes trembling and other nervous symptoms, it is also connected in the text to creativity and prophecy, and thus the ability to liberate the self and others from the destructive effects of coercion.⁴⁴ Los, the creative figure of the poem (besides the poet-prophet himself), is particularly associated with a sublime creative and nervous energy. Before Los attempts to create—and essentially to change Albion and London—he trembles (32.3-4). Although he initially still cannot see Albion's hidden "fibres & nerves" (32.4), Los, perching on the London Stone, sees his "Furnaces in ruins" and "the Four Points of Albion revers'd inwards" (32.5-6). His acute sensibility allows enhanced vision—he is able to see the perversion Albion has become, as well as the destruction of his own creative labor—and builds creative energy. He trembles, watching and generating creative energy, before "He seiz'd his Hammer & Tongs, his iron Poker & his Bellows, / Upon the valleys of Middlesex, Shouting Loud for aid Divine" (32.8-9). Trembling accompanies creation and labor here

⁴⁴ Although I address agitation here, the word "agitation" is used little in *Jerusalem* (see, for example, 88.8). However, the words "trembling," "shuddering," "weeping," etc., which represent physical, mental, emotional, and metaphysical agitation occur many times throughout the poem.

because it is presented as a physical manifestation of inward, nervous energy that can be harnessed for creative labor. Los's own nervous, urban sensibility allows him to build up nervous energy that generates the imagination and creative labor.

The text also presents imaginative, creative labor as a form of neural, urban sublime. For example, towards the beginning of *Jerusalem*, the labors of Los, the creative, poetic character of the poem, are described as sublime:

Yet ceas'd he not from laboring at the roarings of his Forge
With his iron & brass Building Golgonooza in great contending,
Till his Sons & Daughters came forth from the Furnaces
At the sublime Labours. (10.62-5)

In this passage, the building of Golgonooza by Los is sublime in proportion and scope. The "roarings" of his forge and the "great contending" of his work mark his labor as grand in scale. His work is so sublime that his sons and daughters come out to watch these awe-inspiring labors. But Los's creative labor is also presented as a form of urban, neural sublime in its relation to bodily movement and energy. Los's sublime labors are fed by continuous nervous energy, generated by the nervous system. Los possesses urban sensibility, which allows him to perceive more and generate energy so he can create. In *Jerusalem*, nervous energy is important to labor and creation because it offers continuous energy, as Los is in an incessant state of eternal labor. Creation is ceaseless and eternal, fed by positive nervous energy. As Paley suggests, the sublimity of Los's labors resides in this ceaseless creative process, in the fact that the city of Golgonooza, Los's supreme creation, is "continually in the act of being formed" (*Continuing City* 136).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ As Ibata points out, "the unceasing energy and Titanic activity of Los's 'sublime Labours' may be read as an original conception of the sublime as a mode of production, anchored in Blake's artistic practice, which went much beyond the thematic and stylistic interpretations of his time" (42). Ibata further states

Nervous Movement, Walking, and Redemption

The prevalence of agitation throughout the poem, represented in trembling, movement, and activity, suggests “a world not yet settled permanently into place,” a world open to change brought on by Imagination and divine creation (Goldsmith 44). Nervous agitation and energy in the poem are therefore not just representative of pain and suffering (from nervous disorders), but of the possibility of change, healing, and liberation. As potentially generative and transformative, this nervous agitation would need to continue. As Goldsmith indicates, a now obsolete definition of “agitation,” which was still in use during Blake’s time, entailed “exercise” or “activity” (43-44). Agitation, which was “synonymous with vigorous movement or animation,” was also considered “necessary to the health of living organisms” (44). Agitation could thus be viewed as healthy, or important to vitality. *Jerusalem* emphasizes the importance of activity, to “keep moving to and fro, to keep up the agitation” (Goldsmith 44). To take this a step further, nervous agitation and movement in particular are presented in Blake’s text as crucial to the generation and culmination of collective redemption. The potential to connect individuals and land through extended nervous systems (presented as nervous fibres) resides, in part, in the ability to transfer nervous energy and build it up until a collective redemption is achieved.

The prevalence and significance of nervous movement explains in part why walking takes such a vital role in *Jerusalem*. The motion and energy of walking appears

that Blake’s “intense involvement in graphic and printing production” led him to “conceive an experience of sublimity which was not a transcendental elevation, away from the physical world, but which was an integral part of his own artistic activity” (42). As a mode of production in the poem, the sublime then is inextricably tied to the physical body through labor. Physicality and the physiology of the body are thus imperative to sublime creation. This helps explain why nervous energy and an urban sensibility are important to the representations of creation and the sublime in *Jerusalem*. If the sublime is also a physical phenomenon in Blake’s poem, then nervous physical energy is necessary to the creative process.

throughout the poem in various characters and representations, taking on different forms and meanings. For example, walking often appears in the poem as “wandering,” signifying loss or exile. Many characters in the poem, including Jerusalem, wander, demonstrating pain and loss (12.43, 86.41, 79.65, 80.2-3). Walking also appears as agitated movement, especially in the characters, Los and Albion. Los walks the mountains of Albion (62.41, 83.75-6, 85.10) and “From Furnace to Furnace” (86.33) at several points (29.33, 60.6, 78.3-4). In the following passage, Los’s agitated peregrination precedes creation:

That Los in despair oft sat, & often pondered,
On Death Eternal, in fierce shudders upon the mountains of Albion
Walking, & in the vales in howlings fierce: then to his Anvils
Turning, anew began his labours, tho’ in terrible pains. (62.39-42)

The word “shudders” indicates Los’s agitated state throughout this passage. Here, similar to a previous passage addressed above, Los initially sits pondering, then begins his labors. But in between these two significant actions, Los walks. Los’s agitated peripatetic movement through the mountains and vales of Albion represents a part of the creative process and the development of the imagination. Walking represents the building of creative energy while simultaneously representing the exercise of that creative energy. Nervous movement here becomes part of the process of creation. If Los is not creating during or after his walks, he observes and directs the creative labors of others: “Los walks upon his ancient Mountains in the deadly darkness, / Among his Furnaces directing his laborious Myriads” (85.110-11). Agitated peregrination in both of these passages is linked to the process of imaginative vision and labor. Eternal creation, which forms part of the prophetic vision of the poem, is also at times tied to the movement of walking: “For Los in Six Thousand Years walks up & down

continually” (75.7). Walking, as a form of nervous movement, precedes and becomes part of creation and imaginative vision.

Peripatetic movement carries out an important part of urban vision in the poem, as well. In one passage, walking through the city provides Los with a dark vision of London, where he sees “every minute particular,” of the city, specifically “the jewels of Albion,” “running down / The Kennels of the streets & lanes as if they were abhorr’d” (see 31.13-18).⁴⁶ The “jewels” here may refer to excrement and waste that Londoners have discarded or abjected, but Los sees them as things that emphasize distinction and difference, the “minute particulars” that make us all unique (and which we can celebrate collectively). At first, Los “Search’d in vain,” initially “clos’d from the minutia” (31.14), until he eventually walks through the city enough to really see these minute particulars and their destruction or rejection. Walking here provides Los with a closer perspective so he can perceive the environment more clearly. As he continues his peregrination, urban vision provides him with even more insight. Peripatetically “travelling thro’ darkness & horrid Solitude,” Los beholds “Jerusalem in Westminster & Marybone” (31.39). Westminster and Marybone, located on the west side of London, were both newer parts of London in Blake’s time. The west side of London in this era was a primarily rich area, the fashionable side of London where the wealthy resided and shopped. The migration of wealth from the center of Old London to the west side marked a separation of social classes that was damaging to those of the lower classes as it demarcated regions of power in the city. Jerusalem’s location in Westminster and Mary(le)bone holds various meanings, but is culturally significant as she wanders in

⁴⁶ Kennels were open gutters, which channeled run-off in city streets. Jonathan Swift’s “Description of a City Shower” (1710) mentions kennels (line 53) as does John Gay’s poem *Trivia or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) in Book I of his poem (line 15, p. 170).

this moment among the privileged side of London, while Los remains in the heart of the capital city. In this passage, Jerusalem has become lost amid the commercial geography of a capitalist and consumer-focused area of the city.

Los then sits “on London stone” and hears “Jerusalem’s voice” (31.43). Walking through the city and to the London Stone allows Los to find Jerusalem and the potential key to the redemption of Albion. Los is able to locate Jerusalem and to potentially recover the city for Jerusalem’s restoration. In these passages, London must be traversed by foot in order to acquire a more intimate and developed vision of London as it is and as it can be potentially cultivated. Blake’s text thus presents urban peregrination differently from the Romantic-era texts previously explored in this study. Urban walking in *Jerusalem* is still depicted in relation to urban sensibility—here through acute sensibility and the ability to perceive beyond the immediately visible to the minute particulars of the city. However, Blake’s representation rejects the scopic, pleasurable consumption of London depicted in other flâneur-like figures of the urban pedestrian. Los does not consume the spectacles of the city for pleasure and entertainment, but rather observes and absorbs it all in an effort to recover the city and build a better future for London and Albion. The text thus uses the consumer aspect of urban pedestrianism and subverts it, extracting its redemptive qualities while eradicating its potentially violent and self-centered characteristics.

In addition to enhancing open and creative vision, walking as a form of physical agitation is also a way of dispersing ideas and sensations in Blake’s poem. For Jerusalem, peripatetic movement is about creating and spreading joy and love: “Albion gave me the whole Earth to walk up & down; to pour / Joy upon every mountain”

(79.36-37). The rebuilding and extending of Jerusalem throughout London and Albion is represented here through the act of walking. In this passage, pedestrianism generates and maintains creative energy. Walking is also part of the Divine Imagination in representations of Jesus. The Savior says, “Come now with me into the villages, walk thro’ all the cities” (62.23). In this line, walking through cities and villages forms collective love and unity. Peripatetic movement generates and harnesses creative energy and provides a medium for dispersing it throughout the cities, nation, and world. In both of these passages, walking allows for the dissemination of love and collective joy. In this way, pedestrianism is part of re-generation and creating redemption.

In another vision of the redemption of London, walking is part of the physical expression of love: “In the exchanges of London every Nation walk’d, / And London walk’d in every nation, mutual in Love and Harmony” (24.42-43). Here, walking provides connection between nations and peoples, which creates a redemptive harmony. It is important to note Blake’s use of the word “exchanges” here in addressing walking, as it recalls the exchange of goods for money in a commercial society. The stock exchange of London, in particular, was a market for buying and selling securities. Moreover, the word “exchange” also evokes specific places in London. The Royal Exchange was a mercantile and commercial center in London, full of shops and merchants and located in the old part of the city, across Threadneedle Street from the Bank of England. The New Exchange in London, located on the west side of London on the Strand, was a distinctively metropolitan space dominated by spectacle and the exchange of goods.⁴⁷ The display of commodities, shop signs, and advertisements proliferated in the Exchange in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The New

⁴⁷ The New Exchange is prominently featured in a scene of Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (256-257).

Exchange offered the elite classes a place of exchange closer to their homes in Westminster. The word “exchange” then was most commonly associated with commercial exchange and commodity culture, but also with specific London sites. As Makdisi suggests, the “exchanges” are presented “both as material streets and as figurative centers of finance and trade” (165).

Similar to a previous passage discussed in this chapter, these lines represent what seems a vision of London as the imperial city of capitalism, in which London stands as the center of imperial commerce and trade. According to Makdisi, this quotation signifies “on the one hand that the space of London – i.e., modernity and the Universal Empire of capitalism – is spreading outwards of ‘the nations’; and on the other hand that the world itself, as well as the spatial relays of the colonial networks, can be seen and mapped in the space of London (and vice versa)” (165). Yet here Blake appropriates the term to emphasize the reciprocation of love. Jerusalem’s exchanges are not commodity markets, but buildings and streets of community. However, as argued earlier, Blake uses the language and concept of empire and subverts it, employing the collective and unitive aspect of empire to connect human beings and lands in mutual and divine love. Walking in this excerpt helps facilitate these connections and the energy they generate. In describing how the people and the lands of the earth shall build Jerusalem together, the text yet again depicts them as walking and employs an image of connection similar to empire:

In my exchanges every Land
Shall walk & mine in every Land,
Mutual Shall build Jerusalem;
Both heart in heart & hand in hand. (27.102-5)

In this passage, walking again helps connect people and lands together as they build the redemptive city. The pedestrians connect physically (through touching hands and through fibred connections) and spiritually as they continuously build the city of redemption.

Finally, the end of the poem represents walking as part of human connection through the mutual perception of “minute particulars”: “& they walked / To and Fro in Eternity as One Man, reflecting each in each & clearly seen / And seeing” (98.83-39). Pedestrianism in this excerpt allows for continual vision and recognition. While individuals form part of a collective here, the “minute particulars” of each subject are not lost in that unity, but rather are more fully recognized and appreciated. Peripatetic movement keeps the agitation going so that everyone is more in tune to their senses. They can more clearly and acutely see or sense the distinctive aspects of each person. Furthermore, they are part of the community but not consumed by or lost in it. Urban sensibility in this passage entails enhanced perception and the continual agitation of urban walking. In these passages walking goes from nervous to redemptive movement. Walking is no longer associated with nervous symptoms, but changes to maintain the agitation provided by nervous motion. Energy in these passages has now transcended to a redemptive energy. However, the nervous energy of urban sensibility was necessary to generate these moments of redemption.

Building Jerusalem: The Agitated Text and Reader

Understanding the significance of nervous agitation in the text through urban sensibility also helps make sense of the formalist aspects of *Jerusalem*. Blake’s poem uses the text itself to develop an urban sensibility in its readers. As Paley argues, in

Jerusalem, “Energy and Imagination meet in a new synthesis, the best exemplification of which is the great poem itself—a little world made cunningly, microcosm and object of art, painting, and prophecy—the Emanation of William Blake” (*Energy* 260). The text itself serves as an example of the realization of prophetic imagination. As representations of nervous agitation and energy in the text contribute to the imagination and the eventual redemption of London and Albion, the text itself participates in this process, as well. Not only do the characters represent urban sensibility and nervous agitation, but the text itself also works to create these experiences in the reader. By instilling urban sensibility in the audience, the poem works to potentially connect and unite readers as part of *Jerusalem*’s redemptive project.

To begin with, the visual images disturb and agitate the reader, creating a nervous experience similar to urban sensibility. For example, the frontispiece creates a sense of agitation before the reader even encounters the first words of the poem. The image displays Los clandestinely slipping across a threshold, glancing to his left (as if to check if anyone has detected his presence), and holding a hot globe of fire. According to Goldsmith, this image makes the reader “feel agitated, dangerous, at odds with the powers that be, and we like it” (46). The image represents political agitation and rebellion, making the reader feel immediately in conflict with structures of power. Blake thus begins by rousing the reader into agitation and nervous tension from anxious anticipation, building nervous energy from the very start of the poem. In addition to the first illumination, many of the images throughout the Plates of *Jerusalem* represent nervous agitation that is potentially transferred to the reader. These Plates demonstrate physical and mental nervousness and agitation through the representations of fibred

bodies, tensed muscles, distraught facial expressions, and contorted bodily positions. The top of Plate 45, for example, depicts a body with fibres extending into what looks like tree branches. The muscles of the figure's body are taut and the body is twisted into a contorted position where his torso angles down to the ground while his legs extend up into the air. In Plate 62, the figure has a distressed facial expression, as though the character is in intense agony. These particular images potentially disturb and agitate the reader through affective representations of human suffering.

The "instability of the visual iconography" of the poem, as Denise Gigante expresses it, also creates a sense of agitation and nervousness in the reader through fragmentation and flux (464).⁴⁸ To begin with, the illustrations are often inconsistent in relation to the text in *Jerusalem*. According to Gigante, "in some places the visuals appear closely interwoven with the text, dividing, demarcating, and even illustrating it in a more conventional sense" (463). Yet, in other locations, the visual images "seem to challenge the text by juxtaposing absurd images with the most oracular pronouncements, or by occurring in places that mystify the best minds" (Gigante 463-64). For example, Plate 25 offers an illustration of a woman weaving a thread of fibre, which extends from a male figure's loins, into what looks like a ball of thread. Yet the text offers no clear description of such an image. Later in the poem, descriptions of fibres extending from loins appear at multiple points, including Plate 47, which textually describes Luvah tearing "forth from Albion's Loins, in fibrous veins, in rivers / Of blood over Europe: a Vegetating Root in grinding pain [...]" (47.3-4). The poem thus positions illustrations at "unexpected distances from their possible textual

⁴⁸ By "flux," I mean continuous change, but the text presents flux in various types of rhythmic fluidity throughout the text.

referents,” reflecting the “semantic openness” (Ibata 41) of the text and emphasizing the instability and dynamic energy of the poem. As H el ene Ibata points out, some of the illustrations even “contradict the text,” exemplified in “the open and leaping figures on plate 36, which present a striking contrast with the description of Albion’s sickness” (42). Incongruities between image and text offer unexpected divisions in perception, seemingly indicating that the text itself is in the midst of a nervous fit in which the excesses of sensation disrupt a stable form of perception. This disruption, I argue, creates a feeling of agitation and nervousness in the text itself and in the reader. The reader experiences through reading the type of urban sensibility Blake represents throughout his poem.

In addition to unstable visual signifiers, the text itself also creates a sense of uncertainty, agitation, and nervousness. Nervous sensibility is expressed through the fragmentation of form in the syntax and rhythm of the poem. Repetition of participle verb forms and gerunds, such as “wandering,” “trembling,” “shudd’ring,” and “walking,” creates a constant sense of movement and physical agitation. The use of asyndetic lines combined with participle verb forms creates a choppy and interrupted rhythm, which also generate a disquieting reading experience. For example, in the lines, “Therefore Los stands in London building Golgonooza, / Compelling his Spectre to labours mighty; trembling in fear / The Spectre weeps” (10.17-79), the word “therefore” suggests a finalization of labor activity. However, the participle verb forms of “building,” “Compelling,” and “trembling,” as well as the lack of conjunctions, keep the lines moving rhythmically, creating a feeling of continuous movement and activity. The text is purposefully at odds with itself, refusing to allow the reader to settle in and get

comfortable. Movement, agitation, and discomfort prevent stasis or stagnation and maintain the possibility of change.

In another demonstrative passage, a formalist approach reveals fragmentation, agitation, and nervous sensibility embedded in the text itself:

Discovering her own perfect beauty to the Daughters of Albion
And Hyle a winding Worm beneath
. and not a weeping Infant.
Trembling & pitying she scream'd & fled upon the wind:
Hyle was a winding Worm and herself perfect in beauty:
The desarts trembled at his wrath, they shrink themselves in fear.
Cambel trembled with jealousy: she trembled! she envied!
The envy ran thro' Cathedron's Looms into the Heart
Of mild Jerusalem, to destroy the Lamb of God. (82.46-53, copy E)

This passage focuses on Enitharmon, who, like many other characters in the poem has a physically nervous response to events. Yet again, participle verb forms proliferate in these lines. The verbs “saying,” “Discovering,” “winding” (which appears twice), “weeping,” “Trembling,” and “pitying” provide a sense of movement and agitation. However, approximately half-way into the passage, the verbs change to mostly past tense: “trembled” (appears three times), “envied,” “ran,” and “Languished.” This change in verb tense calls attention to the repetition of the word “trembled” (emphasizing nervousness and agitation) and fragments the passage. Moreover, line 47 is broken up spatially and the plate looks as though some of the text was erased. Whether intentional or not, this erasure causes further fragmentation of the text and interrupts the flow of reading. The reader is forced to slow down and focus on the repetition of words, such as variants of “trembling” and “trembled,” and repeated sentence structure: “she trembled! she envied!” (82.51). These paratactical sentences recreate the agitation of the characters through their short, staccato rhythm.

Several scholars, including Punter, have pointed out that *Jerusalem*, like many of Blake's other prophetic books, is "fragmentary and doubtfully complete" (46). According to Punter, "the ordering of the sections is variable, and Blake himself seems at times to have regarded the whole narrative to be arranged at will" (46). This fragmentary aspect of the text creates a disjointed or jarring reading experience, which potentially culminates in agitation in the reader. Fragmentation occurs in other aspects of the poem, as well, especially in the unconventional metric patterns, idiosyncratic enjambment and hyphenation, and varied pacing and rhythm, all characteristic of Blake's work. The "multiplicity" of voices in the text, "often contradictory and cacophonous in their utterances," also provides fragmentation and variety, which is further embedded in the "multiple poetic styles that Blake announces in the initial preface" (Michael 164). The fragmentation and contradictions that these scholars point out particularly participate in Blake's representation of urban sensibility. Blake's text does not just discuss nervousness and sensibility, but also enacts it through poetic and artistic form.

This fragmentary aspect of the text reflects the nervous perception characteristic of the city and thus presents urban vision through form. According to Michael, Blake's text "deliberately 'cuts across' the controlled sequences of traditional narrative in order to create a textual structure that approximates the urban experience" (165). The agitation, fragmentation, and nervous characteristics of urban perception and experience are recreated and carried out in the actual text of *Jerusalem*. Blake's poem, like the metropolis, "is spatial as well as temporal in its organization," reflecting the fragmentary temporal aspect of urban life (Michael 165). The reader then experiences

urban sensibility through the act of reading the poem. In this way, “the experience of reading *Jerusalem*” deliberately evokes “the act of perceiving the city” (Michael 164). The text itself thus helps to create urban vision, as well as a sense of nervous agitation in the reader, both of which are crucial to redemption in Blake’s poetic vision. In this way, the reader participates and engages in the process of redemption Blake represents in the poem.

Moreover, the text appears as an object of the neural sublime, as well. As Vincent de Luca claims, the “wall of words” that crowd the plates of *Jerusalem* simultaneously present a readable text and an image that overwhelms the reader’s perception with “sublime effect” (89-90).⁴⁹ The excess of words on each plate thus provides an overwhelming sensation that contributes to a sense of agitation and nervousness, inducing in the reader “a sentiment very much like the vertiginous exhilaration characteristic of the sublime” (Ibata 31). The frustration experienced by readers at the fragmentary and overwhelming aspects of the text, creates reading as a sublime physical experience, in which the reader potentially feels the nervous energy that the text represents and produces in its reader. Blake thus purposefully tries to agitate his readers and instill urban sensibility in them, as well. Urban sensibility and nervous agitation in the reader implicate him or her in the sin of the fallen world and in the need to develop the imagination and collective love for redemption. Agitating the reader formally, textually, and visually by instilling an urban sensibility formulates part of Blake’s depiction of the collective spread of redemption through the neural, urban sublime. Thus the reader ideally becomes part of Blake’s conception of urban

⁴⁹ Thus De Luca identifies the “sublime event” as occurring “in the actual difficulties of the reading experience” (31). The sublime object is the text and the sublime event is reading (De Luca 231).

sensibility and may potentially participate in the liberation of Albion and building of Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Blake's *Jerusalem* depicts a manifestation of urban sensibility that is subversive, leading to a collective as well as individual redemption. Nervous fibres connect people to each other and to place, potentially resulting in redemption through mutual love and connection to London and the city of Jerusalem. Blake's text characterizes redemption as imagined through enhanced sensibility or perception and urban vision, both important to prophecy and eventually redemption. The excess of the city—of urban place and urban commodity culture—lends a physiological excess that results in agitated bodies and nervous, creative energy. This creative energy and movement generated by acute urban sensibility develops an enhanced imagination that continually creates new possibilities and connections. The enhanced imagination of urban sensibility rouses subjects to extricate themselves and each other from coercive and oppressive power structures to engage in a collective redemption.

As a form of consumption, urban sensibility participates and embeds the body in the power structures of Romantic-period England. As pointed out in the introduction to this project, the culture of sensibility entailed a way of regulating bodies, as much as it proclaimed revolution.⁵⁰ However, Blake's representations of urban sensibility subvert this paradigm, depicting urban sensibility as leading to a de-regulation and liberation of humanity. The agitation of the body of urban sensibility provides an energy that frees individuals from the coercion of modern society. Thus, Blake's text overturns the

⁵⁰ As G. J. Barker-Benfield indicates, the discourse of sensibility was ambivalent and controversial—it simultaneously “signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion and became convention” (xvii).

oppressive systems of modernity, using the developments of modern culture against themselves to liberate and redeem England. *Jerusalem* then provides a profound representation of urban sensibility more subversive and liberating than the texts of even Hazlitt and Lamb, and most certainly De Quincey and Wordsworth. Combined within urban sensibility, nervousness and urban culture, rather than debilitating, are transformed into modes that propel Albion and London to redemption. Blake's text thus presents a radical form of urban sensibility capable of helping to restore the redemptive city, Jerusalem.

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