**London and Urban Culture in Eighteenth-Century Literature**

**Abstract:**

This essay provides an overview of some of the key critical approaches to the literature of eighteenth-century London over the last two decades, before going on to explore a series of examples of the figure of the new arrival in London from the literature of the period. The outsider or new arrival became, for eighteenth-century writers, something to think with, and offered an opportunity to examine London’s sense of its own modernity, and interrogate the ways in which commerce might be reshaping social interactions in the city.

 London is, in many ways, at the heart of eighteenth-century literature. As John Brewer puts it, “London, both as a real place and as an imagined locale in art and literature, was the focus of aspiration and the seat of imagination for many eighteenth-century Britons” (35). As the centre of the publishing industry, it was the place where periodicals, poems, novels, and plays were produced and consumed. London was growing and changing rapidly in this period, and eighteenth-century literature sought to address the reality and the experience of this transformation. At the start of the century, as Cynthia Wall notes, the devastation wrought by the Great Fire of 1666 was still being worked through as “the demands of rebuilding the city generated an intense and widespread interest in urban redefinition that shaped a new set of technologies and a new set of literatures” (ix). In the decades that followed, Miles Ogborn shows, a number of new or reimagined spaces in the city – including, in his account, the street, the pleasure garden, and the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes – reflected “processes and transformations that marked them, and in some ways, London as ‘modern’” (36). Far larger than any other European capital, London attracted economic migrants and fashionable visitors from across the country as well as travellers from around the world who came to marvel at the city that had become a global commercial capital. Not all were delighted with what they saw: Matthew Bramble, in an oft-cited passage from Tobias Smollett’s *Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), captured the visceral antipathy of some when he lamented a world where “there is no distinction or subordination left – The different departments of life are jumbled together…rambling, riding, rolling, rushing, justling, mixing, bouncing, cracking, and crashing in one vile ferment of stupidity and corruption” (84). Nevertheless, whether it inspired delight or disgust, London certainly captured the eighteenth-century imagination.

Over the last two decades a number of works have examined diverse areas of life in eighteenth-century London, from coffeehouses and bookselling to preaching, poverty, and prostitution (Brant and Whyman, Ellis, Farooq, Gattrell, Henderson, Hitchcock, Mauger et. al., Shoemaker). Given the ubiquity of London in eighteenth-century literature, and the range of works that have examined aspects of life in the metropolis, it would be impossible to offer a comprehensive survey of literary accounts of the city in this period and critical responses to them. In what follows, I want briefly to look at two strands of contemporary scholarship that have helped us to explore eighteenth-century London anew, and then, in the light of this work, to consider the ways in which the figure of the new arrival, an outsider who is sometimes disoriented and disconcerted, sometimes delighted and diverted by what he or she sees, is so often used to organize the representation of the city.

As already noted, one strand of enquiry that has illuminated our understanding of eighteenth-century London has considered the emergence of a distinctly modern city by focusing on the processes involved in shaping the capital’s various spaces. Cynthia Wall’s *Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge, 1998) and Erik Bond’s *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Ohio, 2007) – and, in the field of cultural geography, Miles Ogborn’s *Spaces of Modernity: London’s Geographies, 1680-1780* (Guilford Press, 1998) – have addressed some of the ways in which eighteenth-century writers describe and give meaning to urban space in the wake of the differently transformative moments of the Great Fire and the Glorious Revolution. For Wall, the literary productions of the period between 1666 and 1730 “share with the technologies of surveying, mapping, rebuilding, and officially redescribing the city an attempt to reinvest a city emptied of nominal topographical familiarity with comprehensible meaning, to reattach some sort of signification to the signs, both literal and figurative, of the city’s streets and structures” (ix). In Bond’s account, the literature of eighteenth-century London is able “to offer alternatives for urban governance…[and] essential blueprints for reimagining London’s infrastructure” (xii-xiii). As authors brought their characters to the city, they took on the role, in Bond’s words, of “an urban guide who was essential for disseminating new knowledge about London by yoking imaginative tasks to specific geographical locales” (xvii). These monographs, along with a range of essays focusing on the representation of London in the eighteenth century, have developed richly interdisciplinary accounts of the metropolis, reminding us that ideas about urban life were shaped by and circulated in many different forms of writing (Ellis, Wall, Rosenthal, Hammond, O’Byrne).

Another strand of enquiry has offered us a model for considering how the newness of eighteenth-century London may have been apprehended at the level of individual experience. A number of critics have turned their attention to the centrality of ideas of wonder, curiosity, diversion, spectacle, and fashion in eighteenth-century literature and culture, in turn helping us to explore how eighteenth-century writers understand urban life as transitory and ephemeral (Benedict, Domingo, Kareem, Keen, Park). Whereas Wall and Bond have invited us to consider the ways in which eighteenth-century accounts of London attempt to order and shape urban space, Darryl Domingo and Sarah Kareem have respectively addressed “the anxious fascination of eighteenth-century writers with the ‘Reigning Diversions of the Town’” (1), and the ways in which eighteenth-century fiction reveals “the wonder to be found within the everyday” (2). In this period, Roy Porter has noted, “the metropolis became remarkably self-referential” as “Londoners relished and demanded art and novels, journalism and theatre about themselves and their world” (xvi). Fictional new arrivals (and occasionally real ones, as the publication of translations of foreign visitors’ accounts of Britain in this period suggests) were especially well placed to present Londoners with accounts of their city from a new and diverting perspective. At the same time, strangers in London in eighteenth-century literature offer readers outside the city the vicarious experience of the pleasures and tribulations of urban life at a moment when, as J. Paul Hunter argues, novels appeared to reflect “the values of ‘modern’ London life and represented to those…who aspired to migrate to London what sophisticated lives could be like” (1996, 23).

In the eighteenth century, historians have argued, a recognizably modern consumer society was born (Brewer, McKendrick, and Plumb). This was a period of seemingly ceaseless flux and transformation in which new technologies, an ever expanding print market place, and an endlessly changing world of fashion – not to mention a rapidly growing city – gave rise to an increased sense of London’s exceptional status as a commercial capital. The financial revolution of the 1690s, which saw the establishment of the Bank of England and the formation of the national debt, helped to reshape the way that commerce functioned, and established London as a global financial centre. As Mary Poovey argues, “at the end of the seventeenth century, one of the functions performed by imaginative writing in general was to mediate value – that is, to help people understand the new credit economy and the market model of value that it promoted” (1-2). The literature of the period more broadly explored the larger implications of this new world of finance, examining how it might be reshaping social relationships in the city by privileging the manipulation of appearance or management of reputation.

Narratives of London in the eighteenth century both meditate on the wider experience of the city as spectacle and examine the ways in which, in the crowded streets and entertainments of the capital, identity itself becomes a performance. Accounts of the period informed by thing theory have drawn our attention to the way in which, as Julie Park argues, “So central did the acquisition and display of objects become to forming the self…that objects threatened to displace the subject as a locus for selfhood in eighteenth-century England” (xiv). At the same time, the sheer size of London offered an anonymity that afforded people, in the words of Erasmus Jones, writing in the 1730s, “the Pleasure of being esteem’d by a vast Majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be” based on dress, deportment, and other forms of self-fashioning (13). In these circumstances, as Dror Wahrman argues, “the comfort of knowing who people were by how they looked and dressed had been replaced by the play of unreliable appearances” (202). Whereas some, like Jones, were clearly unsettled by a world in which appearances seemed to be all, others thrived on the opportunities this might offer. James Boswell, on his trip to London from Scotland in 1762-3, delighted in the possibilities for self-reinvention, sometimes playing the role of gentleman, sometimes modeling his behaviour on Macheath, the highwayman in John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (1728), while in Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), the eponymous heroine recounts her deft social performances that allow her to cheat, steal, and whore her way to becoming a “gentlewoman”. Among fictional characters, however, Defoe’s protagonists display an unusual facility for navigating the city and adjusting to ever-changing circumstances; as we shall see, later eighteenth-century novels tend to present urban society as a more treacherous environment, especially for women. In the remainder of this essay I want to consider how eighteenth-century writers keep on coming back to the figure of the new arrival as they interrogate their sense of their own modernity.

The figure of the new arrival has a pre-history in the ‘spy’ narratives that emerged in the late seventeenth century in the wake of the popularity of Giovanni Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, first published in English in 1687. Ned Ward’s monthly periodical *The* *London Spy* (1698-1700) brings a country scholar to London who records his confusion and amazement at all he sees, while Tom Brown’s *Amusements Serious and Comical* (1700) invokes an Indian who has been “dropt perpendicularly from the Clouds” – and is thus not acclimated by travel to European ways – to record his sense of “all the Remarkable Things of this Mighty City” (18, 20). While the comic misreadings of urban life in these works are held up for the pleasure of the more knowledgeable reader, separating the sophisticated insider from the naïve outsider, figures like Ward’s spy and Brown’s Indian invite readers to consider how their familiar world might be experienced by strangers. A work like Brown’s *Amusements*, Domingo notes, “facilitates novelty, first, in the representation of all that is ‘new’, ‘surprising’, ‘singular’, or ‘remarkable’ about London, and second in the ‘*Diversion*’ it purports to offer readers” (68). The observations of these strangers demonstrate some of the ways in which, as Kareem argues, “eighteenth-century fiction employs defamiliarizing devices to produce hyper-attention to the ordinary” (5).

In Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s *Spectator* (1711-1714), various essays imagine London through the eyes of foreign observers and defamiliarize the ordinary for the amusement of the periodical’s readers. In *Spectator* 50, for example, Mr. Spectator records his pleasure at following “four *Indian* Kings” around London. After their departure, he asks a friend to make enquiries of their landlord “relating to their Manners and Conversation, as also concerning the Remarks which they made in this Country: For next to forming a right Notion of such Strangers, I should be desirous of learning what Ideas they have conceived of us” (I: 212), an example of the self-reflective impulse described by Porter above. On obtaining some papers they left behind, Mr. Spectator shares with his readers the “very odd Observations” made by the Indian Kings – for example that, in church, men and women pay more attention to “bowing and curtisying to one another” than to any kind of worship (I: 213). Elsewhere, in number 557, Mr. Spectator introduces a letter which he refers to as “a great Curiosity”, written by an “Ambassador of *Bantam*” who, on arriving in London, is astonished to find that the British “account themselves a civilized People, because they speak one thing and mean another: Truth they call Barbarity, and Falshood Politeness” (IV: 503-504). As Mr. Spectator’s emphasis on the eccentric nature of the outsider’s comments suggests, the primary role of these figures is to render the everyday strange for humorous purposes, all the while providing the periodical’s readers with an index of their own politeness and modernity as their “civilized” behaviour is contrasted with the seeming barbarity of the visitors’ native customs (Watt, forthcoming). Nevertheless, as Mr. Spectator notes at the end of his account of the Indian Kings’ papers, “amidst these wild Remarks there now and then appears something very reasonable” (I: 215), thereby suggesting that an outsider’s account might help readers think anew about their own habits, manners, and customs. Taken as a whole, the *Spectator* might be thought of as offering a kind of blueprint for navigating early eighteenth-century urban life. Its account of appropriate conduct and sociable behaviour was presented to readers as shaped by consensus both through the use of Mr. Spectator’s fictional club, which brought together for regular conversation a group of men from different backgrounds, and through the inclusion of letters purportedly sent by readers. Within this context, the essays from imagined foreign observers serve in part to reinforce a sense that the world of commercialized urban leisure and polite sociability described by the periodicals was still relatively new (Klein 10-13).

The new arrivals in the *London Spy*, *Amusements Serious and Comical*, and *The Spectator* ultimately lack any critical purchase on what they see. Other authors, however, use the persona of the outsider in order to offer a critique of their society. In Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* (1762), first published serially in *The Public Ledger*, the foreign observer as oriental spy is reworked in a series of letters attributed to a fictional Chinese traveller in London. Like many new arrivals, Lien Chi registers both disorientation and delight, and Goldsmith’s own position as an Irishman living in London certainly plays a role in his development of the critical perspective of the outsider. While Lien Chi initially finds that “every object strikes with wonder and surprise” (I: 6), his response to the manners and customs of Londoners is by no means uncritical. He finds it disappointing, for example, “to see no signs of that opulence so much talked of abroad” (I: 4), drawing attention to what many commentators in the period saw as a gap between the commercial wealth of London and its cultural prestige. In moments of frustration, he dismisses the British as “islanders”, thereby serving, as James Watt argues, “to provincialize Britons and put them in their place” (2006, 63). While London was frequently presented as the hub of an international commerce that served to improve and refine (as the *Spectator* so grandly claimed in its account of the Royal Exchange in number 69), Lien Chi frequently recasts the city as home to petty pursuits after wealth and status. At Westminster Abbey, for example, Lien Chi expects to find “no intruders by the influence of friends or fortune” (I: 40), but soon learns not only that money can buy anyone a monument, but also that visitors “must pay first” before seeing them. Lien Chi wonders “Whether the paltry sum…demanded was not a national reproach? Whether it was not more to the honour of the country to let their magnificence or their antiquities be openly seen, than thus meanly to tax a curiosity which tended to their own honour?” (I: 45-6). Relics of the national past have become just another money-making spectacle and form of empty show, and, the narrative suggests, it takes an outsider to see things for what they really are.

 In other instances, Lien Chi’s curiosity and openness render him susceptible to the frauds practiced by others, including, for example, when he is duped by a prostitute who offers to repair his watch, never to return with it. Such encounters were regularly described in works that provided information on the various cheats and frauds practiced in the city. These alternative guides offered visitors and new arrivals accounts that were less focused on sites of historical interest and more invested in presenting an unvarnished description of the manners and morals of London’s inhabitants. They issued warnings to new arrivals about the dangers of urban life while also feeding a fascination with tales of criminal exploits among Londoners themselves, casting a wide net in their efforts to capitalize on the anxieties generated by the difficulty of reading people in a large city. Pick-pockets, sharpers, and their ilk feature in works like *The Tricks of the Town Laid Open* (1746), *The Frauds of London Detected* ([1779?]), and *The Complete Modern London Spy* (1781), which were frequently reworked and reprinted over the century. As Carol Houlihan Flynn notes, these accounts of cheats and frauds “describe with stunning repetitiveness the virtues and vices of eighteenth-century London” (47), in so doing, establishing a kind of new itinerary of “‘classical’ sites of pleasure and danger where the visitor expects to be gratified by trouble and temptation” (27). The range of works like this produced in the period suggests that printers and booksellers were happy to cater to a fascination with the corrupt, dangerous, or criminal aspects of life in London. Taken together, such guides help to develop and sustain a narrative about the city as a den of vice in which appearances were not to be trusted and people were all out for themselves.

 Much recent critical work has sought to reconnect the novel to the heterogeneity of eighteenth-century print culture, rethinking the novel’s relationship to other prose writing including newspapers and topographical descriptions of the city, as well as the narratives of cheats and frauds described above (see for example Hunter, Wall, Flynn, Lynch). While Moll Flanders is equipped not just to survive but also to flourish in an urban environment, the heroes and heroines of the later eighteenth-century novel are often presented as struggling to read an urban landscape filled both with commercial pleasures, and the cheats and frauds described in alternative guides to the city. Such scenes demonstrate how, as Deirdre Lynch argues, characters in novels helped readers “to renegotiate social relations in their changed commercialized world” (4), offering them an “education in consumer capitalism” (8). The types of places and the kinds of behaviour outlined in compendia of cheats and frauds supplied novelists with a resource for describing the dangers of the city that their new arrivals had to face. In Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), for example, the eponymous hero and his travelling companion Strap struggle to navigate eighteenth-century London’s physical and social landscape. Like Lien Chi, Roderick and Strap are obvious outsiders in the capital: Roderick’s long hair “of the deepest red” (62) and the two men’s Scottish accents draw attention to their position as strangers. They are thus presented as easy targets, and their initial efforts to seek assistance are rebuffed by labourers who respond to Roderick and Strap’s questions as if their speech was “unintelligible” (62), and by a footman who deliberately leads them astray. They also fall into a trap laid for them by a couple of conmen, who lower Roderick’s defenses by speaking warmly of his native Scotland and advising him on “the snares that young unexperienced people are exposed to in this metropolis” (70) before cheating him out of all his money; even warnings about the dangers of the city, it is suggested, need to be treated with suspicion. Their landlord later explains that they “had been grievously imposed upon by a couple of sharpers, who were associates”, and he recounts “a great many stories of people who had been reduced, cheated, pilfered, beat, - nay, even murdered by such villains” (73). Slowly, Roderick appears to learn to navigate his way through the city; “as I every day improv’d in my knowledge of the town, I shook off my aukward air by degrees” (104). Yet, as Lynch reminds us, “a picaresque narrative can begin again and again” (85) and Roderick and Strap are duped on other occasions, too. In a novel that offers a panorama of society, and in which, as John Barrell notes, over one hundred different occupations are named, these scenes insistently return to the fraud and exploitation that was the underside of commercial society (20).

Like Roderick, Henry Mackenzie’s Harley, the titular hero of *The Man of Feeling* (1771), also falls victim to conmen in the city, and his experiences in London show it to be a place full of men and women seeking to cheat others out of their money. As with his countryman Smollett, Mackenzie’s Scottishness may have sharpened his sense of how a new arrival might be treated in the city. As a man of sentiment and excessive feeling, Harley’s preferred form of currency is sympathy and benevolence. When some companions propose a trip to Bedlam, which the novel describes as one “of those things called Sights, in London, which every stranger is supposed desirous to see”, Harley at first expresses his discomfort at the idea of visiting a madhouse as a form of entertainment, where “‘every idle visitant who can afford a trifling perquisite to the keeper’” can gawp at others’ misery (23). Once there, Harley’s charity – in the form of “a couple of guineas” (27) to an attendant to solicit his kindness to a young woman whose plight distresses Harley – ostensibly separates him from the idle visitors he criticizes; yet, this distinction is destabilized by the fact that he, too, gives money in exchange for a spectacle. This episode underscores the difficulty of conceiving of social interaction independent of the circulation of money. Elsewhere in the novel, Harley falls victim to tricksters. For many cultural commentators, as Paul Keen puts it, the “triumph of commerce” created a world where “identity had been reduced to a set of fluctuating negotiations” in which “inherent worth” has been subordinated to “a treacherous play of appearances” (21). Even as Harley is duped by individuals whose intentions he fails to read, however, he maintains that trusting another is a risk worth taking: “to calculate the chances of deception is too tedious a business for the life of man!” (41). For the social world of the city to be anything other than a war of all against all, it is suggested, individuals must be ready to assume that other people are not trying to deceive them.

It is an obvious point that the predicament of the new female arrival in the city was even more fraught, since the stakes were so much higher: loss of wealth was not so easily recoverable through labour, while loss of reputation could be even more damaging. From the middle of the century, Ruth Perry has shown, “the reading public was repeatedly treated to the spectacle of fictional heroines side by side with women who sold their sexual services” (265). Such episodes serve to “emphasize the gulf between the two sorts of women and the terror felt by good girls when they realize in whose company they have been, how it compromises them, and for whom they might be mistaken” (266). These fictions, Perry points out, “participated in the cultural work that constructed modern notions of femininity”, in the process defining themselves against the example of a text such as *Moll Flanders*, whose heroine achieves “eventual rehabilitation” despite her criminal and sexual history (266, 270). In Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), the eponymous heroine’s trip to London sees her unknowingly mixing with prostitutes, and thereby hazarding her reputation. A new arrival in the city, Betsy is placed, as David Oakleaf notes, somewhere between the city’s prostitutes and the private – and therefore virtuous – women associated with retirement in the countryside, and her “pivotal position between these two groups…turns on her keen delight in the commercial pleasures of the metropolis” (108). As Oakleaf argues, Haywood’s novel asks whether, and if so how, a young woman might be able to enjoy the public, commercial pleasures of the capital without herself being seen as a public commodity (107).

The same question is addressed most famously in Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), whose subtitle – “The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World” – again draws attention to the ubiquity of the trope of the new arrival. Part of the horror that Perry suggests young heroines feel in finding themselves in company with, or in close proximity to, prostitutes comes from their knowledge of the assumptions others make about them. Like Betsy Thoughtless, Evelina lacks visible markers of stable identity in the form of a father or husband who escorts her to the entertainments she visits, and in Burney’s work, as in Haywood’s, distinctions between women in public and public women are constantly blurred. A keen consumer of London’s entertainments, Evelina, although new to the city, is nevertheless able to distinguish between high and low forms of leisure, as is evidenced by her displeasure at some of the places the shop-keeping Branghtons enjoy. Yet, as in her experience of places like the opera, Vauxhall, Marylebone, and Kensington Gardens alongside the Branghtons, Evelina’s spectatorial detachment is compromised by the confounding of any clear distinction between high and low. As Perry notes, “the promiscuous mingling of classes in urban space” and “the sexualized danger of public places” helped to create the climate in which young women could be imaginatively associated with – not simply mistaken for - prostitutes (270).

For Evelina –an orphan whose obscure birth makes her easy prey for libertines like Sir Clement Willoughby – it is her movement between different social groups in spaces of mixed company that causes her particular problems. In one scene Sir Clement, delighted to find Evelina wandering in the dark walks of Vauxhall – a known haunt for prostitutes – without a chaperone, takes the opportunity to “‘make my own interpretation’” (199) of who, or what, Evelina might really be. Much like Betsy, who, as Lynch points out, discovers that she is unable “to both display her person and, controlling others’ interpretations of appearances, successfully claim ownership of it” (102), Evelina soon understands that her movements and actions are scrutinized and often misread by the men she encounters in ways that she cannot control. The obvious differences between Evelina and Moll Flanders help us now to map a sense of change over time, and recent criticism has considered the cultural shift taking place in the period between these two works not just in terms of the history of the novel or ideologies of gender, but also in terms of constructions of identity and notions of selfhood more broadly (Wahrman).

The figure of the prostitute captured many eighteenth-century anxieties about identity and the ways in which commercial exchanges appeared to be shaping social encounters. *Betsy Thoughtless* and *Evelina* both highlight the ways in which young women who participate in, and enjoy, the diverse pleasures of urban life might themselves be seen as purchasable by men in pursuit of their own pleasure. One relatively recent development in eighteenth-century studies has been the growing emphasis on the cultural significance of the theatre. The distinction between gentlewomen and prostitutes often appears to be played for comic effect on the eighteenth-century stage, where the figure of the new arrival in London – in particular the country wife – is again prominent: as Laura Rosenthal puts it, the country wife figure “cut in more than one direction, revealing the transplant’s lack of sophistication but also the darker aspects of her new environment” (87). In farces like Henry Fielding’s *Miss Lucy in Town* (1742) and comedies like Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal* (1777), women ambitious to become fashionable town ladies risk becoming ladies of the town. When Fielding’s Miss Lucy and her husband accidentally take up lodgings in a brothel, the women who run it see an opportunity to make money by selling her as a country virgin. Lucy, meanwhile, is busy negotiating the best deal for herself in her efforts to become a “fine Lady” (4), and shows herself to be willing to sell sexual favours for material goods and social status. In *The School for Scandal*, Lady Teazle, Sir Peter Teazle’s much younger country wife, is seduced by life in fashionable London, so much so that she is nearly persuaded to have an affair with Sir Peter’s nephew Joseph Surface. As Lisa Freeman states, the plot is “governed by the concept of character, the base currency of, and an essential source of credit and value in, the social economy of eighteenth-century polite culture” (76); Joseph’s surname reminds the audience of how little substance “character” might have in the new credit economy. These plays demonstrate the usefulness of the new arrival as a figure to think with – not simply as an object of comedy – in eighteenth-century culture: “Through the figure of a woman going ‘upon the town’”, Rosenthal argues, “the stage continued to confront the pleasures and hazards of urbanisation and created the period’s most enduring trope for the fallout from urban modernity” (92).

While the new arrival in is presented as having to learn how to adapt to the city, he or she is only ever a temporary visitor: eighteenth-century literature provides few examples of outsiders who come to London and settle there. London is a temporary stop – a heady mix of pleasure and danger – before an eventual retreat to the country. By the end of the century, the figure of the new arrival – sometimes now coded as a potentially sinister “stranger” (Simpson) – becomes more fraught. The role of London, certainly in prose fiction, becomes more marginal too, as a comparison between *Evelina* and the novels of Jane Austen attests. In perhaps the most famous example of Romantic poetry referring to London, Book VII of the 1805 *Prelude*, meanwhile, William Wordsworth casts himself as a new arrival and uses this status as a position from which to critique the empty spectacle of the city, from the tight rope walkers in Sadler’s Wells to the preachers in St. Paul’s Cathedral and the statesman-orators in the Houses of Parliament. The “treacherous play of appearances” that Keen describes takes on a new force for Wordsworth, threatening, as it does, his own sense of self as he becomes “lost / Amidst the moving pageant” (Book VII, 609-610). Yet, while Wordsworth’s representation of his experience points to the way in which urban life could be apprehended as a source of alienation, other contemporary writers were beginning to explore what it meant to be a Londoner and to feel attached to the city (O’Byrne). One welcome development in Romantic studies in the twenty-first century has been the serious attention paid to writers such as Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt – men who examined urban life not through the eyes of the outsider but from the perspective of those who affected to know little else (Dart).

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