

# The Interplay between the *urbs* and the psyche: Spatialized Self and Subjectivized Space in William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*

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## Introduction: Wordsworth's Encounter with London

Book VII of *The Prelude*, titled "Residence in London," chronicles Wordsworth's experience of London in 1791, between 1793 and 1795, and again in 1802 (Havens, 1941, 435). Aside from his visit to Paris in 1792, his journey to London marked his first encounter with a great city. At the time, London was the largest city in Europe, not only in terms of population but also as a political, social, and cultural powerhouse (Rodger, 2012, 87). During the eighteenth century, the city had evolved into a global commercial hub, drawing in economic migrants, visitors, and travelers from across Europe and beyond (O'Byrne, 2018, 1). By the 1820s and 1830s, the grandeur of Regency London's new buildings and streets had earned it the title of "metropolis". As a metropolitan center, London's heterogeneity and diversity made it what Brantz et al. call a "thick space" (2012, 19). At the height of the Industrial Revolution, London stood at the most advanced stage of capitalist development (Robles, 2017, 141), becoming a hub of "mercantile" and industrial capital (Shaw, 1993, 88). The city grew into an "endless, illimitable," "huge" and

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“complex” world—an “unknowable labyrinth” (Coverley, 2005,15). Wordsworth encountered such a labyrinth and apparently found it hard to map affectively and cognitively.

Many scholars have examined Book 7 through the lens of the city/nature duality, emphasizing the Industrial Revolution, rapid urbanization and intensification of the opposition between the countryside and the urban world.<sup>3</sup> This urban-rural dichotomy gained “mythological force” over time (Stevenson, 2003, 20), leading to a reductive reading of Wordsworth’s stance toward London. However, his engagement with the city is far more nuanced. Rather than merely presenting London as an overwhelming contrast to nature, Wordsworth portrays it as a site of contradictory possibilities which is evidenced in his description of London as a “mighty city” (Wordsworth, 1805, 7:696; 1850, 7:723).<sup>4</sup> A “great city” (Wordsworth,1805, 7:593) which arouses in Wordsworth, to use Bennett’s expression, “exhilaration” at the “enormity of “ human work” (Fenton, 2005, p 421-422).<sup>5</sup> He is awed by “London’s vast domain”<sup>6</sup> (Wordsworth,1850, 7:765), yet also feels oppressed by its “overflowing streets” and the “mystery” of its faces. His reaction oscillates between “strong wonder” and “obscure delight” (Wordsworth,1805, 7:87), indicating a mix of admiration, risk, and fear. This interplay of emotions suggests that Wordsworth undergoes both “a cognitive assessment” and an “emotional response” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht, 2011, 229). London presents a “motley” array of images and experiences (Wordsworth, 1850, 7:154). Unlike his more familiar, rural landscapes, the city

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<sup>3</sup> The literature on Wordsworth's “Residence in London” can generally be categorized into three groups; a large group of studies fall into the city/country dichotomy and valorization of nature, imagination and dis-alienation (O’Byrne, 2014; Lehan, 1998; Hiller et al. 2019; Versluys, 1987; Weitzman, 1975; Kramer, 1987; Friedman, 1989; Gabriele, 2008; King, 1993; Heffernan, 1998; Makdisi, 1998; Chase, 1986; Jacobus, 1979; Stokes, 2012; Loffler, 2017; Williams, 1973; Wolfreys ,1998; Caeners 2013 in Loffler; Shaw, 1993; Wiley, 1998; Cooper, 2008; Wolfreys, 2018; Coverley, 2005; Arac, 1980). However, there are some scholars who argue that the city is not so repellent to Wordsworth (Heffernan, 1998; Inwood, 1998; Hertz, 1985). Finally, some scholars complain that Wordsworth's view of London in Book VII is ambivalent (Havens, 1941; Gill, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*. All future references to *The Prelude* are based on Norton edition.

<sup>5</sup> In the original German version of *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Georg Simmel, too, uses the word *Großstadt*, or big city, rather than “metropolis.”

<sup>6</sup> In 1805 version, Wordsworth writes ‘that vast receptacle’ (7.765), but in 1850 version he changes it to ‘domain.’ In Lefebvre’s thinking, they are diametrically opposite to one another. ‘The receptacle’ connotes passivity and fixity.

initially does not “mirror” Wordsworth’s own geographical, historical, and social background. Instead, he finds himself a stranger<sup>7</sup> in a world defined by rapid economic and social transformation. London becomes an unfathomable Other, an “abstract” space, which Aitken terms “the chimera of capitalism” (2014, 172). Wordsworth’s encounter with London thus takes place at the intersection of subjectivity, visuality, and spatiality. The city is not merely an external environment; it affects the mind, while the mind, in turn, subjectivizes space.

To analyze Wordsworth’s complex engagement with London, this essay draws on Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space articulated in his oeuvre, most particularly in *The Production of Space* (1991) where he theorizes space through three interconnected dimensions: Spatial practice/the perceived space/ the physical; Representations of space/the conceived space/the mental; and spaces of representation/the lived /the social (the subjective, experiential, and symbolic dimensions of space, shaped by emotions, memories, and cultural practices). By applying Lefebvre’s spatial triad, we can better understand how Wordsworth experiences, conceptualizes, and represents London in *The Prelude*. His bodily movement through the city exemplifies spatial practice, while his struggle to comprehend its complexity reflects the challenges of cognitive mapping within the conceived space. At the same time, his poetic rendering of London evokes a lived space, where emotions and memories transform the urban environment into something deeply personal. Ultimately, Wordsworth’s response to London goes beyond the simplistic urban-rural dichotomy. Instead, his exploration of the metropolis reveals a dynamic and multifaceted engagement with urban modernity—one that captures both the exhilaration and alienation of life in the emerging capitalist world.

### **Spatial Practice: the Urban Experience and Wordsworth’s Embodied Perception**

Spatial practice is the trajectory through which the urban walker’s body navigates and discovers the city, shaping both his experience and his own position within it. Spatial practice is enacted through the body—“hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work” and non-work activities (Butler, 2012, 126). Thus, the body plays the primary role in materializing space:

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<sup>7</sup>Stranger incorporates both nearness and remoteness in human relation (Simmel in Varli-Görk, 2014, 141).

When 'Ego' arrives in an unknown country or city, he first experiences it through every part of his body—through his senses of smell and taste, . . . his legs and feet. His hearing picks up the noises and the quality of the voices; his eyes are assailed by new impressions. For it is *by means of the body that space is perceived, lived—and produced* (Lefebvre, 1991, 162, emphasis added).

This embodied perception of space is central to Wordsworth's experience of London. As he moves through the city, he charts his journey and records his impressions: "we *turn* / . . . into some sequestered nook, / . . . / At leisure *thence, through* tracts of thin resort, / And *sights* and *sounds* that come at intervals, / We *take our way*" (1805, 7:185-90). As the domain of embodied experience, spatial practice is the realm of sensory stimulation from "the lights, sounds, smells, colors, shapes, patterns, textures" of the city (Mehta, 2013, 134). Similarly, Wordsworth experiences London with his whole body: "I had *felt* in *heart* and *soul* the *shock* / Of the *huge* town's *first presence*, and had *paced* / Her *endless* streets, a *transient* visitant" (1850, 7:66-68; emphasis added). Yet, the city's overwhelming stimuli provoke an equivocal response. The term "endless" suggests an unease with the vast and ungraspable nature of the city, reflecting an urban environment that inundates his senses: "the quick *dance* / Of *colours, lights* and *forms*, the Babel din, / The *endless stream* of men, and *moving* things, / . . . / The *glittering* chariots with their *pampered steeds*, / . . . / . . . / . . . the *rash speed* / Of coaches *travelling* far *whirled* on with horn / *Loud blowing* (Wordsworth, 1805, 7:156-67; emphasis added). The city's rapid succession of impressions renders differentiation difficult, forcing Wordsworth to use collective nouns to assimilate these impressions into aggregates to represent the social actors and objects (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 37). Yet, as Lefebvre argues "[E]ach living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space" (1991, 170) (emphasis in original). Thus, movement through urban space does more than record sensory experience—it actively produces new spaces and brings new objects into focus. While Wordsworth's mind *conceives* the city, his body *perceives the city* and *produces* its own rhythms, and like a 'metronome,' his body listens to the streets and towns as if it listens to a symphony. His urban walking generates situated and experiential knowledge, rather than abstract notions of space (Davidson, 2007, 34). As he moves through the material environment, he transforms an "unfamiliar space-time into practised space-time" (García, 2020, 157), refining his mental image of the city. This process reveals a striking mismatch between his childhood expectations of London—imbued with "airy palaces and

gardens built / By genii of romance” (1805, 7:82-83)—and the reality he now perceives. Wordsworth's walking across London generates an understanding which helps Wordsworth locate himself out of the “blank confusion” of the city (1850, 722). As Wordsworth traverses London, he encounters people and objects that disrupt the abstract rhythms of the city, generating what Davidson terms “moments of living in the now” (2007, 85). These moments emerge as ruptures in the linear rhythm of abstract space, serving as acts of presence that reveal a deeper totality. A moment “*is constituted by a choice which singles it out and separates it from a muddle or a confusion, i.e., from an initial ambiguity*” (Lefebvre, 1961, 344, emphasis in original). Within the hustle and bustle of the city, moments signify a “presence” that reveals “the totality of possibilities.” Lefebvre states: “[Presence] supposes and implies an act: the *poietic act*. This also implies an adherence to *being*, to the fact of being and to the possibility of a fullness that is never fixed nor fully defined” (Lefebvre in Revol, 2020, 178)(emphasis in original). For Wordsworth, these disruptions allow him to distinguish between the city’s “common produce” (1850, 7:587) and “those individual sights” that evoke a deeper emotional response (1850, 7:599-602). The most “touching” impressions, he insists, must be “noted and kept in memory” (1850, 7:598-99). One such moment occurs when he observes a father holding his sickly child, who had been brought to “breathe the fresher air” (1850, 7:603-10). Unconcerned with passersby, the father gazes at his child with an “unutterable” love (1850, 7:611-18), embodying what Lefebvre calls a poietic act—a moment of intense presence which is a manifestation of “love” and has “intensity,” “paroxysmal fullness,” and “presence” (1961, 345). This moment of pure presence disrupts the impersonal rhythms of capitalist space and invokes a shared human connection beyond alienation (Shields, 1999, 99). Wordsworth “lost / Amid the *moving pageant*” (1805, 7:599-609)(emphasis added) and surrounded by undifferentiated figures, he encounters a blind beggar. As abject, the blind beggar throws the city into crisis, and as an incomprehensible figure, he also throws Wordsworth's subjectivity into crisis, although at the same time he becomes a criterion for Wordsworth's knowledge about himself, the world, and an augury of another world. Wordsworth’s encounter with the blind beggar signifies the potential blindness of representation, knowledge, and the act of seeing. As the “user” of a directly lived space, he views the “disgusting sight”<sup>8</sup> of the blind on the street as opening up new epistemological and ontological

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<sup>8</sup> In accordance with city ordinances in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the disabled people were not allowed to attend public places (Loukaitou-Sideris, and Renia, 2011, 43).

possibilities that “emerge between the physical space that is perceived by the senses and the discursive space that orders our way of seeing and doing”(Marshall, 2013, 57 in Aitken, 2014 167). Wordsworth defies the city’s ordinance about the blind in the city and insists on his own way of seeing, indicating an “aesthetic rupture” between vision and visibility, allowing “new ways of seeing and doing” (Ibid.167). Visibility as a “cultural construct” resulting from “the entire sum of discourses” is distinguished from vision as “unmediated visual experience”(Bryson in Rose, 2016, 170). Each seeing is only one experience among a myriad of visual experiences and ,consequently, presupposes a blind spot within sight itself. Most probably echoing the then-current anti-urban tradition in the West, Wordsworth's calling London a “blank confusion” reveals this blindness. We see the urban, “ the new field,” with the eyes, concepts, practices and theories inherited from industrialization which are “*reductive* of the emerging reality” and, therefore, we cannot “see that reality”(Lefebvre, 2003, 29)( emphasis in original). Blindness is a matter of “our not-seeing and not-knowing,” a matter of seeing the world through discourses and presuppositions. It is a failure not to “perceive or conceive . . . complex spaces ” and also not to recognize the “blinding” of dogmatic “assumptions” along with “the blinded (misunderstood)” (Ibid., 29, 30).

Rather than portraying London as an oppressive force, Wordsworth’s experience ultimately reflects Lefebvre’s idea that urban “ is a style of thinking...toward the possible in all areas” (2009, 288). While Romanticism often yearns for a lost pastoral ideal, Lefebvre advocates for finding disalienated possibilities within the urban (Shields, 1999, 173). The blind beggar, though marginalized, signifies a “differential space”<sup>9</sup> that resists the homogenizing effects of capitalist abstraction (Thompson, 2020, 259). The blind beggar offers a moment of presence and knowledge(Kofman and Lebas, 1996, 30). Although the “unmanageable sight” of London might “weary out the eye,” Wordsworth's dismay subsides because London “is not wholly so” to one who “looks / In steadiness” and has an “under-sense of greatest, sees the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole” (1805, 7:709-13). Through his walking, Wordsworth seeks to transform London from a habitat into an oeuvre—a space for artistic and existential meaning (Lefebvre,

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Differential space’ is space of ‘difference’ rather than ‘homogeneity’(Lefebvre, 1991, 52).

1996, 173). Wordsworth's contemplative attitude ("steadiness") turns him into a philosopher who like Lefebvre can sense the "under-sense of greatest" and the "always new,"<sup>10</sup> reframing the urban as a site not just of alienation but of creative potential (Merrifield, 2006, 69).

### **Wordsworth's Spatial practice through London as Embedment of Expansion into Contraction**

Representations of space are the product of scientific reasoning and cultural ideologies (Butler, 2012, 126). Literature, too, creates such spaces which despite being imaginative convey a particular perspective on space (Liinamaa, 2020, 343). Particularly, literary works featuring an *I* as their speaker produce representations of space colored by a specific, personal perspective (Davidson, 2007, 80). In Book VII, Wordsworth constructs space in three distinct ways: first, through his mental image of London, shaped by stories he heard as a child before ever visiting the city; second, through his re-presentation of London based on the images he now conceives of it; and third, the very Book VII itself acts as a representation of space as a whole. The London presented in Book VII is multifaceted and complex, embodying a "complex urban texture" (Son, 2006, 182). This vast urban landscape accommodates a wide variety of spaces, from churches like St. Paul's to courts, parliaments, theatres, and even palaces and gardens such as those at Vauxhall and Ranelagh. These spaces, whether monumental (e.g., the Tower of London) or commercial (e.g., Bartholomew Fair), reflect the stratification of London as an abstract space echoes Lefebvre's observation that certain spaces—castles, palaces, cathedrals—represent the power of the wealthy and the state, spatializing power through their mere existence (Shaw, 2020, 199). These spaces are manifestations of the abstract space which consists of "the urban spaces of state-regulated neo-capital characterised by private ownership, restricted access, restricted performance, commodified exchange value and the tendency to homogenisation" (Leary-Owhin et al. 2020, 7-8). The very nature of these spaces aligns with Lefebvre's concept of capitalist space: a place where productive power is exercised and where the subjectivity of human beings is often minimized in favor of a more generalized, abstract existence.

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<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre thought of the future and its possibilities instead of disabling nostalgic desire for the past (2004, 90). Lefebvre is a philosophical romantic who celebrates "the unquashable character of 'joy' and 'life'" (Shields, 1999, 34).

When Wordsworth walks through London, encountering its various institutions, offices, monuments, and buildings, he is traversing through an abstract space deeply influenced by capitalism. The city's division into distinct sections, each functioning according to its own rules, mirrors Lefebvre's ideas about the fragmentation and control inherent in capitalist urban spaces. A particularly striking example of this is Wordsworth's experience at St. Bartholomew's Fair.<sup>11</sup> The Fair encapsulates the contradictions of abstract space, overwhelming Wordsworth with its noise, chaos, and confusion, yet it also compels him to engage with the city in a more philosophical manner. The Fair thrills Wordsworth with its monstrosity: "phantasma,/ Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight and sound." As a "*shock/ For eyes and ears,*" an "anarchy and din/ Barbarian and infernal" (1850, 7:685-88)(emphasis added), the Fair lays "The whole creative powers of Man asleep" (1805, 7:677-81). Apostrophizing it as "blank confusion," Wordsworth considers the Fair as a "true epitome" of "the mighty city" of London (1850, 7:722) where "the same perpetual whirl / Of trivial objects" has been "melted and reduced / To one identity" (1850, 7:725-30). The Fair concretizes urbanization which, in Merrifield's terms, is perceived in one's "mind's eye" as "a chaotic yet determined process," an aggregate of colour, motion, shape, sight and sound (2013, 6). It represents a "set of things/signs and their formal relationships," which is "full and empty"(Lefebvre, 1991, 49), at once an "[empty] blank [full of] confusion" or chaos that his senses cannot fathom.<sup>12</sup>

Book VII also represents the city's inhabitants as abstractions—faces and facades stripped of their individuality, memories, and emotions. Losing their singularity and difference, they are dwarfed into shapes, forms, and faces because capitalist space prioritizes exchange value over human subjectivity, reducing individuals to mere commodities, their personal stories and experiences overlooked (Shaw, 2020, 205). A city where "everything [is] face and façade" demonstrates the "dominance of the visual (*le perçu*) and the primacy of the façade"(Lefebvre, 1991, 274). These faces are emblematic of a larger process of alienation, where the "totality" of human experience is obscured by the fetishization of appearances and the dominance of the visual (Ibid., 274). For Wordsworth, the people of London are largely unrecognizable, their identities flattened into abstract representations: "Face after face" (1850, 7:176-77), "a mystery"

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<sup>11</sup> "The universal exhibition as a totality" (in Stratigakos, 2012, 300)

<sup>12</sup> Tajbakhsh defines the indeterminacy of identity as "confusion." Wordsworth's use of "confusion" is equivocal since it can refer both to his own identity and London's identity (Tajbakhsh,2001, 93).

(1850, 7:597), the very embodiment of abstract space that Lefebvre describes as both expressive and dissimulative. In this way, the city itself becomes a space of contradictions, where appearance and reality collide in a play of presence and absence.

The dialectic of reduction and expansion—the logic of equivalence versus the logic of difference—forms the central tension in Book VII. The logic of equivalence operates by simplifying and reducing the number of positions in a given space, whereas the logic of difference works by expanding possibilities and embracing complexity (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, 130). Lefebvre’s spatial practice, which seeks to understand space as a dynamic process shaped by lived experience, aligns with the logic of difference, expanding the spatial possibilities of the city as experienced by the individual. Wordsworth’s journey through London, encountering new spaces, new contradictions, and new perspectives, exemplifies this process of spatial practice, wherein the complexity of the city is revealed through the embodied act of walking. Conversely, the representations of these spaces adhere more to the logic of equivalence, simplifying and abstracting these complex urban realities into manageable forms. In this dialectical process, Book VII emerges as a battlefield between simplification and expansion. On one hand, the city as represented in the poem is an abstract space, where the logic of capitalism reduces individuals and experiences to mere commodities. On the other hand, Wordsworth’s spatial practice—his walking and his reflections—allows him to engage with the complexity of the city and understand it in a more nuanced way. This tension between the reduction of space and the expansion of its possibilities mirrors the larger struggles within capitalist society, where abstract forces attempt to dominate and simplify, while lived experiences push back against this simplification, seeking to reintroduce complexity, subjectivity, and difference into the urban landscape.

### **Negotiation between practice, representation, and significance: Turning London into a Work of Art**

The urban space of London, as represented in Book VII, is a multifaceted arena that encompasses not only the abstract space (which signifies reduction and simplification) and physical space (which suggests expansion and complication), but also a profoundly affective, symbolic space—what Henri Lefebvre calls a “lyrical event,” one that is “almost always” open to “the political” (Aitken, 2014, 11). In this regard, the space of representation is not a passive

backdrop but an active, dynamic force. Lefebvre asserts that this space “is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre... It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. It is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic” (1991, 42). This notion of space—where the subjective experience of individuals intersects with the objective representations of space—becomes crucial in understanding the urban experience. The spaces of representation, therefore, are dual in character, containing two intertwined moments: the lived, everyday urban space that is directly experienced by inhabitants, replete with cultural memories, images, and symbols, and the emotional, artistic interpretations of this space by poets, writers, and artists (Leary-Owhin et al., 2020, 7). In Book VII, the spaces of representation mirror these two moments. On one hand, Wordsworth paints a vivid picture of natural elements functioning as representations within the abstract urban space of London. On the other hand, the poem itself stands as an artistic rendering of this city space. Lefebvre argues that “the only products of representational spaces are symbolic works,” such as poetry, which are often “unique” and may set in train ‘aesthetic’ trends” (1991, 42). In this context, despite the pervasive forces of capitalism and industrialism, which seek to dominate and commodify natural spaces, Wordsworth affirms that within “London’s vast domain,” he could still feel the presence of “The Spirit of Nature” (1850, 7:765-70). His poetic engagement with London highlights the tensions between nature and the city, between the abstract space of industrial capitalism and the elusive, ineffable quality of nature. Wordsworth, for example, contrasts the “endless stream of men” rushing to work with the timeless “clouds and sky above” (1805, 7:160). The “endless streets” of London symbolize the city as primarily “the place of repetition”(Tambling, 2017, 218), an abstract “quantitative” space that “erases distinctions”(Lefebvre, 1991, 49), where the sky and clouds above offer a glimpse of another, cyclical form of time that resists the mechanistic grind of urban life. Lefebvre’s concept of “rhythmanalysis” provides a valuable framework for understanding these contrasts. He explains that “eurhythmia,” or harmonious rhythms, occur when natural and social rhythms align, whereas “arrhythmia” arises when discordant rhythms—such as those between the city and nature—generate suffering and disorder (2004,16). In the modern city, the rhythmic patterns of life are often “overwhelmed” by the linear, quantifying nature of industrial capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Despite the efforts to erase the natural, these “moments of

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<sup>13</sup> Capitalism instills arrhythmia into the life following Enlightenment's stress on separating nature from the society (Otway, 2014, 218).

spirit” and “poetry,” embodied in natural elements like the sky and clouds, persist as counterforces to the urban machine (Lefebvre, 1966, 122). Capitalism “kills nature” and “goes as far as threatening the last resource: nature, the fatherland, roots” (2004, 53). He further contrasts the “product” of capitalism, which is reproducible and repetitive, with the “work” of nature, which is spontaneous and unique (1991, 70). In this way, the natural elements within the urban fabric of London can be seen as “spaces of representation” that transcend their immediate physicality, becoming infused with cosmic and vital rhythms that defy the deterministic logic of capitalist space (Wilson, 2013, 376).<sup>14</sup> The conflict between the natural and the urban, the cyclical and the linear, is at the heart of Wordsworth’s portrayal of London. In moving through the city, he experiences not only the tangible space of streets, buildings, and crowds but also the “psychic states” that arise from this urban experience, such as the vertigo induced by the “tensions or exhilarations of time-space compression” (Harvey, 2006, 282). This concept of “space-time compression” encapsulates the ways in which urban spaces—especially large cities—generate a simultaneous sense of both exhilaration and anxiety. The “great” city simultaneously produces feelings of “exhilaration, fear, and apprehension” due to its complex physical and symbolic form (Stevenson, 2003, 10, 3). This dynamic is mirrored in Wordsworth’s own perception of London, which is deeply ambivalent and contradictory. He is both drawn to the city and repelled by it, sensing both its power and its alienation.

The space of representation in literary works is not simply an abstract concept but an active, lived experience for readers. As Fyfe argues, “the representation of space in literary works also constitutes a space of representation” (1996, 389). Readers of Book VII, for example, do not merely interpret a fixed set of symbols and images—they actively inhabit the space of the poem, thereby “producing” that space through their own interpretation (Davidson, 2007, 39, 37). This process of interpretation mirrors the way urban walkers engage with the city, deciphering and re-writing the spaces<sup>15</sup> they move through according to their own perceptions and experiences (Murail, 2017, 68). As urban theorists have shown, the act of walking in the city is a kind of “embodied mobility” through which individuals assert their identity and create meaning within

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<sup>14</sup> To Lefebvre sun, sea, festival, waste, expense are spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 59).

<sup>15</sup> Reading resembles writing of the text on the page as Lefebvre writes “To a certain extent the city began as writing on the ground” (1971, 154).

the urban fabric (Lehtovuori, Tartia, and Cerrone, 2020, 331). In this sense, urban walking becomes a way of negotiating and re-negotiating one's relationship to the city, of constructing oneself through the city's spaces. This dialectical process of reading, interpreting, and inhabiting the poem reflects Lefebvre's tripartite framework for understanding space: spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation. In the case of Book VII, the spatial practice involves Wordsworth's perception of the city, which is filtered through his subjective experience of walking through London; the representations of space involve both the poetic depiction of London as well as the historical and cultural images of the city that Wordsworth draws upon; and the spaces of representation emerge through the reader's own engagement with the poem, as they bring their own perceptions and lived experiences to the text. This complex interplay between these three spatial moments—practice, representation, and significance—gives rise to the equivocal nature of urban texts. As Moore suggests, readers often “condense together ‘contraries,’ such as suspension and movement,” producing a “contradictory state that resists interpretation” (41). Due to the simultaneity of three spatial moments of practice, representations, and significance, and their possible discordances, Wordsworth's attitude towards London, to use Stevenson's words, is “deeply contradictory” and ambiguous (2003, 3). He is at once attracted and repelled.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines *The Prelude* (Book VII) through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, exploring how Wordsworth experiences and interprets London through embodied perception and movement. Rather than observing the city passively, Wordsworth actively navigates it, producing meaning through his sensory engagement. His journey reveals a tension between abstraction and lived experience, alienation and presence, contraction and expansion.

At first, London overwhelms Wordsworth with its rapid succession of stimuli—the lights, sounds, smells, and endless crowds blur into an indistinguishable mass. The capitalist city reduces individuals to faceless entities, forcing Wordsworth to assimilate impressions through collective nouns and abstractions. Yet, certain “moments of presence” disrupt this homogenization, such as his encounters with a blind beggar and a father holding his sick child. These moments rupture the impersonal rhythms of the city, allowing for a deeper emotional connection that challenges the alienating effects of urban life.

A key theme is the dialectic of reduction and expansion. The city functions both as an abstract capitalist space, where economic forces dominate, and as an oeuvre—a space of creativity, play, and human expression. Wordsworth's movement through London generates situated and experiential knowledge, helping him transform an unfamiliar, chaotic space into something intelligible and meaningful. His childhood fantasies of London—imagined as a city of "airy palaces"—are replaced by a more complex vision that balances material reality with poetic imagination.

The research also explores blindness as both a literal and metaphorical theme. Wordsworth's encounter with the blind beggar forces him to question dominant ways of seeing and recognize the limitations of inherited perceptions. His defiance of the city's imposed visual order signifies an aesthetic rupture, allowing him to assert his own mode of perception. This aligns with Lefebvre's distinction between vision (immediate experience) and visibility (socially constructed ways of seeing)—Wordsworth's urban practice reshapes how space is perceived and understood.

Another crucial contrast is between the mechanized repetition of the city and the organic rhythms of nature. Wordsworth finds solace in elements like the sky and clouds, which introduce a cyclical, non-capitalist temporality resisting urban uniformity. Lefebvre's concept of "rhythmanalysis" explains this interplay—while capitalist space imposes rigid, linear rhythms, natural cycles offer a sense of harmony and renewal.

Ultimately, the study argues that Wordsworth's London is not just a site of alienation but a space for self-realization and artistic transformation. His poetic engagement with the city turns it from a fragmented, commodified space into an intelligible work of art, affirming the role of perception, memory, and poetic vision in shaping urban experience. By negotiating between abstraction and lived reality, Wordsworth reveals that urban space is not fixed but actively produced through movement, reflection, and creative interpretation.

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