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# Wordsworthian London – Re(configurations) of the Metropolis

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The paper discusses some of the major poems of William Wordsworth to stress the importance of the urban environment in his writing. Therefore, the Romantic poetic self emerges as a complex intersubjective entity. Rather than confirming that the poet totally rejects the urban environment and privileges the rural over the urban, the paper argues that Wordsworth's cityscape "spots of time" have to be tackled with a more nuanced approach. Thus in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" the poet responds to the city with a combination of deep excitement and calm. Wordsworth's symbolic presentation of the city as a female body lying still can be described as an attempt of the Romantic masculine self to appropriate a female experience.
Furthermore, by taking the example of Book VII in "The Prelude" the paper argues that the London of Wordsworth's time can be read as a complex series of different types of locations, including symbolic, imagined, physical, social and linguistic spaces, i.e. spaces suspended between matter and meaning (Lefebvre). Here, Wordsworth still oscillates between his acceptance and rejection of London.
Finally, in Book VIII of "The Excursion", the metropolis remains a completely negative social environment which engulfs everything that is essentially human. Wordsworth's poetry dealing with the metropolis as an intersection of meanings can be read as an expression of the subject's oscillation between urban/natural and presence/absence (J.H. Miller) and as such, it reveals the city as a complex configuration of spatiality as something indeterminate rather than something bounded and fixed.

*Key-words:* Romantic self, urban 'spots of time', city as symbolic/imagined/physical/social/linguistic space

In the following paper we will move from the self's metaphorical inscription upon the urban scene on a September morning (J.H. Miller) in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" through London's sense of mystery which engulfs the self as a social and intersubjective entity (David Simpson) as described in Book VII of *The Prelude*, to *The Excursion*'s total rejection of the life in the metropolis. We will argue that the Wordsworthian concept of identity arising from a 'moral

crisis' is being confirmed in his urbane 'spots of time' since all of them involve a double affirmation-negation movement. In line with the 'spatial turn' of the last decade ("an assertion of the ontological parity of space and time […] with neither being intrinsically privileged", Warf & Arias 18), we will argue that the London of Wordsworth's time can be read as a complex series of different types of locations, including symbolic, imagined, physical, social and linguistic spaces, i.e. spaces suspended between matter and meaning (Lefebvre). Thus the early-nineteenth-century metropolis becomes a social construct as important as 'Time' in the readings of Romantic poetry. Wordsworth's poetry dealing with the metropolis as an intersection of meanings is also an expression of the subject's oscillation between urban/natural and presence/absence (J.H. Miller) and as such, it reveals the city as a complex configuration of spatiality as something indeterminate rather than something bounded and fixed.

Wordsworth too was the product of a late eighteenth-century drift from country to city and his three different responses to the metropolis, in his sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", the London book of *The Prelude* (Book VII) and Book Eight of *The Excursion*, show that Wordsworthian self is not exclusively individual. Rather, to use David Simpson's words, "it is a medium in which the world is already there, and open to inspection" (7). We want to depart from Hillis Miller's assumption that the cityscape in Wordsworth's poems is not just an indifferent background within which the action takes place: it is "an essential determinant of that action and no account of his [poems] would be complete without a careful interpretation of the function of […] cityscape within it." (*Topographies* 16) So what is Wordsworthian London like and what does it mean?

Being used to the canonical Romantic mindset in Wordsworth privileging the Rousseauvian 'natural' or rural life over the 'artifical', urban life, we must also admit that he sometimes departs from it. Thus in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" the reader is faced with a powerful description of London on a September morning:

> 'Earth has not anything to show more faire:
> Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in its majesty:
> This city now doth, like a garment wear
> The beauty of the morning; silent, bare' (ll. 1-5)

Here we clearly see that Wordsworthian experience of London is not always negative and that he does not always feel displaced from the urban environment. On the contrary, the poet responds to the city with a combination of deep excitement (with repetitive negatives) and calm, characteristic of his "gentle shock of mild surprise" (cf. Hillis Miller, 1985: 71). Wordsworth is a solitary observer who, as in the case of the "Solitary Reaper", wants to take advantage of his own emotional response to the outer scene in the mood of 'wise passiveness' ("Expostulation and Reply", l. 24). The entire image of London bathed in the morning sun insists on the congruence of rather than difference between the

rural and the urban environment. The city's 'ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie/ Open unto the fields' (ll. 6-7) and the city itself appears to be a human figure, or rather a human body lying still. What is missing from the poem is the epiphanic leap from the past experience to the present of a mature poetic self. The experience of London is that of the here and the now which might make us question if the experience was Wordsworth's at all. Pamela Woof believes that it wasn't: Dorothy's journal entry suggests that "London could have the qualities of permanence and moral grandeur that we associate with nature" (Woof, 1988: 33). Though "Wordsworth's account was probably written before Dorothy's journal entry", as Pamela Woof explains (their common source being a conversation on that July morning in London) "we cannot absolutely know which is echo and which anticipation" (Woof, 1988:33). Wordsworth might use the same clusters of images and the same words to describe the experience but the 'eye' recalls Dorothy's (as in "The Daffodils", "A Night-Piece", "The Ruined Cottage"). Wordsworth's symbolic presentation of London in terms of a body lying still in which the contours of valley, rock or hill correspond to the contours of a human body is an attempt of the Romantic masculine self to appropriate a female experience. Dorothy, we are again reminded in this poem, serves as a "talisman for permanence"[1] to the mature poet who knows that she would never lose the visionary power and that she would always be able to see the world with a different eye. It is also an expression of Wordsworth's inability to cope with the urban environment as he constantly oscillates between the rural/ the urban (nature/culture), motion/stillness (river, rocks), life/death (morning brightness/ heart lying still). If we were to believe Pamela Woof's belief that Dorothy's and Wordsworth's conversation on a July morning in London might be the source for his positive view of London, we could say that it is only through naturalization – assimilation of the city to natural archetypes through Dorothy's rather than his eyes that Wordsworth can hope for the mastery of the urban. In other words, this poem questions rather than confirms Wordsworth's fundamentally 'masculinist' inheritance of Milton's 'bogey'[2]. Thus London becomes *a symbolic space* which threatens the constitution of the masculine/single self [3].

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[1] see Mary Jacobus's reading of Tintern Abbey in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (1798), p. 108

[2] Milton's 'bogey', in Gilbert and Gubar's reading, is his cosmology, his vision of 'what men thought' and his powerful rendering of the culture myth that Virginia Woolf, like most other literary women, sensed at the heart of Western literary patriarchy. (For a detailed account of Milton's 'bogey' see Gilbert and Gubar. "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers" in *The Madwoman in the Attic*)

[3] Mary Jacobus claims that 'by associating London with blasphemy (words out of place), 'painted bloom' and 'open shame' of the prostitute, Wordsworth taints the city with the ambiguity which threatens the constitution of the (masculine) single self. "(...) Located at the source of the production and reproduction of signs, the city is like a woman whose soul has been overthrown, or a man who has been feminized by publishing his secret." (*Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude*, 1989, p. 222)

In book VII of *The Prelude*, London is first *an imagined space*: it holds the boy Wordsworth by a chain 'of wonder and obscure delight' (l. 91). Wordsworth's first experience of the city comes from another boy, a cripple from his birth who returns from London unchanged with the same appearance and the same body. It is not one of the 'golden cities' (l. 87) among 'Tartarean wilds' (l. 88). The city rather appears as a site of alienation to the young Wordsworth:

> "One thought baffled my understanding
> How men lived, even next-door neighbours
> Yet still strangers, and knowing not each other's names"
> (ll. 117-120)

Therefore at first, Wordsworth says that he approached London in 'courteous self-submission' (l. 143). Was he afraid of losing himself in this 'Babel din' (l. 157)? The abundance of city sights testifies to the presence, the plenitude of events and people. However, it also points to a more significant absence: the interactions taking place in the city transform an individual into a non-entity, the relationships that are formed are both 'alienated and alienating' (Lefebvre 20). People of London are being referred to as a throng or a thickening hubbub and every attempt at individualizing them fails: they are reduced to their unintelligible voices or bodily movements (a female vendour screams, a travelling cripple stumps with his arms while a dame takes her walk in decency).

Most theorists posit two types of urban space superimposed on or coexisting with each other: physical space and social space (Gilbert 103). In terms of *physical space* the city appears as a two fold negation of nature which, at the same time, mirrors nature. In Lefebvre's words, it appears as "a second nature of stone and metal, built on an initial, fundamental nature made of earth, air, water and fire" (25). Yet, Lefebvre continues, "every urban space attempts to reunite the spontaneous and the artifical, nature and culture "(26). So inherent in it is 'the simulation of nature' (Lefebvre 26): fashionable pleasure gardens on the Thames (Vauxhall and Ranelagh) which provided entertainments of many kinds, the 'river proudly bridged' (l. 129) and 'statues and flowery gardens in vast squares' (l. 134) are examples of such simulation. The city is a place densely circumscribed by objects and potential signs: it does not offer the possibility of being left physically alone. Instead of being a meeting place (as in *Home at Grasmere*) the streets of London are reduced to nothing more than passageways with the endless streams of men and moving things, the chariots, the hackney-coaches and the coaches traveling fast. The London street becomes a network organized for and by consumption, the center of a new consumerist, capitalist era: Wordsworth perceives 'the string of dazzling wares,/ shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names' (ll. 173-174). Thus the urban space is colonized in the street through the image, through publicity and the spectacle of objects (cf. Lefebvre 21). Moreover, London appears not only as the center of Britain but also as the center of the world. Wordsworth's movement through the city resembles a movement through a labyrinth where streets collide in 'sequestered nooks' (l. 186) and 'unsightly lanes' (l. 197), which in their turn open up to wider streets. As these streets ultimately

end on the banks of the river Thames which then flows into the ocean, Britain's imperial link to the rest of the world, Wordsworth's movement through London symbolizes the movement through the imaginary space of empire 'that British ground commands' (l. 5, *View From the Top of Black Comb*). A number of different nationalities that Wordsworth mentions (Italians, Jews, Turks, Swedes, Russians, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Indians, Moors, Malays, Lascars, Tartars, Chinese) shows that London of Wordsworth's time is an open space which slips into the imaginary space of the empire. In Saree Makdisi's words:

> "it is potentially an ideal representational site for understanding the intensely local as global: to produce something even approaching the status of 'a cognitive map' of the city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would somehow involve mapping the imperial world-system of which London itself is simultaneously the beginning and the end." (23)

It is impossible to ignore the British east Indies and China trades and the commodities brought from the farthest reaches of the colonial system to London. The problem with London is that it never turns into a place or rather a "container which maintains and contains, not divides and disperses" (Casey 185). Thus, it could never be claimed as home, "as related to the construction of identity and ethical values" (Gilbert 103).

In terms of *social space*, London at first sight appears as an antithesis to the 'natural' world of the Grasmere Valley. As often in Wordsworth's poetry the self must be understood in terms of the relationship between the individual and the community. One only has to remember *Home at Grasmere* where the place itself, the Grasmere Valley, becomes 'personalized': it means nothing without the communal narratives with which it is imbued. Wordsworth reveals himself as a social poet and his obsession with a particular place or spot is tied to his sense of human identity. What J. E. Malpas calls 'Proust's principle' – "namely the idea that persons and places intermingle with one another in such a way that places take on the individuality of persons, while persons are themselves individuated and characterised by their relation to place" (189) – could equally be applied to Wordsworth. His poetry is a sort of 'memorial inscription', embodying a number of little narratives where nature becomes "a part of what we are, of our minds, our actions and our selves, as is the food we eat and the air we breathe." (Malpas 189). In other words, Wordsworth does not want to subsume a peasant under his own 'egotistical sublime' but shows his share in the common humanity. People in the Grasmere Vale are the opposites of strangers in London who are unaware of each other's names and the intersubjective relations that exist among people of the Grasmere Valley are reduced to "the weary throng/ the comers and goers, face to face – / face after face" (ll. 171-173). In fact the faceless shapes that move along the street anticipate the well-known spot of time in the same book VII of *The Prelude*: St. Bartholomew Fair where Wordsworth calls the spectacle 'a hell / For eyes and ears' (ll. 659-660), ' […] a dream/ Monstruous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound' (ll. 661-662). The fair represents some sort of 'Hydra-humanity' because it is 'alive/ With heads' (ll. 664-665) and full of people who 'stretch the neck and

strain the eyes' (l. 670). Here Wordsworth is worried about the destruction of identity taking place in the urban centres and thus he anticipates the 'cultural critics' of the Victorian age, such as Matthew Arnold and William Morris.

Wordsworth is aware that in London, individuality is being transformed into a theatrical performance: 'those mimic sights that ape/ the absolute presence of reality' (ll. 248-249). The entire city seems to be alive with pantomimic scenes, singers, rope-dancers, giants, dwarfs, clowns, conjurors, posture-masters and harlequins. At first Wordsworth seems to be enjoying the show: he observes the scene with 'ample recompense' (l. 293) and 'charitable pleasure' (l. 466): 'life then was new/ The senses easily pleased' (ll. 440-441), he tells us. Though he was 'most passionately moved' (l. 504), his imaginative capacities were obscured. In order for him to be a poet he needed a limitless possibility of expansion, something he could not hope for in the city. In smaller communities of his native Lake District, it was possible for him to establish intersubjective relations. Avishai Margalit's binary concepts of 'thick' and 'thin' relations might be of use here[4]. While thick relations are anchored in the shared past or moored in shared memory, thin relations are backed by the attribute of being human. "Thick relations are in general", Margalit explains, "our relations to the near and dear while thin relations are in general our relations to the stranger and to the remote." (7). What distinguishes Wordsworth from Margalit's useful opposition is that his memory encompasses the lives of shepherds, the poor, the distressed, i.e. his 'thin' relations[5]. However, Wordsworth's phrases such as 'love of mankind' and 'little unremembered acts of kindness and of love' which lie at the core of Wordsworth's feeling for 'thin' relations, receive their first test in London.

Since "a cityscape is not a pre-existing thing in itself. It is made into a cityscape, that is, into a humanly meaningful space by the living that takes place within it" (Miller 21), Wordsworth is trying hard to see London as a humanly meaningful space but he sometimes oscillates between the two positions: meaningless and meaningful. The phenomenologists of memory have insisted on the fact that the places we remember have certain powerful features in them (see Casey 197). The first one is 'variegation' – places are memorable because they are a variety of different features (London is remembered because of the 'motley imagery' (l. 150) of its 'Babel din' (l. 157)). The second one is 'expressiveness' which is much more difficult to apply in the urban than in the rural surroundings. We all have our special places which bring with them some emotional claim or resonance. This is because, in Casey's view, expression and emotion are closely linked:

> " Landscapes come to us enveloped in a 'sympathetic space' that favours the physiognomic over the geometric, the expressive, over the merely communicative". (197)

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[4] I have first heard about Avishai Margalit's 'thick' and 'thin' relations from Yu Xiao at 2008 Wordsworth Summer Conference in Grasmere and have been inspired by her article 'Habit and Moral Enhancement in The Old Cumberland Beggar' to be found in Gravil, Richard (ed.). *Grasmere 2008: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference.* Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks. 2009. pp. 59-68

[5] Cf. Yu Xiao: 'Habit and Moral Enhancement in The Old Cumberland Beggar', p. 60

Therefore, Wordsworth must transform London into a physiognomic human shape or into a natural landscape as he does in "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" and still attempts in Book VII of *The Prelude* where there is a continuous flow of fresh air from outside the city ('straggling breezes of suburban air', l. 208). Wordsworth tries to transform London into a meaningful, expressive space by embracing the 'thin' relations as well. Thus he retells the story of the Maid of Buttermere, a native of his own hills. She was joined in false wedlock to a man from the city who had courted her, although he had a wife and children. She was then deserted by him when she was pregnant:

> "Nor was it unamusing here to view
> Those samples, as of the ancient comedy
> And Thespian times, dramas of living men
> And recent things yet warm with life: a sea-fight,
> Shipwreck, or some domestic incident
> The fame of which is scattered through the land,
> Such as the daring brotherhood of late
> Set forth - too holy theme for such a place,
> And doubtless treated with irreverence,
> Albeit with the very best of skill –
> I mean, O distant friend, a story drawn
> From our own ground – the Maid of Buttermere,
> And how the spoiler came, 'a bold bad man'
> To God unfaithful, children, wife, and home,
> And wooed the artless daughter of the hills,
> And wedded her, in cruel mockery
> Of love and marriage bonds. (…)"
> (ll. 311-327)

As Thomas De Quincey explains in *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets*, not only did her story become the major theme of "meodramas produced in the London suburban theatres" (40), but also in years afterwards "shoals of tourists crowded to the secluded lake, and the little homely cabaret, which had been the scene of her brief romance" (40,41). The city life corrupted the image of a good-hearted, simple Buttermere maid in the same way as it corrupted the woman uttering blasphemy, 'abandoned and the pride of public vice' (l.420). The city people connected a sense of the ludicrous with her disappointment and thought that her vanity might have been the cause of her misfortune, something her rural neighbours could never have suspected her of. In other words, the spiritual transformation of London into a meaningful space fails because no collective value could be ascribed to it: female modesty, patience and grace vanish under the pressure of urban vice. Thus Wordsworth's rural women are all heroic and they retain their dignity as human beings. As in the case of Mary of Buttermere, their power is implied by their inner suffering.

Of all the primal affections, the relationship of a mother to a child seemed to Wordsworth the deepest rooted and the most abiding and it gave him the greatest

revelation of the power of the human heart. This is why Wordsworth approaches the same theme again and again in his poetry. When he comes across the pretty London boy sitting on his mother's knee, the boy reminds one of Margaret's pretty boy ("The Ruined Cottage"). Wordsworth cannot bring himself to believe that such beauty could exist in that miserable place, in the middle of 'dissolute men/ And shameless women' (ll. 387-388), the boy's mother being one of them. As is the case with the Maid of Buttermere, Wordsworth has to connect the boy with nature and he calls him 'a cottage rose' (l. 380), 'a cottage-child' (l. 381). The excessive beauty of the child is in sharp contrast to the wretchedness of the place and the people surrounding him. At least in imagination Wordsworth has to take the pretty boy away from the bad city mother and give him to Mother Nature; he would rather see him 'embalmed' (l. 400) and 'stopped at the growth he had' (l. 402) than spoiled by oaths, indecent speech and ribaldry. In other words, in these two cases Wordsworth does not manage, despite all his effort, to create such 'sympathetic space' that would turn London into a humanly meaningful space: Mary's nameless child 'sleeps/ Beside the mountain chapel undisturbed' (ll. 411-412), while the pretty boy, 'embalmed/ By Nature' (ll. 400-401) looks in envy on Mary's child tomb. London in a way becomes a space that drains out and destroys a 'natural man': Mary with her innocence and timidity is a natural woman while the pretty boy is a natural child, 'scattered from the clouds' (l. 377). It incorporates and consumes all the relics of 'natural' spaces on which it has grown but it does not turn into an anti-space (cf. Makdisi 27). Persistently, Wordsworth wants to see beauty in it:

> 'the calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
> Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
> Unfrequent as in deserts'
> (ll. 634-636)

When 'the great tide of human life stands still' (l. 631) the poet feels the peace of night and solemnity. Likewise, his final gesture of reading the message on a blind beggar's chest implies that London could still become readable. His sudden acquaintance with the blind beggar resembles that with the leech-gatherer and both figures become 'admonishment' sent to the poet from afar. However, where the leech-gatherer would speak and the poet would not pay any attention to what he said, the blind beggar is mute but still a "speaking monument" (Kneale 352). The blind beggar, though pictured as an emblem of alienation, a ruined piece of nature, something human reduced to an almost animal state is not a prompter of charity. This is the message only those who perceive him as an "indigestible anomaly would get, those who believe that their identity is firmly grounded in their possessions" (Bromwich 21). The sort of call the poet hears 'as if admonished from another world' (l. 623) is linked to his sense of bonding with others simply because they are human and because it is through our feelings that we belong to general humanity. From an unreadable linguistic space where the fronts of houses are 'like a title-page/ With letters huge inscribed from top to

toe' (ll. 176-177), London turns into a readable label on a blind man's chest. The initial continuous, meaningless roar of the London crowd turns into the beggar's solitary, meaningful silence.

Finally, in the *Excursion*, the poem which is, according to David Simpson, central to any coherent understanding of Wordsworth, the metropolis remains an almost completely negative social environment. London becomes a spectacle that can be epistemologically contained and controlled by the viewing subject. Therefore the Wanderer's final words are as follows: 'I grieve, when on the darker side/ Of this great change I look; and there behold/ *Such outrage done to nature* as compels/ The indignant power to justify herself' (book 8, ll.154-56, italics mine). In fact, some parts of the *Excursion* capture Wordsworth's own fear of change best. The birth of a huge town causes the natural surroundings to change and ultimately, to vanish, and Wordsworth deplores this fact:

> 'The foothpath faintly mark'd, the horse-track wild,
> And formidable length of splashy lane, (…)
> Have vanish'd – swallowed up by stately roads,
> Easy and bold, that penetrate the gloom
> Of Englands farthest glens. The earth has lent
> Her waters, air her breezes; and the sail
> Of traffic glides with ceaseless interchange,
> Glistening along the low and woody dale,
> Or on the naked mountain's lofty side.
> Meanwhile, at social industry's command,
> How quick, how vast an increase!'
> (Book 8, ll. 109-119)

What follows is a description of factory work where men, maidens, youths, mothers and little children go to work under unnatural light of this 'illumined pile' (l. 178 ). Their 'unceasing toil' (l. 176) is part of the daily routine which is harsher than human suffering in the time of war. The factory remains their only 'temple' where they offer 'perpetual sacrifice' (l. 188) to their capitalist master.

With a clairvoyance of a twenty-first-century green activist, Wordsworth saved the Lake District from the intrusion of Windermere railway and people in the area still think about it as his greatest achievement. Fearing that the railway would run through the vales of Ambleside and Grasmere, he praised the beauty and seclusion of the district assuring the editor of the Morning Post that the lakes were already within easy reach for everybody (as one of the chief arguments in carrying the line forward to Keswick through the afore-mentioned vales has been that the beauties of the Lake District must be brought within easier reach of those who cannot afford to pay for ordinary conveyances.) Assuming that the railway would bring a crowd of all but appreciative tourists, Wordsworth offered alternative pleasures:

> "Go to a pantomime, a farce, or a puppet-show, if you want noisy pleasure – the crowd of spectators who partake your enjoyment will, by their presence

> and acclamations, enhance it; but may those who have given proof that they prefer other gratifications continue to be safe from the molestation of cheap trains pouring out their hundreds at a time along the margin of Windermere." (*Guide to the Lakes*, 140)

Wordsworth contends that "a vivid perception of romantic scenery is neither inherent in mankind, nor a necessary consequence of even a comprehensive education" (138). It is a taste depending on "processes of culture or opportunities of observation" (138) that must be gradually developed in nations and individuals until it becomes habitual. One such 'process of culture' is the ability to appreciate poetry and the above-quotation is reminiscent of Wordsworth's lament from *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* (1815) about the majority of mankind who neglect the reading of poetry in order to devote themselves to domestic cares or business:

> "Poetry then becomes only an occasional recreation; while to those whose existence passes away in a course of a fashionable pleasure, it is a species of luxurious amusement. In middle and declining age, a scattered number of serious persons resort to poetry, as to religion, for a protection against the pressure of trivial employments, and as a consolation for the afflictions of life."[6]

Likewise, Wordsworth believes that a large majority of mankind does not know how to appreciate natural beauty.[7] The manufacturers of Yorkshire and Lancashire who want to send large groups of their workmen, by railway, to the banks of Windermere are heralds of the new capitalist, consumer society. People are sent off like children for holiday entertainment at the will of their master, and must return at the same, or they will be dealt with as transgressors, Wordsworth observes. Natural beauties are sold to them as if they were household commodities. Industrialization gave birth to the consumer who consumes nature as scenery, landscape, image, fresh air (Williams 82). The same consumer also consumes poetry as "a species of luxurious amusement" (*Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, 1815*, 471), as Wordsworth tells us. He is above all worried about the declining faith in the moral of landscape. For the late Wordsworth, the primordial, original, innocent nature remains the only path for preserving human dignity and greatness. His final refusal to see the metropolis as an open-ended

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[6] Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (1815) in Selected Poems and Prefaces edited by Jack Stillinger, p. 471

[7] He tells an anecdote of a Manchester tradesman who spotted a small piece of pleasure-ground with a detached rock rising in the middle of it just below Wordsworth's house. The tradesman said that it would be a nice place 'if that ugly lump (rock) were out of the way'. He never thought of the beauty of the rock's form, the ancient oaks growing out of it, the flowers and shrubs adorning it. Wordsworth is surprised at his reaction and therefore he comments: 'Men as little advanced in the pleasure which such objects give to others are so far from being rare, that they may be said to represent a large majority of mankind.' (See Letter I – Kendal and Windermere Railway, To the Editor of the Morning Post, Appendix II to Guide to the Lakes)

tissue of meanings (symbolic, imagined, physical, social and linguistic) might be commensurate with his renunciation of active oppositional politics (Makdisi 25) or it might be the expression of his coming to terms with his own 'moral crisis'. Whatever is the case, for the mature Wordsworth the authentic Britishness does not reside in the metropolis.

We have seen that London in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" turns into a symbolic space which, in the appropriation of his sister's experience of the city, threatens the constitution of Wordsworth's masculine self. London of *The Prelude* becomes a complex series of different types of locations: imagined, physical, social and linguistic spaces. In terms of physical space it appears as a negation of nature which at the same time mirrors nature. Its streets are networks organized for and by consumption where human interactions remain superficial. London is also a network of social interactions but the plenitude of events and people points to a more significant absence, the state of utter alienation. The intersubjective relations that exist among the people of the Grasmere Vale are in stark contrast to the people of London where individuality is being transformed into a theatrical performance. Yet, Wordsworth is constantly striving to see London as a humanly meaningful space. In order to turn it into a 'sympathetic space' with some emotional resonance, he has to try thickening his relations with London people. However, both his attempts at doing so fail (the Maid of Buttermere and the pretty London boy are cases in point). London turns into a space which destroys a natural man. Yet, the initial image of the metropolis as an unreadable linguistic space turns into a readable label on a blind man's chest, his solitary but meaningful silence.

In *The Excursion*, London becomes a capitalist beast exploiting men and little children alike. Wordsworth recognizes the danger of a new type of man, the consumer, coming to the Lake District and destroying what is authentically British. Wordsworth's late poetry is therefore a warning that the metropolis breeds pestilence by suffocating what is essentially human: our feelings for one another and our dependence on nature.

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## Wordsworthov London – (Re)konfiguracija metropole

Članak uzima u obzir neke od najvažnijih Wordsworthovih pjesama naglašavajući važnost koju pjesnik pripisuje gradskoj sredini. Na taj se način romantičko pjesničko jastvo oblikuje kao kompleksan subjektivitet. Članak odbija potvrditi tezu da pjesnik odbacuje grad i prihvaća ruralnu sredinu, inzistirajući na tome da Wordsworthove gradske «vremenske točke» zahtijevaju podrobniju analizu.

U pjesmi «Composed Upon Westminster Bridge», pjesnikovo viđenje grada je kombinacija jakog uzbuđenja i mirnoće. Njegovo simbolično ocrtavanje Londona kao

ženskog tijela koje mirno leži može se tumačiti kao pokušaj romantičkog muškog jastva da prisvoji žensko iskustvo. Uzimajući kao primjer Knjigu VII iz *Preludija*, članak tvrdi da se London Wordsworthova vremena može čitati kao kompleksan niz različitih lokacija uključujući simboličke, imaginativne, fizičke, socijalne i lingvističke prostore (Lefebvre). Ovdje Wordsworth još uvijek oklijeva između prihvaćanja i potpunog odbacivanja grada.

Naposljetku, u knjizi VIII iz *Ekskurzije*, metropola se nadaje kao negativno okruženje koje proždire sve što je ljudsko. Stoga se Wordsworthova poezija koja govori o gradskoj sredini kao sjecištu različitih značenja može čitati kao izraz pjesnikova oklijevanja između urbanog i ruralnog, prisutnog i odsutnog (J.H.Miller) te kao takva progovara o gradu kao kompleksnoj konfiguraciji spacijalnosti koja nije gotova i zadana, već je sasvim neodređena.

*Ključne riječi:* romantičko jastvo, gradske «vremenske točke», grad kao simbolički/zamišljeni/fizički/društveni/lingvistički prostor