Handbooks of English and American Studies

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Volume 6

Handbook of British Romanticism

Edited by
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Abstract: In keeping with a number of recent contributions and against the long-standing notion of Romanticism as primarily a rural phenomenon, this chapter highlights the centrality of urban and metropolitan environments to Romantic writing. After outlining the role of London and Edinburgh as hubs of literary production, distribution, and reception in the Romantic period, it turns to the city as a key *subject* of Romantic writing. As is illustrated here by means of the *Prelude*, central texts of the period can be understood as responses to the challenge of representing new, specifically urban environments and their impact on the individual and on society. Central insights from twentieth- and twenty-first-century urban sociology and urban anthropology – notions introduced by Simmel, Benjamin, Debord, de Certeau, Augé, and others – can thus be shown to shed light on central Romantic texts. Conversely, some of the central concerns of contemporary urban studies can be historicized by tracing them to Romantic-period discourses. Moreover, the chapter briefly discusses the emergence of new genres as responses to urban environments, here the urban essay of Lamb, Hunt, and others. Finally, specifically urban forms of self-reflexive performance are shown to be central to the formation of urban readerships and audiences. The chapter thus argues for the centrality of urban environments to Romantic literary and cultural production.

Key Terms: urbanization, metropolis, literary production and reception, challenges of representation, *flâneur*

1 Literature and the "encreasing accumulation of men in cities": Complicating an Established Understanding of Romanticism

In a much-cited passage in the 1805 *Prelude* (↗ 21), William Wordsworth states that his interest in London theatre, despite some enthusiasm, "passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind" (1979, VII.507). A second illuminating passage which, in its implications, complicates an understanding of the city in Wordsworth's poetics is from the "Prospectus to *The Recluse*," where Wordsworth within a few lines laments the state of being "barricadoed evermore / Within the walls of cities" (1989b, 79–80) while at the same time ascribing to the muse, the "prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st / The human Soul [...] / A metropolitan temple in the hearts / Of mighty Poets" (1989b, 83–84; 86–87; for a discussion of both passages see Bruhn 2013). The equation of

the city centre with the most central part of consciousness (the mind, the creative impulse) implied in both passages points far beyond Wordsworth's familiar complaint about the "the encreasing accumulation of men in cities" (2008, 597) – or the 'dominant' reading of Book VII of *The Prelude* – and alone lends itself as a starting point to exploring the centrality of the city to poetological and anthropological thought in the period.

Nicola Trott pithily summarizes the seeming paradox as follows: Wordsworth, "popularly regarded as an unbudgeable Grasmere fixture," is a "confirmed ruralist [who] is also an avid metropolitan, making regular sorties to London throughout his life" (2003, 15). In a recent reading of Book VII of *The Prelude*, Eugene Stelzig cites this assessment and goes on to make what I believe is too simple a distinction between "Wordsworth the 'avid metropolitan' [who] enjoyed his visits to London" and "the poet Wordsworth [who] tends to script the city according to the Romantic valorizing of the rural over the urban" (2011, 181). Stelzig does read Wordsworth's depiction of the city as "complexly ambivalent" (2011, 191), but it is precisely the facile equation of Romanticism with a "valorization of the rural over the urban" that is the issue here: the long familiar assumption that "one of the chief, if not the chief characteristics of [Romanticism] is its almost obsessive engagement with the natural world" (Peer 2011, 1) – and that this is concomitant with a lack of interest in and even a turn away from the city – has long been complexified, and the role of the city has been foregrounded in a number of important studies. After Raymond Williams's illuminating forays in *The Country and the City* four decades ago, recent contributions to "urban Romantic studies," considering a broad range of forms of cultural expression – poetry, the novel, drama, the essay, religious tracts, travel writing, political commentary, but also medical literature, caricature and the visual arts, architecture and various forms of urban performance – have sought to go "beyond the suburbs of the mind" in further exploring this field. Among the many more recent studies exploring the centrality of the city to Romanticism, one should specifically mention Julian Wolfreys's 1998 *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens*, James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin's ground-breaking 2005 collection *The Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840* (see especially their excellent introduction on various expressions of a "Romantic metropolitanism," 31), Vic Gatrell's 2006 *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*, Ian Duncan's 2007 *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, Larry Peer's collection *Romanticism and the City*, which appeared in 2011, or Gregory Dart's 2012 *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810–1840: Cockney Adventures*. These works have, each in their own way, contributed to a rethinking of the connection between Romanticism and the city and have made the urban more central to an understanding of literature and culture in the decades around 1800. As Chandler and Gilmartin have argued, Romanticism, rather than being "a movement against the city," needs to be understood as "an aesthetic that developed along with – and contributed to – the ascendancy of metropolitan life" (2005, 19).

What these recent studies share in their attempts to come to a fuller understanding of the role the city played for Romantic literature and culture is a shift away from merely studying 'Romantic representations of the city.' Rather, the more intriguing questions at the intersection of urban anthropology and urban poetics have become central to this line of inquiry: How does *la condition urbaine* affect human individuality, society, cultural production?

2 The City as a Node of Romantic Networks of Production and Reception

As particularly William St Clair has shown in his painstakingly documented *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, the Romantic literary scene, both in terms of production and reception, was a profoundly urban, even metropolitan one (see also the survey chapter "The Literary Marketplace" in Jarvis 2004, 50–73). It is worth noting, if hardly surprising, that the dramatic rate of urbanization and the accelerated growth especially of London in the period coincided with a significant concentration of literary and cultural production and reception in the metropolis.

With the total population of England growing from about 7.2 million in 1781 to 13.2 million in 1831 (see St Clair 2004, 453), the population of London more than doubled in the same period, growing from just over 700.000 inhabitants to 1.6 million (see Raven 2004, 26; Ball and Sunderland 2001, 42). But even outside of London, urbanization increased rapidly in the period in question: throughout the eighteenth century, only London had a population of over 100,000 (see Thompson 1990, 12); by 1820, Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham had also grown to this size, while by 1850, four more cities hat reached the mark of 100,000. All in all, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the growth rate of Britain's urban population was more than twice that of the British population generally (see Thompson 1990, 11).

Although especially texts written locally where published "in dozens of towns all over the country" (St Clair 2004, 166), the publishing market was remarkably centralized. No matter where Romantic texts where written, the overwhelming majority of them were published in London, with Edinburgh as a significant, if dramatically less important, second centre: it is estimated that, in 1790, 77% of all English-language books printed globally where printed in London (down from some 90% in 1750). And although, given the significant growth of other cities in Britain and the increasing role of the United States as a publishing market, this share further declined in the period in question, London remained *the* "dynamic hub of the book trade" in the Anglophone world (Raven 2004, 25). However, as Ian Duncan has shown in *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, Edinburgh played a special role as a centre of the British literary scene in the Romantic period. Referring to the significant role of Edinburgh in the period, his first chapter, echoing Walter Benjamin on Paris, is tellingly entitled "Edinburgh, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (2007, 3–45; see also Duncan 2005). Duncan shows that "between 1802, the year of the founding of the *Edinburgh Review*, and 1832, the year of the Reform Bill and the death of Sir Walter Scott [...] Scottish publications and genres dominated a globalizing English-language market and made Edinburgh a literary metropolis to rival London (2007, xi; see also Chandler and Gilmartin 2005, 53; for the relative importance of London and Edinburgh as centres of literary and cultural production and their complex interconnections, see St Clair 2004, 159; 177; 187 et passim).

As for the reception of literary texts, St Clair estimates that "by the middle of the romantic period more than half the adult population had the ability to read" – with an even higher proportion than that in London (2004, 266). Thus, infrastructures and networks of reception also became more important. One might, for instance, consider the number of circulating libraries in London, which rose from just four in 1770 to 26 in the period 1790–1800 (see St Clair 2004, 665). Similarly, "[b]y the middle of the period, every substantial town in Great Britain had at least one shop which sold books, and most had several" (St Clair 2004, 189). In 1836, Edinburgh, with a population of some 150,000, was said to have over 100 booksellers (see St Clair 2004, 191). However, one gets a sense of the share of the London reading public, and the comparative negligibility of even a city like Dublin, from a highly revealing set of figures St Clair presents for the distribution of the first editions of Scott's *Waverley* novels (↗ 28), among the period's absolute best-sellers: While some "6,000 copies were shipped to retail booksellers in London, about 2,000 served [the entirety of] Scotland and England north of York, but only 100 copies were sent to Dublin" (2004, 191).

Recent research has also further highlighted the role of leading magazines in addressing – and to some extent creating – specifically metropolitan audiences. In this vein, Anthony Harding's "The London Magazine and the Metropolitan Reader in the 1820s" (2013) has shed light on how the new journal became a significant if ultimately short-lived success in the 1820s. By focusing on its readership, Harding has elucidated how, stylizing an ideal metropolitan addressee, the magazine countered prejudices against the metropolis and provided its readers with a new self-confidence as Londoners. Through the sophisticated reader it chose to address, Harding argues, the *London Magazine* emphasized the city's leading cultural and commercial role while at the same time proving influential in its cultural and political judgment. He further shows how the *London Magazine* supported a mind-set concerned with national and international affairs which often stood apart from other magazines and which, after all, entertained an outlook in favour of the much-criticized Romantic writers of the period (for a discussion of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, see Duncan 2007, 51–58 et passim). However, it has been shown that such magazines, the economics of publishing and the networks and infrastructures of publishing also find repercussions in the fiction of the period. Thus, Ian Duncan has shown how Edinburgh and London, as two different cities, are mapped in relation to each other in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which Duncan refers to as "the leading

Romantic-era instance of a quintessentially urban genre" (Duncan 2013, 34). Identifying miscellanies as a token of the Romantic variety of genres and as testimony to new types of reading experience, Duncan traces these notions in a reading of John Galt's *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *The Steam Boat*, which reflect the magazine's "infrastructure of production, distribution and reception" (Duncan 2013, 34) and its connections to London.

The high concentration of the literary and cultural scene in a few metropolitan centres in the period in question may prompt the more general question to what extent different forms of cultural expression are logically and empirically tied to the physical space of the city: logically, neither publishing nor the theatre nor, for instance, a public lecture are necessarily tied to the physical space of the city, but they all in varying degrees rely on urban density as arguably the central economic factor in securing an audience. In practice, Romantic cultural production and exchange are strongly associated with the city. Thus, although personal meetings with publishers were no longer strictly necessary (see St Clair 2004, 159), many writers, if they were not living in London or Edinburgh anyway, went to the urban centres to arrange for publication of their works.

In sum, no matter whether one looks at literary production and reception – printing and binding facilities, circulating libraries, wholesale booksellers, newspapers, literary magazines, and the reviewing scene – or the cultural scene generally – music or the theatre, the visual arts, public lectures, or discussions in coffee houses –, infrastructures of cultural production and reception as well as a large number of writers and the vast majority of readers where concentrated in very few centres, with London as the absolute hub and Edinburgh as a briefly flourishing if altogether secondary centre.

3 The City as a Topic: New Phenomena, Genres, and Strategies of Representation

Given the dramatic rate of urbanization in the period and the overwhelming dominance of urban centres, it is hardly surprising that the city and urban life should also feature centrally in the literature of the period. In contrast to an established understanding of Romanticism as having been primarily a rural phenomenon, it has recently become clear that Romantic writing frequently also explored central issues at the intersection of modernity, urbanization, and personal identity, and thus, in a sense, engaged in urban sociology and urban anthropology *avant la lettre*. Especially London was thus perceived as a phenomenal challenge to literary representation, as a place of visual and acoustic excess stifling any attempt at totalizing comprehension or representation: the London experience of constantly overstretched human mental capacities and endangered individuality, it has been shown, required "new modes

of perception and expression" (Wolfreys 2013, 20; for Romantic representations both of other British and of continental cities, see several contributions in Chandler and Gilmartin 2005; Peer 2011; Gurr and Michel 2013). Thus, a number of phenomena twentieth-century urban theory has highlighted as quintessential characteristics of urban environments and as central to the urban experience generally can be traced to the Romantic period and can be shown to have prompted new genres and new modes of representation. In this vein, Sharpe and Wallock's observation on urban environments and their literary representation, though originally referring specifically to Modernist form and the texture of the modern city, arguably also applies to the Romantic city: "City and style, object and evocation quickly take on aspects of one another as the urban environment shapes an aesthetic perception, which in turn produces a new form of vision of the city" (1987, 5). Their notion that "[o]ne of the most useful ways of studying the city envisions the urban landscape as a form analogous to that of a literary composition" (Sharpe and Wallock 1987, 11), however, might also profitably be inverted: rather than looking at how a city functions like a text, we might ask how literary texts in the Romantic period respond to the urban challenge by simulating key urban textures.

3.1 Urban sociology, urban anthropology and Romantic literature: The case of Wordsworth

In the following, the centrality of key concerns in twentieth- and twenty-first-century urban studies to an understanding of Romanticism will be illustrated by referring to William Wordsworth, arguably still the ideal type of Romantic ruralism. The most complex and illuminating illustration of his engagement with the metropolis is to be found in Book VII of *The Prelude*, "Residence in London," in which Wordsworth recounts his months in the capital after the completion of his studies in Cambridge early in 1791. While it has long been common to study the 'representation of the city' in Book VII (from among the many readings of Book VII alone, see for instance Williams 1973 and 1985; Gassenmeier 1985 and 1996; Gassenmeier and Gurr 2002; Stelzig 2011; Bruhn 2013), scholars have more recently begun to discuss the rise of what might be called "urban anthropology" (Simmel, de Certeau, Augé) in the Romantic period and have shown how notions from contemporary urban theory relate to typically Romantic conceptions of the individual and its mind to argue that metropolitan conditions made possible Romantic concepts of nature and the imagination (see for instance Caeners 2013).

In Book VII, in a passage on "private courts / Gloomy as coffins, and unsightly lanes," which "may [...] entangle our impatient steps," Wordsworth refers to the com-

plexities of the city as "those labyrinths" (Wordsworth 1979, VII.180–185)[1] and thus uses one of the prominent *topoi* in the representation of urban complexity. But *The Prelude* also allows readers to *experience* complexity by simulating the sense of disorientation induced by the maze of the city:

Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain
Of a too busy world! Before me flow,
Thou endless stream of men and moving things!
             ... the quick dance
Of colours, lights, and forms; the deafening din;
The comers and the goers face to face,
Face after face ...
Meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,
Escaped as from an enemy we turn
Abruptly into some sequestered nook (VII.149–170 [1850 *Prelude*])

Note the "meanwhile" (168) as an indication of the simultaneity of these impressions. The culmination of what in the course of Book VII are literary hundreds of lines of such frenzied description occurs in the rendering of Bartholomew Fair. Here, in a passage of some 50 lines of breathlessly asyndetic enumeration, Wordsworth summarizes his impressions as follows:

                 What a hell
For eyes and years, [this] anarchy and din,
Barbarian and infernal,—a phantasma,
Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!
[...]
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,
All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts
Of man, his dullness, madness, and their feats
All jumbled up together to compose
A Parliament of Monsters, Tents and Booths
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast mill,
Are vomiting, receiving on all sides,
Men, Women, three-years Children, Babes in arms.
O, blank confusion! True epitome
Of what the mighty City is itself. (VII.686–688; 714–723)

It may bear pointing out that, here too, "meanwhile" (VII.719) indicates the simultaneity of sense impressions which, like in the representation of the sights and sounds of London in Book VII generally, are rendered in asyndetic enumerations crowding in upon each other in what seems an enactment of complexity, an attempt performatively to suggest the feeling of being overpowered by these impressions (for an over-

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1 All subsequent references to *The Prelude* are taken from this edition.

view of strategies of representing simultaneity as central to the complexities of urban life, see Gurr 2011). Moreover, Book VII with its rendering of London as a "monstrous ant-hill on the plain" (VII.149) also makes clear the moral complexities and the ethical judgements inseparable from the representation of "these labyrinths" (VII.185; see also my discussion in Gurr 2011).

Wordsworth here points forward to Georg Simmel's classic 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," arguably a founding text both of urban sociology and urban anthropology. Simmel here described the "rapid crowding of changing images, the [...] onrushing impressions" and the resulting over-stimulation of the senses as "the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates" (Simmel 2004, 13). Thus, the performative or experiential representation of simultaneity may be seen as a central strategy of representation: the suggestive asyndetic sequences of impressions in Book VII simulate the chaotic and overpoweringly "rapid crowding of changing images" (Simmel 2004, 13; for anticipations of Simmel in British Romanticism and a brief comparative reading of Wordsworth and Simmel, see also Chandler and Gilmartin 2005, 13–17). Even in the assessment of the impact of urban environments on the city dweller's mental and emotional life, Wordsworth comes remarkably close to Simmel: in similar terms, both describe the anonymity, isolation, and emotional barrenness of the city and the indifferent, "blasé attitude" urbanites develops to shield themselves against the constant "over-stimulation of the senses" (Simmel 2004, 13; see Caeners 2013, 72–78).

The anonymity of the city even suggests a sense of what French anthropologist Marc Augé has called "non-places." This is Augé's term for locations such as airports, railway stations, shopping malls or international chain hotels, representative of a "world of supermodernity [where] people are always, and never, at home" (Augé 1995, 109), where they feel a

solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others. The passenger through non-place retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the checkout counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude. (Augé 1995, 103)

This type of anonymity, to be sure, for Wordsworth characterizes the city as a whole.

Wordsworth's depiction of London in Book VII, moreover, invites comparison with Michel de Certeau's widely cited distinction between the "walker's" and the "voyeur's" perspective on the city (1988, 92–93): the "walker" finds himself in the midst of the city's complexity; walkers "follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (1988, 93). In contrast to this, the "voyeur's" perspective on the city is characterized by the view from an elevated location. De Certeau here speaks of the "pleasure of 'seeing the whole,' of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts" (1988, 92). As he notes, with the view from above on the city, "[t]he gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes" (de Certeau 1988, 91), which

"makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text" (de Certeau 1988, 92). To some extent, this perspective even makes the beholder feel in control and allows the "voyeur" to "be lifted out of the city's grasp" and out of the moral complexities of urban life with its "extremes of ambition and degradation" (de Certeau 1988, 91–92). It is hardly a coincidence that the predominantly critical passages of Book VII are associated with an immersive experience of the city, a walker's perspective that leads to a lack of control and a sense of being entirely overpowered by the city. On the other hand, Book VII begins and ends with images of nature in Grasmere, with "a quire of redbreasts" (24) and their "most gentle music of the year" (29), which "smote" (33) the poet with "delight" (31). This, as well as a "walk [...] by later twilight on the hills" (37–38) inspired him with "tenderness and love" (48), and made him "fit [...] for the poet's task" (53) to begin the account of his residence in London. At the end of Book VII, Wordsworth explicitly returns to the experience of Grasmere's nature, which thus frames the experience of London. For Wordsworth, the retreat to the countryside appears to allow for the distanced, totalizing perspective yielding an overview, approaching the sense of control of the whole that de Certeau ascribes to the view from above. Similarly, the far more positively connoted rendering of London in "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" is associated with a view, if not from above, then at least from a place slightly removed – spatially, as a view from the bridge, temporally, as a view in the early morning, before the general hustle and bustle of the day. This far more reassuring sense of the city, it may be argued, results from the ability to perceive the lay-out of the city, to get a sense of orientation from seeing its landmarks – "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples, lie / Open unto the fields and to the sky" (Wordsworth 1989a, 6–7).

3.2 The urban essay and the Romantic *flâneur*

A further formal and thematic innovation of urban Romanticism is the urban essay as written especially by Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt. Their ambulatory explorations of London point forward to the *flâneur* as later theorized by Walter Benjamin or to the concepts of *dérive* and psychogeography as developed by Guy Debord and the Situationists. Thus, Lamb's passion for wandering around London's streets had a vital impact not only on Lamb's private life and his writing, as Lessenich has shown in a recent essay on "Charles Lamb's London Wanderlust," which depicts Lamb as an exponent of Romantic urban writing. Lamb's infatuation with the streets of London also compellingly demonstrates that Romantic writing does not necessitate a rural setting and that the country-city divide is in fact impossible to draw exactly. Lamb's Elia essays in particular have been shown to be a *flâneur*'s rich and multi-levelled engagement with the city, in which he found "more Romantic picturesqueness [...] than in the Lake District" (Lessenich 2013, 130). As Lessenich has pointed out, Lamb's

poetological Elia essay "Witches and Other Night-Fears" of 1821 even self-reflexively explains Lamb's preference for the essay as the quintessentially 'urban' form.

In a related vein, Leigh Hunt makes use of the essay as a specific form of urban exploration. Thus, Hunt's "A Walk to Chelsea" has been referred to as "a curious amalgam of literary, social, political, topographical and architectural history" (Poetzsch 2013, 71). Hunt's urban essays not only enlarge on his walking tours around London and its suburbs but at the same time develop an analysis of pedestrian walking practices in the sense of de Certeau's "Walking in the City." As the archetypal English *flâneur* of the period (see Jarvis 1997, 210), Hunt is fully aware of the fact that in walking the city, pedestrians both map or appropriate its space and locate themselves within it. Hunt's essays thus allow for a psychogeographical reading and, as Poetzsch has pointed out in an essay felicitously titled "Leigh Hunt's Pedestrian 'Townosophy': Reading London on Two Feet," they even develop their own epistemology of spatial reading practices – his "townosophy" (Hunt 1962, 305).

3.3 Performing urbanity: urban self-reflexiveness in Romantic cultural production

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that self-reflexive forms of urban cultural expression, self-thematizations of the city and of urban communities, specifically forms of urban performance in which the urban lifestyles and identities are self-reflexively constructed and negotiated, rather than being a "postmodern" phenomenon, were already prominent in the Romantic period. Thus, Frederick Burwick, in "*Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London*: Urban Representations and Mirror Reflections" (2013), has not only shown how Moncrieff's adaptation of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* stages early nineteenth-century London but also elucidates the blurring boundaries between stage illusions and real life he describes as peculiar to a number of contemporary performances. Burwick shows that, by representing popular interests in their depictions of characters and mannerisms, Moncrieff's and other plays not only became models for the audience to imitate; rather, other performances in a self-reflexive manner began thematically to incorporate this paradoxical interrelatedness of art imitating life and life imitating art, culminating in the installation of a "Looking Glass Curtain" at the Royal Coburg Theatre in 1821, which meta-theatrically doubled the urban game of "seeing and being seen" (for different types of Romantic urban performance, see also During 2005 or Esterhammer 2000).

In a related vein, Ann Bermingham's assertion in an essay on "Urbanity and the Spectacle of Art" is telling: "With urbanism came urbanity, and London's confident assertion of its own urbanity was matched with a behavioural aesthetic of individual elegance and sophistication" (2005, 156). Commenting further on the notion of an emerging sense of "urbanity," Bermingham notes that "the perfume of urban chic that hung about the London shops could be bottled and sold in the provinces. [Ack-

ermann's] magazine *The Repository of the Arts* (January 1809) disseminated the new spirit of London urbanity to the rest of the kingdom" (2005, 158). Bermingham here addresses two related issues which have recently received a lot of attention in urban studies but which can be traced back to classical antiquity, namely the various implications of 'urbanity' and 'metropolis' as well as the question of the connection (or lack thereof) between urbanity and the city (for a more in-depth discussion of both, see Gurr 2010): both 'metropolis' and 'urbanity,' it seems, are not merely descriptive terms, but more or less strongly imply normative elements, even a cultural promise that is difficult to categorize. However, the concepts of 'metropolis' and 'urbanity' are of course not *only* normative: It does make sense to classify cities according to various criteria, and many attempts to define the metropolitan character of cities are very enlightening (the most widely influential contribution is of course Sassen's [2001]). Thus, the term 'metropolis,' for instance, curiously oscillates between designating a populous city, a status of centrality as a financial centre, a traffic node, a centre of research and education or of publishing on the one hand, and a far less tangible *'je ne sais quoi,'* a metropolitan 'feel' of cultural promise on the other hand. Even in scholarly discourse, the descriptive and the normative components of the concept of 'metropolis' are not always neatly distinguished.

Moreover, from the very beginning of its history (see for instance Ramage 1973), the term 'urbanity' has had strong evaluative implications (for a helpful survey of recent theories of urbanity, see Dirksmeier 2009, 21–81). With Cicero in 55 B. C., '*urbanitas*' was etymologically tied to '*urbs,*' the city, and thus obviously to Rome, but from the start, it was a clearly positive term designating elegant manners, intellect, *esprit*, experience, sophistication, and thus a refined – urban(e) – lifestyle, which could, however, also be cultivated in a country residence. There is no space here to retrace the complex conceptual history of *urbanitas*, but as late as 1788, Friedrich Nicolai, after taking the waters there, noted on Pyrmont (even then hardly a metropolis):

> When, for reasons of health, I stayed in Pyrmont in July 1787, I had the good fortune there to live in a small circle of estimable men and witty dames, whose knowledge, fine manners, grace, gaiety, wit, and goodnaturedness endow conversation with that *urbanity* and unselfconsciousness that can so enliven and cheer the spirit. (vii; my translation; emphasis mine)[2]

At times, the term thus appears to have been largely dissociated from the physical space of the city. Given the question of what makes a 'metropolis,' one might thus ask more generally to what extent the quality of 'urbanity' is tied to the physical space of the city as a densely populated agglomeration. Though one can generally assume an

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2 "Als ich im Julius 1787, meiner Gesundheit wegen, in Pyrmont war, hatte ich das Glück, dort in einem kleinen Zirkel von schätzbaren Männern und geistreichen Frauenzimmern zu leben, deren Kenntnisse, feine Sitten, Anmuth, fröhliche Laune, Witz und Gutmüthigkeit, der Konversation jene Urbanität und Unbefangenheit gaben, die den Geist so sehr aufheitern und erhellen kann."

empirical – if not an inherently necessary – connection between 'urbanity' and the city (at least since early modern times), a dissociation of urbanity and city is possible under specific historical, socio-cultural and geographical conditions, and an 'urbane' habitus can to some extent be cultivated in the country (see Dirksmeier 2009). Many forms of cultural expression, for instance, while empirically strongly associated with the city because they rely on urban density for the number of potential spectators, may also occur in the country.

The connection between the city and urbanity *today* is generally seen in the context of the debate on the potentially decreasing role of cities and metropolitan regions in a process of de-spatialization in many areas of life, particularly with the idea of the "global village" brought about by technological means of communication, which make spatial distance increasingly irrelevant. In this vein, it has been argued that cities are losing their privileged role altogether. Siebel, for instance, has argued that, given recent developments in society, the city is no longer the privileged "site of a way of life impossible elsewhere": "In highly urbanised societies such as that of western Europe, the difference between city and country, as far as a way of life is concerned, has shrunk to a difference of more or less of the same. It no longer designates something qualitatively different" (2004, 32; my translation). However, given Bermingham's observations about the "new spirit of London urbanity [being disseminated] to the rest of the kingdom" (2005, 158), which is also borne out by several other recent contributions to "Urban Romantic Studies" (see especially Burwick 2013), we might ask whether this dissociation of 'urbanity' from the metropolis might not be historicized and traced, not least, to the period we are concerned with here. In a similar vein, it has been argued that even central Romantic texts such as Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage*, Shelley's *Alastor* (↗ 32) or Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* (↗ 31), which can by no means be regarded as 'urban' poetry in, say, Baudelaire's sense, might nonetheless be read in this light: if Nancy's diagnosis of the impossibility of distinguishing between the city and the surrounding world or between country and city at a time of global urbanization and urbanizing globalization is historicized, these texts can be shown to be informed by an anticipated sense of this indistinction and appear as a markedly 'modern' form of poetry obliquely engaging with the shocks of urbanization (see Rajan 2013).

4 Romanticism as a Quintessentially Urban Phenomenon

It has become clear in recent years that "the cultural production of the Romantic period in England cannot be adequately understood in the absence of detailed attention to the metropolis from which it gained motive, structure and orientation" (Chandler and Gilmartin 2005, 33). What is more, it might even be argued that Romanticism

is in essence an "urban" phenomenon, with the city as both the hub of production, distribution and reception, *and* as a central subject matter of Romantic cultural production, a subject matter which brought forth both new genres such as the urban essay and new modes of representation.[3]

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3 This chapter reuses material from my "Introduction" to *Romantic Cityscapes* (Gurr 2013).

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