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Wordsworth's Metropolis and Mental Life in *The Prelude*: Reading William Wordsworth's London through Georg Simmel's Theory of Modernity and Urbanity

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Abstract

The Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, not only wanders lonely as a cloud in the wild, but also wanders lonely in the crowd in the city. While Wordsworth is often celebrated as a Romantic poet of nature, his depictions of London in The Prelude reveal an acute awareness of urban life, capturing the sense of alienation, sensory overload, and solitude in crowds that prefigure modern experiences of the metropolis. By reading these passages through the lens of Georg Simmel's theory of modern urban consciousness, Wordsworth emerges as not only a poet of the countryside but also a perceptive observer of the city and its psychological impact on individuals. This study explores how Wordsworth's representation of London in Book VII anticipates Simmel's analysis of the metropolitan condition, particularly the development of the blasé attitude, the tension between individuality and anonymity, and the intellectualization of emotional life. The poet's observations of London's crowds, spectacles, and social performances reflect the fragmentation and impersonality that Simmel associates with modern urban experience. Yet Wordsworth also discovers, amid this chaos, fleeting moments of beauty, compassion, and moral awareness that counter the city's dehumanizing tendencies. By juxtaposing the sensory and moral economies of the metropolis with those of the natural world, Wordsworth transforms the city into a site of psychological and philosophical inquiry. This interdisciplinary reading situates Wordsworth at the threshold between Romanticism and modernity, showing how his poetic vision engages deeply with the emerging consciousness of the modern urban self.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, Georg Simmel, Modernity, Metropolis, London.

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Introduction

Christopher Stokes (2015) argues that while canonical Romantic poetry is often linked to natural landscapes such as valleys, lakes, mountains, and woods, the works of certain writers from the period focus just as much on urban life, particularly on London, as they do on the rural countryside (p. 215). For instance, Timothy Morton (2007) observes that William Wordsworth, "who told us how to wander lonely as a cloud also told us for the first time what it felt like to be lonely in a crowd" (p. 172). Wordsworth (1770-1850), a central figure in the Romantic Movement, is often celebrated as a poet of nature, memory, and individual experience. As a poet of nature, he expresses the essential passions of rustic life through a plain and emphatic language (Öztürk, 2024, p. 60). As a poet of memory, he achieves a "sensuous unity of self with the past" through lyric recollections and nostalgic yearnings of childhood (Güneş, 2003, p. 187). However, his work also engages deeply with themes of social transformation and modernity; his reflections on London in *The Prelude* reveal a striking awareness of urban life, capturing feelings of alienation, sensory overwhelm, and solitude amidst the bustle of the city, and thus making it highly relevant to the sociological theories of Georg Simmel (1858–1918).

Simmel believed that modernity eroded the aura of things, a belief that resonates with Wordsworth's poetry. M. Löwy and R. Sayre (2002) argue that Romanticism, including Wordsworth's work, was a reaction to the alienation of industrial society. Similarly, Simpson (2009) positions Wordsworth as a poet who resists the disenchantment of the modern world. For Wordsworth, the natural world retains its aura, while urban spaces and mechanized society diminish it, demonstrating that reading Wordsworth in tandem with Simmel offers a fertile avenue. Simmel, as one of the foundational figures in modern sociology, explored the psychological and cultural consequences of modernity, urbanization, and economic commodification. Simmel developed a classification of modern urban individuals, describing them as constantly exposed to "great nervous stimulation, which blunted feelings and created matter-of-fact ways of dealing with people" (Lehan, 1998, p. 7). Wordsworth's poetic vision, especially his reflections on alienation, sensory overload, and the search for authenticity, can be read through Simmel's lens to reveal his nuanced critique of emerging modernity. Reading these passages by means of Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life", which analyses the psychological effects of modern urban environments, illuminates how Wordsworth anticipates many of the challenges of modern metropolitan existence. This study argues that Wordsworth should not be confined to the countryside; rather, his city experiences demonstrate his perceptive engagement with the emerging realities of urban modernity.

Wordsworth is traditionally celebrated as a poet of nature, whose literary fame rests on his portrayals of the rural landscape and his descriptions of the restorative power of natural experience. However, scholars increasingly recognize that Wordsworth's engagement with the urban environment, particularly London, complicates this conventional picture, highlighting his sensitivity to the paradoxical experiences of solitude and social immersion in metropolitan life. In the seventh book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth depicts the crowded, bustling streets of London, capturing a heightened consciousness of social density, sensory overstimulation, and the alienating effects of urban life (Folliot & Lopoukhine, 2019; Meyer, 2003). The passages, where the poet depicts his experience in London, reveal a nuanced awareness of city life, one that has often been overshadowed by his pastoral poetry.

The urban sensibility in Wordsworth finds an intriguing resonance with Georg Simmel's sociological analysis of modern cities. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life", Simmel theorizes how the density, diversity, and rapid pace of city life affect individual

consciousness, producing what he calls a blasé attitude and a defensive psychic adaptation to a bombardment of stimuli. Simmel emphasizes that metropolitan life fosters both anonymity and psychological isolation, prompting individuals to develop heightened self-consciousness and distinctive cognitive strategies to navigate urban complexity. Scholars such as Jens Martin Gurr (2011) have argued that the passages where Wordsworth describes his experience in London anticipate many of Simmel's insights, depicting the psychological impact of crowds, sensory overload, and emotional detachment in ways that resemble Simmel's observations.

Recent scholarship situates Wordsworth within a broader discourse on urban Romanticism, challenging the rigid rural/city binary. Tedeschi (2017) examines how Romantic poets responded to the processes of urbanization, while Peer (2011) highlights the literary strategies by which poets register the city's complexity, temporality, and affective density. Wordsworth's metropolitan reflections, whether in the depiction of crowded streets, urban spectacles, or the contemplation of the city from a distance, could thus be read as an early literary exploration of modern urban consciousness. Yet, despite these studies, systematic engagement with Wordsworth's London experience through the lens of Simmel's sociology remains limited. Most analyses either focus on Simmel in the context of later modernist literature or treat Wordsworth's urban passages as marginal to his larger nature-centred corpus.

This literature suggests a clear gap: while scholars have recognized Wordsworth's sensitivity to urban life and the anticipatory resonance with Simmel's insights, there is room for a study that explicitly reads Wordsworth's London passages in direct dialogue with Simmel's theory of the metropolis and mental life, examining how early Romantic literature prefigures the psychological and social dynamics of modern cities. Such an approach allows for a re-evaluation of Wordsworth not only as a poet of nature but also as an acute observer of the emerging urban experience and modern consciousness.

"Residence in London": Wordsworth's Experience in London

"Residence in London", the seventh book of *The Prelude*, marks a dramatic shift in Wordsworth's poetic journey as he moves away from the natural landscapes that have shaped his imagination and enters the bustling, chaotic, and overwhelming urban world of London. His meditations on London are based on "an opposition between the natural and the artificial", respectively the rustic and the urban (Lehan, 1998, p. 76). Unlike the earlier books, which emphasize the tranquillity and sublimity of nature, Book VII presents the city as a space of noise, distraction, and fragmentation, where Wordsworth struggles to find the same kind of inspiration and unity he experiences in the countryside. Book VII of *The Prelude* reveals that Wordsworth does not completely reject the modern city; rather, he is "both compulsively drawn to and ambivalently enthralled" by the British capital; nevertheless, he also views the city as a challenge, as London fundamentally opposes several of his core values. Specifically, the urban environment disrupts three key principles in Wordsworth's poetry: "the organic community, the stable sign and the poet's gaze" (Stokes, 2015, p. 216). In the metropolitan context, social relations appear fragmented rather than organically unified, language and signs lose their transparency and symbolic coherence, and the poet's contemplative gaze is repeatedly interrupted by the sensory excess of the city. Signs in London are "for the most part dysfunctional insofar as their signifiers do not readily indicate referents in the real world" (King, 1993, pp. 57-58). In other words, signs are not stable in the city. As a result, London emerges not merely as a physical setting but as an epistemological challenge that destabilises Wordsworth's poetic mode of perception.

In Book VII, Wordsworth explores his fascination and disillusionment with city life, describing both its energy and its alienation. His observations reveal a Romantic critique of modernity, commercialization, and the loss of authentic human connection in the urban environment. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the city's cultural richness, its diverse inhabitants, and its unique spectacles, making this one of the most socially conscious and observational sections of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth views the city as a place of sensory overload; he recounts his overwhelming experience of London's fast-paced, chaotic nature. Friedman (1989) observes that the threat of revolutionary violence from the urban crowd constantly lingers at the margins of Book VII. The anonymity and artificiality of city life are contrasted with the intimacy of nature; the Romantic poet points to alienation and the loss of authentic connection in the city. He also draws attention to the theatricality and spectacle of urban life; the city emerges as a stage, filled with performances, crowds, and illusions. He seeks moments of reflection and imagination in the city as he searches for meaning amidst the city's distractions.

Wordsworth completed his degree in January 1791 and then relocated to London, where he stayed until late May. During his time there, he engaged with "Dissenting and Radical circles" while exploring the various attractions and spectacles the city had to offer (Gill, 2011, pp. 135-36). Wordsworth's arrival in London is marked by a feeling of awe and disorientation. Coming from the peaceful landscapes of the Lake District, he finds himself immersed in a world of noise, movement, and endless variety. He describes the overwhelming crowds, markets, theatres, and chaotic streets, where thousands of people move in a mechanical, impersonal rhythm. The city never rests, and its energy, while impressive, also feels exhausting and devoid of the deeper spiritual connection he finds in nature. Instead of the organic harmony of the countryside, London represents fragmentation, where everything seems disconnected and artificial. Unlike his encounters with nature, which inspire feelings of unity and transcendence, the city bombards him with images and sensations that feel disjointed and fleeting. This creates a sense of alienation, where Wordsworth struggles to find a stable centre in the ever-changing, unpredictable landscape of the metropolis. The Romantic poet seems to refer to "the experience of being surrounded by the urban crowd," which Pinch (1996) points out is "fundamentally unassimilable" (p. 154). The urban crowd's being unassimilable accentuates Wordsworth's difficulty in integrating the sensory overload of the polis into a coherent poetic or spiritual framework. Hence, the urban crowd functions as a limit case that exposes the strain modernity places on the Romantic modes of perception and selfhood.

One of the central critiques Wordsworth presents in Book VII is the city's ability to isolate individuals even amid crowds. The people of London move past each other without truly engaging; they exist as part of a machine-like social structure, where genuine connection is rare. Wordsworth contrasts this with the intimacy of rural life, where individuals feel a sense of belonging to both nature and community. He describes the city's inhabitants as being consumed by money, commerce, and superficiality, leading to a loss of deeper emotional and spiritual fulfilment. Wordsworth's Romantic distrust of industrialization and urbanization becomes clear in this section. He sees the modern city as a place that deadens the soul, reducing human beings to mere functions in an economic system rather than as individuals capable of experiencing deep, meaningful emotions. Despite his criticism, Wordsworth does not completely dismiss the city. His "pedestrian narrative" (Hartman, 1964, p. 236) demonstrates that he is fascinated by its theatrical quality and recognizes London as a place of performance and spectacle. He describes street performers, actors, vendors, and public spectacles, all contributing to the city's dramatic, almost

dreamlike quality. London is a stage where people constantly play roles, masking their true selves behind social expectations and artificial identities. This connects to Romantic themes of illusion versus reality, religion versus science, nature versus technology, while the city appears vibrant and alive, Wordsworth senses that much of it is superficial and disconnected from deeper truths.

One of the most memorable images in Book VII of *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's description of St. Bartholomew's Fair, a massive public gathering filled with merchants, performers, and common people (pp. 828-29). While the fair is exciting and full of energy, Wordsworth sees it as a symbol of the city's transience and lack of substance. Everything in London seems temporary, built to entertain, distract, and sell rather than to enlighten or inspire. Wordsworth does not completely reject the city despite his struggles to find the same sense of spiritual connection that he experiences in nature, Instead, he attempts to find meaning in the urban environment through moments of reflection and imagination. He recognizes that even in a place like London, one can still engage with deep thought, memory, and poetic insight. He describes moments of solitude amid the crowds, where he feels the presence of imagination trying to shape meaning out of the city's chaos. He remains strangely immune to "the 'underworld' of London" as "he moves among that chaos and confusion like Aeneas in his cloud" (Hartman, 1964, p. 234). In other words, Wordsworth's imagination functions as a protective and mediating force, allowing him to traverse the sensory disorder of the metropolis without being fully absorbed by it. Thus, the poet's imaginative faculty preserves a degree of autonomy and coherence, enabling moments of insight even within the disorienting spectacle of urban modernity.

William Wordsworth, remaining immune to the chaos of London, ultimately concludes that nature is still the true source of wisdom and poetic inspiration, and that the city, while fascinating, cannot offer the same depth of experience. By the end of Book VII, Wordsworth's Romantic ideology is reaffirmed: the natural world, with its beauty, tranquillity, and deep connection to the human soul, remains the ideal space for poetic thought, while the city, despite its energy and spectacle, is ultimately an alienating and shallow environment. Book VII of *The Prelude* serves as Wordsworth's reflection on the modern city and its effects on human consciousness. His experience in London challenges his previous ideas about nature as the ultimate source of poetic inspiration and forces him to confront the realities of urban life, industrialization, and modernity. London is overwhelming and chaotic, offering spectacle but little true connection. The Romantic observer seems to "be carried along, as on a wave, through masses of various beings" (Stoddard, 1988, p. 37). The city fosters alienation, reducing people to passive participants in an economic and social machine. Despite its energy, London lacks the depth of nature, which Wordsworth sees as a source of wisdom and personal transformation. Wordsworth struggles to find poetic meaning in the city, reinforcing his belief that nature remains the best guide for the human soul. He realises that "imagination is dulled rather than delighted" by the metropolis (Hartman, 1964, p. 239). The seventh book stands out as one of the most socially engaged sections of *The Prelude*, showing Wordsworth as not just a poet of nature but also an observer of human society. His reflections on London foreshadow the concerns of later Romantic poets, who would critique industrialization, urbanization, and the loss of authentic experience in the modern world. Ultimately, Book VII acts as a contrast to Wordsworth's earlier nature-filled books, reinforcing the idea that true poetic inspiration and moral insight are best found not in the distractions of the city, but in the deep, quiet communion with the natural world. In essence, Book VII is a literary and psychological map of London, capturing the young Wordsworth's evolving consciousness in response to urban life. It provides rich material for

reading his experience alongside Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life", particularly in terms of individuality, anonymity, sensory overstimulation, indifference, modernity, urbanity, urban-inflected self-reflection, urban culture, and the cultural development of individuals.

Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life"

Originally published in 1903, Simmel's essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" is a foundational text in urban sociology, offering a penetrating analysis of how life in large cities shapes human consciousness, behaviour, and social relations. Focusing on "the tumult of the modern metropolis" (Levine, 1971, p. xx), Simmel contrasts metropolitan life with rural life, arguing that the density, pace, and diversity of urban environments produce unique psychological and social adaptations. While rural life is characterized by personal familiarity, intimacy, and slow rhythms, city life is marked by anonymity, rapid change, and impersonal interactions (Simmel, 1971, p. 325). This complexity requires city dwellers to develop new ways of perceiving, processing, and interacting with the social world.

The distinctive psychology of metropolitan life, according to Simmel, arises from the intensification of emotional and sensory experience produced by the constant influx of external and internal stimuli (Simmel, 1971, p. 325). Human perception depends on contrasts, on the differences between present and past impressions, and when these contrasts become rapid and numerous, the mind must exert more energy to process them. In rural or small-town settings, the pace of life is steadier and more predictable, leading to fewer demands on one's mental capacities. The metropolis, Simmel argues, creates "a deep contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence" (p. 325). The city's continuous stream of new sights, sounds, and interactions, its quickened tempo of economic and social life, creates a heightened state of awareness and a more strained psychological condition. Thus, the metropolis profoundly reshapes human consciousness, producing a more intense, yet often more fatigued, fragile, and alienated mode of mental life. The mental life of the metropolitan individual is intellectualistic, whereas that of the person who lives in the country rests more upon emotions and interpersonal relationships. The intellect is "a protective organ" for the metropolitan individuals to protect themselves against "the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it" (p. 326). The metropolitan person reacts primarily rationally rather than emotionally; as a result, the metropolitan type becomes less sensitive. The intellectualistic metropolitan individual becomes indifferent to personal relationships. The mental life of the metropolitan inhabitant is heavily shaped by the money economy and "the exchange value which reduces all quality and individuality to a purely quantitative level" (p. 326). Interpersonal relationships in the modern city are imponderable. Simmel argues that "through the entire course of English history London has never acted as the heart of England but often as its intellect and always as its money bag" (p. 327). Because of the money economy, the modern becomes more calculating and practical, transforming "the world into an arithmetical problem" (p. 327). Punctuality, calculability, minute precision, and exactness define metropolitan life; the firmly fixed framework of time "transcends all subjective elements" (p. 328). The capitalistic character of metropolitan life excludes "those irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life" (pp. 328-329). In privileging calculation, efficiency, and exchange value, the modern metropolis suppresses spontaneity and affective depth, reshaping subjectivity in accordance with impersonal economic rationality. Therefore, the individual's inner life becomes increasingly abstracted and instrumental, mirroring the mechanised and quantified structures of modern urbanity.

Simmel emphasizes the psychological consequences of urban living, particularly the constant sensory and social stimulation inherent to metropolitan environments. Individuals are exposed to overwhelming visual, auditory, and social input, and in response, they develop what Simmel calls a blasé attitude, defined as a form of emotional reserve or indifference that protects the individual from becoming mentally exhausted. The "blasé outlook" is the psychic phenomenon "unconditionally reserved to the city" since the "rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts" lead to indifference, besides generating intense metropolitan intellectuality (p. 329). The blasé attitude is an adaptive phenomenon because "the nerves reveal their final possibility of adjusting themselves to the content and the form of metropolitan life by renouncing the response to them" (p. 330). While this detachment functions as a coping mechanism, it also contributes to alienation, fostering emotional distance between individuals even as they navigate dense social networks. The city thus produces a paradoxical condition: a life rich in social exposure yet marked by isolation and emotional restraint.

Economic and social rationalization is a key feature of metropolitan life in Simmel's account. Money mediates many urban interactions, encouraging calculable and impersonal social exchanges. Money "hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair" (p. 330). This rationalization promotes a formalized, functional approach to social life, often at the expense of deep personal connections. Simmel notes that the accumulation of objective culture advances rapidly in the city, yet individuals may struggle to internalize or meaningfully engage with this culture. The result is a tension between a thriving public, intellectual, and material culture and the limitations of subjective experience, as individuals grapple with feelings of overload and detachment.

Simmel designates the "mental attitude of the people of the metropolis to one another" as one of reserve (p. 331). The inhabitants of the metropolis need this attitude of reserve for self-preservation against the threat of being "completely atomized internally" (p. 331). The attitude of reserve is also marked by "a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion which, in a close contact which has arisen any way whatever, can break out into hatred and conflict" (p. 331). Immersion in a metropolitan unwished-for chaos would be unbearable for the metropolitan residents, so they are "saved by antipathy" from the dangers of metropolitan life (p. 331). This attitude of reserve as the general psychic trait of the metropolis "assures the individual of a type and degree of personal freedom" (p. 332). This tendency leads to the organisation of "a relatively small circle almost entirely closed against neighbouring foreign or otherwise antagonistic groups" (p. 332). Such a social organization requires "a rigorous setting of boundaries and a centripetal unity, and for that reason it cannot give room to freedom" (p. 332). However, in metropolitan cities, the metropolitan individual "gains a freedom of movement far beyond the first jealous delimitation and gains also a peculiarity and individuality to which the division of labour in groups, which have become larger, gives both occasion and necessity" (p. 332). Personal, intellectual, and economic relations in the metropolis grow in a geometrical progression as soon as a certain demarcation has been passed, which transforms the metropolis into the seat of cosmopolitanism (p. 334). Despite its challenges, Simmel observes that urban life also enables individuality and freedom. The metropolis offers opportunities for self-development, personal expression, and intellectual and artistic exploration that are less accessible in rural contexts. In the city, individuals can cultivate unique interests, experiment with lifestyles, and assert their personal identities. Thus, Simmel presents the metropolis as both a site of social constraint and psychological challenge and a space of creativity, autonomy, and intellectual growth.

Simmel's analysis has proven especially influential in literary studies, where his ideas provide a framework for understanding urban consciousness in literature. Authors who depict metropolitan life through crowded streets, social spectacles, or the alienation of city dwellers can be read through a Simmelian perspective. Simmel's concepts of the blasé attitude, sensory overload, and the tension between individual freedom and social impersonality resonate with literary portrayals of urban life, making his work particularly relevant for studies that examine the psychological and social effects of modern cities. In this context, Simmel's essay offers a powerful tool for interpreting literary depictions of London in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and other Romantic texts, highlighting the interplay between urban environments and human subjectivity. In Book VII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth provides a rich account of his experiences in London, depicting the city as both exhilarating and overwhelming. His narrative emphasizes the sensory intensity of urban life, marked by the crowds, noise, and endless activity of the streets, which mirrors many of the psychological phenomena later theorized by Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life." Wordsworth frequently highlights the paradox of solitude amidst the urban crowd, observing that despite being surrounded by throngs of people, he feels isolated and detached. This experience closely resonates with Simmel's concept of the blasé attitude, the emotional reserve developed by city dwellers to cope with the constant barrage of stimuli in metropolitan environments.

Wordsworth's London passages also illustrate the overstimulation of perception that Simmel identifies as central to urban life. The poet describes the juxtaposition of diverse social classes, the theatricality of street life, and the relentless pace of city events, all of which demand heightened attention and cognitive adjustment. Similar to Simmel's analysis, these descriptions convey a dual effect: the metropolis produces intellectual and aesthetic stimulation while simultaneously inducing emotional distancing and psychological strain. Wordsworth's reflections on urban spectacle, from observing beggars and street performers to attending social ceremonies, reveal his acute awareness of both the vibrancy and the impersonality of metropolitan existence. Furthermore, Wordsworth engages with the social and moral dimensions of city life, noting disparities of wealth and the functional rationalization of urban interactions. His attention to social hierarchies and the calculated behaviours of city dwellers anticipates Simmel's discussion of money-mediated social relationships and the formalized nature of urban interaction (Simmel, 1971, p. 326). The poet's observations suggest that city life, while offering cultural and intellectual richness, can also foster alienation and a sense of abstraction from personal, intimate connections. Yet, in alignment with Simmel, Wordsworth's urban experience is not purely negative. The city provides a space for self-reflection, critical observation, and moral growth, allowing the poet to cultivate a heightened consciousness of human behaviour, social complexity, and his own moral sensibilities. London serves as both a site of challenge and a laboratory for developing intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities, highlighting the metropolis as a formative environment that shapes the inner life of its inhabitants.

By reading Wordsworth's observations in the seventh book of *The Prelude* alongside Simmel's framework, one could see that the poet's early urban experiences anticipate many insights of modern sociology. Brown (1999) suggests that Wordsworth anticipates Simmel's critique of modern disconnection by portraying nature as a space of genuine human connection. Hence, in Wordsworth's urban representations, one could find an anticipation of Simmel's observations on the psychological adaptations, social impersonality, and emotional paradoxes of city life. This alignment underscores the value of applying sociological theory

to Romantic literature, revealing how urbanity influenced early conceptions of consciousness, subjectivity, and modernity.

Reading Wordsworth through Simmel

One of the key intersections between Wordsworth and Simmel is their shared concern with the effects of economic and technological modernization. Simmel's work *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) examines how monetary exchange transforms human relationships, reducing qualitative experiences into quantifiable economic values. Similarly, Wordsworth's poetry laments the encroachment of market values into human life. Simpson (2009) examines how Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" critiques the commodification of human labour and the alienation of individuals from traditional communities. Simpson also highlights how Wordsworth, much like Simmel, views the increasing rationalization of life as eroding deeper human connections.

The seventh book of *The Prelude* begins with "that quickening breeze" which issues from the walls of the city, salutes the poet, urging him to sing aloud "with fervour irresistible / Of short-lived transport, like a torment bursting / From a black thunder-cloud" (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 815). He desires to chant with the "minstrels from the distant woods" and to "pitch a vagrant tent among / The unfenced regions of society" before he decides to turn to London as a traveller "unenslaved" by "personal ambition" and free from "dangerous passions," although he is "self-willed" (p. 816). The seventh book opens with the Romantic poet's intense feelings about the sublime natural world, as expected from a Romantic spirit, before he resolves to go to the city, characterised by personal ambitions that threaten to enslave the city dwellers. He recognises that it has been three years since he travelled to the city and he recollects feeling "in heart and soul the shock / Of the huge town's first presence" and pacing the "endless streets" of the city as "a transient visitant" (p. 817). When Wordsworth recalls his first encounter with the metropolis, he captures the psychological and emotional intensity of his initial experience of London. The word "shock" conveys both awe and disorientation, which suggests that the city's sheer size and vitality overwhelmed his senses. This shock is not simply fear or wonder, but it is a moment of rupture, when his habitual ways of perceiving the world, shaped by rural calm and natural continuity, collide with the density, noise, and multiplicity of the urban environment. In that instant, the metropolis becomes a force that both fascinates and destabilizes him. By describing himself as a transient visitor who moves through the endless streets of the city, Wordsworth also articulates a profound sense of alienation and impermanence. His descriptions convey how he feels unanchored, a temporary observer rather than a participant in the life of the city. The image of endless streets evokes both physical vastness and emotional disconnection: a maze of human activity that lacks the intimacy and harmony he associates with nature. His wandering through these streets mirrors his internal search for meaning amid modernity's chaos. The poet, "fixed amid that concourse of mankind," now comes to realise that "life and labour seem but one" in the metropolis where "Pleasure whirls about incessantly"; he regards himself as "an idler" who is "well content / To have a house (what matter for a home?)"; he is a rambler in the city who lives "cheerfully abroad / With unchecked fancy ever on the stir, / And all my [his] young affections out of doors1 (p. 817).

William Wordsworth's reflection on his being "fixed amid that concourse of mankind" is strikingly paradoxical. To be fixed suggests stability and rootedness, yet he is surrounded by a concourse, which is a moving crowd. This juxtaposition highlights the tension between the individual and the multitude, a central theme in Wordsworth's London experience. The poet is stationary within a restless human tide, observing the constant flux of

"life and labour" that seems to merge into one continuous motion. The city, in his view, embodies the fusion of work and pleasure, where human energy is consumed by both economic activity and ceaseless entertainment. The perpetual whirl that pervades the city evokes a dizzying, centrifugal motion, which may be viewed as an image of urban excess and sensory overload; pleasure in the metropolis becomes mechanical and repetitive rather than spontaneous or restorative. Wordsworth's self-characterization as an idler who is content to have a house but not a home further reveals his ambivalent detachment from metropolitan life. The distinction between a house and a home is crucial: a house is merely a physical shelter, while a home connotes belonging, intimacy, and emotional rootedness. By dismissing the need for a home in the city, Wordsworth confesses a kind of emotional estrangement. He resides in the city but does not belong to it; his contentment is tinged with irony, as if to acknowledge the superficial comfort of one who lives without deep attachment or community. This attitude reflects the alienation of the urban observer, a figure who drifts through the metropolis in a state of detached curiosity rather than genuine participation. Although physically confined within the metropolis, his mind and spirit remain oriented toward the open spaces of nature; his "unchecked fancy" represents the resilience of imagination against the constraints of urban life. The poet becomes a flaneur before his time, a wanderer who moves through the city not as a participant in its commerce or spectacle, but as a reflective observer whose inner life transforms the experience of modernity into art and insight. In this way, Wordsworth's stance anticipates both Simmel's sociological observations and later modernist depictions of city life. Like Simmel's metropolitan individual, Wordsworth responds to the overstimulation and impersonality of the city by cultivating an inner distance, a psychological space that protects his individuality. Yet unlike the purely blasé city-dweller, Wordsworth transforms this detachment into creative perception; his unrestrained fancy and "young affections" which are "out of doors" suggest that his imaginative energies, though displaced from the urban crowd, remain vital and free. This passage encapsulates Wordsworth's complex negotiation with modernity. He recognizes the energy of the metropolis but refuses to let its mechanical rhythms define his inner life. His position as a rambler becomes an act of resistance, a refusal to be absorbed into the city's relentless pace. In doing so, Wordsworth articulates an early Romantic response to urban modernity: one that seeks to preserve the integrity of the self and the imagination amid the whirl of industrial, economic, and social transformation.

The poet recalls how London enchanted his childish imagination. He also remembers a boy from the circle of his friends, "a cripple from his birth, whom chance / Summoned from school to London" and recollects how he envied this "fortunate" traveller (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 817). When the boy returns from London, Wordsworth "curiously" scans his "mien and person" and is disappointed "not to find some change" in his "look and air" (p. 817). Wordsworth asks him so many questions, yet every word that the boy utters falls flat; he is utterly disillusioned as his friend's report of the city falls short of the "[m]arvellous things" that he has pictured in his mind about the city (p. 817). One thought has confused him the most; he could not understand "how men lived / Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still / Strangers, not knowing each the other's name" (p. 817). This passage shows how Wordsworth's first imaginative encounter with London takes shape before he ever sets foot there, and how that early fantasy begins to crumble when confronted with reality. Wordsworth recalls the childlike enchantment that the idea of London once held for him. The city exists first as an imaginary landscape, a place of wonder and mystery. His excitement at hearing that his friend has been summoned to London conveys both admiration and envy. The physical limitations of the friend make his journey seem even more extraordinary, heightening the sense that London is a place of transformation, where even those confined by

circumstance might encounter the miraculous. Yet when the boy returns, the poet's curiosity turns into disappointment and confusion. He expects to see some visible sign of change and a mark of the city's greatness etched upon him. But the friend's ordinariness shatters the poet's fantasy. This moment of disillusionment reveals how the imaginative power of childhood constructs the city as myth, while experience begins to expose its human reality. The failure of the boy's stories to live up to Wordsworth's expectations underscores the tension between imagination and reality, between the idealized city of youthful wonder and the complex, unromantic city of adult perception.

The observation that even next-door neighbours are strangers in London points to an early encounter with urban anonymity and alienation. For a child raised in the tight-knit rural communities of the Lake District, where social bonds are intimate and personal, the notion that proximity could coexist with estrangement is incomprehensible. The line crystallizes what will become one of Wordsworth's central concerns in Book VII: that the modern city, for all its energy and spectacle, erodes human connection and moral sympathy. This passage thus marks a pivotal psychological transition. London first appears as a dream of possibility, but it quickly becomes a symbol of modern disconnection. The wonder of childhood gives way to the critical perception of adulthood; the city is no longer experienced affectively, through immediacy and excitement, but intellectually and ethically, as a space whose very scale and density undermine intimacy and sympathy. Wordsworth's early confusion about neighbours living like strangers anticipates the Romantic critique of modernity that pervades his later poetry and resonates strikingly with Simmel's sociological analysis. Simmel (1971) also describes how the density of urban life produces a paradoxical isolation amid proximity, where constant contact dulls genuine human feeling (pp. 329-330). This episode foreshadows Wordsworth's later ambivalence toward the metropolis: it is at once alluring and alienating, a site of fascination that conceals a loss of intimacy and authenticity. His disappointment in his friend's unchanged appearance mirrors his dawning recognition that the modern city, rather than transforming the individual, often renders him anonymous, detached, and unseen, a theme that will deepen throughout the seventh book of *The Prelude* and define Wordsworth's poetic confrontation with urban modernity.

William Wordsworth (1994) addresses London as the "monstrous ant-hill" (p. 818). This poetic address captures both his awe and his anxiety before the spectacle of the modern city. Wordsworth personifies London as a vast, teeming organism symbolizing the intense busyness of modern urban life. He imagines the city as an "endless stream of men and moving things," as a ceaseless current of human activity. The poet observes the "dance of colours, lights, and forms," the "deafening din," and the continuous spectacle of "comers and goers" that define the metropolis. The city's streets are filled with dazzling shopfronts, ornate signs, and representations of famous figures such as "Boyle, Shakespeare, Newton," and even quack doctors, which are seen as an emblem of commerce, celebrity, and display. The detailed visual imagery resembles a panoramic sweep, evoking the sensory overload of London's streets in the early nineteenth century. The opening command to "Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain / Of a too busy world!" establishes both admiration and critique (p. 818). The ant-hill metaphor suggests extraordinary organization and industriousness, but also dehumanization and loss of individuality. The image of countless identical ants evokes a society of relentless labour where human beings have become miniature, mechanical parts of a larger, impersonal system. This resonates powerfully with Simmel's description of metropolitan life, where individuals must protect their inner freedom against the overwhelming pace and complexity of the city.

William Wordsworth deploys the language of motion, reflected in "flow", "dance", and "moving things", which conveys the kinetic energy of urban existence, but also its instability and disorientation (p. 818). Wordsworth's perspective oscillates between wonder and awe, suggesting that the city exerts both fascination and threat. He describes London almost as a living spectacle, a kind of moving theatre of modernity where everything, including faces, wares, advertisements, and signs, demands attention. As Cynthia Chase (1986) argues, everything in London has "the capacity to be displayed as signs" (p. 48). The repetition of "face after face", "shop after shop", and "letters huge inscribed from top to toe" creates a sense of relentless visual bombardment, what we might now call sensory overstimulation. At the same time, Wordsworth's meticulous cataloguing of images shows how the city has become a text to be read; its buildings are "like a title-page," and its signs are "like guardian saints" (p. 818). This metaphor of reading the urban landscape anticipates modern notions of the city as spectacle and sign-system, where meaning is mediated by commerce and representation rather than by nature or community. Yet, amid this profusion of images, the poet senses a kind of spiritual emptiness. The figures of Shakespeare, Newton, and other great men appear as commercial ornaments, their cultural and moral value commodified into visual decoration. This passage thus dramatizes Wordsworth's ambivalent modern consciousness. London embodies both the marvels and the perils of modernity: it is a scene of human achievement and vitality, but also of alienation, noise, and impersonality. The poet's awe gives way to a subtle critique of how capitalism and spectacle reduce human and moral significance to surface appearances. In Simmel's sociological terms, this could be read as a poetic illustration of the blasé attitude, marked by the dulling of emotional response caused by overstimulation and the transformation of individual life into a series of fleeting impressions (Simmel, 1971, pp. 329-330). Yet unlike Simmel's detached urban subject, Wordsworth seeks to recover meaning through imaginative perception. By transforming chaos into art, he reclaims the power of attention and moral reflection that the metropolis seems to threaten. This passage captures Wordsworth's double vision of London as both sublime and monstrous. The city fascinates him as a living embodiment of modern energy, but it also disturbs him as a sign of spiritual and social disconnection. His detailed, panoramic vision anticipates not only urban sociology but also later modernist representations of the metropolis from the French symbolist Baudelaire's Paris to the English modernist Eliot's London, where beauty, alienation, and spectacle intertwine.

William Wordsworth (1994) continues his journey through London, shifting from the crowded spectacle of the streets to quieter, hidden corners of the city. He describes how, after being overwhelmed by the "roar" of the bustling city, he and his companion "escape as from an enemy" into a "sequestered nook" (p. 818). The contrast between the noise and the stillness dramatizes a movement from chaos to calm, from the overwhelming public spaces of the metropolis to private or hidden ones. From there, he wanders through "tracts of thin resort," encountering scattered scenes of popular entertainment: a kind of street peep-show, dancing dogs, a dromedary with monkeys, a minstrel band, and a ballad-singer (pp. 818-19). Yet, alongside these amusements, he also passes through "unsightly lanes" and dark, oppressive, labyrinthine alleys, which are "gloomy as coffins" and filled with the piercing cries of street vendors (p. 819). Eventually, his wandering leads him unexpectedly into "privileged regions" and into the quiet, green courtyards of the Inns of Court, where lawyers look down from their chambers upon serene gardens and waters (p. 819). This passage reveals Wordsworth's shifting perception of urban space and his deep sensitivity to contrasts of sound, motion, and social environment in the metropolis. The image, which is contained in the act of escaping as if from an enemy, signals his ambivalence: the city's energy feels aggressive, almost hostile, and the act of retreating from it resembles a moral or

psychological defence. The roar of the metropolis recalls Simmel's description of the intensified sensory experience of modern life, the rapidly shifting external stimuli that overwhelm the metropolitan resident (Simmel, 1971, p. 325). Wordsworth's retreat into a "sequestered nook" is thus both literal and symbolic: it is an effort to reclaim inner quiet and perceptual clarity amid urban overstimulation; such a retreat to the nook embodies what Simmel means by the reserve.

As he continues his walk, William Wordsworth's eye lingers on the spectacles of popular culture, street performers, and ballad-singers. His tone here is not entirely dismissive; there is curiosity and compassion in his observation of these minor entertainments. Yet these sights also illustrate how pleasure and labour intertwine in the city, how performance and survival merge in a society driven by display. The antic pair of monkeys and the female vendor's scream suggest both the comic and the grotesque aspects of city life. The image of private courts signals another dimension of Wordsworth's urban vision: the coexistence of vitality and decay, joy and suffering, within the same physical landscape. The labyrinthine quality of these "unsightly lanes" reflects the moral and spatial complexity of the metropolis, a place that simultaneously conceals and reveals, oppresses and liberates. The transition to the privileged regions and gardens of the lawyers marks a moment of social contrast and spatial revelation. The poet's accidental passage from the dark alleys of the poor to the serene courtyards of the elite exposes the class divisions embedded in the city's geography. The juxtaposition of the female vendor's scream with the studious lawyers gazing upon calm gardens underscores the moral irony of urban modernity: within a few steps, one moves from squalor to privilege, from noise to peace, from survival to leisure. In this scene, Wordsworth also acts as a kind of early flaneur, wandering through the city, observing its diversity of spaces and social conditions, transforming observation into moral reflection. The movement between noise and silence, light and darkness, spectacle and retreat, reflects the psychological rhythm of urban experience that Simmel later theorized as central to modern life. Like Simmel's metropolitan subject, Wordsworth must navigate a world of sensory intensity and social fragmentation by cultivating moments of inward distance and reflection. Yet Wordsworth's response remains distinctly Romantic: rather than succumbing to detachment, he seeks moments of re-enchantment and moral insight. The sudden discovery of green gardens among the city's labyrinthine streets suggests that even within the modern metropolis, nature, contemplation, and beauty survive, hidden, fragile, but still present.

William Wordsworth's perception of the metropolis deepens into moral and social awareness, as will be evident from the quotations drawn from the poem below. He describes returning "into the throng" after wandering through quieter streets (1994, p. 819). As the crowd thins and the air grows fresher, he notices the visual noise of urban life: ballads hanging on "dead walls", enormous advertisements competing for attention that "[p]ress forward, in all colours, on the sight", and bold words proclaiming dubious promises (p. 819). Amid this cluttered scene, he turns his gaze to the people; he beholds the "face hard and strong / In lineaments, and red with over-toil," and the "travelling cripple" who moves painfully through the streets on his arms (p. 819). He also observes a variety of familiar urban figures: a sailor resting on the pavement, a nurse, a bachelor idling in the sun, a soldier without employment, and a respectable woman taking a walk. The poet records this panorama with both realism and compassion, offering a cross-section of city life. The passage begins with the image of flow and movement: he follows "the tide that slackens by degrees" (p. 819). This metaphor of the human tide situates Wordsworth once again amid the metropolis's dynamic rhythms. Yet this flow soon becomes an emblem of exhaustion: as the tide slackens, the poet enters zones where the city's glamour gives way to weariness and

social exposure. The imagery of ballads that "dangle from dead walls" and huge, brightly coloured advertisements that crowd the view, each one vying aggressively for the observer's attention, underscores how urban life is saturated with commodified signs and spectacles. The city, as Wordsworth portrays it, speaks in posters and slogans; its moral and aesthetic surfaces replaced by the language of commerce and persuasion. Advertisements and shop signs, which are "fronted with a most imposing word", use grand and impressive language to draw attention, and are "in masquerade" as they pretend to be something that they are not (p. 819). This image reveals the poet's distrust of appearance, suggesting that behind the grand public images of London lies deceit, illusion, and moral hollowness. When Wordsworth shifts his focus from these textual surfaces to the human figures on the street, the tone becomes more intimate and compassionate. The hard face that is "red with over-toil" epitomizes the physical toll of industrial labour. The "travelling cripple" is a powerful symbol of human endurance and social marginality; he is a figure at once pitiable and dignified, whose body bears witness to the city's indifference. Unlike the "monstrous ant-hill" earlier in the poem, this is no abstraction of humanity; it is the city seen through individual suffering (p. 818).

The enumeration of types such as the sailor, the nurse, the bachelor, and the soldier in William Wordsworth's reflections about London suggests both the diversity and the anonymity of urban life. These people are recognizable social figures, yet they blend into a tableau of everyday existence. Wordsworth observes them with the detached curiosity of a moral ethnographer, yet his tone remains sympathetic rather than condescending. This balance between observation and empathy distinguishes his approach from later urban realism: his gaze is moral and reflective, not merely descriptive. This passage crystallizes Wordsworth's evolving response to modernity. The city is a world of signs, labour, and fatigue, where humanity struggles beneath layers of spectacle and commerce. Yet through poetic attention, he restores individuality to those whom the metropolis renders invisible. His descriptions of the cripple and the overworked labourer demonstrate his lifelong concern for the rustic life of ordinary people, now transplanted into the urban environment. Thematically, this scene resonates strongly with Simmel's argument that urban existence produces both overstimulation and emotional blunting, forcing individuals to protect themselves through detachment. Wordsworth, however, resists this numbing effect: rather than turning away, he meets the city's suffering with heightened moral perception. His poetry enacts what Simmel calls the struggle to preserve the autonomy of the individual in the face of metropolitan forces (Simmel, 1971, pp. 331-332). The juxtaposition of advertising and poverty reveals Wordsworth's acute awareness of urban capitalism's contradictions: the same city that celebrates progress and abundance also displays destitution and fatigue in its streets. The cripple and the labourer become emblems of the human cost of modernity. This passage portrays London as a space of contrasts, vital yet oppressive, communal yet isolating. Wordsworth's eye moves from the spectacle of signs to the reality of faces, reclaiming moral depth from the surfaces of modern life. Through this act of seeing, he transforms the metropolis from a place of alienation into a field of moral and poetic discovery.

William Wordsworth (1994) continues his exploration of London's "thickening hubbub" before turning to reflections on theatricality and moral spectacle; the poet describes his passage through the dense evening crowds of London, observing a striking array of people from different nations, occupations, and social classes "among less distinguishable shapes" (p. 819). He notices figures such as the begging scavenger, the Italian street vendor carrying devotional images, the Jewish peddler, and the Turk selling slippers. As he surveys this "mighty concourse," he is struck by the extraordinary diversity of the city: Swedes,

Russians, Frenchmen, Moors, Malays, Tartars, Chinese, and "Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns" (p. 819). London, for Wordsworth, becomes a global stage where all "specimens of man" coexist within one restless, interwoven spectacle of humanity. London "now presents itself as a microcosmic version of the world's peoples" (Hugo, 1987, pp. 1-2). This passage captures Wordsworth's evolving perception of the metropolis as both a source of fascination and moral inquiry. While the city overwhelms him with its sensory roar, here he approaches it with "no unthinking mind," suggesting a shift toward reflective observation rather than emotional disorientation (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 819). The catalogue of ethnic and occupational types transforms London into a microcosm of empire, revealing how the metropolis mirrors Britain's global reach and the mingling of peoples under modernity. Yet this diversity, though impressive, also hints at displacement and commodification; each figure is reduced to a visible role within the city's economy of spectacle. Wordsworth's careful attention to these individuals suggests a tension between human sympathy and social distance; he is at once observer and moral witness, both fascinated by and uneasy about the way urban life turns people into visual curiosities. In this sense, the passage anticipates Simmel's notion of metropolitan consciousness, where the individual negotiates between curiosity and detachment, sensation and reflection, within the overstimulating environment of the modern city.

William Wordsworth (1994) turns his gaze from the busy streets of London to the city's "spectacles within doors", to its galleries, exhibitions, and displays that imitate nature and reality (p. 820). He describes viewing birds, beasts, and exotic plants brought from around the world, followed by artistic and mechanical reproductions that "ape / The absolute presence of reality" (p. 820). These include panoramic paintings, models, and miniature representations of famous landmarks such as St. Peter's Church, the Falls of Tivoli, and the Sibyl's Temple. Wordsworth acknowledges the skill and ambition behind these human-made imitations but subtly criticizes their artificiality. Such spectacles reflect both "man's weakness and his loves", and disclose his desire to master, replicate, and contain the vastness of the natural and human world within confined spaces of representation (p. 820). This episode can be read as Wordsworth's poetic anticipation of Simmel's critique of modernity and the metropolitan experience. Like Simmel, who argues that modern urban life overwhelms the individual with sensory stimuli and fosters a blasé attitude as a defence mechanism, Wordsworth here encounters a world saturated with simulations and artificial sensations. The city's indoor spectacles are emblems of a culture that seeks to mediate experience through representation rather than direct contact with nature or reality. In Simmel's term terms, this shift marks the triumph of the intellect over feeling, where the modern subject turns to abstraction, display, and mimicry to manage the chaos of sensory life in the metropolis (Simmel, 1971, p. 326). Wordsworth's tone reveals ambivalence: he admires human creativity yet laments the loss of authentic experience that accompanies technological and artistic imitation. The panoramas and models, though astonishing, replace genuine engagement with a life-like mockery, a simulation that distances man from the living world. In Simmel's framework, this reflects how the modern city's constant stimuli flatten emotional depth, forcing individuals to find meaning in artificial reproductions rather than organic encounters. Thus, both Simmel and Wordsworth identify a central paradox of modernity: as the city expands human perception and ingenuity, it simultaneously erodes the immediacy of feeling and the spiritual connection to nature. Wordsworth's critique of imitation and his sense of wonder mixed with unease embody the Romantic consciousness of alienation that Simmel would later theorize as the psychological cost of urban modernity.

William Wordsworth (1994) recalls attending the popular entertainments of London, most notably at Sadler's Wells, a theatre known for its pantomimes, acrobatics, and spectacular shows that blended rural fairground amusements with urban performance culture (p. 820). Though he admits that as a young man he was "intolerant" of such diversions, Wordsworth describes how he eventually found himself captivated by these "giants and dwarfs, / Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins" (p. 820). Amid the "uproar of the rabblement," he is intrigued by the workings of belief and illusion and how ordinary people willingly suspend disbelief, how they allow themselves to be moved and deceived by theatrical spectacle (p. 820). This vivid recollection offers one of Wordsworth's most penetrating insights into the psychology of modern urban spectatorship, aligning closely with Simmel's reflections on modern consciousness. For Simmel, life in the metropolis generates a psychic tension between overstimulation and detachment: to survive the sensory and social intensity of the city, individuals adopt a blasé attitude, cultivating intellectual distance rather than emotional immediacy. Yet Wordsworth's description of Sadler's Wells reveals a counter-impulse within the same modern condition: the mass craving for illusion and collective feeling as a release from that detachment. The theatre becomes a microcosm of modern urban experience, where sensation, spectacle, and artificiality replace the organic, spiritual engagement that Wordsworth associates with nature. The spectators' belief in obvious illusions symbolizes the way modern individuals are seduced by appearances, willingly participating in the constructed fantasies of the city. This aligns with Simmel's notion of objective culture, in which human creativity becomes externalized and autonomous, as it is seen here in the mechanical, performative culture of spectacle that dominates urban life. At the same time, Wordsworth's fascination with the crowd's psychology and his urge to "note the laws and progress of belief" (p. 820) anticipates the sociological gaze Simmel would later theorise; both thinkers treat the metropolis as a site where human perception, emotion, and belief are reshaped by modern conditions.

William Wordsworth's tone mixes irony, curiosity, and moral concern; he neither fully condemns nor celebrates the urban spectacle but recognizes it as a symptom of the modern soul's divided state, simultaneously desiring wonder and trapped within artifice. When read through the lens of Simmel's concept of the money economy, Wordsworth's description of Sadler's Wells gains an even deeper sociological resonance. Simmel argues that modern urban life, governed by the logic of money, transforms all human interactions and cultural expressions into commodities. In this context, the spectacles of Sadler's Wells represent more than mere entertainment; they embody the commodification of wonder itself. The conjurors, dwarves, and harlequins perform not for communal celebration but for an anonymous paying audience, their art reduced to a purchasable experience within London's expanding marketplace of sensations. Wordsworth's observation that he watched these performances at leisure underscores the new mode of urban spectatorship born from capitalist modernity: detached, observational, and transactional. The audience's pleasure depends not on participation but on consumption, purchasing access to a spectacle that briefly simulates enchantment. In Simmel's theory, this mirrors how the metropolis replaces genuine experience with mediated forms of excitement, turning art, nature, and even emotion into commodities that circulate through an impersonal economic system. Yet Wordsworth's moral intelligence resists the purely blasé stance Simmel describes. His curiosity to observe and understand these people reveals an enduring Romantic impulse to recover meaning within the dehumanizing circuits of modern exchange. Where Simmel diagnoses a structural condition, Wordsworth dramatizes it emotionally: the poet oscillates between moral discomfort and aesthetic fascination, witnessing how urban modernity converts both belief and imagination into spectacle. Thus, Sadler's Wells becomes an emblem of modern life's paradox, where the

human yearning for transcendence persists even as it is commercialized and staged for mass consumption.

William Wordsworth (1994) then transitions from describing the popular entertainments of London to observing spectacles of the public performances of lawyers and politicians. Though these activities are "titled higher," he suggests they are, in spirit, not far removed from the theatrical amusements of Sadler's Wells (p. 824). The poet recalls attending the law courts and Parliament, where eminent "tongue-favoured" orators held the attention of vast audiences with their eloquence and rhetorical skill (p. 824). At first, he is awestruck by their power; their speeches seem inspired, their command of language dazzling, their presence heroic, yet, as the display continues, his admiration fades into fatigue. The endless flow of words and the artificial brilliance of performance eventually become "tedious", revealing to the young Wordsworth the emptiness behind the spectacle of political and legal eloquence (p. 825). This passage deepens Wordsworth's critique of urban theatricality by extending it to the supposedly serious realms of law and politics, which are spaces, he believes, driven as much by spectacle and performance as the popular entertainments of the fairground or theatre. The young poet's initial awe before the orators of Parliament and the courts mirrors the crowd's rapture at Sadler's Wells; both audiences are captivated by surface brilliance and rhetorical display. Yet the scene's progression from admiration to fatigue reveals Wordsworth's growing awareness of the artificiality and self-display underlying metropolitan eloquence. What appears as reasoned speech and civic virtue dissolves into mere performance detached from moral substance. In relation to Simmel's reflections on modernity, this moment exemplifies the dominance of the intellect and abstraction over genuine feeling in the metropolitan condition. Simmel observes that in the modern city, life becomes mediated through rationalization, formal structures, and verbal or intellectual performances that obscure authentic emotion and individuality. Wordsworth's "superhuman" orator, who dazzles with "words follow[ing] words" and astonishes with his memory and logic, embodies this over-intellectualisation, which points to a triumph of style over meaning, of verbal excess over moral truth (p. 825). The poet's fatigue, therefore, signals not just boredom but a moral and sensory exhaustion characteristic of modern urban life: an overload of stimuli and rhetoric that numbs genuine perception. Through this portrayal, Wordsworth anticipates Simmel's insight that the modern individual, surrounded by endless discourses and performances, tends to develop a blasé attitude as a defence against overstimulation. Yet, in Wordsworth's Romantic framework, this detachment is also a spiritual loss, characterised by the substitution of authentic communion and moral seriousness with spectacle and persuasion. Both thinkers thus diagnose a shared crisis of modernity: a world where intellect and display displace sincerity, and where the city's energy, though dazzling, estranges individuals from feeling and truth.

William Wordsworth (1994) turns his critical eye to "the Pulpit's oratory," finding that even the sacred space of worship is not immune to the city's culture of performance and display (p. 825). Though he acknowledges that some sermons convey "awful truths" with genuine moral power, he focuses on those preachers whose eloquence is tainted by vanity, theatricality and "ostentation" (p. 825). He describes, almost satirically, a fashionable young clergyman who ascends the pulpit like an actor taking the stage, meticulously groomed, speaking in an "elaborately low" tone, leading "his voice through many a maze," performing gestures of affected piety, "winding up his mouth / From time to time into an orifice" and casting calculated smiles upon his congregation (p. 825-826). This preacher decorates his sermons with ornate references to Scripture, Shakespeare, and even Ossian, weaving together sacred and secular sources into a showy display of learning and style. The result is an

aestheticized religion, where rhetoric and image replace sincerity and spiritual gravity. Through this depiction, Wordsworth exposes the hollowness of metropolitan religiosity, showing how even faith has been absorbed into the urban economy of spectacle, self-display, and intellectual vanity. From a Simmelian perspective, this moment powerfully illustrates the psychological effects of metropolitan modernity. Simmel argues that in the modern city, individuals' blasé attitude should be considered as a defensive indifference to the constant bombardment of stimuli. To stand out in such an environment, people resort to exaggeration, performance, and self-display, thereby turning life into a stage on which appearance substitutes for authenticity. Wordsworth's preacher embodies precisely this condition; his sermon becomes a performance aimed at capturing attention in a city oversaturated with sensation. Moreover, Simmel notes that modern urban life leads to the intellectualisation of emotions and affects, as feeling gives way to form, and genuine inner experience is replaced by external expression and technique. The preacher's polished rhetoric and theatrical gestures demonstrate this shift from spiritual, heartfelt sincerity to stylised performance. What should be an inward, moral experience becomes an object of spectacle, a symptom of the city's commodification of all aspects of human life, even religion. Thus, Wordsworth's portrayal of the pulpit orator exposes how modernity transforms sacred spaces into arenas of self-promotion, self-exhibition, and self-fashioning, reflecting the broader urban condition where individuality struggles to remain authentic amid the pressures of visibility, artifice, and sensory overload.

William Wordsworth (1994) observes the endless parade of individuals in the city, each striving to distinguish themselves through eccentric dress, exaggerated gestures, or ostentatious behaviour, which he sums up in this phrase: "the strife of singularity" (p. 826). He views this spectacle with detached curiosity, likening it to a traveller idly noticing seashells on the shore: common, transient, and ultimately insignificant. Through this image, Wordsworth critiques the urban obsession with self-display and individual distinction amid mass anonymity. Read through Simmel's theory, this strife of singularity embodies a key psychological response to metropolitan life: the individual's struggle to assert identity within the overwhelming social density of the modern city. As Simmel argues, in an environment where sensory and social stimuli are incessant, people adopt exaggerated behaviours or appearances to defend against invisibility and emotional dullness. Wordsworth's tone of weary detachment underscores his recognition of this phenomenon, not as genuine individuality, but as a performance born of anxiety, where self-expression becomes another symptom of the city's alienating pressure on the human soul. As opposed to the endless parade of individuals in the metropolis, the city's alienating pressure on the human soul and its spectacles of "foolishness and madness in parade" (p. 826), Wordsworth presents a rare moment of quiet human tenderness. Amid the noise and vanity of urban life, he observes a working-class father tenderly cradling his sick child in the sun, a humble yet profound image of love, sacrifice, and moral strength. This scene, where the poet zooms in on a working-class father rather than the middle and middle-upper class residents of the city, stands out, as Wordsworth says, "set off by foil" (p. 826), meaning that genuine emotion and integrity shine more brightly against the city's background of artifice and display. The image of the father who eyes "the poor babe with love unutterable" sharpens the contrast with the metropolitan blasé attitude, alienation and emotional indifference (p. 827). This specular image of attachment between the father and the child that represents genuine love that words fail to describe serves as a foil to the pervasive indifference of metropolitan individuals. From a Simmelian perspective, this moment captures the fragile persistence of authentic human feeling within the alienated space of the metropolis. While the city tends to fragment individuals and dull emotional life through overstimulation and impersonality, the father's

simple act of care reclaims a sense of emotional truth. Such gestures represent fleeting yet vital assertions of human warmth and connection within the mechanized rhythm of modern urban existence.

William Wordsworth (1994) reflects on the overwhelming spectacle of the city, comparing the "huge fermenting mass" of humanity to a "black storm" that highlights individual lives, "single forms and objects" like sunbeams in a valley (p. 827). The "feeling and contemplative regard" of the Romantic poet seeks to distinguish faces and figures amid the boiling mas of humankind (p. 827). In this teeming, restless multitude, individual distinctions blur and boundaries dissolve. In this chaotic urban crowd, distinct faces and identities seem to melt into one another, forming a continuous, almost amorphous flow of human energy. Each person's uniqueness is subsumed within the ceaseless motion, the overlapping sounds, gestures, and appearances of the city, creating a sense of overwhelming anonymity and sensory saturation. The metropolis, in this vision, becomes a living organism: vast, dynamic, and indifferent, where the individual struggles to assert visibility or meaning amid the restless commingling of human lives and the erasure of singularity. Amid the bustling streets, he perceives each face as a "mystery," and his contemplative attention transforms the crowd into a moving, dreamlike procession (p. 827). His gaze eventually falls on a blind beggar, who stands unmoving with a written note explaining his condition. "Amid the moving pageant" the poet is "smitten" with the rare image of "a blind Beggar" who stands "with upright face" and "propped against a wall", and wears on his chest "a written paper" which tells the passers-by his story (p. 827). The beggar's stillness and steadfast expression strike Wordsworth profoundly, symbolizing both the limits of human knowledge and the depth of human experience amid the urban tumult. Wordsworth thinks that the blind beggar constitutes "an apt type" that embodies our place in the universe (p. 827). He gazes at the "shape of that unmoving man" and his "steadfast face and sightless eyes" as though he was "admonished from another world" (p. 827). Amid the chaos and anonymity of the metropolitan crowd, the beggar's presence interrupts the sensory overload and superficiality of the city, compelling Wordsworth to confront the deeper realities of human existence: suffering, mortality, and moral responsibility. The admonition implies both a warning and a lesson; it reminds him of the limits of what we can know, the value of compassion, and the presence of enduring human truths that persist despite the distractions and artificialities of modern urban life. This passage juxtaposes the anonymity and sensory overload of metropolitan life with the quiet dignity of the blind beggar, creating a moral and contemplative foil. The image of the blind beggar shatters the Western modernity into pieces. From a Simmelian perspective, the beggar embodies the exception to the metropolis's impersonal, blasé social environment. In a city where most are absorbed in self-interest and superficial display, the beggar's unmoving presence and transparent vulnerability demand ethical attention. The blind beggar forces the metropolitans to see him. Wordsworth's "second-sight procession" mirrors Simmel's notion of metropolitan consciousness, where overstimulation fosters detachment (p. 827). However, the rare, striking individual interrupts this indifference, reminding the observer of humanity, suffering, and moral responsibility. The beggar thus becomes a symbol of authentic human experience, of vulnerability and transparent humanity, standing out against the chaotic, alienating crowd and prompting reflection on both personal and universal dimensions of life.

William Wordsworth (1994) contrasts the city's constructed spectacles and outward excitements with moments of quiet, reflective experience that require little external stimulation: "the peace / That comes with night; the deep solemnity / Of nature's intermediate hours of rest, / When the great tide of human life stands still" (p. 827). He describes the deep

peace and solemnity of the night: empty streets, infrequent sounds, the calm blending of earth, sky, moonlight, and stars. In these hours, the bustle of human life pauses; the business of the day past and future seems locked away, and the observer can perceive traces of human suffering, like "the feeble salutation from the voice / Of some unhappy woman" (p. 827). These moments allow the mind to engage internally and contemplatively, drawing meaning from stillness rather than spectacle. This passage highlights the contrast between urban overstimulation and the restorative potential of solitude within the modern city. Metropolitan life overwhelms the senses and fosters a defensive detachment born of constant exposure to social and sensory stimuli. Wordsworth's nocturnal scenes offer the Simmelian reserve, an escape from this psychological overload, allowing the individual to reclaim subjectivity, reflection, and emotional depth. The city, though typically a site of incessant motion and crowd-induced impersonality, here becomes a stage for subtle, almost hidden interactions and perceptions, revealing a layer of humanity often lost amid daytime bustles. Wordsworth implies that true understanding of urban life is not found in the spectacle of crowds or public performance, but in these liminal, marginal moments, the rare, quiet glimpses of human vulnerability and the reflective solitude of night. In Simmelian terms, these moments counterbalance the alienating effects of metropolitan modernity, enabling the individual to maintain a sense of moral and emotional agency amid the city's overwhelming impersonality. Wordsworth thus anticipates a key tension in urban life: the simultaneous presence of sensory overload and ethical insight, in which meaningful human experience emerges most clearly not in the crowd but in its relative absence.

William Wordsworth (1994) presents a vivid and overwhelming depiction of the St. Bartholomew Fair, a massive urban spectacle teeming with motion, noise, and sensory chaos. The fair is described as a "Parliament of Monsters" (p. 828), where all manner of entertainments such as buffoons, tumblers, equestrians, exotic performers, automatons, ventriloquists, and freaks of nature, are jumbled together in an anarchic display: "What a shock / For eyes and ears! what anarchy and din, / Barbarian and infernal, —a phantasma, / Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!" (p. 828). The crowd itself is part of the spectacle: men, women, and children surge through the fairgrounds, competing for attention and vying to see and be seen. "A Babylonian London" emerges from Wordsworth's account; the city seems to be "a hell of monstrous anarchy" (Heffernan, 1998, p. 427). Wordsworth emphasizes the sensory overload and confusion of such urban events, portraying the fair as simultaneously fascinating, grotesque, and disorienting. This passage epitomizes the psychological and social conditions of metropolitan life. The city overwhelms the individual with constant stimuli. The St. Bartholomew Fair, with its chaotic crowd, dazzling displays, and cacophony of sound and motion, embodies the extreme of this modern condition: distinct identities and boundaries dissolve during the carnivalesque period, and the individual risks being consumed by the impersonal mass. At the same time, Wordsworth highlights how such spectacles reveal both the creativity and the absurdity of urban life. The "Parliament of Monsters" symbolizes the Promethean reach and folly of human invention, where artifice, entertainment, and performance are amplified in the metropolitan context. Yet the poet's reflective tone indicates the necessity of contemplative distance to navigate this overwhelming scene, echoing Simmel's notion that modern urban consciousness requires a defensive intellectual and emotional detachment to survive the relentless pressures of metropolitan existence. Thus, the passage illustrates the dual nature of the city in Simmel's theory: it is a site of incredible human energy, creativity, and spectacle, but also one of alienation, impersonality, and sensory saturation. Wordsworth's nuanced portrayal captures both the thrill and the moral anxiety of city life, demonstrating how metropolitan environments challenge perception, feeling, and ethical engagement.

William Wordsworth presents the St. Bartholomew Fair as a spectacle of extreme sensory and social intensity, a chaotic scene in which performers, animals, automatons, and crowds intermingle in an almost hallucinatory display. The fair overwhelms the senses through motion, sound, colour, and multiplicity, creating a carnivalesque scene where distinctions between social classes, professions, and individual identities are temporarily erased. The fair exemplifies the metropolitan condition as a dense, heterogeneous urban environment that bombards the individual with stimuli, producing both fascination and strain. Simmel observes that the modern city cultivates the cosmopolitan mentality, which requires individuals to navigate diversity, rapid change, and social difference. In the fair, Wordsworth's depiction of Albino, painted Indians, dwarves, exotic performers, and mechanical contrivances reflects this cosmopolitan encounter: the city exposes inhabitants to an overwhelming variety of appearances, cultures, and behaviours. Yet, while the exposure is intellectually and sensorially stimulating, it also demands psychological detachment. To cope with constant sensory and social bombardment, Wordsworth needs to ascend the showman's platform, seeking distance from the press of the crowd to observe and process the spectacle. Moreover, the "vomiting" and "receiving" of people into the fairground (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 828) mirrors Simmel's idea that the city's crowds produce both intensity of experience and emotional numbness. The metropolitan individual must negotiate the simultaneous exhilaration and alienation inherent in urban life. The fair's "Parliament of Monsters" embodies the Promethean creativity and transgression of human society, illustrating how the city aggregates human invention, ambition, and spectacle into an almost incomprehensible whole. In Simmelian terms, this crowd-mediated spectacle reveals the tension between individuality and social anonymity: each person is both a participant and an imperceptible part of a larger, impersonal mass. Thus, Wordsworth's depiction of the fair aligns with Simmel's understanding of the metropolitan experience: the city offers novelty, cultural variety, and intellectual stimulation, but at the cost of sensory overload, detachment, and emotional strain. The fair becomes a microcosm of the cosmopolitan city, where human diversity and spectacle coexist with impersonality, forcing the observer to develop critical attention, ethical discernment, and aesthetic distance to navigate the urban flux. Transcending its "tangible extensiveness" and its physical boundaries, "the metropolis also becomes the seat of cosmopolitanism," and thus the horizon of the metropolitan individual is enlarged (Simmel, 1971, p. 334). The metropolis extends beyond its physical borders, and its inner life overflows with waves into a far-flung national or international area.

In the last passage of the seventh book, Wordsworth gathers his whole experience of the city and gives it philosophical depth. In this passage, Wordsworth reflects on the chaotic spectacle of the St. Bartholomew Fair and regards it as the "true epitome" of London itself as a place of "blank confusion" where countless individuals and trivial objects are caught in a "perpetual whirl" that melts and reduces all "differences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end" to "one identity" (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 829). In this urban maelstrom, distinctions blur and differences lose meaning, leaving everything reduced to one single identity. The city dissolves all distinctions, blending everything together until individual identities lose their shape and merge into a single, indistinguishable mass. The city's unceasing flux and sensory overload create a kind of mental oppression, a condition so pervasive that even "the highest minds" and "the strongest" ones cannot entirely escape it (p. 829). Yet Wordsworth insists that this chaos is not wholly destructive. For the individual who can observe "in steadiness," who perceives "among least things an under-sense of greatest," the metropolis becomes not a site of alienation but of education (p. 829). Such a mind can discern unity within multiplicity, finding harmony within disorder. Wordsworth connects this perceptual steadiness to his earlier experiences with Nature's vast and orderly forms, such as mountains, rivers, seas, and

deserts, which had cultivated in him an "attention" and "comprehensiveness" capable of organizing the disordered stimuli of the city (p. 829). Ultimately, he concludes that even in "London's vast domain," he could still feel "the spirit of Nature" and "the soul of Beauty and enduring Life" (p. 829). Amidst the city's "meagre lines and colours," and the "press of self-destroying, transitory things," he experiences a transcendental harmony, a composure born of moral and imaginative vision (p. 829). Nature's spiritual order, he realizes, can survive even in the most chaotic human environments. The "blank confusion" and "perpetual whirl" that Wordsworth describes anticipate precisely the Simmelian description of the city as a space of intensified sensory experience, fragmentation, and overstimulation, and a world of constant novelty and impersonal encounters that threatens to exhaust the individual's emotional life.

The metropolitan mind is overwhelmed by difference and triviality, forced to process too much, too quickly, until distinctions lose meaning. Wordsworth acknowledges the danger of mental numbness when he speaks of the "oppression, under which even highest minds must labour" (Wordsworth, 1994, p. 829). Yet unlike Simmel's modern urbanite, Wordsworth refuses resignation. He seeks an alternative form of adaptation, not indifference, but attentive transcendence, which distinguishes him from a detached flaneur. His steadiness of vision represents a moral and imaginative response to the metropolis: rather than retreating into detachment, he reasserts the integrative power of perception and memory, cultivated through nature, to resist fragmentation. Simmel notes that the metropolis breeds an intellectualised consciousness since individuals rely more on rationality and abstraction than on emotional depth. Wordsworth's response inverts this tendency. He demonstrates how the imaginative and spiritual faculties can operate even in urban modernity, finding beauty and harmony where others perceive only chaos. His insight that "the Spirit of Nature was upon me there" shows that the natural and the urban are not opposed but continuous at a deeper, spiritual level (p. 829). This continuity represents a kind of Simmelian reconciliation: the individual regains selfhood and coherence not by rejecting the city but by internalizing and reinterpreting its multiplicity through an imaginative framework despite "the press / Of self-destroying, transitory things" (p. 829.)

Overall, in the seventh book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the sensory overload of urban life, which aligns with Simmel's argument that modern cities produce a blasé attitude due to constant exposure to stimuli. Simmel argues that the rapid tempo of modern city life dulls individuals' responses to external stimuli, leading to detachment and superficial relationships. Wordsworth, too, explores this theme in his poetry, where the natural world is often depicted as a refuge from sensory overstimulation. London is "pulsing with overwhelming and seemingly infinite chains of stimuli" (Stokes, 2015, p. 217). Lewis (2000) also contends that Wordsworth's nature poetry serves as an antidote to modern overstimulation. Wordsworth's description of London contrasts sharply with his tranquil depictions of nature. Thus, Wordsworth's poetry aligns with Simmel's view that modernity leads to an overload of stimuli, numbing human sensitivity, and reducing authentic experience. However, Hartman (1964) argues that reverie, "that dream-like void", allows Wordsworth "to pass unscathed through London" (p. 238). For Simmel, modern life creates a fundamental alienation from organic, pre-modern ways of living. Wordsworth similarly presents nature as a counterforce to the isolating effects of urbanization and industrialization.

Conclusion: Wordsworth as a Poet of Urbanity and Critic of Modernity

Through the lens of Simmel's sociology, Wordsworth appears not merely as a nostalgic poet of nature but as an early critic of modern alienation, commodification, and sensory overload. His poetry embodies a Romantic resistance to the fragmentation of

experience that Simmel later theorized. By examining Wordsworth's poetic response to urbanization, sensory excess, and commodification, we see how his work anticipates later critiques of modernity. Just as Simmel explored how individuals navigate the complexities of modern urban life, Wordsworth's poetry offers a vision of how one might reclaim depth, meaning, and connection in an increasingly fragmented world.

Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" provides a foundational understanding of how modern urban existence transforms human consciousness and social relations. He argues that the relentless pace, density, and sensory overload of metropolitan life compel individuals to adapt psychologically and socially to survive the incessant flow of stimuli. Unlike the emotional intimacy and steady rhythms of rural life, the metropolis demands an intellectual, rational mode of being. City dwellers cultivate an emotional detachment that shields them from overstimulation but also fosters alienation and indifference. This psychic defence, together with the impersonal logic of the money economy, reduces individuality to calculable exchange value and makes social interactions more formalized and instrumental. Yet, paradoxically, the metropolis also becomes a space of liberation and self-expression: amid anonymity and impersonality, individuals gain freedom to shape their own identities and pursue intellectual and artistic autonomy. Thus, Simmel portrays urban modernity as a condition of tension between stimulation and fatigue, isolation and freedom, impersonality and individuality, and as a duality that profoundly defines the modern human experience.

In Book VII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's portrayal of London captures the complex psychological and social dimensions of modern urban life, thereby anticipating, in poetic form, many of the insights later articulated by Simmel. Through his vivid depictions of the city's crowds, spectacles, and chaotic energy, Wordsworth presents London as a site of sensory overload and moral contradiction: a space where excitement, wonder, and diversity coexist with alienation, fatigue, and emotional detachment. The poet's shifting responses from awe and curiosity to disillusionment and introspection reflect the dual nature of metropolitan existence that Simmel describes. Both perceive the city as an environment that overwhelms the senses and compels the mind to develop protective mechanisms such as indifference or abstraction. Yet, amid this turbulence, Wordsworth also discerns moments of moral insight and aesthetic reflection, such as the isolated figure of a beggar, the tenderness of a father with his child, or the quietude of the city at night, where individuality and human feeling reassert themselves against the homogenizing pressures of urban life. Ultimately, Wordsworth's London experience, like Simmel's sociological vision, reveals the metropolis as a crucible of modern consciousness: a place of fragmentation and impersonality, but also of freedom, awareness, and creative renewal.

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