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The City in Mind: Environmental Literacy and Adaptation in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Adam Edward Watkins
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THE CITY IN MIND: ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY AND ADAPTATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of Purdue University

by

Adam Edward Watkins

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ABSTRACT


This dissertation argues that a new paradigm of selfhood emerged in nineteenth-century British literature, one that recognized the individual will and environmental influence not as antithetical but as dialectical forces in the formation of the self. The concept of an externally negotiated subject challenges both the inward and socially determined conceptions of self that have dominated the relevant criticism. Informed by empiricist, associationist, and evolutionary theories of the mind, the portrayals of subject-formation in this study highlight the radical changes occurring in the human environment in nineteenth-century, which catalyzed the conception of a malleable yet self-forming subject. Along with the increased variability of the modern environment, the urban sphere afforded an array of cultural artifacts and spatial tools by which human subjects could shape their cognitive tendencies and affective states of being. With an emphasis on human adaptability and agency, nineteenth-century literature espouses the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning and develops a form of psychological realism predicated less on depictions of interiority than on increasingly sophisticated portrayals of mental and behavioral engagement with external conditions.
INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century British literature portrays the industrial city as an unnatural space that threatened individual identity and the sense of an autonomous self, or so the received wisdom tells us. This dissertation offers a divergent perspective, in which the city proves an ecological extension of human life-processes and significantly informs how British culture understood psychological development. In the literature under consideration, the city evinces the sway of material conditions on the psycho-physiology of human subjects while at the same time attesting to the ability of individuals and society at large to shape those material conditions. From such a perspective, the city proves a technology of self, one replete with an array of cultural objects and material influences that altered cognitive, emotional, and psycho-physiological tendencies.¹

Stemming from this context, the nineteenth-century city in literature becomes a dynamic environment in which characters discover and develop their agency in self-formation.

The rise of the modern metropolis in Britain, then, was integral to the emergence of this new paradigm of subject-formation, one that I refer to as environmental self-fashioning. This paradigm presupposes not only a malleable self but also a theory of the mind as relationally constituted – that is, a sense of mental development predicated on externality as much as interiority. In proposing this view of subject formation, I offer an

¹ The term “technology of self” is adapted from Foucault and will be discussed at greater length later in this introduction.
alternative to long-held assumptions about the deep psychology of an autonomous and inward self in nineteenth-century literature or the decentered, discursively determined self proposed by poststructuralism. Considered as an “inward turn” and a “linguistic turn,” respectively, neither of these approaches adequately regards the role of the physical environment in the formation of psychological functions, either as they are understood today or in the nineteenth century. To be clear, I am not suggesting that an environmental determinism replace the social / linguistic determinism espoused by poststructuralism. Rather, I argue that significant changes to the human environment coupled with cultural discourses concerning the psycho-physiological nature of the human subject resulted in a profound awareness of how individuals could negotiate desired forms of selfhood by conscientiously shaping the environment shaping themselves.

In concert with the alterations to the human environment, then, the Enlightenment’s theories on the human subject informed the portrayal of subject formation in nineteenth-century British literature. A helpful starting point is George Cheyne’s *English Malady* (1735), which modernized Robert Burton’s humoral study *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) by building upon the psycho-physiological principles of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and Isaac Newton’s *Opticks* (1704). In his own *English Malady*, Cheyne outlined several key causes of distemper, an umbrella term for the disorder of the nervous system. After noting several activities and modes of existence closely associated with urban life, Cheyne discusses the city directly, where “[d]istempers are to be found in their highest and most astonishing Symptoms” (54-55). Largely due to overstimulation, confined quarters, and poor air quality, the nervous malady of urban life could only be cured once the ailing subject had
“suck’d in and incorporated the sweet, balmy, clear Air of the Country, and driven the other out of their Habit” (55). In medically prescribing the rural environment as a cure for psycho-physiological disorders cultivated in the city, Cheyne ushers the environmental self-fashioning paradigm into a modern and medical age. Over the eighteenth century, medical sciences would develop a more sophisticated understanding of physiological and psychological components of the human subject and a more complex understanding of climatic influences, both through direct effects and through the inducement of customs and habits. William Falconer’s Remarks on the Influence of Climate (1781) proves exemplary, as it focuses on the physical, psychological, and social manifestations unique to various climates (e.g. temperate and cold), to modes of existence (e.g. agrarian and commercial), and to densities of population (e.g. rural and urban).

Also expanding on Locke’s philosophy of self and mind, the associationist philosopher David Hume would provide the groundwork for an adaptionist view of psychology (Leahey 117, 174); David Hartley and Joseph Priestly, who largely adopted Hartley’s theory, would further reinforce the role of experience and habit in the adaptation of mental processes to external conditions, while also bringing associationist thought more firmly into a psychological schema, locating it within the laws of the natural world. Arguing for the determining influences of the environment, Priestley stresses that one’s “own actions and determinations” were “necessary links in this chain of causes and events” (502). In other words, Priestley integrates human agency into a chain of determining causation. Such integration was not just significant to philosophical conceptions, particularly those concerning free will and materiality, but it would also
become central to educational and social practice, as environmental conditions would be seen as either a lift or a limit to physical, mental, and moral development.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, these physiological and associationist theories of the self would became entrenched in British culture via the discourse of sensibility, which reached its height in the 1770s and 80s. Sensibility proved an intersection for these discourses and the rise of the modern city; thus, it offers this dissertation a crucial point of departure. Both Ava Arendt and G. J. Barker-Benfield have noted the correlation between the urban commercialization and the heightened attention paid to sensibility (Arendt 94, Barker-Benfield xxv-xxvi). Yet, the commercial aspect was only one part of the over-stimulation experienced in the urban environment, which inevitably forced British subjects to become more aware of how their lived spaces constantly influenced their physiological systems and ways of thinking. The narratives of self-formation under consideration in this dissertation would gain from the culture of sensibility a sense of the city as integral to characters’ awareness of environmental influence and as a necessary source of influence for desired forms of subjectivity. In this way, the literature of environmental self-fashioning accomplishes what its supporting theories do not, showing how such a paradigm of self was deployed in a modern world.

In particular, I have chosen four canonical texts as my subjects of analysis: Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*

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2 Ann Jessie Van Sant provides, in my mind, the best definition for sensibility, which includes its physiological, epistemological, and psychological aspects: sensibility refers to “an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passional arousal. Through belonging to all, greater degrees of delicacy of sensibility – often to a point of fragility – are characteristic of women and upper classes. Excessive delicacy or acuteness of feeling produces an impaired or diseased state” (1).
(1805), Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), and Charles Dickens’ *Our Mutual Friend* (1864). I selected these texts, each of which provides a narrative of human development, to show that this paradigm was far more than an undercurrent in British culture; rather, it was widely disseminated to the British reading audience. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, then, literature began to bring the discussion of nerves, mind, and environment to a larger public. And this literature did much to advance the understanding of human engagement with place by taking the objective knowledge of medical sciences, pairing it with phenomenological experience, and codifying this engagement through literary representations.

One possible origin for the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning in literature is William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785), which was the most famous poem of its time and one that would prove wildly influential to the poets and novelists I consider in this study. Cowper’s poem picks up on all the key points of the discussion thus far, presenting a dichotomy of rural virtue and urban immorality that he entrenches in the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility. In the country, Cowper depicts the natural sensory stimuli as a physic to both body and mind: “Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds / Exhilarate the spirit, and restore / The tone of languid Nature” (Book I: p. 10). The “nerves” become “new-brac’d” and the “spirits cheered” (I: 19). Cowper also highlights how remote landscapes and highly private domestic spaces better allow one to cultivate mental life; there, one can “possess / The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge / The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure” (I: 13). Like the country, the city can shape the mind, but rather than revitalizing, the city generally corrupts: “In cities, foul example on
most minds / Begets its likeness” (I: 36). In offering a space full of natural stimuli, a space away from the commotion of the city’s “peopled scene,” the country greatly benefits the body as well as the mind and proves the “proper soil” for the growth of human virtues (III: 93; I: 32). While such a dichotomy seems to reinforce the usual thinking about the city in literature, I would argue that the urban sphere provides the necessary counter point by which Cowper understands the psycho-physiological benefits of country life. Furthermore, the relation of Cowper’s poem to the urban sphere proves more complex than this initial foray suggests.

Cowper’s poem proves significant to my discussion not simply because it reinforces Cheyne’s understanding of rural amelioration but also because it codifies psycho-physiological health in a rural aesthetic. In Cowper’s lines, the rural sphere functions as both a causal spur to psycho-physiological health and a poetic signifier for positive mental states. This conjoining of the causal and symbolic becomes a foundation on which the Gothic and Romantic projects build; it also proves a key element of my argument for a more biologically grounded reading of literary depictions of rural and urban experience. Too often, the causal relationship between place and mind is overlooked in literary criticism, so that the spaces portrayed are read as a canvas on which the author projects the psychological state or emotions of a character – what is usually referred to as pathetical fallacy. Such a reading reinforces the supremacy of the

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3 Across several strophes dedicated to urban life, Cowper outlines the following, commonplace complaints of urban life: the sedentary lifestyle leads to “withered muscle, and the vapid soul” (I, p. 21), the capitalism of the “gain-devoted cities” brings “[t]he dregs and feculence of every land” (I, p. 36); the “Rank abundance breeds / In gross and pampered cities sloth and lust, / And wantonness and glutinous excess” (I, pp. 36-7); dissembling abounds so that “vice is hidden” (I, p. 37). An anthropomorphized London “calculates, computes, and scans,” a phrasing that anticipates Simmel’s sense of the “more calculating” urban mind (Cowper I, p. 38; Simmel 411).
inward self and largely ignores the implications of environmental influence and self-fashioning that I will develop throughout this dissertation.

Cowper’s poem, then, reveals the rather complicated and cross-shaping relationships among environment, individual, and culture. The poem is, of course, a product of the urban arts market, and the rural retreat proves a phenomenon of urban culture – a culture that exists because of the conditions of geography and populace. And like all rural retreats, Cowper’s own reveals the necessity of returning to the city. Referring to his “peasant’s nest,” Cowper admits that his rural spot was “[m]y visit still, but never mine abode” and returns to a London that proves a bifurcated space of culture (“by taste and wealth proclaimed / The fairest capital in all the world”) and violence (“By riot and incontinence the worst”) (I: 14, 37). Not only is the city fair (if violent), Cowper further identifies the positive aspects of large cities. For instance: “I do confess them nurseries of the arts, / In which they flourish most” (I: 37). Ultimately, then, Cowper offers a geographical rendering of potential modes of life and states of being.

While it would be easy to suggest a pat dichotomy of urban degradation and rural virtue, the situation proves more complex as each space bears influences that the ideal subject, one of psycho-physiological health as well as taste and culture, requires for his or her formation. Following Cowper’s model, the literature covered in this dissertation relocates characters across a variety of environments, allowing the characters to experience and thus recognize the influences unique to each locality. But even more so than Cowper, these texts consistently point to the urban sphere’s role in this recognition, and they begin to develop a more sophisticated sense of how the urban seat of culture becomes a space for the cultivation of self.
The Understanding of Self in the Nineteenth-Century Culture and Criticism

The urban sphere of the late eighteenth century offered an altogether new space – one that was rather intense, sensorially speaking – but it was also part of a general complication and variation of the human environment. Matched by the further proliferation of these new and complex spaces across the nineteenth century was the proliferation of theories about the psycho-physiological engagement with and dependence on the external world. Many physicians would follow Falconer’s lead in considering the climatic influence on physical and psychological development and wellbeing. The evolutionary theory of Erasmus Darwin, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, and Herbert Spencer would also add significantly to this discourse, which took as its fundamental tenet that the environment shaped the bodies, brains, and behaviors of all organisms. Across the nineteenth century, then, various philosophical, scientific, and psychological discourses would concretize and complicate a conception of human subjects as shaped by their engagement with place, a conception that suggested the active role individuals and societies could take in the environmental form of subject formation.

Despite the scientific precedent, the paradigm for subject-formation has gone largely, if not entirely, overlooked in criticism on nineteenth-century literature. When taking a psychological interest, most criticism has looked back across the nineteenth-century with a psychoanalytic perspective, one that prioritizes inward mechanisms and drives. Conversely, the ecological criticism that does exist, i.e. ecocriticism, has limited its scope to a metaphysical sense of the connection with nature or to poststructuralist
views of conservationist ideology and environmentalism as discourse.\textsuperscript{4} None of these perspectives provide an adequate understanding of the biological reality with which human subjects must engage and the lived environment through which they will necessarily be formed. It perplexes me that ecological psychology, which has become a fixture in the field of psychology over the last half century, has not had more influence on literary criticism, especially considering that this psychology stems from (and greatly reinforces) much of the general tenets of the medical, philosophical, and psychological discourses mentioned above. This is not to deny the presence of ecological tenets in cultural studies and in the literary criticism that coopts it. However, and for instance, Gaston Bachelard’s \textit{Poetics of Space} (1958) remains a fixture in literary criticism concerned with the dynamic between subject and place while the still phenomenological but much more biologically grounded work of Yi-Fu Tuan, such as \textit{Space and Place} (1977), has received far less attention.

Perhaps more to the point, I find it interesting, and quite telling, to consider Freud’s place in the field of psychology versus his cultural significance. Thomas Leahey notes that while psychoanalysis had a greater influence on modern culture than any other

\textsuperscript{4} Lawrence Buell’s 2011 summary of first- and second-wave ecocriticism, “Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends,” affirms the sociocentric and poststructuralist tendencies of this field and evinces the absence of an ecological or environmental psychology approach. This is, of course, a generalization of ecocriticism and its offshoots in ecofeminism and ecocolonialism. Even so, a survey of the seminal collections and surveys in these fields bears out this claim; see Cherryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm \textit{The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology} (1996); Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphey, \textit{Ecofeminist Literary Criticism} (1998); and Graham Haggan and Helen Tiffin, \textit{Postcolonial Ecocriticism} (2010). These studies, particularly ecofeminist and ecocolonialist, prove more interested in environmental forms of subjugation rather than an environmental approach to psychological development and self-formation. Some notable exceptions include Scott Slovic’s “Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience” and Neil Evernden’s “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy.” Both point to the interrelation between self and external environment but ultimately use environmental psychology in an argument for the moral value of natural spaces. The ecocriticism on nineteenth-century literature follows these trends, and, as far as I can tell, no book-length study has taken an environmental psychology approach to nineteenth-century literature or its portrayal of urban life.
psychology, “its relations with academic psychology have been ambivalent from Freud’s
time to our own” (245). Instead, “the psychology of adaptation in one form or another
[either Lamarckian/associationist or Darwinian] has dominated academic psychology”
(245). The twentieth-century psychology of adaptation, whether on a phylogenetic or
ontogenetic scale, has gone a long way towards understanding the ecological realities of
and environmental influences on perception, cognition, behavioral schemas, etc.. And
this understanding is based on a lineage beginning with Locke and proceeding to the
associationists, to the evolutionary psychologists, and then to William James, who further
entrenches the physiological and ecological bases for the field of psychology as it headed
into the twentieth century.

All this being so, scholarship on the nineteenth-century literature has been
dominated by rather different preoccupations, namely the internal drives and passions
espoused by psychoanalytic theory or the tyranny of discursive forces and its prison of
language. The criticism that explores conceptions of subjectivity in nineteenth-century
literature has generally ignored environmental engagement, though a series of critical
“turns” has been shifting more and more towards such considerations. The first to be
discussed here is the “inward turn,” which, while not exclusively psychoanalytic,
operates along the same principles. According to this criticism, nineteenth-century culture
conceived of a self as essential, autonomous, and determined largely by interior drives
and passions. The ideal for such a self was to look inward and discover his or her own
true nature. Such has been the dominant reading of Romantic literature, and the term
“Romantic subjectivity” has become synonymous with an essential, autonomous, even
transcendent self. While this view of the Romantic project has long existed, certainly
studies by M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom have ensured the dominance of this perspective, as has the more recent work of Charles Rzepka. Even Andrea Henderson’s *Romantic Identities* (1996), which provides an impressive discussion of alternative forms of selfhood in this era, ultimately concedes the dominance of the autonomous model.

The inward turn is not limited to Romanticism, of course, and has been seen by many critics as endemic to nineteenth-century culture at large. In fact, a critical touchstone of the inward turn, Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* (1989), presents a narrative of the development of inwardness from Augustine to the present. An alternative form of this historical narrative has been recently suggested by Dror Wahrman (*The Making of the Modern Self* [2004]) and Nancy Armstrong (*How Novels Think* [2005]), who both suggest a transition from an external self predicated on social rank, outward behavior, as well as physiological and sartorial appearances to a “modern self” for whom interior life and essential individuality prove the key attributes. These particular studies are exemplary of a much larger critical tradition that subscribes to the premise that the truth of modern human subjectivity lies within. Among the approaches of this ilk that address the subject/place relationship, environmental influences are regarded as purely symbolic, as something to be transcended, and/or as something to be rejected. For example, Richard Lehan, in *The City and Literature* (1998), suggests that the post-

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5 Notable studies include Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry* (1963), Bloom’s “The Internalization of Question Romance” (1969), and Rzepka’s *The Self as Mind* (1986).

6 Of particular note is Henderson’s chapter on Byron’s “The Prisoner of Chillon,” which points to a “context-based identity” (59) espoused by Godwin and French physiologists that is much in line with my own sense of an environmentally formed self. Yet, while this form of subjectivity briefly appears in the poem, Henderson shows how it is rejected, in typical Romantic style, in favor of an “inwardness” replete with “an interior faculty of resistance” to external influence that reestablishes the ideal, autonomous self (84, 75).
Romanticists (which he collectively refers to as Modernists) were even more inward than their inward predecessors. Continuing a process begun by Wordsworth, Modernism’s aesthetic and symbolist turns evince a removal “to a private, autistic state of mind, shutting out the urban, commercial, and industrial world that had become hostile. Under such pressure the city as a physical place gave way to the city as a state of mind,” thus perpetuating the movement “away from physical reality toward inward process and subjectivity” (76, 77). Exemplary of the “inward turn,” Lehan begins with a sense that subjects and authors engage a real, tangible world but then replace it with one that is purely imaginary, only symbolic, as though the psycho-physiological influences of external conditions could be shut out at will. The human subject can augment his or her lived environment in a variety of ways, but it is a mistake to think that this environment can be transcended or ignored – and even the nineteenth-century portrayals of such attempts belie their projects or ultimately admit to their inevitable failure.

Suspicious of the inward turn, many literary critics opted for what has been referred to as a “linguistic turn” – i.e. the poststructuralist movement, with Derrida and Foucault as its foci. Under the auspices of the linguistic or poststructuralist turn, the delusion of autonomous individuality is undone by the examination of systems that generate, sustain, and just as often decenter the self. In many ways, I am sympathetic to the poststructuralist project, specifically its effort to analyze the myriad forces that shape the individual. To be sure, many of the critics who have informed my approach in this study are tied to the poststructuralist project, such as Regenia Gagnier, particularly her work in *Subjectivities* (1991), as well as Raymond Williams, Julian Wolfreys, Sharon Marcus, and many other critics who deal with urban life. Indeed, most of the canonical
work on the urban sphere in cultural and literary studies takes a poststructuralist approach, one that generally views the city as a concretization for social forces.

In its examination of person / place relations, poststructuralism, not to mention literary criticism that adopts it as a *modus operandi*, proves limited by its own preoccupations and anxieties. These limitations are apparent when dealing with the interrelations of people and place as both become subordinated to the rule of discourse. Thus, poststructuralism works against the key tenets of my own approach: it undermines the validity (i.e. the truth value) of science, the role of the physical environment in shaping humanity and culture, and the agency of individuals who *are* under the influence of external forces (including social ones) but *are also* capable of recognizing those forces, engaging them in a life-process of negotiation. I agree, then, with Eric Prieto’s sense that poststructuralist views of the external world are marked by their choice of the term “space” instead of “place,” which “implies a de-centering of the human perspective” (77). Such decentering disallows the potential of self-development through and adaptation to various localities, as the environment becomes a further enactment of power structures and where “[i]ndividuals are considered to be incidental players in a game of structures” (Prieto 87).

Not only does poststructuralism overlook a reciprocal engagement of place and subject, but it also, according to Speculative Realists, constrains reality to “the correlate of human thought,” thus perpetuating a Cartesian split that holds subjects separate from the object world. Such a view, of course, does not accord with an ecological perspective, and both ecologically oriented scholars and Speculative Realists find fault with an epistemology where “knowledge of a reality independent of thought is untenable”
From this view, poststructuralism offers a bounded network of discourse-informing-discourse that mirrors the self-enclosed psychological system of the human being under a psychoanalytic perspective.

New Historicist criticism and literary criticism engaging with nineteenth-century sciences has responded to the ephemeral prison of language by re-grounding culture and individuals in a temporal moment or a physical body. Both approaches have been informative to my own project, though I inevitably find that, since their “ground” is not the physical environment itself, they do not go far enough in recognizing the underlying ecological system by which all historical moments and human subjects are shaped and in which they develop. Even so, much can be gained from historicist approaches – like Alan Liu’s *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (1989), for example – which inevitably address the environmental contexts even if they remain subordinated to an “historical epistemology” (47). The “physiological turn” – that is, a recent focus on the influence of physiological sciences on literature – has also proven a further step towards the paradigm I am advocating. Many of these texts explicitly refer to the capacity of the physical environment to influence the bodies and minds of subjects, as nineteenth-century

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7 The connections between poststructuralism and New Historicism are quite strong, and there is as much that overlaps in their projects (and weaknesses) as there are distinctions. Claire Colebrook makes this point well when discussing new historicism as an answer to “the supposedly ahistorical character of post-structuralist criticism”: “New historicism may have initially appeared as an ‘answer’ to the interpretive insecurity precipitated by post-structuralist theories of textuality. But new historicism itself continually encountered the problem of its own legitimation. History in general could not be retrieved as some pre-textual ground so attention was directed to all those local devices and instances from which history was formed: anecdotes, artifacts, specific materials and contingent events” (220).
physiological sciences affirmed. Yet, none of them explore this capacity beyond naming it, nor do they consider the ways in which human subjects become conscious of this influence, adapt to it, and begin to utilize it in the project of their own self-making.

Because these approaches focus primarily on the relationship between mind and body or self and historical context, they do not come to an adequate understanding of the reciprocal, formative influence of subject and environment – the central tenet of ecological psychology, anthropology, and my sense of environmental-self-fashioning. They also prove unable to overturn some of the key components of the inward and linguistic turns. Both the historical and physiological turns suggest a more malleable self but neither fully appreciates the contextual construction of self – that is, they do not see how selfhood has as much to do with spatial practice and environmental engagement as with social contexts. Also, neither of these approaches adequately resolves the destabilization of epistemology and ontology enacted by poststructuralism. To this last point I will now turn in order to discuss how an ecological perspective of self helps resolve the problems raised by poststructuralist approaches to being and knowing.

8 In British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind (2001), Alan Richardson notes the environmental role in shaping mind and behavior” (2); Noel Jackson momentarily considers in Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry (2011) “the mind’s response to external stimuli” in regards to sensibility of the poet and the influence of poetry on others (27, 9); in George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (2006), Michael Davis suggests that the mind is necessarily “open to the influence . . . of environmental conditions” (5); in Embodiment: Victorian Literature and the Senses, William Cohen focuses often on the body as site of permeability and flow between internal and external, whether in terms of matter or information. Cohen’s study comes the closest to my own though it still lacks a clear and consistent sense of psychological engagement with the external environment and how such engagement works to shape and develop subjectivity. See also Rick Rylance, Adela Pinch, John Mullen, and Peter Logan for discussions on nineteenth-century psychology in relation to the body.
Environmental Epistemology, Environmental Realism

As mentioned above, this dissertation proposes that significant changes to the human environment coupled with cultural discourses concerning the psycho-physiological nature of the human subject resulted in a profound awareness of how individuals could negotiate desired forms of selfhood by shaping the environment shaping themselves. “Negotiate” proves a crucial term here, as it alludes to the complex and reciprocal dynamic between the environment, the individual subject, and society, each of which influences and is influenced by the other elements. In other words, no one element should be seen as reigning over the others, particularly in terms of the life process of human subjects. Through an ecological understanding of subject-place relations, I see the human and social elements as extensions of the physical environment, the human an evolving component of the biological milieu and society as the primary adaptive function of the human. Because of their reciprocity, alterations to any of these three elements necessarily entail an alteration to the others.\(^9\) Indeed, the difficulty is not in proving their mutual influence but rather determining where changes begin. Neither society nor the individual subject can transcend the underlying materiality of their survival, and such an understanding was becoming increasingly clear to British culture by the end of the eighteenth century.\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) The triadic approach to understanding the relationship between subject, societies, and environments has often been used as a way of obviating subject-object dualism, as it regards these three elements as enmeshed within the same overall system. For Alf Hornberg and Timothy Ingold, this larger system is ecological; see Hornberg 97-100 and Ingold “Three in One” 40-42. Lefebvre also assumes a triadic approach in his seminal *The Productions of Space* (1974), though, given his ultimate goal to critique the capitalistic forces, Lefebvre seems to regards the social has having the greatest influence.

\(^{10}\) In addition to the philosophers, scientists, and physicians discussed below, zoological studies by George Cuvier, Erasmus Darwin, and many others had made clear that external conditions could significantly impact if not utterly control the success or failure of both individual animals and entire species.
In what follows, I will establish some of the concepts and terms that will be integral to this dissertation. My intent is to provide the groundwork for how human cognition and affect could be influenced by external conditions. While I will prioritize an environmental basis for cognition and affect, I do not mean to ignore the role of cultural practice or theory, but I do suggest, in accord with other environmentally oriented studies of human behavior, “that culture is the form of human adaptation” to the environment (Ingold “Culture” 39). Like Timothy Ingold, I see culture as based on a knowledge evolved from external engagement, and thus, I too follow J. J. Gibson in suggesting, “Knowledge of the world cannot be explained by supposing that knowledge of the world already exists” (253). Rather, knowledge must necessarily result from (and be tested against) continual engagement with the external world, with an ecological system where the social and material are thoroughly intertwined. Such notions of culture and epistemology as developed through external engagement are certainly not unique to twentieth-century thought; rather, they are fundamental tenets of the empiricist and evolutionary theory that informs the literature discussed in this dissertation.

First, it will be helpful to establish a specifically environmental form of epistemology, one that will be integral to my readings of Wordsworth’s The Prelude and Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend. To make sense of how meaning is extracted from (instead of projected on) the external world, I invoke J. J. Gibson’s sense of “affordances,” which

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11 As with Gibson, Ingold, and other ecological scholars across a variety of fields, Konrad Lorenz establishes in Behind the Mirror (1973) the fundamental basis for his approach to cognitive interaction with external conditions: “all human knowledge derives from a process of interaction between man as a physical entity, an active, perceiving subject, and the realities of an equally physical external world, the object of man’s perception” (1). It is through a similar form of trial and error recognized in associationist theory that Lorenz argues all information is gained and reaffirmed: human beings are “perpetually making experiments, matching their results against reality, and retaining what is fittest” (24).
“are what [the environment or an object] offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes” (Gibson 127). Affordances are necessarily constrained to the capabilities and needs of the organism. Thus, while a stone affords throw-ability to a human, it does not to a worm; however, for the worm, the stone can afford a shelter-ability it cannot to the human. Such organism-specific constraint may seem paradoxical: how can an affordance be inherent to the object but also relative to the perceiver/user? Gibson’s answer to this question is helpful to our consideration of affordances, but it also reinforces the sense of meaning (including the meaning of the “self”) as something that is constructed in a reciprocal process of engagement:

An important fact about the affordances of the environment is that they are in a sense objective, real, and physical, unlike values and meanings, which are supposed to be subjective, phenomenal, and mental. But, actually, an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer. (Gibson 1979, 129)

From this perspective, meaning does not lie in the mind nor in the world but through an engagement between subject and object – it is that process of engagement, that middle-ground of interaction, where meaning is created. The mind collaborates in meaning as well as records it, and language proves one of several methods for storing and sharing that information.
The sense of mental collaboration with the external world to create meaning is central to Wordsworth’s own poetic project, which explores “How exquisitely the individual Mind . . . to the external World / Is fitted,” but also how “The external World is fitted to the Mind.” Thus, the mind and external world make a “creation” through their “blended might” (‘Prospectus” 63-68). And of course, Wordsworth’s own model for mental engagement with the external world draws largely from an associationist model, where information is gained from external experiences and applied to future experiences through association. By the time this theory moves through associationism to the psychological theory of Herbert Spencer, it takes on a more physiological and evolutionary aspect. Spencer also highlights more clearly how physical engagement with the world – the manipulation of an object, the use of tools, etc. – proves an operative progression that is necessarily linked to cognitive progression. As humans develop “cognitive and operative processes, the advance is towards a reciprocity so active that each further cognition implies elaborate operative aid, and each new operation implies sundry elaborate cognitions” (461). More recently, anthropologists have tacitly taken up Spencer’s sense that the mind is developed through physical processes taking place outside of the body. Pointing to a widely accepted and dramatic cognitive evolution that occurred 60,000 to 30,000 years ago, Steven Mithen argues that the mind became “extended beyond the brain” as result of “new types of material culture,” which he believes was “fundamentally part of the new mind” – “as much the cause as the consequences of new ways of thinking” (208). Mithen refers to a 1998 study by Andy Clark and David Chalmers, which highlights the “active externalism” of the mind through epistemic action or practices that “alter the world so as to aid and augment
cognitive processes such as recognition and search” (8). The urban sphere in nineteenth-century literature, I argue, provides a vast arena for just this kind of epistemic action, as it allows subjects to engage with a myriad of cultural artifacts that not only convey information but also allow for operative processes to beget new cognitive processes. It is in the city where this reciprocity becomes the most active, and it is in the city where the authors in this study reveal the full extent of environmental self-fashioning.

To consider what, exactly, a place affords the subject, we must keep in mind all the elements of a given locality, whether the physical space, the climate, the culture, or other people. When speaking of the environment, then, I am not only referring to a physical reality surrounding a given subject but also buildings, material objects, other organisms, particular weather, cultural assumptions and historical knowledge associated with the place. To indicate all these potential elements of a specific locality and their influence on human subjects, I will use the term structure of influence. Here, I have coopted and revised Raymond Williams’ structure of feeling to serve my own purposes. Williams’ structure of feeling describes the instances and process in which “experience, immediate feeling, and then subjectivity and personality are newly generalized and assembled” through constant interaction with “social forms” (129). Social forms can be fixed or stabilized – like language, manners, cultural products, buildings, etc. – but they are also in a constant process of shifting and evolving (129; 129-131). Ultimately, Williams’ uses “structures of feeling” to portray how the individual subject engages with the deterministic forces around them. Regina Gagnier describes (and later employs) Williams’ use of the term as a theory of practice that reintroduces “agency into disciplines preoccupied with systems and structures without abandoning recognition of
social structures or retreating to methodological individualism” (10). Williams’ and Gagnier’s approach to the self as engaged with external systems has proven helpful to my thinking on determinism and individual agency, though I also work to evolve this theory of practice into an ecological understanding of the self – a critical gesture that proves necessary as both the social structures and individual engage within a larger orbit of environmental influence.

To make more sense of the term *structure of influence* and how it will operate in my analysis of the subject / place dynamic, let us turn to two key spaces within this dissertation: the country and the city. As mentioned above, the psycho-physiological influence of the rural environment had been recognized by Cheyne and others, and this influence, we must acknowledge, is the result of an aggregation or assemblage of aspects of the environment: its direct or climatic influences, its affordances, the adaptations it necessitates, and then the extra-environmental layer of those adaptations such as social practices associated with that locality. Herbert Spencer outlines a sensory as well as cognitive engagement with the assemblage of a particular locality, noting that “daily experiences” results in an accumulation of the feelings induced by a place and its usual objects, leading to composite states of feeling and still “larger aggregation of states,” which ultimately merge into “a more complex feeling . . . produced by being in that locality” (*Principles of Psychology* 589). The complex feeling results from being in a

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12 Here, “assemblage” is offered in the Delueze and Guattari meaning of the word. As with a book, their initial example of an assemblage, each environment also has “lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorializations. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*” (3-4). In general, I prefer to use structures of influence as it renders environmental the structural of feeling that Williams sees as purely social; however, assemblage similarly points to the ways in which each space has a multiplicity of objects and forces that all afford some quality of experience.
particular place, from experiencing its unique structure of influence as augmented by one’s own life experiences. Spencer’s depiction of engagement with locality builds from associationism, and thus such assemblages or structures of influence had been identified in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, even if not expressed in such terms.

Authors of this era similarly portrayed structures of influence in their narratives, allowing them to reveal a psychological engagement with the external world and the reciprocal dynamic of meaning within this structure. In *The Italian* (1797), Ann Radcliffe portrays an affective moment of environmental experience when the kidnapped Elena looks out the window and senses that “the objects” of the mountainous locality “seem to impart somewhat of their own force, their own sublimity to the soul” (75). Rather than a self-generated feeling, Elena’s experience seems to be imparted from without. What follows is a list of particular aspects of the present topography, many of which are correlated with a psychological quality:

Along this deep and shadowy perspective, a river, which was seen descending among the cliffs of a mountain, rolled with impetuous force, fretting and foaming amidst the dark rocks in its descent, and then flowing in a limpid lapse to the brink of other precipices, whence again it fell with thundering strength to the abyss . . . . (75)

Rather than read this scene – wrought with psychological valences of “fretting” and “limpid” – as a moment of pathetic fallacy, I argue that Radcliffe’s direction of influence from scene to subject provides a critical clue. As in Gibson’s discussion, the scene imparts or affords a particular structure of influence that is simultaneously a quality and meaning inherent to that place while also being specific to the perceiver, to his or her
own psychophysiological state of being and emotional needs. The notion that aesthetic experience was predicated on dynamic engagement with external stimuli is very much at the heart of the culture of sensibility and the cultural conception of taste. As we will see in Chapter 1 on Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the eighteenth-century associationist philosopher David Hume emphasizes how aesthetic experiences and the refinement of particular tastes allows one to cultivate an affinity for psychologically beneficial environmental stimuli. Through engagement with place, or music, or literature, one can influence the effect of environmental stimuli on the nervous system and passions. Once again, we find ourselves at the intersection of environmental forces, personal agency, and culture as adaptation.

Like the mountains, the urban sphere can also produce feelings of sublimity, but this was not the psycho-physiological response most often associated with the nineteenth-century city, which had a different *structure* to its influence. Even by 1800, Wordsworth’s lament in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” over the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” and the “savage torpor” induced by urban life was commonplace (596). While certain aspects of the city were believed to have a cultivating influence, its overall structure of influence was quite often seen to degrade the urban subject in body, mind, and morality. Much of this influence had to do with the general state of confusion caused by the city’s thrumming masses and labyrinthine spaces. By 1800, London’s population would grow to 900,000 (Schwarz 650). The increase of people led to increases in street traffic, which was further problematized by the numerous mechanical conveyances. The often-hostile relationship between English perambulators and horse-

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13 See Hume’s “On the Delicacy of Taste and Passion” (1742).
drawn coaches was well documented even by the 1710s. These coaches proved especially troublesome in the late 1800s as their reduced dimensions and improved suspension systems allowed for greater numbers on the streets as well as greater speeds. Furthermore, the coaches made the city more accessible to both London dwellers and tourists, thus bringing greater numbers out into the streets (Whyman 53; Reed 629). As the population grew, so did the streets gain in number. In the 1710s, the entirety of London included 2,175 streets, which constituted 250 miles (Bryant and Whyman 4); by the end of the eighteenth century, the area of London would be twice as large as it was at the onset (Schwarz 644). While streets increased in number, space itself was on the decline as open areas were largely built over and smaller structures were expanded upon.

While open spaces of the city were being reduced, these environs also served more purposes: accommodating various forms of traffic as well as other public, commercial, personal, and illicit activities. The diverse functions of these public spaces required a wide variety of sign systems—whether commercial or bureaucratic—and thus afforded a highly complex and at times chaotic semiology. This pandemonium resulted in part from the increase of stores and advertising, but it also had much to do with the conflicting efforts to systematize these spaces. The Westminster Paving Act of 1762 and later paving acts implemented the posting and regulation of street signs and house numbers. Yet, these new systems overlapped with the sign systems already in place and did more to exacerbate the sensory chaos of the urban space than to correct it.14

14 Susan E. Whyman, in “Sharing Public Spaces,” discusses the necessity for new strategies to “negotiate public areas” (49); one such strategy was the incorporation of street signs and house numbers, but Whyman points out that, even until 1770s, “there was no standardized format for place names,” so that mail and directions had to incorporate multiple names and sign systems to describe the same place or places (49).
At various levels, then, the urban sphere complicated many of the fundamental processes by which humans engaged with their biological environment. Of course, because the city is human-built does not negate the fact that it is an environment of ongoing life-processes, i.e. a biological space. By altering the biological environment, though, human beings necessarily alter themselves. In referring to the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation,” Wordsworth had said as much, and the notion would be repeated in various ways over the course of the century: Elizabeth Gaskell would refer to “town life” where people’s “nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them” (*North and South* 301) and later Georg Simmel recognized that the “intensification of nervous stimulation” led to both “the dominance of the intellect,” a “more calculating” mind, and a blasé disposition (4-9, 411, 413).

Yet, we should not assume that the urban sphere had one structure of influence that determined a pervasive but singular form of alienated, overwhelmed, and/or dissipated subjectivity. Rather, what proves so fascinating about the British urban sphere, and establishes its importance to the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning, is its multitude of unique localities, which offer unique structures of influence. In addition to the Thames River and the expansion of underground London, inhabitants had to contend with a proliferation of alleyways that stemmed off of the bustling streets and further complicated the engagement of subjects with an urban environment. The function of such spaces proved ambiguous. Sometimes they were a “private space, accessible only to those who lived there” (Shoemaker 5). However, they were often used as a space to get away from the crowds – either for the purpose of having a conversation (as often portrayed in Dickens’s fiction) or to simply remove oneself momentarily from the bustle. Yet, for
those unfamiliar with their labyrinthine twists and turns, these alleys could become “sites of confusion or entrapment” (Carter 40-1). Thus, not only did the city prove over-stimulating as well as difficult to navigate, but subjects also struggled to recognize the potential uses and threats posed by many of its spaces.

Much like the alleyways, commercialized spaces meant to provide a more intimate space – such as coffeehouses, alehouses, and taverns – also retained much of the racket and unrest found out in the streets, thus becoming “a site for an extraordinary mixture of public and private activities” (Shoemaker 7; also see Steward & Cowen 18). The highly permeable storefronts in commercialized spaces of the city (as well as the communal spaces of apartment constructions and courtyards) resisted the distinctions between public and private spaces, and such resistance could itself be seen as causing the cultural desire to concretize this distinction across the nineteenth century.\(^{15}\) In other words, the distinction between public and private became apparent when compromised or challenged, and thus the urban sphere appears to engender a psychological desire for privacy that was then sought via material and imaginative practices.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) For more on the role apartment buildings played in the cultural understanding of privacy, see Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories* (1999). For more on the permeability of commercialized spaces, see Lynda Nead’s *Victorian Babylon* (2000), 167-185.

\(^{16}\) Michael Reed suggests that “the distinctions between private, institutional and public space,” while still useful, become increasingly difficult to draw in the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries because of the “increasing fluidity” of the “semi-commercialized social space” of the city; yet, Reed also points to the ways in which architecture changed, making the domestic interior more removed for the city environment and thus more private (615, 616-17). Patricia Meyer Spacks questions in *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (2003) whether it is accurate to say that distinctions between public and private were increasingly complicated in an era where they also took on increasing importance (6). Spacks also emphasizes the imaginative component of this distinction; for instance, she suggests, “Privacy is above all an imaginative category. If a remarkable act of imagination was required to conceive of back stairs, figuring out how to use the new possibilities of new architecture demanded comparable imaginative force” (8). I believe Spacks is right, but I would argue that more attention needs to be paid to how the external / material constructions help assist in the imaginative processes, so that the mind works in concert with the external sphere to recognize psychological needs and to induce social norms from those needs.
In addition to recognizing the heterogeneity of the multiple localities within the urban sphere, my approach to place also identifies a more complicated relationship between particular localities and their larger environs, a relationship that is poorly expressed via the oppositional terms of interior and exterior. Rather than seeing the shop, the arcade, or the home as an interior space offset to the exterior of the city, or the city as an interior space within walls or more abstract boundaries that offset it from the surrounding geography, I find it more useful to think of these spaces using the term *nested*. Each locality exists within a larger environment, and nesting indicates how smaller localities, “however well-defined and apparently self-contained, remain open to [external] influences and resonate, so to speak, in response to them” (Malpas 29). Similar to nested spaces within the city, the city itself provides a different structure of influence than the surrounding countryside, but it does maintain some similarities as well, based on the temperature, geology, and flora and fauna of that area. A perfect example can be seen in Gaskell’s *North and South*, where the northern industrial city is juxtaposed to both the northern seaside town of Heston and the southern metropolis of London. While the northern city shares many of the same features of London, it ultimately has stronger affinities to the northern seaside town because of their shared climate and the modes of living commensurate with that environment.

The climate not only affected individuals directly, then, but also influenced the modes of living and cultural practices of a given region. Such a view of culture’s indebtedness to climate and place was already evident by late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century. The aforementioned *Remarks on the Influence of Climate* is particularly significant here, as Falconer argues that “external circumstances” would not only
influence the individual’s “disposition and temper” but also “the manners, intellects, laws and customs, form of government, and religion” of a region or country (2). Many of Falconer’s claims were or would become commonplace assumptions: people of southern climates are more friendly but also more passionate and thus prone to violence, the nerves are deadened by overexposure to cold temperatures or physical labor, those who live in commercialized environments prove more intelligent but also more manipulative, rural peoples are more warm in disposition but also lacking in intelligence and culture. By affecting the dispositions of individuals, the climate would have a profound influence on the larger social tone and cultural practices of a place. The modes of life and labor correlated with each locality also shaped social structures – seafaring cultures would have different nuances, for example, than agricultural ones. Of course, the cultural practices and social norms influenced by climate and geography would in turn influence the individual subject. To appreciate fully the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning, then, we must always keep the reciprocity of the individual, social, and environmental in mind.

Taking this complex understanding of structures of influence, I want to turn the conversation back towards individual agency, to the ways in which these subjects can actively control the environmental influences working upon them. Returning to the notion of how the environment could induce individual needs and thereby effect cultural changes, the burgeoning hyper-awareness of privacy provides a key example. Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that while the eighteenth century did not originate the notion of privacy, “the evidence indicates a new level of attention to it during the period”; Spacks particularly emphasizes the physical evidence of “architectural history” (6). Over the
course of the eighteenth century and nineteenth, many trends in domestic design worked towards the insulation of these private spaces, as “middle-class homes were designed, externally and internally, to ‘ward off’ urbanization” (Byrden and Floyd 12). Front doors led to an entrance room and not an all-purpose hallway as had previously been the style; a parlor could still be found on the ground floor but was no longer accessible from the street; and bed chambers were provided with closets and further separated from the more heavily trafficked spaces of the house (Reed 616-17). Just as the urban environment engendered new needs, concerns, and values, so too were inhabitants (those with the means, at least) able to build their own localities so as to accommodate these new needs.

What proves significant about the home is not that it provided a barrier between the subject and the city or a seat for utter privatization. Rather, the upper- and middle-class home proved a social space. Again, I find the sense of the home as nested within a larger space to be more appropriate view of its function, as opposed to figuring it into an interior / exterior binary. The point of domestic insulation was not to separate the self from the city or public but rather to create a space in which the structure of influence could be actively controlled and thus utilized for specific purposes. The home offered a different structure of influence from the city, but it was not distinct from the world outside. The people and cultural products of the city proved important devices within the home, which subjects also utilized to cultivate desired forms of subjectivity. Thus, even as we come to recognize the home as “a powerfully influential space for the development

17 The relationship between the architectural changes in eighteenth-century urban homes and a growing desire for privacy is also addressed by Spacks 6, and Jürgen Habermas 44, though they approach this issue, as I do, from a perspective that interrogates the distinctions between public and private spheres.
of characters and identity,” as Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd do, we must be careful, I argue, when discussing “a conception of the domestic space as separate . . . from those of the world ‘outside’” (2).

As philosophers and physicians began to recognize the influences of external spaces – Sir James Kay’s study of the industrial city proves an apt example – so was there a concomitant effort to utilize structures of influence in a form of “domestic environmentalism,” which “conflated moral guidance with the actual appearance and physical layout of the house and its contents” (Grier 6). By 1873, such conceptions had permeated British culture and were no longer simply notions espoused in scientific or philosophical discourses, as this passage from an 1873 article in The Furniture Gazette, entitled “The Domestic Use of Design,” makes clear:

There can be no doubt that altogether, independently of direct intellectual culture, either from books or society, the mind is moulded and coloured to a great extent by the persistent impressions produced upon it by the most familiar objects that daily meet the eye . . . and yet there are few who correctly apprehend to how great an extent the character, and especially the temper, may be affected by the nature of ordinary physical surroundings . . . .

What architecture is to the mass, furniture in its domestic application is to the individual; . . . it will often happen that a comparatively insignificant article in the house does more in the way of impressing, or even moulding, the human intelligence with which it is in almost persistent contact. (4)
Invoking a Lockean language of the mind as matter to be molded and impressed upon, this article also evokes the sense of how environmental assemblages can be created in order to effect desired states of being as well as desired cognitive processes. Such practices do not remove the subject from the larger urban environment but rather help them to adapt to it in ways more desirable than developing a “savage torpor” or a blasé, calculating mind.

By being able to control the structure of influence in one’s most frequented locality, human beings become capable of engendering their own environmental enrichment. While the home is likely the most exemplary enriched environment, John Gwynn’s urban planning treatise *London and Westminster Improved* (1766) also identifies the city as an example on a grander scale. While he addresses the need to improve ventilation in the streets of the city for the same reasons that concerned Cheyne, much of Gwynn’s argument in the treatise utilizes a Lockeian psychology – where external objects shape the blank slate of the mind – to explain how the urban scene could have a benevolent impact on the human subject. “Publick magnificence,” Gwynn suggests, will “stimulate invention,” a cause-and-effect relationship he verifies through the examples of the Greeks and Romans. Gwynn suggests that their advances “were not actuated by supernatural cause, or any innate principles in their original formation; the mind is a mere blank, but capable of receiving such impressions as custom, education, or

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18 Environmental enrichment is a more recent principle in animal and human sciences, which recognizes that richer, more stimulating environments can increase cognitive functioning and psychological wellbeing. This notion has recently evolved into the science or neuroplasticity, which acknowledges how proper stimulus can lead to thicker cerebral cortexes and an increased number of synapses. While certainly steeped in more modern understanding of brain functioning, the notion of plasticity and environmental stimulus goes back to William James who would have likely developed it from the conception of the plasticity of the nerves in medical theories of sensibility. In other words, the idea that environments filled with proper stimulus can cultivate intelligence, as well as taste, goes back to the eighteenth century.
any other relative cause shall make upon it” (xiv-xv). Thus, Gwynn claims that the
splendor of their urban environments made beneficial impressions upon their minds and
led to their cultural advances. Building a better city, then, will result in “the advancement
of grandeur and elegance” and will “increase among all ranks and degrees of people . . .
refinement of taste” (xv, 1). Rather than relocating the individual to another environment
in order to refashion the mind, Gwynn posits that human beings might advantageously
reshape the environment shaping them.

Relocation, reconstruction, refashioning – these forms of human agency result in
environmental self-fashioning. But we might also consider spatial practices within certain
spaces, the playing of music to effect certain moods, the psycho-physiological effects of
food, the influence of a good, long walk. Individuals have at their disposal a myriad of
external spaces and objects to effect different psychological states. If these are all truths
of the biological existence of human beings, we must then consider how the unique
spaces of the modern world, in providing a different structure of influence, engendered
new ways of engaging and new ways of thinking. Asked another way, what new selves
did the modern city create?

This question will have to be answered over the course of the dissertation, as no
local discussion could do it justice. Still, I do want to reaffirm that one of the key
affordances of the modern city was its capacity to make the reciprocal nature of the
human engagement with place more apparent. In making British subjects aware of this
paradigm of self as a reality within their own lives – as opposed to an abstract theory –
the city can be said to function as a technology of self. I take this phrase from Foucault,
and as with other terms I have appropriated from poststructuralists, I must necessarily
revise its connotations. Foucault lists four types of technology – of production, of sign systems, of power, and of self – and he suggests that no one thing is relegated to just one type of technology. But what interests me in particular is Foucault’s definition for technologies of self: such technologies “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being; so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (18). Foucault goes on to discuss how different forms of discourse – dialogue, monologue, letter writing, autobiography, confessions – functioned as technologies of self, not only allowing the individual to “know thyself” but also producing a particular kind of self given the technology. For instance, the letter writing of the Romans and confessional practices of Christians, as the bases for self-understanding, produced very different conceptions of self that these subjects then steered toward.

The urban sphere proves to be a technology of all four types – it is a production technology, a sign system technology, a power technology, and a technology of self. As we have seen, the human self is produced through engagement with the environment (and other organisms in it) as much as he or she is through linguistic practices. The city and its micro-localities of home, alley, street, lobby, etc., allowed for individuals “to effect . . . a certain number of operations” on body, mind, and behavior “so as to transform themselves.” Because it brings all four types together, the city offers an invaluable medium for understanding how self-development occurred in conjunction with power dynamics, sign systems, and numerous modes of production. It is the city that affords such considerations.
The question that this raises is why discuss the urban influence on self-formation via nineteenth-century fiction and poetry and not, for example, periodical literature. Or why make this a literary study and not an historical or anthropological study. Indeed, for Foucault, it is writing itself that proves the quintessential technology of self, where in the subject externalizes his or herself and where the self becomes shaped by the kind of writing that was culturally expected. Different forms of writing – epistolary, autobiographical, confessional – all required the subject to take different perspectives towards the self and thus cultivate different conceptions of self. The mode of writing that I explore in this dissertation, the bildungsroman, began to appear early in the eighteenth-century but gained its full cultural influence in the nineteenth century, at the same time that the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning also took a firm hold in British culture. The bildungsroman is, I contend, a generic symptom or manifestation of the environmental self-shaping with which this dissertation is concerned as such narratives are constructed around the physical and psychological development of the a singular or several key characters as they travel through a variety of locations, each of which offer a series of experiences that shape the character(s). Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the urban sphere becomes the critical nexus through which the subjects of these narratives had to pass, allowing them the opportunity to adapt to a modern world in which they can then thrive. But of course, this literature also had to explore how these characters psychologically adapted to this experience, how they acquired an environmental literacy that allowed them to read structures of influence, to adapt to those structures, and / or to adapt their own psycho-physiological responses. In this way, these narratives chart a sophisticated negotiation between the subject and external influences in
the narrative arc towards a desirable selfhood -- not a transcendent self but rather one that is ideal for modern environmental conditions. In short, the bildungsroman proves the necessary medium for this study as it provides the long-view of urban engagement, allowing the reader and critic to interrogate and track the characters’ process of adaptation and maturation.

**Chapters**

The first section of the dissertation will consist of two chapters, one on the early Gothic novel and one on the Romantic epic. Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* are both exemplary of their respective genres, and, despite this distinction, both are bildungsroman narratives that reveal the necessity of urban experience to the ideal but malleable self they champion. The first chapter focuses on Radcliffe’s Gothic novel, resituating its place within a psycho-physiological discourse of the self and within an increasingly complex sense of urban influence. Through a project of aesthetic appreciation much in line with that of David Hume’s own sense of taste and passions, Radcliffe’s heroine, Emily St. Aubert, develops her sensibility into a tool that utilizes structures of influence for psychological cultivation and maintenance. Through this project, ultimately, Radcliffe situates urban experience as a catalyst for the subjectivity she champions – one defined by mental distemper, flights of fancy, and acute sensitivity to external stimulus, all of which engenders a stronger affinity for rural aesthetics, simple and tame passions, and domestic pleasure.
Though William Wordsworth’s “Poet of Nature” moniker would seem to make him a likely champion of a rural self-fashioning, in the second chapter I will argue that it is the influence of the urban sphere that Wordsworth simultaneously embraces and attempts to obfuscate under a rhetoric of transcendence. Of particular interest in this chapter is how the urban structures of influence are echoed in key scenes of sublime transcendence in *The Prelude*, which more often take place in remote localities. This mapping of urban experience onto rural locality reveals, I argue, the ways in which Wordsworth’s urban experience has shaped his conception of the sublime experience and mental engagement with the external world. The urban sphere acts as an epistemic playground for Wordsworth, teaching him many of the tropes he will use throughout *The Prelude* to articulate the power of the mind: the power and ever-presence of motion; the manner in which stimuli must necessarily become an “under-presence” as the conscious mind focuses on other objects; the dramatic shifts of psychological state of being induced by different urban structures of feeling; and the new, imaginative connections fostered by the confusion of walls and posters, theatrical performance spilling into streets, and the general blurring of interior and exterior spaces. In many ways, then, Wordsworth’s epic poem on the growth of the mind proves as much an espousal of the urban influence as it is a testament to “nature” or Wordsworth’s superior imagination.

The second half of this dissertation explores the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning within the context of the Victorian novel. The Victorian novel reveals, I argue, a more conscious and confident implementation of environmental self-fashioning, while at that same time focusing more explicitly on the urban sphere as a site of extreme influence and, resultantly, a site of extraordinary potential to refashion how one thinks,
feels, and behaves. The first chapter of this section, which deals with *North and South*, argues that Elizabeth Gaskell diffuses the tensions between free-will and determinism within Unitarian discourse and Victorian culture at large, a tension that has long vexed criticism on the industrial novel and the psychology of this era. Following Joseph Priestley’s sense of the human subject as an active agent within the chain of determining (but not deterministic) forces, Gaskell depicts her heroine’s education amid environmental influence, those affecting herself and others. This growing consciousness affords her a degree of control in her subjective state of being and her self-formation.

Also, important to my argument in this chapter and section are the spatial practices exhibited by Gaskell’s heroine, practices which reveal a growing sense of cognitive engagement with external space as part of daily life. The final chapter on Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, significantly expands on this cognitive engagement, as it utilizes a rather profound sense of subjectivity’s ecological contextualization. In accord with associationist and evolutionary psychology, Dickens’s novel offers a progressive formulation of psychological correspondence with and adaption to external conditions and influences. Here, the urban illegibility and alienation that preoccupies poststructuralist approaches to the city in literature becomes a symptom of initial experience or poor acclimation; however, by portraying the adaptive behaviors to locality and the use of external elements to supplement and augment the ways in which subjects think and develop, Dickens not only shows how human subjects can create a productive correspondence with the urban sphere but also how human psychology proves a system of integration with the world rather than a system enclosed in the brain or encapsulated in the body. In emphasizing Dickens’s own prioritization of psychological
externality rather than internality, I work to undermine the common critical view that sees Dickens’s characters as lacking the psychological complexity of real organisms.

In summation, this dissertation presents a new understanding of the self that emerged in nineteenth-century literature, one that recognized individual will and the environmental influence not as mutually exclusive but rather as dialectical forces in the formation of selfhood. Such an understanding was made possible by the increased complexity and variation of the human milieu – the chaotic metropolis and industrial towns, quieter suburbs, the soothing countryside and coasts, and advances in transportation increasing access to them all – which affirmed the psycho-physiological influence unique to each locality. With a reflexive emphasis on human adaptability and agency, nineteenth-century narratives of personal development reveal the potential for individuals to exclude or incorporate external influence into the economy of the self via the practices of travel, habituation, and adaptation, allowing them to negotiate desired forms of subjectivity. The type of subject formation proposed in this study helps resolve the polarized conceptions of self that nineteenth-century scholarship has identified, a self often seen either as autonomous, deep, and essential or as permeable, superficial, and externally shaped. Ultimately, I work toward a sense of the externality of mental life, analyzing how these narratives and their modes of representation promote a pre-Freudian conception of psychological development as something that happens around individuals as much as within them, which proves a more dynamic, sophisticated, and environmentally-oriented psychology than post-Freudian readers have heretofore acknowledged.
CHAPTER 1 – THE URBANISM OF UDOLPHO: ANN RADCLIFFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SENSIBILITY

As her first narrative gesture in *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance* (1794), Ann Radcliffe introduces Monsieur St. Aubert – a recovering urbanite and father of the novel’s protagonist, Emily. Having “mingled in gay and in the busy scenes” of Paris, St. Aubert soon “retired from the multitude ‘more in pity than in anger,’ to scenes of simple nature, to the pure delights of literature, and to the exercise of domestic virtues” (1). In this gesture, Radcliffe invokes two themes that pervaded British literature of the late eighteenth century: the rural retreat from the city and the culture of sensibility with its interrelated components of psycho-physiological health, aesthetic taste, and moral bearing. Through these two tropes, Radcliffe explores throughout *The Mysteries* the physical and mental influences of the urban sphere. In one key scene – after Emily’s love-interest, Valancourt, has been introduced – St. Aubert acknowledges that the urban “world” poses many threats to the love “it seldom feels”:

its scenes, and its interests, *distract the mind, deprave the taste, corrupt the heart*, and love cannot exist in a heart that has lost the meek dignity of innocence. Virtue and taste are nearly the same, for virtue is little more

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1 Citations for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* come from the Oxford World’s Classics edition (2008), ed. Bonamy Dobrée. Hereafter, I refer to the novel as *The Mysteries*. Much of the chapter focuses on the events in and around the castle Udolpho; thus, I have decided to break from the traditional shorthand of *Udolpho* so as to avoid confusion.
than active taste, and the most delicate affections of each combine in real
love. How then are we to look for love in great cities, where selfishness,
dissipation, and insincerity supply the place of tenderness, simplicity, and
truth? (49-50; emphasis added)

The over-arching plot of this gothic romance is the union of Emily and Valancourt, and
here Radcliffe identifies the city as a potential antagonist – one that threatens the
interconnected mind, taste, and moral feeling of the subject. Valancourt proves a worthy
love interest precisely because he “has never been to Paris” (36). Yet, Emily and
Valancourt will soon be subjected to their own trials in different cities that will alter them
physiologically and psychologically, threatening to deprave their senses and disorder
their interiorities. In this light, St. Aubert’s proclamation becomes a thesis question for
Radcliffe’s novel; in other words, how does one maintain a healthy psyche, defined
largely by a capacity to feel, in the face of urban influence? The answer, it would seem,
has much to do with virtue, and as M. St. Aubert indicates virtue has much to do with an
“active” form of taste.

Given his own experience and his paternal role, St. Aubert educates Emily about
the psycho-physiological influence of urban life and helps her to cultivate tastes that
prove a psycho-physiological form of control. One significant eighteenth-century
assumption about the relationship between the city and taste is indicated in M. St.
Aubert’s frequent references to “dissipation.” A popular watchword of the late eighteenth
century for the city’s negative influences, dissipation signified the unproductive
scattering of physical and mental energy that resulted from immoral indulgence and that
led, potentially, to the distempering of the passions.2 Eighteenth-century physician William Buchan points out that people are endued “with various passions, for the propagation of the species, the preservation of the individual, &c. Intemperance is the abuse of these passions; and moderation consists in the proper regulation of them” (101). According to Buchan, passions could become distempered through over-indulgence of luxury and the abuse of debauchery. Intemperance, leading to greater stages of vice and violence, can lead to consumption (which pervades the “great towns,” Buchan suggests).

In concert with Buchan, a pattern emerges in late eighteenth-century print culture, particularly in the London Magazine, where the “city” is recognized as “the dominion of luxury and dissipation” (“Lively Portrait” 68).3 While it could be found outside the cityscape, luxury was strongly associated with the urban aristocracy, the rise of international trade, the increase of factories and commercial spaces, the proliferation of professions and consumer products, and, of course, the masses of consumers that the urban sphere harbored.4 In The Frauds of London Detected (1779), Richard King laments

2 In accord with my own thinking, Robert Miles points to concerns over urban luxury and its aesthetic contrast with pastoral simplicity, though he does not explore The Mysteries in light of this contrast; see Gothic Writing 1750-1820 (2002), 41-42. The relationship between luxury and sensibility (and thus including aesthetics, taste, morality, etc.) has received ample attention. G. J. Barker-Benfield makes clear in The Culture of Sensibility (1992) that “the ‘luxury’ of feeling . . . was at the heart of the culture of sensibility, and it was basic to the consumer psychology the polite commercial economy required” (xxvi). While certain kinds of luxury are often seen as prerequisites to fine feeling, many scholars have recognized the eighteenth-century concern that luxury deadens the senses and taste; see Anne Vila Enlightenment and Pathology (1998), 232-234; and Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” 19-22. Berg and Eger’s collection Luxury in the Eighteenth Century (2003) proves an invaluable source on luxury and the rise of commercial culture.


4 Leonard Schwarz’s “London 1700-1840” provides an overview of many aspects of London, including its characterization as a site of decadence and economic growth. Also, see Sharpe, “Population & Society 1700-1840,” and Robert Shoemaker, London Mob (2004) 1-26. It is also worth noting that, as Barker-Benfield suggests, all classes of the eighteenth-century urban sphere participated in the consumption of consumer products in their “aspiration for ‘respectability’ and ‘gentility’” (99), thus, all classes indulged in luxury, rather than necessary, goods.
that London contains so many “depredations, frauds, thefts and whoredoms . . . . London is become luxurious, and . . . luxury begets dissipation, and consequently the evils we complain of” (v). The kind of cause-and-effect chain that King identifies is precisely the concern of St. Aubert, who understands the potential of urban stimulation, particularly for the affluent, to become a degrading influence if not properly managed or offset by well-cultivated taste. But this cultivation highlights a wrinkle in the geographical, social, and psycho-physiological dynamic established so far – the urban sphere was itself the main purveyor of cultivation as it afforded greater access to education and the arts.

Thus, we return to a slightly revised form of Radcliffe’s prior question: how does one resolve the urban sphere’s dual role as a source for cultivation and the seat of dissipation? This is the central question of Radcliffe’s novel, and in arguing this much, I work against three key tendencies in Radcliffe criticism that will be engaged throughout the chapter: the tendency to largely ignore the role of the urban sphere in Radcliffe’s work and first-wave Gothic literature in general; to prioritize the gendering of sensibility as opposed to its potential as an environmental paradigm for psycho-physiological

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5 King’s cause-and-effect chain beginning with the urban environment closely mirrors Cicero’s “Oration for Roscius of America,” which was rather popular in the latter half of the eighteenth century, being quoted by English physician William Falconer (366); associationist philosopher Joseph Priestley in *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, 276; and generally echoed in William Cowper’s *The Task*. Cicero states: “The City creates Luxury; Rapaciousness is the necessary Consequence of Luxury; Audaciousness breaks out from Rapaciousness; and thence springs all Manner of Guild and Misdeeds; but this Country life, which you call savage, is the Directress of Frugality, Industry, and Justice” (trans. Guthrie 54-55).

6 According to Linda Dryden and Robert Mighall, the urban Gothic emerges in the mid nineteenth-century and proves more than “a mere transplanting of the Radcliffian tale of terror in a modern urban context. This is not just a Gothic in the city, it is a Gothic of the city. Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience” (Mighall *A Geography* 30; see also Dryden). In “Gothic Cities,” Mighall goes so far as to claim that “The term ‘urban Gothic’ should be a contradiction in terms” given the first wave of Gothic literature and its typically remote and rural localities (54). A handful of scholars have briefly acknowledged the urban sphere as contributing Gothicism’s modern concerns; see William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (1985); Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle* (1989); Diane Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism* (1998); and David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (1980). In their discussions, these concerns are quickly glossed, not part of an extended analysis of Radcliffe’s work, and thus not seen as integral to Radcliffe’s sense of subject-formation.
control; and to read Radcliffe’s portrayal of aesthetic engagement as part of a psychophysiological paradigm rather than the rhetorical mirroring or symbolic projection of an otherwise autonomous interiority. The Mysteries affirms the paradigm of an environmentally fashioned self and recognizes active taste and aesthetic theory as components of a larger discourse in the eighteenth century regarding the integration of self and society with the environment. While I grant that gender must be acknowledged as a variable within this influence, given the common assumption that the female body and mind were more impressionable, I argue that Radcliffe’s ideal subjectivity proves gender neutral – indeed, Emily St. Aubert follows her father’s model. Both characters achieve their selfhood through the cultivation of taste via an engagement with rural and

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8 As with nineteenth-century literary criticism in general, scholars of Radcliffe have frequently read the correlation between aesthetic scenery and character psychology as symbolically rather than causally linked. For instance, Daniel Cottom suggests that Radcliffe’s landscapes are simply a space “over which [her characters’] various psychological states may be displayed on a larger scale” (The Civilized Imagination [1985]). Similar references to psychic projection, pathetic fallacy, or affective fallacy in Radcliffe’s work are found in Markman Ellis The History of the Gothic (2000) 9, 124; DeLamotte 48; Poovey 320, Punter 68-69. Robert Miles comes nearer to my own sense of a self that “is shown to be constituted in and through nature,” yet for Miles this process is merely symbolic and rhetorical; Miles ultimately aligns his view with the “pathetic fallacy,” a concept I am eager to overturn (Ann Radcliffe [1995] 12). Terry Castle also regards the affective connection between landscape and viewer as a symbolic relationship, one steeped in psychoanalytic principles of repression and return (The Female Themometer [1995] 17), and such a psychoanalytic prioritization of internality (as opposed to causality or reciprocity) informs much of the readings of Radcliffe’s sublime aesthetics as well, a trend initiated by David Morris in his seminal article “Gothic Sublimity” (1985), which initiated a critical shift from a Burkean (and more empiricist) reading of the sublime to a Freudian one. This shift will be explored at greater length later in the chapter.

9 Two significant, though in some ways conflicting, texts that address eighteenth-century theory on environment are Dror Wahrman’s The Making of the Modern Self (2004) 86-120 and Alan Bewell Wordsworth and the Enlightenment (1989). While Wahrman suggests that the conception of a malleable self that is implicit in the eighteenth-century discourse on climatic influence is usurped by the inward turn to a more fixed and autonomous subject, Bewell and my own study provide evidence to the contrary. Bewell’s discussion of eighteenth-century environmentalism and its influence on Wordsworth will be addressed in the next chapter, and later in the present chapter I will provide further evidence of the continuation of discussions on environmental influence on the human subject.
urban structures of influence; thus, Radcliffe presents a psycho-physiological form of external engagement rather than an inward mechanism of repression and projection.

The first section of this chapter will establish the empiricist tenets that underwrite Radcliffe’s understanding of taste, sensibility, and ultimately her sense of self-formation, while the remainder will show how such self-formation becomes entangled with urban influence throughout The Mysteries. Central to this chapter’s urban discussion is my claim that the castle Udolpho functions as a thematic and aesthetic extension of the urban sphere, providing Radcliffe, her heroine, and the reader an opportunity to reflect on the urban experience as though viewing it through a glass darkly. Emily’s stay at Udolpho proves largely unpleasant, even terrorizing, but it also allows her to further cultivate her active taste by expanding her capacity to feel via aesthetic and spatial practices. The psycho-physiological condition the Emily garners from her urban experience proves beneficial and much like St. Aubert’s once Emily is resituated within the picturesque landscapes of France. My reading, then, revises Diane Hoeveler’s and David Punter’s sense that Radcliffe shows only “a deep disdain” for the social issues of the urban sphere or that it is “wholly destructive” of virtue, or taste for that matter (Hoeveler 87; Punter 1:78). Instead, Radcliffe portrays, I argue, a much more complex relationship with urban experience, one more in tune with the realities of urban existence in the eighteenth century.10 Furthermore, this complex relationship proves integral to the formation of the particular subjectivity Radcliffe champions, one defined by “mental distemper,” prone to

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10 Several significant collections have appeared in the last decade, which have provided criticism with a more fully developed picture of eighteenth-century urban life. I have in mind Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay’s Trivia (2007); The City and the Senses: Urban Culture Since 1500 (2007); and The Cambridge Urban History of England, Vol. 2, 1540-1840 (2000) – many of the chapters from these collections have been referenced in the introduction or will be referred to in this chapter. Also helpful is Robert Shoemaker’s London Mob: Violence & Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England (2004).
fancy yet acutely sensitive to external stimulus – in short, the kind of subjectivity widely promoted in the gothic and romantic literature that succeeds Radcliffe. Though narratively obscured and critically marginalized, the city proves central to Radcliffe’s gothic narrative and the modern self it fashions.

**Environmental Sensibility and Self-Cultivation**

Despite sensibility’s origination in empiricism and its continued engagement with medical treatises and theories of mind, literary and cultural criticism tends to view sensibility as a social rather than environmental paradigm. In other words, they focus on sympathy, sentimentality, and the emotional aspect of sensibility. Most often, it recounts the following narrative: empiricist philosophy engenders sensibility, sensibility rises within the medical discourse of George Cheyne or the aesthetic theories of Hume and Priestly, and it arrives at its apex in sentimental fiction and fashionable culture. What then? A quick sea change in the late eighteenth-century, as sensibility becomes a ridiculous affect, a vocabulary of fainting, blushing, and crying to be satirized. It would seem that sensibility becomes something different altogether, now silly and artificial,

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11 Todd suggests: “‘Sentimentality’ came in as a pejorative term in the 1770s when the idea of sensibility was losing ground. It suggested and still suggests debased and affected feeling, and indulgence in and display of emotion for its own sake beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety” (8). Stephen Ahern similarly argues that, across the eighteenth century, sensibility “gradually changes form denoting a primarily sensual to an increasingly ethical category of experience that becomes subsumed by sentimentalism as a literary-cultural ethos” (12). While in varied forms, an analogous version of this narrative (a shift from sensibility to sentimentality) is stated, as in Wahrman (39) and M. Ellis (7), or is reflected in the larger argument, as it is in Van Sant. By and large, these texts prioritize the gendering of sensibility, the man and woman of feeling, within the sentimental novel, as does Claudia Johnson’s *Equivocal Beings* (1995). This is not to discount scholarship that focuses more on nineteenth-century culture and acknowledges how the nerve paradigm continues in the nineteenth-century, see, for example, Peter Logan’s *Nerves and Narratives* (1997); Alan Richardson’s *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2001); Rick Rylance’s *Victorian Psychology and British Culture* (2000); and Thomas Dixon’s *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (2003), to name a few.
certainly something “not easily located within the enlightenment rationality of the philosophers and scientists” (M. Ellis, *Politics of Sensibility* 7). The recounting of this shift from sensibility as environmental effect to sentimentality as cultural affect is, perhaps, an accurate reflection of the eighteenth-century discourse at large. Yet, it is in many ways misleading as it suggests that at some point in the latter half of the eighteenth century the empiricist and environmental undercurrent in this discourse was lost.

Of course, it was not. The understanding of sensibility as tied up in the functions of the nervous system and as affected by the environment was readily found in Radcliffe’s day, and it would continue well into the nineteenth century. Such a distinction is crucial to my larger argument regarding the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning in Radcliffe’s novel. That Radcliffe understood sensibility within this psychophysiological bearing is beyond doubt, as other critics have illustrated; even so, the environmental orientation of Radcliffe’s understanding has often gone overlooked as critics predominantly focus on the variability of the nervous system – across gender, class, nationality – rather than focusing on the variability of the environment and the kind of states of being it engendered. In *The Mysteries*, Radcliffe makes constant references to the nervous system and the capacity of external stimuli to “impress the mind” (31).

Also consider that St. Aubert is “prescribed the air of Languedoc and Provence” to

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12 See, for example, James Johnson, in *The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions* (1813); Thomas Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1807); James Forbes’ *Oriental Memoirs* (1813): I:35, 138; James Martin’s *The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions* (1856).

13 Robert Miles, in *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (1995), provides a concise discussion of empiricism, associationism, and sensibility in regards to the late eighteenth century and focuses briefly on the difference in nervous fibers between classes; Miles goes on to discuss the picturesque and sublime, but more as a form of ideological expression than an environmental form of self-fashioning (49-52).

14 Barker-Benfield argues that “Impressions’ was one of the most frequently used nerve referents” and correlates it to Locke’s nerve paradigm (18). Van Sant points to the part metaphorical, part indexical meaning of terms like *impress* or *imprint*, and their basis in a physiological understanding of psychological function (94).
ameliorate a sickness that had “seized upon his nerves,” a medical practice (air cures) and terminology (nerves) common to the eighteenth-century medical treatises.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, one can easily find the frequent echoes of associationism in aesthetic treatises of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as well as its literature. In the case of Radcliffe, we see in \textit{The Mysteries} how sublime scenery “dilated [the] mind” or how “terror” similarly “occupies and expands the mind” (163, 248)\textsuperscript{16} – a description highly reminiscent of Joseph Priestley’s belief that the mind “perceives, and is conscious of nothing, but the ideas that are present to it”; thus, “it must, as it were, \textit{conform} itself to them” and “must enlarge or contrast with its field of view” (126-7).\textsuperscript{17} That Radcliffe would borrow from Priestley makes sense given that the latter was close friends with

\textsuperscript{15} The word “nerves” already had a lengthy history by 1584. Also, the importance of respiration had long been established, such as in the work of Galen in the second century. Yet, a humoral system of the body, like that used by Galen, would continue to be the dominant physiological model until theories on the nervous system and brain began to challenge it in the middle of the seventeenth century and became the dominant perspective in the eighteenth century (see Austin 36). Furthermore, medical attempts “to change the nature of patient’s temperament, or to alleviate cases of madness . . . were rarely even attempted until the mid-eighteenth century” (Still 30).

\textsuperscript{16} Radcliffe offers a similar definition for terror and horror in “On the Supernatural in Poetry”: “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (149). The correlation between sublime stimulus and the expansion of the psyche goes back to John Baillie’s 1747 “An Essay on the Sublime”: “The Sublime dilates and elevates the Soul, Fear sinks and contracts it” (97). Similar descriptions can be found in Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror," \textit{Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose}, by J. and A. L. (London: J. Johnson, 1773), which was also influential to Radcliffe, and, in predating Priestley’s own text, reinforces the presence of empiricist conceptions of the mind in the latter parts of the eighteenth century. While the correlation between soul and psyche might seem problematic, the soul was often seen as synonymous with consciousness, especially within empirical psychology. Gilpin also points out how the imagination can dilate itself in vast ideas of space" (\textit{Three Essays} 56), and, while such a sentiment seems to aggrandize the power of the imagination more the influence of the environment, we must keep in mind that within empiricism ideas are all determined by environment – that this is Gilpin’s thinking too is evident in a passage to be discussed later in which Gilpin refers to external objects of the cityscape as already “ideas” (\textit{Observations} (1786): II: 267-268. Wordsworth and Byron will also refer to the dilation or enlargement of the mind in a manner that echoes Priestley: for example in \textit{Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage} that “we thus dilate / Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate” (ll.1421-22); see also Wordsworth \textit{The Prelude}, XIII: 20-60. For more on the influence of associationism on Romanticist thought, see M. H. Abrams 177-183.

\textsuperscript{17} This description comes from \textit{Lectures on Oratory and Criticism} (1777), though Priestley’s own associationist belief’s were largely drawn from David Hartley and were published in Priestley’s abridged account of Hartley’s theories, \textit{Hartley’s Theory of the Mind, on the Principles of the Association of Ideas} (1775).
Thomas Bentley, an uncle of Radcliffe’s with whom she frequently resided. Radcliffe knew Priestley personally and likely read his *A Course of Lectures*, which was in her uncle’s library. Sensibility, for Radcliffe, worked to encapsulate the numerous ways in which the psycho-physiology of the subject was influenced by external world— that is in terms of health, in terms of aesthetic tastes, and in terms of the shape of the mind and self. In what follows, I will explore these aspects in greater depth.

Sensibility referred to the receptivity of the sensory system and mind to the external stimulus, a “psychoperceptual scheme explained and systematized by Newton and Locke” (Barker-Benfield xvii). John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) outlines how, through physical sensation, external stimuli engender ideas and provide the materials through which mental functions are developed. Locke conceived of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, or “empty cabinet” void of innate ideas, which suggested a self that was profoundly shaped by external experience. The mind, according to Locke, begins as a “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas”; our sensations, caused by external stimulus, “at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet . . . . [T]he mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise the discursive faculty,” that discursive faculty being tied to the act of reflection (I: 2.15). Within an empiricist view, consciousness,

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18 For more on Radcliffe’s relationship with Priestly and his theories, see Norton’s recent biography of Radcliffe, *The Mistress of Udolpho*, particularly 27, 67-69.

19 Stephen Cox similarly sees sensibility as arising from Lockean notions of self and as referring to “the medium of nervous ‘feeling’ through which the self is affected by the outside world” (25). More recently, Susan Whyman defines sensibility as building from Locke, and recognizing thus “an externally constituted self” (186). The following studies also refer to empiricism in general or Locke in particular as foundational to sensibility: Todd 24-30, Van Sant 90, M. Ellis 10, Pinch 17-18, Ahern 12. However, when it comes to Radcliffe, these texts (outside of Pinch) view sensibility as having already turned into the affect of sentimentality.
subjectivity, and self become largely synonymous terms, and all ideas, even the idea of the self, are derived directly or indirectly from the environment.

Most importantly, though, eighteenth-century physicians and philosophers received from Locke’s theory a conception of a self that was highly malleable and consistently shaped by the environment. Starting with George Cheyne’s *The English Malady; or, a Treatise of Nervous Disease of All Kinds* (1735), the empiricist conception of self gained a more physiological aspect and become intertwined with the capacity of the sensory organs, nerves, and brain to feel external stimuli. Cheyne’s text, a touchstone for discussions on sensibility both in the eighteenth century and today, establishes how the climate as well as elements of the built environment can lead to psycho-physiological “Distempers” (ii). Climatic influence on physical and psychological formation can also be seen in John Arbuthnot’s *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (1733), and in David Hume’s popular “Of National Characters” (1742). Physicians Robert Whyte, William Buchan, and William Falconer all wrote in the later part of the eighteenth century about environmental influence as well, the latter suggesting that human beings are “liable to be considerably affected, both in his body and mind, by external circumstances, such as climate, situation, etc.” (Falconer 2). It is important to note here that Falconer first offers “circumstances” as the larger, environmental sphere of

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20 Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I: 2.15. It is important to note that Locke regards self, consciousness, and personal identity as largely synonymous. Locke writes: “Person, as I take it, is the name for this self. Wherever a man finds what he calls himself, there, I think, another may say is the same person” (II: 27.26). Locke also explains that personal identity, or self, as being attributed to “that conscious thinking thing, . . . which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends” (II: 27.17).

21 As with his definition of personal identity, Locke refers to the “Self” as “that conscious thinking thing” (II: 27.17). Later, he writes: “Person, as I take it, is the name for this self. Wherever a man finds what he calls himself, there, I think, another may say is the same person” (II: 27.26). The present discussion mainly draws from Book II, chapter 27, sections 3, 9, and 17.
the subject, a sphere that then includes situation, diet, labor afforded, housing, social conditions, etc., in addition to climate.

As I noted above, many commentators have read sensibility in Radcliffe’s text less as part of environmental engagement and more as a feminine flaw, a dangerous quality that leads women to social or mental ruin. This, I find, is not entirely accurate. St. Aubert does teach Emily to “restrain her sensibility” as “[a]ll excess is vicious,” even when it comes to fine feeling (19-20), a sentiment he repeats from his death bed: he tells Emily she must “not indulge in the pride of fine feeling,” as “sensibility” proves “a dangerous quality” to those who truly possess it (80). Such directives appear, at first, conflicting, and seem even more so when St. Aubert looks fondly upon Valancourt, who is “full of ardour” and “highly susceptible to whatever is grand and beautiful” (41). It could be argued that St. Aubert’s valuation of Valancourt’s fine feeling, in relief to his anxieties about Emily’s, points to the gender politics at stake in the discourse of sensibility. Building from Mary Poovey’s seminal “Ideology and The Mysteries of Udolpho” (1979), studies typically focus on the gendered valuations of sensibility or fine feeling, often recognizing it as a feminine flaw; they might also see these gender valuations as problematically overlapping, such as when Poovey points to “the paradoxical role sensibility plays in simultaneously restricting women and providing

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22 For instance of this critical approach, see Kate Ellis; Eugenia DeLamotte, Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic (1990); Miles, Robert. Anne Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress (1995); Adela Pinch, Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen (1996); Diane Hoeveler, Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës (1998); Markman Ellis, The History of Gothic Fiction; Donna Heiland, Gothic and Gender: An Introduction (2004); and David Punter & Glennis Byron, The Gothic (2004); and Stephen Ahern, Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel 1688-1810 (2007).
them power” (Poovey 311). This approach to sensibility in *The Mysteries* reinforces the pervasive trend to read the novel as feminine Gothic vis-a-vis Lewis’ masculine *The Monk.*

Radcliffe’s novel *is* concerned with gender politics – I do not mean to suggest otherwise. Yet, in both instances where St. Aubert warns Emily against indulging in “fine feeling,” he also qualifies the imperative: he merely warns her against the dangers attendant to sensibility, not sensibility in total. He implores that Emily avoid becoming apathetic, “for whatever may be the evils resulting from a too susceptible heart . . . nothing can be hoped from an insensible one” (20). At the heart of St. Aubert’s advice is the sense that “we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them” (80). The question, then, becomes how such control can be effected.

With gender being so heavily prioritized in the relevant criticism, Radcliffe’s attitudes about the urban environment and its influence on sensibility and subjectivity have received little attention; St. Aubert’s warnings are more geographical than gender specific, especially since his language is particularly gender neutral. Such is the case when he tells Emily how mental aptitude and the cultivation of taste are important to both “a country and a city life; in the first, they prevent the uneasy sensations of indolence, and afford a sublime pleasure in the taste they create for the beautiful, and the grand; in the latter, they make dissipation less an object of necessity, and consequently of interest”

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For other discussions of conflicting sensibility see also Pinch 123, M. Ellis 55. For those who discuss sensibility as predominantly a feminine flaw, see Miles *Ann Radcliffe,* 130; Punter 66-68; Hoeveler 74; Ahern 155. DeLamotte as well as Punter and Byron see Emily’s excessive feeling as leading to visionary moments, though DeLamotte sees this as a positive development (43-44), while Punter and Byron see this “female accomplishment” as “no real salvation” (187-88).

(6). Once again, St. Aubert correlates the city with dissipation – a term he also uses when discussing how the urban scenes “distract the mind, deprave the taste, corrupt the heart.” Yet, a strong mind and cultivated sense of taste will keep one from dissipation, i.e. indulging in the vices and corrupting stimulus (aesthetic or otherwise) of the city. In the country, such qualities will endear one to healthful stimuli encoded in the aesthetics of beauty and grandness.

St. Aubert’s precepts bear strong similarities to those espoused by David Hume in “On the Delicacy of Taste and Passion” (1742), another seminal text within the discourse of sensibility. Here, Hume breaks down sensibility into the categories of passion and taste, suggesting that “cultivation of that higher and more refined taste” will help “to cure us of this delicacy of passion” (92). A cultivated taste “improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions,” while at the same time rendering “the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions” (92). Thus, Hume outlines a program for the maintenance of psychological processes – i.e. passions – via aesthetic training, a program founded on empiricist conceptions of self that places great importance on the kind of stimuli that “strike the senses” (93). The physiological basis of Hume’s study leads to a causal relationship between the external object and the sensations it affords. This causal relationship will be further articulated in his 1757 essay “Of the Standard of Taste” as well as in Edmund Burke’s 1759 “Introduction on Taste,” which was added to his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).  

I stress Hume’s “On the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,” however, because it offers a

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25 For more on the interconnections between Hume’s and Burke’s essays on standards of taste, see Dario Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment: Burke and Hume on Taste” (2012).
clearer sense of one’s own agency in the development of his or her sensibility and thus his or her psychological state of being. St. Aubert’s function in *The Mysteries* is to indoctrinate Emily into such a program, one that recognizes a malleable self: malleable, but not passive, as this aesthetic program recognizes the role of self-cultivation and geographic relocation in what proves an environmental form of self-fashioning.

Before moving to discuss Radcliffe’s portrayal of urbanites and urban experience, I want say a few more words on the aesthetic program St. Aubert teaches Emily, particularly its incorporation of the sublime. A great deal has been said in Gothic criticism about the sublime, and rather than outline that discourse in full, a more efficient method would be to point out that while most critics acknowledge Radcliffe’s debt to Burke, and some proceed to note Burke’s debt to empiricist psychology, few deliberate on how Radcliffe depicts the sublime aesthetic as physiological tool for the cultivation of a proper sensibility. Radcliffe’s physiological depiction of the sublime is complicated by the transcendent sense of holism Emily receives when “her mind arose to the adoration of the Deity” upon viewing His sublime “works,” but even her description of how the soul “seems to expand . . . into a nobler nature” takes on the associationist

26 In scholarship of the last three decades or so, the most dominant trends in the discussion of the Gothic sublime have been either a feminist or Freudian perspective, though these are not mutually exclusive perspectives by any means. The Freudian trend was initiated by David Morris regards the sublime, particularly the supernatural sublime, as a form of repression and rerun; see Miles *Gothic Writing*, 67; Castle 132-33; Jack Voller 36; Botting “Introduction,” 8. Noting the transgressive and subjugating aspect of sublime experience, particular its threat to self-preservation, critiques have read the sublime as masculine or patriarchal and the subject-position as inherently feminine; see Miles *Gothic Writing*, 67; Anne Mellor 95; Elizabeth Bohls 209–29; Heiland 60-71. Offering a counterpoint, Charlie Bondhus (16) and Allison Milbank (xviii) have also provided feminist readings of the sublime in Radcliffe’s work but have rather found the sublime as an empowering experience. Like Bondhus, Vijay Mishray provides a Kantian view of the Gothic sublime that, like the Freudian readings, shifts away from the environmental and physiological basis of sublime experience and towards an autonomous subject. Vanessa Ryan has recently, and effectively, argued against the reading of the sublime in correlation with Kantian autonomy and has reemphasized the physiological and empiricist orientation of the Burkean sublime and its influence on eighteenth-century literature; see also Milbank viii-ix and Miles *Ann Radcliffe* 46-50.
language of mental expansion already seen in Priestley and evident elsewhere in The Mysteries and “On the Supernatural in Poetry.”27 The mind-expanding capacity of the sublime and terrible will prove of significant value to Radcliffe’s environmental aesthetic and its correlation to self-formation, but equally important is how Radcliffe consistently places the sublime in proximity with the beautiful and picturesque, a proximity which suggests, I argue, the necessity of positive pleasure after the negative pleasure of terror so as to affirm the value of the latter.

This aesthetic system of psycho-physiological agitation and soothing is most apparent during Emily’s and St. Aubert’s trip toward Rousillon through the Pyrenees. Having witnessed the sublime mountains, which evoke a “solemn” state of mind, they begin to descend towards a valley and its “features of beauty [that] then mingled with the scene”; and though they “look back” upon the “sublime objects they had quitted” with regret at leaving them, their eye’s prove “fatigued with the extensions of [their] powers” and were “glad to repose on the verdure of woods and pastures” (43). Thus, upon evoking the spiritual sense of solemnity, Radcliffe then points to the physiological (and psychological) strain that afforded it. The mingling of the sublime and beautiful thus becomes a softening of the extreme psychological force of the sublime experience, and Valancourt points to this mollification while reaffirming its condition as an external influence: such scenes “soften the heart, like the notes of sweet music, and inspire that delicious melancholy . . . . They waken our best and purest feelings, disposing to

27 For more on how the natural sublime leads Radcliffe to a sense of holism, see Milbank xii- xvii. Miles provides a rather succinct discussion of the interconnections between the associationist implications of Burke’s, Ann Laetitia Aikin’s, and Radcliffe’s own discussion on taste and the sublime; Miles particularly singles out Aikin’s phrase, “a ‘strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch’” as evocative of associationist models of mental functioning (49).
benevolence, pity, and friendship” (46).

In combining these natural aesthetics, Radcliffe exemplifies how the mingling of different aesthetic registers causally produce a diverse range of emotional states. Thus, to have a keener taste for these aesthetics allows one to more readily access the potential feelings they afford. It is at this point that St. Aubert provides the warning with which this chapter opened concerning the urban influence on taste, and he reiterates that message soon after when he claims that rural poverty “cannot deaden our taste for the grand, and the beautiful, or deny us the means of indulging it; for the scenes of nature—those sublime spectacles, so infinitely superior to all artificial luxuries! Are open for the enjoyment of the poor, as well as the right” (60). Indeed, such enjoyments take on a rather democratic meaning, and still implicit is the sense that such enjoyment is available to all through the proper cultivation.

Yet, while St. Aubert warns against the “artificial luxuries” of urban life and the dissipation to which it can lead, the aesthetic project outlined above offers a means in which the shock or terror of urban experience might be mitigated, so that one could access the mental expansion of terror or the “refined perception through heightened sensitivity” that it engenders (Thomas 132). We must recall that St. Aubert’s own sensibility has undergone a form of sublime urban shock and rural mollification. The urban sphere, then, is in some ways responsible for St. Aubert’s subjectivity, one that Radcliffe clearly champions. Through Emily’s own experience, Radcliffe depicts what role the urban sphere plays in cultivating such a selfhood.

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28 Both Miles and Jayne Elizabeth Lewis have noted the shift from sublime to picturesque as an oft repeated strophe in Radcliffe’s fiction that gives the narrative “emotional depth as well as thematic meaning” (Miles Ann Radcliffe 80; see also Lewis “ ‘No Colour of Language’: Radcliffe’s Aesthetic Unbound,” 379).
Sensibility and the City

While the first volume of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set in rural France, anxieties over city life frequently disturb the pastoral calm of its pages. Radcliffe relates these concerns through St. Aubert as well as through characters indicative of urban conditioning. Offsetting the “pure taste, simplicity, and moderated wishes” of St. Aubert, Monsieur Quesnel, his Parisian brother-in-law, proves calculating and cold, determined to become a person of “consequence,” and whose taste was defined by “splendor” (11). Mmes. St. Aubert and Quesnel are also contrasted: the latter expresses an affected astonishment that the former could live “in this remote corner,” preferring instead “the splendor of the balls, banquets, and processions” (12). Of course, Emily’s aunt, Mme. Cheron of the French city Tholouse, and her eventual uncle-in-law, Signor Montoni of Venice, also exhibit urban subjectivities, noted in particular for their “talents of dissimulation” (123, 143). Mme. Cheron is defined by her “ostentatious style” that is “more shew than taste,” her “avarice,” “ambition,” and an “unfeeling manner” (118, 140, 144). While Signor Montoni remains mysterious at first, we do see the “quickness of his perceptions,” suggestive of his enervation as both a southerner and an urbanite (122). After the death of St. Aubert, Emily goes to live with her aunt, where she witnesses Mme. Cheron’s lavish parities and the “the immoderate and feverish animation” of the people who attend, exhibiting their own “insensibility” (122-23). Such parties continue in Venice, to which Emily is taken after Mme. Cheron marries Montoni. 29 It is in Venice

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29 Mme. Cheron’s name is changed to Mme. Montoni once they are married, but I will continue to refer to her as Mme. Cheron, or simply Cheron, for the sake of clarity.
where Emily truly experiences the duplicitous nature of the city, as she is enthralled by its splendor while also acknowledging its dissipating influence.

The eighteenth-century discourse regarding the urban sphere and its influence offered a similar sense of urban duality, a discourse I will touch upon here so as to historically contextualize Radcliffe’s portrayal of urban experience. Even those who seemed largely opposed to the urban sphere, like Radcliffe does thus far, recognized its importance to cultural progression. William Cowper, as we saw in the introduction, admits that the urban centers are “nurseries of the arts” and that London in particular is “by taste and wealth proclaimed / the fairest capital of all the world” (693, 697-99). The city’s positive influence on the mind is exemplified further in the aesthetic discussion of John Gwynn. Gwynn’s *London and Westminster Improved* offers an empiricist notion of how “Publick magnificence” could “stimulate invention,” outlining a cause-and-effect relationship that he reinforces by exemplifying the Greeks and Romans (xiv). The magnificence and splendor of the city, Gwynn claims, results in “the advancement of grandeur and elegance” as well as “increase among all ranks and degrees of people . . . that refinement of taste” (xv, 1). Gwynn’s discussion, then, reinforces the potential for urban grandeur to have a positive effect on the mind, but it also affirms the increasingly democratic sense of taste and cultivation at the end of the eighteenth-century. Not only was the cityscape itself a potential aesthetic boon, but it was also the primary arena for art and culture in England. Art was most often exhibited in London, Leonard Schwarz argues, because that is where the patrons lived; furthermore, the “great national festivals

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30 Gwynn goes on to suggest that the advances of these civilizations “were not actuated by supernatural cause, or any innate principles in their original formation; the mind is a mere blank, but capable of receiving such impressions as custom, education, or any other relative cause shall make upon it” (xiv-xv).
and artistic events almost invariably took place in the capital” (655). Radcliffe, as a London resident, was herself a beneficiary of this phenomenon: she attended the theater frequently (at least before she was famous) and she probably attended the performances that were a part of the famous Handel season of 1791 – allusions to which can be found in *The Mysteries* (Norton 62-64).

Of course, commerce also contributed to the cultivation of taste and refinement by increasing the availability of goods to numerous demographies. Susan Whyman’s research on letters written by urban dwellers of the eighteenth century reveals that the commercial activity associated with fashion, and clothing in particular, led to the common perception of London as a “women’s haven,” though she stresses that London’s draw on “elite and middling-sorts of women” went beyond “[f]ashion” and “shopping” (45). Such interests were not exclusive to women, of course, as men also engaged in the buying of fashionable wares. Nor was the interest in fashion exclusive to the social elites, as Shoemaker acknowledges. Mary Robinson’s discussion of metropolitan manners exemplifies the recognition of how all classes, at times problematically, invested in London’s fashions: “The public promenades . . . are thronged with pedestrians of all classes, and the different ranks of people are scarcely distinguishable either by their dress or their manners” (Robinson 198). Robinson explains later that the “exterior ornaments of all ranks of people” made visible that multiple classes had adopted the air of “Refinement” (206). Furthermore, the sedentary lifestyle found in the city (as opposed to the labor and climatic exposure commensurate with agrarian life) was productive of

31 In *London Mob*, Shoemaker points to the strong relationship between commerce, clothing, and class lines, suggesting that “the use of clothes for social advancement fuelled the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century” (15).
refinement, according to Falconer: these urban conditions led to weaker nervous fibers, which were believed to be “necessary for nicety of sensation and apprehension,” both of which “are necessary to form an elegant taste” (Falconer 408, 378-9).

While the magnificence of the city could itself cause awe and induce refinement, such prosperity had other, less favorable effects that were quite shocking to one’s nervous system. The excessive waste was, of course, one result of affluence and excess, especially as the healthy economy of the city attracted droves of immigrants looking for a better life only to find squalor. Recognizing from an empiricist perspective the ill effects of the urban waste, William Gilpin provides a critique of the city’s sensory pollution that echoes St. Aubert’s own and proves an antithesis to Gwynn’s. Gilpin finds himself “distracted by a multiplicity of objects” and the “succession of noisome objects which did violence to all the senses by turn.” Its streets abounding in pollution, proliferation, and “rapid motion,” London is full of “disgusting ideas” for Gilpin, a phrasing that evokes the empiricist correlation between the external world and consciousness.

Invoking an empiricist sensibility at either end of the eighteenth-century, physicians George Cheyne and William Falconer similarly point to the urban pollution associated with the coal fires, lamps, cemeteries, waste, cattle, not to mention the “large bodies of people, particularly those who are shut up in large towns and close streets.” And both identify a psychological impact, what Cheyne calls “the Humour of living in

32 This connection seems fairly prominent – one well known example, discussed by Barker-Benfield, is Mandeville’s The Fable of the Bees, in which he sees “London’s filthy streets” as a “healthy sign of ‘the Plenty, great Traffick and Opulence of that mighty City’” (Barker-Benfield 120).
34 Falconer 167; also see Cheyne 54-55. Urban pollution is also mentioned by physician William Buchan (Domestic Medicine 443). John Gwynn’s treatise was, of course, a suggestion for what the city could become rather then what it already was; thus, he too recognizes, and suggests ways to resolve, the poor quality of urban air (3-4).
great, populous and consequently unhealthy Towns,” i.e. the nervous distemper or diminished “energy of the brain and nerves.” The concern over the health of the urban environment, particularly the air, was pervasive: we even see it mentioned in commentaries on social manners, such as Mary Robinson’s 1800 “Present State of the Manners, Society, etc., etc., of the Metropolis of England” (199). Radcliffe would have been well aware of these concerns, not only because of their pervasiveness but also because of trouble closer to home: the uncle with whom she frequently lived had taken up residence on Greek street in Soho in 1774 to overlook his factory, though his health soon failed and “in order to get change of air and scene” he took up residence away from the city at Turnham Green, as noted in the Dictionary of National Biography (Stephen 318).

The potentially corrupting influence of commerce and luxury on the mind and nervous system was also of concern, as we have already seen. The refinement of the nerves that they engendered was itself a weakening of the physiology that could cause more harm than good. Commercial life, comprised largely of “sedentary employments” and time spent indoors, would “diminish the strength, and render the body less robust, and more subject to the action of external impressions” (Falconer 408). Furthermore, “[t]his effect upon the body influences the mind, and reduces it” to a state similar to those who live in warm climates. Such people have an increased faculty of sensation, a sensibility of the body that is “by sympathy,” i.e. causally, “communicated to the mind” (406). “From this sensibility,” Falconer continues, “arises the passionate temper,” a quickness of sensation, and ultimately a violent and vindictive” temper. People of warm climes, which Falconer has correlated with those who participate in commercial life, are

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35 Cheyne ii; Falconer 167.
“kept in a perpetual state of irritation from the high degree of sensibility that prevails, which causes a great multiplication of crimes, by multiplying the objects of temptation” (Falconer 25). The proliferated objects of temptation, we might reason, are another corrupting aspect of the urban sphere, as is the necessity to contend with a massive population, which induces people to be “tricking and knavish” (Falconer 206). When St. Aubert invokes the term *dissipation*, then, more is at stake than just an anxiety about indulgence in unproductive appetites; rather, implied is a more profound anxiety about a slippery slope of two interrelated corruptions: one being psycho-physiological, the other social. The urban sphere, with its polluting and corrupting aspects, not only challenged one’s physical constitution but also the integrity of one’s mind and virtue.

Radcliffe’s portrayal of Emily’s urban experience aptly reflects this cultural discourse, taking into consideration both the sense that the city could cultivate taste while at the same time threatening one’s psycho-physiological state of being. In her portrayal of Venice, Radcliffe tends to prioritize the aesthetic splendor and culture of the place and its people, though she does also indicate troubling implications of and results from urban experience, particularly luxury. In this, Radcliffe maintains a high degree of fidelity to her model, Hester Lynch Piozzi’s *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789).36 While Venice would be known as the prototypical, Gothic space of magnificent decay to later Romantic and Victorian writers,37 Venice was by and large magnificent in Piozzi’s account. Upon arriving in

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36 Radcliffe never saw Venice herself and was inspired by Hester Lynch Piozzi’s *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789), which focuses on many of the urban ills and resulting human vices outlined in the pervious discussion.

Venice, she stresses that the city “exceeded expectation: such a cluster of excellence, such constellation of artificial beauties, my mind had never ventured to excite the idea of within herself [sic.]” (151). Piozzi does note, however, that Venetians exhibit the temperaments associated with urban luxury, indulgence, and other vices. The women are “sensualists” and “injure their health too irreparably” as they “follow unrestrained where passion, appetite, or imagination lead them” (181-82). So too do the behaviors of commoners convey “loose living and licentious dissoluteness” (185). Venice proves an urban paragon of indulgence, according to Piozzi: “Never was locality so subservient to purposes of pleasure as in this city” (187). Even so, Piozzi’s Venice and the people she details provide Radcliffe with a truly “magnificent city” (200, 204).

Radcliffe makes her own Venice even more magnificent that Piozzi’s by having Emily arrive during the Carnival season. The city appears to be made of fantasy, as though “called up from the ocean by the wand of an enchanter,” and it induces further flights of fancy, filling Emily’s mind with unreal ideas (171, 175). Like Piozzi, Radcliffe repeatedly points to the city’s magnificence, but she also encodes a nervous aspect to its excessive aesthetic. When Emily views Venice in the water’s reflection, she sees a “tremulous picture,” suggesting not only the movement of the image but also the nervous stimulation that the scenes induce. Emily gazes on them with “anxious enquiry” (175).

The denizens of Radcliffe’s Venice bear their urban conditioning in typical ways, as per the duality in the discourse on urban influence. Montoni, more completely in his element now, fulfills St. Aubert’s characterization of the urbanized subject as defined by “selfishness, dissipation, and insincerity.” His attempts to marry off Emily for his own financial gain reaffirm his insensibility, avariciousness, and maniacal ambition. He has a
proclivity for excessive parties and gambling – urban vices both. He “delighted in the energies of the passions”; he is “roused” by the pains of others; and he has replaced “real interest” with “artificial ones” (182). His usual company also exhibits vices associated with urban life and a degraded sensibility: they are defined by “strong passions,” “dissipat[ion],” “unbounded extravagance,” “cunning” and “a cruel and suspicious temper” (183). Like Mmes. Quesnel and Cheron, the Venetian women have a proclivity for splendor and excess; yet, their own “excessive refinement,” while suggestive of a weakened nervous system, conveys a certain “beauty” and “sweetness” to Emily (188).

These women, then, reveal that urban cultivation could be largely beneficial to one’s subjectivity, regardless of its ill influence on others. As the eighteenth-century discourse shows, the urban refinement of the nerves could lead to various psycho-physiological outcomes.

During her time in Venice, Emily gives in to the same environment as Montoni and his cohorts, returning again and again to the bustling carnival and its “fantastic diversity,” and we begin see typical consequence in regards to her sensibility (174). The “gay and busy scene” often awakens Emily from reverie or melancholic longing for home (176), and such mental diversion speaks to St. Aubert’s concerns over urban distraction and dissipation. Emily appears to give in to the artificial grandeur, as she “gazed, and listened, and thought herself in a fairy scene” (176). The “fantastic splendor” of Venice awakens “fanciful images” in Emily’s mind – an echo of her experience in the Alps. But here, artifice rather than nature lingers, causing her to have “indulged herself” in her own fantasies until “she almost wished to throw off the habit of mortality” (178). Emily, in other words, chooses to ignore her physiological condition as she indulges in “fanciful
ideas,” a notion that is symbolically rendered in a poem she then composes about a sea-nymph. The sea nymph’s underwater world of “cool arcades and glassy halls” proves a fantastic mirroring of magnificent Venice. Yet, the watery world also indicates the physical insensibility attendant to unconsciousness. Whereas Radcliffe’s earlier reference to “tremulous” water suggested the nervous stimulation of the body, affirming the connection between the sensual surface of the body and the surfaces of the water, here the water is described in terms of “surges” and restlessness, suggesting that the external stimulation has an increasingly violent influence. Yet, the sea-nymph sinks below this ongoing agitation and takes recourse to psychological depths that allow for the sensory or physiological violence to be ignored.

Ultimately, in following her own fancies, Emily begins to resemble Piozzi’s Venetian women, who “follow unrestrained where passion, appetite, or imagination lead them” (Piozzi 182). While Emily becomes increasingly uneasy in her dealings with Montoni and his cohorts, Radcliffe affirms that “if anything could have dissipated Emily’s uneasiness, it would have been the grandeur, gaiety, and novelty of the surrounding scene, adorned with Palladio’s palaces, and busy with parties of masqueraders” (187; emphasis added). The psycho-sensual experience of Venice, then, proves exemplary of the eighteenth-century concerns about the urban sphere and its dissipating impact on the self, and, while it exposes Emily to grandeur and further refinement, it also leaves her vulnerable to ever-greater dangers.
The Urbanism of Udolpho

When Emily travels to Venice through the Alps, her psycho-physiological response to the sublime scene reveals her pitch-perfect sensibility: “with her fears were mingled such various emotions of delight, such admiration, astonishment, and awe” (166). The already urbanized Madame Cheron “only shuddered” and instead contemplates “the splendor of palaces” to be seen in Venice (166). Upon leaving Venice, and travelling through the sublime Apennines, Emily’s senses “were now dead to the beautiful country, through which she travelled” (224). Early in her stay at Udolpho, Emily talks of “the regattas of Venice” to divert herself from “idle terrors,” revealing an acquired taste for artificial pleasures nearer to Mme. Cheron’s rather than the taste for simpler pleasures promoted by St. Aubert (255). The city has changed Emily, and in moving to Udolpho, she does not quit the urban sphere but rather finds a darker version of it. In this way, the castle Udolpho mimics the role of the Gothic tale at large, that of a dark mirror to reflect the unsavory and often less visible aspects of modern life at the end of the eighteenth century.38

Returning for a moment to the eighteenth-century discourse on the city experience, it is necessary to explore further how urban luxury, violence, and psychological trauma become causally linked. Echoing Hume, Falconer claims that the

38 For Fred Botting, the Gothic as a whole “functions as the mirror of eighteenth-century mores and values: a reconstruction of the past as the inverted, mirror image of the present, its darkness allows the reason and virtue of the present a brighter reflection” (“Gothic Darkly” 5). I believe that this mirroring in The Mysteries also frames the dark side of the contemporary world, such as urban experience, and recasts its psycho-physiological influence within the supernatural. Kate Ellis uniquely observes a correlation between the castle in Gothic literature and the urban sphere – though Cynthia Wall does correlate the approach to Udolpho’s gatehouse with other portrayals of urban arrival and furthermore suggests the gatehouse itself to be part of an urban aesthetic (994, 991). More often, scholars have read Udolpho as a prop-locale for supernatural happenings, an arena for Freudian repressions and returns, or a figure for “a kind of outlaw masculinity” (M. Ellis 57).
constant strain of luxurious indulgence would ruin “taste and learning” as it weakened the nerves, and by extension the mind, until they were rendered too callous or too inelastic to function properly.\textsuperscript{39} The result was a distemper or disorder of one’s psychophysiology, which for Cheyne includes such symptoms as a “deep and fixed Melancholy,” “Horror,” and “wandering and delusory Images on the Brain” (199; emphasis in original). For Falconer, the insensibility of urbanites led to selfishness, an “abject submission” to their appetites, “multiplied inhumanities,” even violence and rioting.\textsuperscript{40} The ultimate urban ill – mob violence – was connected with many of the other aspects of urban experience: the influence of example, commercial life, the violent passions attendant to weakened nerves, and the indifference to the wellbeing of others.\textsuperscript{41} In addition to resulting from urban degradation, rioting was seen as further terrorizing and shocking one’s mind and nervous system.

As an extension of the urban sphere, Udolpho offers an anachronistic frame for modern urban experience and Radcliffe’s concerns about its effect on the subject.\textsuperscript{42} As a

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\textsuperscript{39} Falconer 519; Cheyne 66.
\textsuperscript{40} See Falconer 509, 510. Vila similarly acknowledges how certain urban “excesses” and “debaucher[y]” led to “violent passions”; see Vila, 233.
\textsuperscript{41} See Falconer 538.
\textsuperscript{42} Here, I am building on the “creative anachronism” Markman Ellis identifies between the modernity of Radcliffe’s concerns and “the exotic location in deep history” of her novel (\textit{History of Gothic Fiction} 52). This position is in accord with a well-established critical view of gothic and romance literature at large. Dino Franco Felluga discusses of the romance form as inviting “the reader to participate in a program of psychic projection, either to a place where or a time when social antagonisms may be reconciled” has been particularly generative to my present discussion; see \textit{The Perversity of Poetry} (2006), 51-54, especially 75. Like Felluga, I am also indebted to Frederic Jameson’s sense of the romance (and, we might add, Gothic) genre as figuring “a transitional moment in which two distinct modes of production, or moments of socioeconomic development coexist” (148). Other recent criticism that locates particular aesthetics of Radcliffe’s day in the past spaces of her fiction; see Cynthia Wall, “The Impress of the Invisible: Lodges and Cottages” (2012); Jennie MacDonald Lewis, “The House as Aesthetic Object in Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho” (2012); Katarina Gephardt, "Hybrid Gardens: Travel and the Nationalization of Taste in Ann Radcliffe’s Continental Landscapes" (2010); and Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, “‘No Colour of Language’: Radcliffe’s Aesthetic Unbound” (2006).
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Gothic mirror, Udolpho reflects the perils of urban experience, those that are obfuscated by luxury and splendor even as they are induced by them. Udolpho proves a construction of destabilized boundaries and thus exemplifies the urban space itself. But also, Udolpho stands as a symbol for the destabilized boundaries of the self; indeed, Emily’s own fortitude has been compromised by Venice and will be further threatened by the terrors and horrors of Udolpho, which becomes, then, the external emblem of the psychophysiological state it causally induces. For Emily, such social and personal boundaries never stabilize while in this Gothic castle; yet, in placing Emily in an environment where urban terror is set within view of mountain sublimity and natural beauty, Radcliffe creates a context in which the project of aesthetic, and thus environmental, self-fashioning can be further actuated. At Udolpho, Emily is able to use the precepts of taste that St. Aubert taught her to ameliorate, to control, and even to make beneficial the traumas imposed upon her.

The use of the castle by Radcliffe as a darker and more Gothic version of the modern cityscape is predicated, I argue, on the historical, linguistic, and aesthetic parallels between these two built spaces. The major eighteenth-century cities of England and the continent that preoccupied social commentators and appeared with greatest frequency in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century British literature – Rome, Venice, Paris, London – all grew out of much smaller, stone-walled fortifications. Consider, for example, the fortified burg in the background of Albrecht Dürer’s 1519

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43 Peter Clark points out that the walls of the city were “so vital for continental visions of urban identity”; see introduction to *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, 2:2. Clark does not mention whether the English shared this vision, though Hume, for instance, twice mentions the “fortifications” of a city when discussing the tendency of objects to engender a positive emotional response, i.e. “esteemed beautiful.” If they are not quintessential to the urban sphere for Hume, they are at least an exemplary feature; see *A Treatise of Human Nature* 450, 586.
engraving “St. Anthony Reading” (see Fig. 1), which emphasizes the similarities between the castle and early urban centers in the sixteenth-century, the same century in which *The Mysteries* is set. When depicting Udolpho, Radcliffe constantly reminds the reader of the castle’s built environment of “towers,” “massy walls,” and “edifices” (226, 227, 251, 287), along with its dim “arcades,” “avenues,” and “corridor[s]” (245, 300, 320, 326). In these spaces, we see lamps amidst these stone avenues, their light glimmering “on the walls of the corridor” (338, 231); we also witness “noisy bustle” and commotions, and intimidating strangers (301). Such descriptions seem as appropriate for older parts of Radcliffe’s London as for this Gothic castle.

Along with these visual similarities are linguistic ones. The word castle comes from the Latin *castellan*, meaning a fortress or protected village; *castellan* is the diminutive form of *castrum* – a fortified town (“Castle”). It is also worth noting that the family Emily stays with after she escapes from Udolpho, a family who generally resides in Paris, bears the name Villefort. The correlation of a sixteenth-century urban family with a fortified village suggests that Radcliffe was aware of the variability of castles, fortified villages, and walled towns. Indeed, as the etymology bears out, castles and early urban spaces were not conceived of as distinct spaces but as varying degrees of a similar, constructed environment. I do not mean to suggest that the modern city and the ancient castle were synonymous or close to it, only that Radcliffe’s allegorical use of the castle and the spatial / aesthetic similarities she emphasizes are founded on a common ancestry of which she seems to be aware.
Figure 1. “St. Anthony Reading.” Albrecht Dürer. Public Domain.
Radcliffe’s use of Udolpho as a horrifying reflection of urban life also has a literary precedent in James Thomson’s own temporally distancing *Castle of Indolence* (1748), a source of inspiration that Radcliffe cites on several occasions in the novel. In Thomson’s Gothic poem, the titular Castle of Indolence functions as a mirror, and thus extension, of the urban sphere and its ills: “Loose Life, unruly Passions, and Diseases Pale” (I:i.9). In the poem, an “enchanting wizard” lures pilgrims to his castle, set amidst the “listless climate” of a pastoral landscape, where they can experience the indulgence of indolence and luxury (I:ii.3, 8). The “Freshness” of this valley seems greatly to affect the lungs and eyes of the pilgrims, many of whom are urban denizens (I:vii.4; see also I:xiii). Within the castle, the pilgrims find “a huge crystal magic Globe to spy” called “Of Vanity the Mirror” (I:xlix.1-2, l.1). Upon viewing the luxuriant behavior of “a gaudy spendthrift Heir,” we see “a splendid City rise to View, / with Carts, and Cars, and Coaches roaring all” (I: li.1-3, 6). Across several stanzas, Thomson presents the chaos of this city and its masses, who appear exceedingly impassioned if not excited to violence. The most sinister are the politicians’ sons; connected with “Lucifer,” they are seen “In dark Cabals and night Juntos,” and “as if to get / New Light, their twinkling Eyes were inward set” (I:liv.2, 4-6). In these glowing-eyed devils, we might recognize attributes of Radcliffe’s own Gothic villain – Montoni’s eyes appeared “to gleam with fire” when he arrives in Venice (171). In Thomson’s poem, the difference between the world within the mirror and the one outside it soon blurs; the castle scenes begin to echo the urban images of vice and violence as its inhabitants are swayed by the “Pleasure of Excess,” are driven into “a gay Uproar,” and are subsequently “madden’d” (I:lxiii.1, 7-9).
Reinforcing the correlation between the castle and the city, Radcliffe makes evident the parallels between Montoni’s mansion in Venice and Udolpho via Emily’s initial encounter with each. In both scenes, the same Venetian servant meets the party at the gates and leads them into a hall with a marble staircase. While hanging “silver tripods” light the house in Venice, Udolpho offers a single “tripod lamp.” The luxuriant “lattices” of the former become the “rich fret-work” of the latter. In both, Emily is led into an open or spacious “apartment” decorated either with “paintings” or a “painted window.” While the overall aspect of the Venice interior is luxuriant, darkness and desolation define Udolpho, the latter a dim reflection that is punctuated by the description of “a large Venetian mirror” that “duskily reflected the scene” (176, 228-29). Thus harkening back to Thomson’s poem, its castle, and the mirror of the city that castle contained, Radcliffe situates Udolpho metaphorically as a mirror that extends the urban experience of Venice, reflecting it in a more Gothic light for our consideration.

The transference from Venice to Udolpho is also evident in the continuance of characters. Montoni, Mme. Cheron, Count Morano, and other members of Montoni’s unsavory entourage populate Udolpho just as they had Venice. Montoni continues to throw parties to which he invites the same cavaliers and ladies Emily saw in Venice, parties to which Emily is asked to wear her same Venetian clothing (311). Well into her stay, Emily sees “three ladies, dressed in the gala habit of Venice” accompanied by “two Signors from Venice” entering Udolpho (382). When officers come to capture Montoni, who has fled debts made and crimes committed in the city, he is not surprised to see “all

44 While their appearance seems “shocking” to Emily, it has more to do with the fact that one of those ladies, Signora Livona, had been so kind to her and this place so cruel (382). That the “gaiety of her air” seems out of place points rather to the duskiness of Udolpho’s reflection of the city, than to questions about whether it is a reflection at all (382)
those terrible-looking fellows one used to see at Venice” (397). Even characters introduced at Udolpho are holdovers from Venice, as is the case with Ludovico, who was not seen but heard singing the verses of Ariosto from a gondola (177, 247). In Udolpho, however, Ludovico does not sing; instead he frequently demands silence from Annette, Emily’s babbling servant (257, 297), and he is now stern rather than exuberant, as Annette complains, “he is always knitting his brows” (298). In this way, Ludovico becomes a microcosm of the larger reflection at stake: Udolpho as a darker and sterner version of Venice.

Ludovico also exemplifies that while the geographical shift in Radcliffe’s novel does not afford new characters, what does change is their sensibility and temper; in each one, we see not recuperation from urban conditioning but rather its continuation, its more extreme degradation of the body and mind. As noted above, the continued indulgence in vices, intense passion, and dissimulation leads to an insensibility towards others and, eventually, violent behavior. Such an exacerbation of ill temper can be seen in Montoni, Count Morano, and other members of Montoni’s crew, who frequently break out in “irascible anger” with little instigation (288). Of course, Montoni is himself increasingly seen as “insensible” or animated with “passions so fierce and so various” (288, 296). Throughout their stay at Udolpho, Montoni and Mme. Cheron become ever more combative, creating “scenes of terrible contention” (296). Under the medical discourse of sensibility, these distempers, while a far cry from the luxuriousness and quickness of

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45 Rictor Norton points out that Ludovico functions as a satiric version of the heroes depicted in the verses of Ludvicio Ariosto, and while I don’t see Udolpho as satiric, per se, I do find that this acknowledgement is in line with my own thinking about how Udolpho proves a critique of romantic Venice; see 99.
sensation we initially saw in Cheron and Montoni respectively, are the inevitable results of urban life where taste and prudence are wanting.

This “terrible contention” between Montoni and Cheron “exhausted [Emily’s] spirits” as much as anything that had occurred since “her departure from Tholouse,” this last part a reaffirmation of the unity in her Venice and Udolpho experience. Emily can’t help but contrast her present guardians with the gentleness of her parents, nor those pastoral scenes of her earlier and happier life with her “present life,” which appears as though “the dream of a distempered imagination” (296). This distemper is very much Emily’s own, as her Venetian indulgence into fantasy has now turned to darker “terrors of fancy” (254). Rather frequently, and typically following some shock or horror, Emily is betrayed by her destabilized mind, such as when, in the dim lamp-light of her room, “she almost fancied she saw shapes flit past her curtains” or when the lamp’s “faint flashes . . . upon the walls called up all the terrors of fancy” (241, 254), descriptions reminiscent of Cheyne’s “wandering and delusory Images on the Brain.” In several other instances, we see Emily’s agitated mind lead her to misrecognize people or objects.

In this light, the common critique that the Gothic genre confuses reality with the imaginary or supernatural misses the point. Within the contentious space of Udolpho, being unable to discern what is real from what is not seems to be highly problematic. Certainly Radcliffe intends for the reader to see a potential danger in this slippage between real and imaginary. But the point, here, is that this slippage is not merely Gothic convention but rather a medical understanding of mental distemper. While such moments
have led critics, like Markman Ellis and others,\(^4^6\) to suggest that Radcliffe’s novel largely “proposes that the mind has unlimited power over external reality” (Ellis 68), such visionary experience is rather the result of environmental conditions. More specifically, they are the result of a psycho-physiological system over-taxed by the extreme aesthetics and experience of the urban sphere.

Emily repeatedly acknowledges how the castle’s scenes of “vice and violence” appear to her as though “the visions of a distempered imagination” (329), which suggests that, in addition to echoing the urban sphere, Udolpho’s confines also reflect an urbanized subjectivity. Indeed, Udolpho’s crumbling and deranged aspect signifies well the depredated physiological fortification of the urban-conditioned body. Just as Venice’s trembling water suggested the physiological influence of its sensory stimulation, so too does the weakened body of Udolpho signify its psycho-physiological influence. Radcliffe suggests the correlation between Udolpho’s walls and Emily’s sensibility immediately upon Emily’s arrival, as “she anxiously surveyed the edifice” of the castle with its “pierced and embattled” features (227). The aesthetic of the castle extends to the mountain walls around it, which are similarly “shattered” and tell of “the ravages of war” (227). The aesthetic flux between castle and mountain becomes a common theme in Radcliffe’s depictions of the external Udolpho, but also at stake is the flux between the construction and Emily’s own weakened fortitude, which is indicated through her anxiety.

\(^4^6\) While critics have long emphasized how the supernatural moments of *The Mysteries* are eventually explained away through reason, critics have conversely accepted Emily’s supernatural visions as imagination run amuck with acknowledging a logical or physiological basis for it. For instance, Ahern suggests that Radcliffe challenges “empiricist epistemology” in such moments when the sense become untrustworthy and thus misses the empiricist psychology that explains why the sense have become deranged or impaired (152). Punter does suggest a correlation between “sensibility and distorted perception,” but, as I will reaffirm later, he ignores the physiological basis for aesthetic experience (68).
and insensitivity towards the stimulus her body still receives. Thus, Udolpho, a model for the permeated boundaries of the self, continues to depict the urban threats first observed in Venice, but more clearly indicates these threats in regards to the permeable boundaries of self.

This symbolic correlation between self and castle is predicated on causal connections – for example, the permeable boundaries of Emily’s new home, particularly her own bedchamber, will allow for terrifying events that further degrade the elasticity of her nerves. Additionally, then, Udolpho reflects concerns about the uncertain boundaries of private and public spheres in urban settings, concerns that would become a focal point of middle-class morality as well as architectural trends in the city. Indeed, Emily’s experience in Udolpho is more indicative of uncertainty and violence than Venice. Udolpho proves “a strange, rambling place” in which Emily and her servant Annette are frequently lost (231). For Emily, the distress that Udolpho presents is, like in the city, not simply its spatial complexity but the real possibility of finding some vice or violence around every corner. After stumbling upon a veiled recess in a wall that holds what appears to be rotting corpse (and turns out to be an anatomical wax figure), Emily continues to navigate “the intricacies of the castle,” but now she is afraid that she will “again be shocked by some mysterious spectacle” that might reside behind “one of the many doors (258).

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47 My thinking in this correlation between castle and urban experience builds on The Contested Castle by Kate Ellis, who recognizes similar parallels though does not apply them to The Mysteries. Ellis touches on how the middle classes of the late eighteenth century saw the home as a site of refuge from “the growing urban centers [that were] filled with uncertainty and violence” (xi).

48 Michael Reed discusses how the spaces within houses became more insulating through their construction, particularly the inclusion of entry rooms and the increasingly privatized bedrooms (617-8).
For the time being, Udolpho is Emily’s home, but it is one that presents new
terrors from within and little protection from threats posed without. We have already seen
the threats posed by Montoni and even Madame Cheron, affirming Kate Ellis’ sense that
the Gothic novel in general “foregrounded the home as fortress, while at the same time
exposing its contradictions” (xi). While Udolpho houses familial dysfunction, it also
exhibits the close proximity of “unfamiliar neighbors” and the desire for “a private place”
as refuge (K. Ellis 9).\(^49\) Of course, the constant threat posed by strangers, particularly to
women, is a pervasive urban theme, one that Raymond Williams defines via a dichotomy
between the knowable communities of the village, which fostered “natural country ease,”
and the unknowable urban masses, which in turn led to “an unnatural urban unrest” (180).
Emily’s experience of Udolpho captures this unrest well, as she anxiously retreats from
the sounds of steps, the indexical signs of the strangers who might do her harm. In an
exemplary moment, Emily is on the walkway of a rampart and must pass “three
strangers,” one of whom has an expression of “dark watchful villainy” written on his face
(287). Though she draws her veil, the men look at her “earnestly” and continue to gaze
after her. In this scene, Emily is overcome with fear and timidity, just as she is later when
Montoni commands that she join him and his cohorts at dinner – she shrinks “from the
thought of being exposed to the gaze of strangers” (311). Even within the domestic event
of dinner, Emily must confront unknown persons. Nor is Emily legally or physically safe
from Montoni – the stand-in patriarch. The contradiction of the unsafe refuge is
exemplified by Emily’s chamber at Udolpho, which has two doorways, one that locks

\(^{49}\text{Ellis’s point about the urban context evincing a greater need for privacy accords well with the discussion in the introduction regarding the architectural changes happening in home construction in London and Patricia Meyer Spacks’s claim that “the evidence indicates a new level of attention” to privacy in the eighteenth century (6).}\)
from the outside and another that does not lock at all. Thus, Emily is ever exposed to potential transgressions from the outside world, a condition representative of the threat posed to women who, even in the refuge of the urban home, had little control.

The lack of refuge within the bedroom, the site par excellence of private life, is both causally and symbolically related to the transgressions on Emily’s psyche – the room’s open reception of external elements frequently lead to Emily’s internal agitation, even to her “terror” and “sudden shock” (240–41, 260, 262, 264). Both within her room and in the corridors of the castle, Emily is exposed to increasing violence, until it seems as though the whole castle is mad with rioting: “Every where, as she passed, she heard, from a distance, the uproar of contention, and the figures and faces, which she met, hurrying along the passages struck her mind with dismay. . . . [E]very avenue seemed to be beset by ruffians” (317). Again and again, Emily’s psyche is struck and shocked by what she comes across in the avenues of Udolpho, and like the castle itself, Emily proves incapable of keeping without herself the violence of the external world.

The terrors and horrors of Udolpho are, of course, tied up in the aesthetic discourse of Radcliffe’s day. When Emily experiences terror, “it occupies and expands [her] mind, and elevates it to high expectation, [and] is purely sublime” (248) – language reminiscent of Priestley as well as Radcliffe’s own “On the Supernatural in Poetry.” In that Udolpho reflects the negative side of the urban aesthetic of splendor, it also reflects the potential for urban sublimity to break bad. Within Udolpho, beneficial terror often shifts to “horror,” which paralyzes Emily physically and mentally until she “dropped senseless” (249). Yet, by incorporating the urban within the mountain-situated Udolpho, Radcliffe places urban sublimity in a productive tension with the natural spaces beyond
the castle walls. These external spaces allow Emily to engage with natural aesthetics that produce an ameliorating effect, affording Emily the means to control her emotions in moments of terror and thereby allowing them to expand her mind without inducing psycho-physiological harm.

In one exemplary instance, which occurs the morning after her fear first leads to her distempered imagination, Emily observes the scenery outside. We watch Emily’s attention move from the crumbling ramparts, to the sublime surrounding of mountain cliffs, which then blends into more picturesque imagery of mists and forests amidst rocky crags, and finally to the pastoral beauty of green valleys in the distance (242). Beginning first with sublimity, Radcliffe reveals a wide spectrum of possible aesthetics as well as the psychological valences associated with them. But these scenes are more than pathetic fallacy – they have a causal relationship with Emily’s psychological state, as “her mind recovered its strength” by taking in the aesthetic stimulus of this scene (242). By moving down the aesthetic scale from urban space to rural valley, Emily can effect her own psychological shift from terror to natural sublimity and finally to mental repose. Emily, following her father’s precepts, keeps herself from becoming insensible – the ultimate danger of urban experience. And by remaining sensible, she can continue to access the beneficent influence of the rural world outside her window.

In resolving psychological distress, then, Emily does not simply turn to reason or virtue – that is, she does not rely only on inward faculties to effect psychological stability – rather she turns to external influence. In a scene that soon follows the one above, Emily walks out on the ramparts of the castle and again observes the aesthetic migration from the “grandeur of the broad ramparts, and the changing scenery they overlooked” (245).
Her psycho-visual experience proves remarkably similar to the one described in the Pyrenees with Valancourt and St. Aubert, but here, the effect not only softens the sublimity of the mountains but also the terrors she has experienced. In this moment, she is able to look upon and even “examine the gothic magnificence of Udolpho” (245). It is, I argue, no coincidence that while Emily fortifies herself via these aesthetics, Montoni is seen “pointing to the ramparts” to instruct the workmen on what foundational weaknesses require reinforcement (245). While the exterior grandeur buttresses Emily, her position outside Udolpho also allows her to gain a visual and psychological perspective over it. However, her movement back inside reacquaints her with its internal dangers: she sees a group of strangers that she wishes to avoid “at the extremities of the arcades” and her fears cause her to imagine that Count Morano is amongst them (245). Left “agitated with apprehensions,” Emily’s shift to the interior and then to her own interiority quells the psychological strengthening afforded by her turns around the rampart.

While at Udolpho, Emily will repeat the aesthetic engagement I have just outlined – particularly her focus on the shifting aesthetics from castle, to mountain sublime, to verdant picturesque. And each repetition occurs soon after some terror, affirming these moments as aesthetic mitigations of her urban trauma. Shifting from her psychological engagement with the urban sublime within Udolpaho to the natural sublime without, Radcliffeportrays not an erasure of Emily’s distress but rather a method for its positive incorporation, which is enacted through a process of aesthetic and thus psychological naturalization. Sensibility, then, is not a form of weakness in Emily, as many scholars
have suggested; it is rather an economy of exchange between her subjectivity and the external world that she learns to negotiate. The following section will explore the aftermath of Emily’s urban experience, assessing the lasting influence this experience has on Emily’s subjectivity and how it proves necessary to the subjectivity formation Radcliffe ultimately champions.

Rural Redux and the Import of Urban Experience

As Emily flees Udolpho into the surrounding mountains and woods, her “terrible apprehensions” and “all the busy scenes of the past” continue to plague “her anxious mind” (409, 412). Emily’s psychological state, still reflective of urban Udolpho, is only ameliorated when her travels lead her out of the Apennines, where the scenery “softened into the beauty of sylvan and pastoral landscape” (462). In this journey, Radcliffe provides a graduated aesthetic shift, a narrative version of Emily’s experience at the casement. Much of the third and fourth volumes depict Emily amidst the rural sea-side of the Chateau-le-Blanc (where her father died on the journey meant to restore his health) and the idyllic La Valleé. While these natural environments “gradually restored her spirits to their natural tone” (495), the novel also suggests that returning to a former subjectivity is not as easy as re-inhabiting the places of one’s past.

Emily’s altered subjectivity is suggested in various ways. First, it is suggested in the heterogeneous, aesthetic template afforded by Chateau-le-Blanc and its environs. The surrounding landscapes reveal pastoral beauty, picturesque variety, and sublimity of the
mountains and oceanic types (469). The chateau itself is built in the Gothic style, resembling Udolpho, but with newer additions having a more “modern architecture” (471); it also contains, like Udolpho, traces of the urban in the form of splendid parties attended by Parisians or in the décor of some of the apartments – one in particular contains “grand furniture” that “came from Paris” as well as “large Venetian mirrors” (532, 539, 547). The accumulation of aesthetic tones reminds the reader of the various, aesthetic experiences of Emily’s journey and thus the expansion of her mind, as per empiricist and associationist tenets. In other words, the multiple aesthetics of Chateau-le-Blanc become another model for Emily’s consciousness, which cannot return to a blank sheet but is by this point a cabinet well-stocked. Emily’s psyche, then, gains from her urban experience so long as it is not debilitated by that experience, allowing her to expand the horizons of her consciousness. In fact, it is through her urban experience that she develops a more sophisticated aesthetic palate and comes to face to face with the capacity of different environments to help cultivate different psychological characteristics.

While Radcliffe has consistently shown the real dangers of the city, she also suggests that a virtuous, rural, domestic life cannot fully be appreciated without the urban experience. The physician William Falconer, who largely praises rural life, admits to its inability to cultivate refinement. The city afforded a wide range of stimulus and influences, both good and bad, with which to cultivate both good and bad tastes. But even the shocks experienced in urban life – assuming they are of the terrible and not horrible variety – were seen to cultivate a desirable sensitivity. Even that champion of the rural retreat William Cowper admits his “sensibilities” were “wonderfully enhanced by a long
series of shocks, given to a frame of nerves that was never very athletic” (Life and Letters 285). Like the Gothic itself, the urban sphere cultivates refinement as much through shock as through providing an arena of culture. In dilating the mind, shock allows for subsequent experiences to be more readily taken in and more deeply felt, so long as the mind is not dilated to the extent of dissolution, so long as the nerves are not stretched to the point of inelasticity. Such qualifiers, then, reaffirm the value of aesthetic and environmental variation.

Radcliffe also uses the three family members who inhabit the Chateau-le-Blanc to recall previous subjectivities in the novel and to triangulate Emily’s own. Like other urbanites in The Mysteries, the Parisian Countess De Villefort exhibits a sensibility that has “long since decayed under the corruptions of luxury” – her resultant insensitivity to nature and other people is strongly emphasized (466, 468). Blanche, the Count’s daughter from a previous marriage, is rather innocent, frequently awed by the natural landscapes, and completely befuddled that anyone could prefer the “black walls and dirty streets” of Paris “when, in the country, they might gaze on the blue heavens, and all the green earth!” (472). The Count prefers nature over the “false taste” he sees in Paris; yet, having spent many years there, his psycho-physiological response to the environs of the Chateau are no longer the same as Blanche’s, like they once had been. Still, these scenes do awaken fond remembrances and pleasurable, if measured, feelings (597, 465). All of these characters speak to Emily’s own subjectivity: Blanche is a double of Emily before her father’s death and her urban trials; while very different from the Countess, Emily had proved just as insensible to the scenes of nature upon leaving Venice; but ultimately, Emily seems most akin to the Count. They share a mutual understanding of melancholy,
particularly the kind attendant to the retreat from the urban world to the rural scenes of one’s past. This triangulation of Emily’s selfhood suggests, then, that her moral and mental fortifications remain intact, but it also underscores that, after experiencing urban spaces, she is no longer what she once was.

In portraying Emily in relief to the De Villeforts, Radcliffe reveals Emily’s progress toward a sensibility that has been strongly championed throughout the novel—the sensibility of St. Aubert, the rural retreater par example. Though St. Aubert strongly encourages Emily to check her sensibility with reason, we see him regularly indulge in sensations derived from nature and domesticity. This is, of course, after his own urban trials, and after he chooses La Valleé for the sight of his retirement particularly because it was there he first indulged in the “pensive melancholy” that later became “a strong feature of his character” (2). Amidst this melancholy, subtler splendor is found, which brings “tears of pleasure” to St. Aubert’s eyes; his own urban experiences help him more fully to recognize the “sweet affections” attendant “to simplicity and nature” to which the “brilliant and tumultuous scenes” are juxtaposed (2). “The conscious of acting right,” i.e. the knowledge gained from his trials in Paris that rural living was the more righteous path, further “refined his sense of every surrounding blessing” (4). Again and again, Radcliffe emphasizes how distress leads to psychologically beneficial reprieves— a key concept within the discourse of sensibility.

While the first example highlights the moral aspect, a few pages latter Radcliffe offers a more physiological instance as St. Aubert is “attacked with a fever” that “gave a severe shock to his constitution,” language highly evocative of the psycho-physiological conception of self (8). Even here, though, physiological degradation does wonders for
sensibility: “The refreshing pleasure from the first view of nature, after the pain of illness, and the confinement of a sick-chamber, is above the conceptions, as well as the descriptions, of those in health” (8). Not only do the scenes of nature “revivify the soul” in such moments, but they also “make mere existence bliss” (8). Here, the enervation attendant to illness makes the subject more susceptible to the external stimulus, but the outcome is similar as that above: what was simple or mundane before is now readily seen as infused with profundity. Emily first becomes aware of this pattern of distress and reprieve symbolically, by seeing it in nature: “But hark!” she exclaims, “here comes the sweeping sound [of the wind] over the wood-tops;--now it dies away;--how solemn the stillness that succeeds!” (15). Note that the solemn stillness is felt only after the rush of wind – the agitation caused by some external element. This solemnity proves a seed that eventually grows into the more supernatural or more powerfully sublime feelings that follow from psychological shock later in the novel.

Whether in the first moments and days after her father’s death, or the first months after escaping Udolpho, the environs of Chateau-le-Blanc and La Vallée prove the stage on which Emily exhibits the aftermath of trauma. And there is the sense that Emily’s new, urbanized subjectivity, though destabilized to the point of distemper, proves a desirable state of being. While bliss and awe often follow the agitations of one’s nerves and mind, in more extreme cases in Radcliffe’s novel what follows distress is melancholy, which eighteenth-century physicians understood as a mental distemper. St. Aubert, we saw, had long dabbled in melancholia, and Emily’s experiences with this state of mind first arise after her mother’s death and become more pronounced as St. Aubert’s own condition worsens. When St. Aubert faints and then recovers, Emily experiences
“terror” that is then “subsided into a gentle melancholy” (66). After his death, Emily again experiences the “shock of affliction” that will similarly “soften into melancholy” (99). Her continued state of anxiety, leading to “a melancholy imagination,” makes her all the more “sensible to every impression” (63).

After St. Aubert’s death, Emily indulges her melancholia in the manner that St. Aubert warned her against; yet, she also takes on a subjectivity more akin to St Aubert’s own in doing so. Upon returning to La Vallee, she haunts his favorite spots; she even has the “melancholy pleasure” of reciting poems he once recited – including one about bats and how melancholy “charms” the mind, making one feel a supernatural accord with nature (96). Emily’s own mind becomes somewhat “distempered,” causing her to invest the world around her with supernatural meaning, as when she thinks, for a moment, she sees St. Aubert sitting in his favorite chair (95). In doing so, she is not unlike St. Aubert, who was also susceptible to “romantic images” and “the poet’s dream,” and who could also “send forward a transforming eye” and make his imagination visible before him (15).

Emily’s psycho-physiological reaction to her father’s illness and death proves a foreshadowing of what later occurs in Venice and Udolpho, with the key difference being that her terror in the rural sphere typically fades to melancholy rather than first heightening to a state of horror. At Udolpho, Emily experiences more frequently and to a more dangerous degree the “dream of a distempered imagination” or the “frightful fictions, in which the wild genius of the poets sometimes delighted” (296). And while her return to Chateau-le-Blanc allows her terror finally to subside to melancholy, it never alleviates that melancholy. But, as Radcliffe has repeatedly suggested, Emily might not want it to.
Indeed, something significant of Emily’s urban experience at Venice and Udolpho lingers on, which is best understood in the symbol of the ruined watchtower – her favorite spot on the grounds of the Chateau-le-Blanc. Like Udolpho, and in keeping with Radcliffe’s ubiquitous use of the pathetic fallacy, the watchtower proves symbolic of the permeated boundaries of self, as suggested by its “broken walls” (540). Also, important to the symbol of the ruined tower is the “small chamber” at the top, which “was less decayed” than the rest of the structure; this not only delineates a mental space within the tower but also one that is in better condition than the rest of it (665). In this symbol, Radcliffe reaffirms the malleability of Emily’s self, and, in doubling the symbolism of Udolpho’s ruins, she recalls the enervation attendant to Emily’s urban experiences. That the tower is symbolic of a decidedly urban subjectivity is reinforced by the fact that Valancourt also spends much time here after his own urban trials, after his own dissipation and admitted loss of “fortitude” (517). Both characters morally and mentally withstand their urban trials even if their psycho-physiological constitutions are weakened in the process; in this, the permeated but still-standing tower proves an apt symbol for each.

While the permeation of the self suggested by the tower points to the aftermath of urban shock, also at stake in this symbol is the increased susceptibility to external spaces. Thus, the tower stands for the condition exhibited earlier by St. Aubert, where affliction allows one to experience more readily the awe and bliss of simple nature. In her small chamber, Emily luxuriates in the “soft tranquility” of the surrounding scenes, scenes whose descriptions are often evocative of nervous stimulation, the “trembling radiance” of the water (665, 666). She also composes two poems that bear strong similarities to the
one composed by her father that she recited earlier, suggesting her fuller realization of a
subjectivity akin to his own. The first, “To the Bat,” depicts the same winged creatures
from St. Aubert’s poem, but here they more explicitly embody some element of the
poet’s interiority. As they fly in and out of “the ruins ivy’d tow’r” that proved a spatial
symbol for Emily’s psycho-physiological being, they reinforce the permeability of her
self and suggest a free interchange between interior and exterior spaces. The second
poem, “To Melancholy,” refers to the “charmful pow’r” that melancholy can have on the
mind, invoking “Fancy” and “wild romantic dream, / That meets the poet’s musing eye”
(665). This one, again, echoes St. Aubert’s own as it reinforces Emily’s poetic sensibility
and the sense that distempered imagination can lead to positive, if “wild” psychological
experience.

Both poems allude to psychic projection onto the external space, seemingly
affirming the sense of spectrality and pathetic fallacy identified by many commentators
on Radcliffe’s novel and on the Gothic and Romantic genres in total. Yet, while this
poetic experience suggests an aggrandizement of the deep self – its inwardness,
autonomy, and individual power – it ultimately results from the reality of the self as
permeable and highly malleable. Contextualized within an ever-repeating cycle of
distress and reprieve, which occurs both in local moments and across the larger narrative,
these poems are rather reflective of the benefits of a well-distressed mind recollected in
tranquility, so to speak. By the novel’s end, both Emily and Valancourt have achieved a
subjectivity like St. Aubert’s. As with St. Aubert, the urban stimuli that weakened the
nerves and distempered the mind prove a necessary catalyst for a subjectivity that is
strongly inclined toward rural domesticity, the solemnity of nature, and visionary
experience. If the city was the antagonist initially, it has also become, paradoxically, a requisite medium for their psychological development and happy union.

Interestingly, all of Count de Villefort’s, St. Aubert’s, and Emily’s urban engendered subjectivities are explicitly correlated to poets or foreshadow Romantic sentiments to come. It would be inaccurate to call these subjectivities pre-Romantic, however. Charlotte Smith’s *The Emigrants* (1793), which also employs the rural retreat trope and more explicitly engages Cowper’s *The Task*, similarly portrays concerns about the urban-shaped sensibility. In the poem, Smith’s speaker compares herself to the emigrants, as one “who long / has dwelt amid the artificial scenes/ Of populous City” and loses “all taste / For Nature’s genuine beauty” (I. l.260-265). Yet, the speaker’s language suggests not a total loss, like Countess De Villefort; rather, her stance towards the natural scenery is more melancholic – replete with the visionary qualities attendant to mental distemper – much like the Count, St. Aubert, and Emily. The Count’s nostalgic look at the natural haunts of his childhood also bears close similarities to William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” in which Wordsworth views “forms of beauty” from which he has been “absent long” because caught for five long years “in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities” (ll. 23-7). Like the Count and Emily, Wordsworth’s spot of time reveals him to be “changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first / I came among these hills” (67-8). Indeed, time in the city changes the terms of the economy between self and place because it has changed aspects integral to the self – such as the physiological system of nerves, one’s taste, patterns of perception, patterns of cognition. The result is a melancholic appreciation of beauty accessed only through some loss – an experience of place that is part ode, part elegy.
In the next chapter, I want to explore in greater detail how the Romantic poetry that follows Radcliffe’s vastly influential novel takes up the trope of the urbanized subjectivity, and I will argue, as I have done here, that this urbanization is integral to the type of selfhood it champions. As with Radcliffe’s novel, it glorifies the self and the power of the imagination; yet, rather than espousing an autonomous and deep psyche, they reinforce the permeability and malleability of the self, a condition upon which the ideal sensibility is predicated.
CHAPTER 2 – “IN THE PRESENCE OF THAT VAST METROPOLIS”:
WORDSWORTH, EPISTEMIC PLAY, AND THE CITY

In the 1805 version of The Prelude, William Wordsworth cultivates an extensive theory of self and psychological formation, one that expands upon the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning discussed in the last chapter. Wordsworth is as interested as Radcliffe in achieving a poetic state of being – that is, one highly sensible to external influence and able to utilize external influences to creative ends. Wordsworth first outlines his psychological theory of reception and creation in his 1802 “Preface” to the Lyrical Ballads and the “Prospectus” to The Recluse, written shortly thereafter, both texts proving an extension and progression of associationist theory and Locke’s empiricism. Perhaps the most famous articulation of Wordsworth’s theory of mind

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1 The Recluse was to be a comprehensive philosophical poem of which The Prelude was the introductory part. Because The Prelude is part of this philosophical endeavor, I take Wordsworth’s depiction of psychological development in The Prelude as a theoretical expression of personal experience.

2 Wordsworth’s connection to associationism has been well established, and certainly was so long before M. H. Abrams’ The Mirror and the Lamp (1953), though Abrams’ account proves an important starting point for the present conversation. Abrams argues for Wordsworth’s more expressive (and idealist) sense of creativity in his poetry while at the same time acknowledging the associationist debts of his critical prose (103-4). Cairns Craig and Gavin Budge have both recently argued against the tendency following Abrams to prioritize “an expressive system” and suggest “associationism’s necessarily inferior explanatory power” (Budge 54; see also Craig 85-87). Most scholarship on Wordsworth’s philosophy have suggested, in concert with Abrams, that Wordsworth, particularly during the first decade of the nineteenth century, was caught between empiricist and idealist theories; see, for instance, Simon Jarvis 4-5; John O. Hayden 10-13, 18-22; Keith Thomas 18, and Robert Langbaum 18. See also Alan Grob’s The Philosphic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth’s Poetry and Thought 1797-1805 (1973). The empiricist theory of John Locke, as well as other Enlightenment luminaries, pervaded Cambridge during the time Wordsworth attended. Kenneth Johnston argues that Wordsworth “certainly read the Essay on Human Understanding, one of the great books of the age” (159). Hartley, Keith Thomas affirms, was on Wordsworth’s bookshelf (15). Wordsworth knew Godwin and admired Political Justice, though eventually found its atheism untenable.
comes from the “Prospectus,” where he proclaims, “How exquisitely the individual Mind . . . to the external World / Is fitted,” but also how “The external World is fitted to the Mind”; thus, the mind and external world make a “creation” through their “blended might” (63-68). The mutual influence of the engagement between mind and world is even more evident when Wordsworth claims in “The Preface”: “What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure” (605; emphasis added). Here, the subject and objects maintain a reciprocal influence, a continuing ability to act each on the other. While experience and habit prove necessary components of this mental engagement, Wordsworth singles out “pleasure” as the main principle on which knowledge is “built up,” as it positively reinforces the associative processes. With this store of knowledge in place, the subject comes to look upon a world that is a “complex scene of ideas and sensation” (606). From these preludes to his poetical and theoretical endeavors, we see the confirmation of a Wordsworthian subject that is fundamentally empiricist but not, it is important to note, a passive receiver of sensations.

Equally important is the sense that the subject’s agency expands beyond the arena of the mind. This form of agency, one of environmental immersion and engagement,

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3 Wordsworth’s description is in line with Priestley’s articulation of associationism: “all our intellectual pleasures and pains [and] all the phenomena of memory, imagination, volition, reasoning, and every other mental affection and operation, are only different modes, or cases, of the association of ideas: so that nothing is requisite to make any man whatever he is, but a sentient principle, with this single property . . . and the influence of such circumstances as he has actually been exposed to” (Hartley’s Theory xxiv).

4 Rowan Boyson provides a compelling reading of Wordsworth’s depiction of pleasure as echoing “the neuro-physiological theories of David Hartley, John Brown, and Erasmus Darwin,” while offering his own sense of how the pleasure of “poetry and our enjoyment of nature are life-enhancing” (123-24).

5 I emphasize mental agency here because of an incorrect assumption that materialist epistemologies portray a passive mind; even Thomas and Hayden, who both note the active mind explicit in the Locke’s theory and implicit in Hartley’s, suggest that Wordsworth turns to Idealism in order to accommodate his sense of the mind as an active agent; see Thomas 17 and Hayden 23. Abrams similarly suggests that Coleridge was concerned about the passivity inherent in mechanical theories of the mind (Mirror 169).
proves crucial to Wordsworth’s theory of psychological development in *The Prelude*, but it remains a theme that has gone underexplored in Wordsworth criticism due to critical assumptions about Romanticism’s inward turn (or its ideology, anyway). In *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (1989), Alan Bewell astutely claims that Wordsworth’s “enduring concern is not with the mind or nature in isolation, but with how human powers and responsibilities manifest (and have manifested) themselves over time in our active engagement with nature” (238).6 Bewell’s contextualization of Wordsworth’s poetry within eighteenth-century environmental discourse proves not only helpful to my own study of Wordsworth’s environmental view of psychology but also offers a more culturally grounded sense of Wordsworthian nature than has been offered since.7 On this critical spot, I agree strongly with Bewell, though from here I diverge from his subsequent focus on “the geological agency of human beings” (239). Instead, I want to fold this sense of external agency back into a consideration of Wordsworth’s theory of psychological development, to consider

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6 Along with Bewell, a few other scholars have emphasized, even if briefly, the relational or environmental aspects of the Wordsworthian self. In *Literature and the Relational Self* (1994), Barbara Ann Schapiro extrapolates the perspective of self in Stephen Mitchell’s *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* to several authors, including Wordsworth, though she spends little time discussing the role of the external environment and does not address the city. Alan Richardson’s *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (2001) and Noel Jackson’s *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (2008) both offer a strong sense of sensationalist theory that informed Wordsworth’s understanding of mind and self.

7 More recently, ecocritics such as Jonathan Bate, James McKusick, and Karl Kroeber have tried to recast Wordsworth’s attachment to nature as a political orientation that opposes industrial advances. Kroeber specifically posits an “individual imaginative subjectivity, and awareness of human interdependencies” that results from rural living as oppositional to the “pseudo-impersonality encouraged by industrialized imperialism” (7). Kroeber is correct to suggest that different localities can offer different cultural baselines; yet, in concert with Scott Hess, I find the definition of “‘nature’ in opposition to the modern social and economic world, especially the city” to be unproductive, though unlike Hess I see this opposition as a misreading rather than an accurate one (9). This ecocriticism, I find, limits its own potential efficacy by limiting its spectrum to an idealized “nature” that only recapitulates the theories of Romantic ideology they try to work against. Yet, Wordsworth engages with numerous types of environments in *The Prelude* and in his poetry as a whole, and each of these environments offers a sense of ecological interdependence and provides new experiences, new images, and thus more creative potential.
the ways in which mental and physical forms of environmental engagement work in concert in *The Prelude*, engendering an external reaction upon the individual psyche. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth frequently depicts this process of engagement and psychological development in the form of play, which highlights an epistemic process of physical interaction with the external world. In Book 5, which offers a consideration of educational methods, Wordsworth champions the “old Grandame Earth” and the “playthings” she affords for the cognitive exercise of the child (5.346-348). In other words, the objects of nature prove epistemic objects by which the developing child acquires knowledge about the external world and his or her own mental functions. The natural environment – one unshaped by humans – proves an invaluable educator in this manner, and Wordsworth reveals in *The Prelude* how this process originates in the affect-rich interaction between infant and mother (the first ecological system experienced in life) and from there expands to include the external world and the objects in it. Cultural artifacts, particularly books, become increasingly important in this progress, and through these objects Wordsworth emphasizes the capacity of humans to enrich their environment in ways that induce greater psychological development. Along these lines, I argue that Books 7 and 8, which focus largely on Wordsworth’s urban experiences and his reflections on them, portray the city less as an impediment to psychological growth and more as an enrichment environment for it.\(^8\) Wordsworth spends far less time lamenting

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\(^8\) Environmental enrichment refers to an environment that affords cognitive growth either because of its own structure or because of particular objects in it. My sense of this dynamic is informed by the work of cognitive scientists Andy Clark and David Chalmers as well as the work by anthropologist Stephen Mithen, who separately support a theory of how the mind is extended through engagement with external objects, particularly cultural artifacts. As discussed in the introduction, their work has been especially helpful in my thinking on epistemic engagement with the external world, an engagement that I argue is central to Wordsworth’s own theory on psychological development.
the city of “blank confusion,” which has received the bulk of critical attention concerning Wordsworth’s urban engagement, than he does playing with the various structures of influence that it affords him. Such experiences and structures prove integral to his understanding of cognitive processes and help advance his own imaginative efforts. It is in the city, I argue, that Wordsworth regards the full extent to which “man and the objects that surround him [are] acting and re-acting upon each other,” even if the total realization of this condition is not made until later reflections. While the city will present both “blank confusion” and ideological complications for Wordsworth, it ultimately provides objects that “being / Themselves capacious, also found in me / Capaciousness and amplitude of mind—” (8.757-759). Such is the progress of mental expansion that the bulk of this chapter will outline.

In the final section, I argue that the two moments most often addressed by criticism on The Prelude – Simplon Pass and Mount Snowdon – reveal the extent to which urban structures of influence inform Wordsworth’s perception of these remote localities and the knowledge they afford him about history and creative empowerment. In

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9 Alan Liu and Jonathan Wordworth argue that Book Seventh, where London is most prominently figured, depicts a type of fall or epic descent into hell (Liu 398; J. Wordsworth, Companion 188). Most scholars have likewise read Wordsworth’s London as a hellish or chaotic space that impedes the imagination with its crude stimuli and threatens both epistemological and ontological security: see Geoffrey Hartman Wordsworth’s Poetry, 239; Raymond Williams 150; Mary Jacobus 629; Keith Thomas 130; Stephen C. Gill 73; Ross King 66; Markman Ellis 145; Tim Fulford 53-54. For readings of Book 7 as an anti-urban depiction within the satiric tradition, see C. R. Stokes 205; David Boyd 617; and Herbert Lindenberger 237–239. More ambivalent views are taken by William Galperin, who suggests that “London for Wordsworth is a place where knowledge—a recognition of the subject’s place in time and space—is necessarily purchased with loss of power and individuation” (127), and Lucy Newlyn, who argues that the city is “polluting” and estranging but concedes that “Wordsworth is at his best when he is disturbed” and ultimately that the city proves a “formative experience” and is “as crucial as the country in moulding his imagination” (181). Stuart Allen acknowledges the city’s alienating aspect but also argues that Wordsworth evinces the city’s imaginative potential through allegory. James Chandler’s and Kevin Gilmartin’s “Introduction” to The Romantic Metropolis (2005) provides the most overtly positive account of the urban sphere on Wordsworth’s poetic imagination, though they do not speak to its role in psychological development, per se.
this way, I will show how Wordsworth’s environmental psychology undermines dominant mainstays of Romantic scholarship: the first being the essential, autonomous, and transcendent Romantic subject. The inwardness of Romantic subjectivity is perhaps best displayed by Andrea Henderson in *Romantic Identities* (1996), in part because she attempts to find alternatives to this critical commonplace only to reaffirm its pervasiveness in Romantic poetry and its centrality to Wordsworth’s own conception of self.10 The “resistant interiority” that Henderson associates with Wordsworth ultimately supports a false premise, that the selfhood promoted by Wordsworth was autonomous from the external environment rather than in a reciprocal dynamic relationship with it (Henderson 8).

The supposed gap that scholarship has seen between nature and modern socio-political realities in Wordsworth’s writing is the second mainstay that I wish to interrogate. In many ways, this second commonplace builds from the first. New Historicist accounts have acknowledged the inwardness and transcendence of the Wordsworthian self – what Alan Liu calls Wordsworth’s “imperialism of the mind” (211) – but only to critique it, showing how it obfuscates historical influence on Wordsworth’s

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10 Henderson argues “that the canonical Romantic model of ‘deep’ subjectivity is of limited usefulness in helping us understand Romantic conceptions of the subject,” but she then largely reaffirms this model of subjectivity in the work of Byron and Wordsworth (3). In her chapter on Byron, she depicts how he explores a “context-based identity” in “The Prisoner of Chillon” only to adopt instead “a Wordsworthian notion of resistant interiority” – i.e. an inward self that is resistant to external influence (8). The three works that proved most influential in establishing this still dominant view are: M. H. Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism* (1973), Geoffrey Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, and Harold Bloom’s “Internalization of the Quest Romance,” though Charles Rzepka significantly affirmed a Wordsworthian sense of the “true self”: an autonomous consciousness distinct from nature (25, 68-69). More recently Joel Faflak has presented a similarly inward aspect to Wordsworth’s theory of the self where interior forces regulate organic growth and where development is signified by “various traumas” (98, 76); for Faflak the Arab scene in Book 5 proves exemplary of the Wordsworthian self because it is there that “Wordsworth evolves the capacity to let the inner life stage itself on its own terms” (98).
mind or his underlying historical epistemology. For Liu, Jerome McGann, and Geraldine Friedman, history is embedded in Wordsworth’s poetic landscapes, landscapes which quite often bury that history beneath thick descriptions of nature or the projection of the self’s own consciousness. I argue instead that The Prelude portrays the struggle to read history and to contemplate cultural meaning via the environment, not a struggle to repress it. In short, my argument poses three primary claims: Wordsworth’s epistemology is environmental rather than historical; the Wordsworthian self is malleable and relational rather than autonomous and transcendent; and Wordsworth’s nature is very much unstable in meaning, culturally and historically enriched, and inclusive of the human actions that have shaped it. It is with these tenets in place that Wordsworth records the development of the individual mind.

Infant Sensibility, Playthings, & Books

To begin, I want to explore in more depth Wordsworth’s depiction of human sensibility as it develops from infancy into early childhood in order to concretize his views of psychological development. The tenets established here will prove vital to the next section, which argues for the urban sphere as a form of enriched environment, a conception Wordsworth works up to by exploring first the mother, then the rural

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11 I will most frequently engage with Alan Liu’s own New Historicist tome Wordsworth: The Sense of History (1989), particularly in my effort to argue against Liu’s sense that Wordsworth’s poetry should be read from the perspective of a “historical epistemology” (40). Of course, work by Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Geraldine Friedman has also been integral to the New Historicist project and have worked to critique the displacement of socio-historical realities or doctrinal commitments in Wordsworth’s poetry behind a sense of imagination and nature that are “stable and orderly” (McGann 69). While Levinson’s view is closer to McGann’s, Friedman’s is more in line with Liu’s, acknowledging that history is “originally absent” but also that it persistently “returns, equally phantom and revenant, to haunt the texts under consideration” (Friedman 3).
environment, and then objects of material culture as epistemic objects. At the root of Wordsworth’s psychological scheme is the reciprocal action and reaction between self and nature, and thus, the purpose of *The Prelude*’s early books is “to trace / How Nature by extrinsic passion first / Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand” as well as to show how “first-born affinities . . . fit / Our new existence to existing things” (1.571-74, 582-83). Thus, Wordsworth launches his epic exploration of his psyche by reaffirming a mutual influence of extrinsic and intrinsic forces; that these forces operate under a similar natural law (as fitting an associationist schema) is apparent in the portrayal of external force as affect or “passion.” In what follows, I will show how Wordsworth develops an understanding of this affective link between subject and environment, its importance, and how it encourages the subject to undertake epistemic action through environmental engagement. Finally, I will emphasize Wordsworth’s repeated return to the issue of mental self-awareness, whether or not the diegetic subject perceives the associative processes at work in his or her psychological engagement with and development through the external world. Initially, Wordsworth likens the mental operations that fit the mind to nature as to musical principles of harmony, where an “Invisible workmanship . . . reconciles / Discordant elements and makes them move / In one society” (1.351-355).

Both Wordsworth’s understanding of associative processes as “Invisible workmanship”

12 Langbaum argues that these “first-born affinities” represent innate ideas, and thus reveal some of the early glimpses of idealism in Wordsworth’s theory of psychology (22). While Locke strongly opposes innate ideas, he does not suggest that the “operations” of the mind are the result of experience – only that they can be noted or reflected upon only through experience. Similarly, Hartley’s sense of association as a natural force inherent to the human mind – just as gravity is inherent to matter – affirms his own sense that mental process (though not ideas themselves) may be inborn.

13 Fundamental to the associationist model outlined by Hartley was the sense that psychological behavior followed the same natural laws as those found external to the subject. Hartley took Newton’s theory of gravity as a model for his own discussion of the connective property of associations. See *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749) 21.
and his emphasis on turning discord into harmony will prove key themes for The Prelude and important touchstones for my argument.

Through much of the early part of The Prelude, Wordsworth explores how children grow through their cognitive engagement with the external world and how they acquire operations of reflection and self-awareness of their own mental agency. Wordsworth’s discussion of “infant sensibility” incorporates many of Locke’s fundamental conceptions of the nascent mind at work. Wordsworth first focuses on the mother-child dynamic, and, though scholarship has been more inclined to read this dynamic via psychoanalysis, Wordsworth’s interest does not lie the role the mother plays in the child’s identity formation; instead, Wordsworth offers a unique conception of environmental epistemology in early mental development. Pointing to an initial connection between mother and child (“the babe who sleeps / Upon his mother’s breast”), Wordsworth notes how the child receives affective stimulus from interaction with the mother, “feelings” that pass into the child’s “torpid life / Like an awakening breeze” (2.239-40, 243-44). As a result, the infant’s mind, “[e]ven in the first trial of its powers,”

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14 For Locke, through experience and memory the mind comes to “be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise the discursive faculty; and the use of reason becomes daily more visible, as these materials that give it employment, increase” (II.1.15; emphasis added). While Locke specifically refers to reason here, he also describes how the mind, working with these same “materials,” can actively conjoin and deconstruct them at will – a sense of mental activity quite similar to Hartley’s associationism. Through the repetition of and reflection on these activities, the mind becomes ever more aware of its own agency.

15 Jonathan Wordsworth (80), Chris Jones and Li-Po Lee (par. 9), Joel Faflak, and Kerry McSweeney (42-44) all offer a Freudian perspective, emphasizing the drama of ego formation even though nothing in the scene speaks directly to it. Jonathan Wordsworth even implies the poor fit of this reading: “In terms of child psychology Wordsworth makes the wrong guess: an infant’s problem is not with forming parts into wholes, but with perceiving differences, distinguishing between self and other” (80). Certainly, we should not condemn Wordsworth for failing to subscribe to a psychological theory that would not exist for another 100 years. More productive readings have been offered by Jackson (71) and Langbaum (53), who both stress the sensationalist epistemology inherent to this scene – Boyson also points to the “developmental models of sensation throughout” The Prelude (128-29). My own effort is to explore how Wordsworth translates this sensationalist epistemology into an environmental epistemology.
becomes aware of external influence (2.245). Offering an overtly associationist extension of this idea, Wordsworth suggests that the baby becomes “eager to combine / In one appearance all the elements / And parts of the same object, else detached / And loth to coalesce” (239-250). In other words, the mind of the child associates the various experiences of engagement with the mother, and the many influences she affords, into a conception of a singular object. The now singular object of the mother becomes the child’s first observed environment, one that is defined through affective influence and response. Furthermore, in emphasizing the mother as first environmental object, Wordsworth points to how the first ideas the child acquires from the external world result from an engagement that is equally environmental and social.

The child’s process of engagement, reception, and association then extends from the mother to the external world. Because the child is “[s]ubjected to the discipline of Love” – that is, since the child acquires positive stimulus from the initial, external agent – “His organs and recipient faculties / Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads, / Tenacious of the forms which it receives” (2.251-254). As the infant’s sensory organs and cognitive faculties are expanded or “quickened,” he or she begins to recognize an environment beyond the mother whose breast had been both a fond location for rest and source of nourishment. Yet, the baby is not “bewildered and depressed” by this larger

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16 The mother proves a valuable example for how meaning exists extrinsically to the mind as well as for how the individual mind must do the work of adhering various elements and influences into a coherent whole. Thus, I disagree with Rzepka’s sense that “For the Romantics, order is no longer assumed to inhere in a physical universe of objects (the advance of the natural sciences notwithstanding); rather, it inheres in the organized mental universe of percepts” (10). Rather, I would suggest that Wordsworth sense of mind “fitting” to the external world indicates that order and meaning exist externally but require mental action to be recognized – but this is only one part of the process for Wordsworth, as the mind also fits the world to its own notions. Wordsworth recognizes, then, a reciprocal, mutually shaping engagement between external world and mind that bears similarities to Gibson’s sense of affordances, as discussed in the introduction, which will be further explored later in this chapter.
sphere because of the positive experience it has known thus far and because the infant still finds itself within the mother’s “beloved presence” (2.261, 258). Mixing both sentimental and physiological language, Wordsworth suggests:

Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of Nature that connect him with the world.
Emphatically, such a being lives,
An inmate of this active universe. (II: 262-266; my emphasis).

The bond with the mother, the infant’s first environmental object, thus spreads to the larger environment, which similarly nurtures growth through positive stimulus. Thus, the infant becomes a happy inmate of an environment that beneficently acts upon it through similarly affective forces – note the correlation between gravity and emotional bond.

Subject to external influence, the child also has agency within its cognitive engagement:

For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And—powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear and joy—his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds. Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life—. (269-276)

Receiving sensations and subsequent ideas for his or her experience, the infant must necessarily do the cognitive work of association – of combining and linking simple ideas
in order to perceive and engage with the environment effectively. Such are the fundamental “affinities” of the infant: to begin the mental process of linking sensation and ideas, which proves vital to the child’s ability to engage with its mother and ultimately to engage with the world. The reciprocal acting and reacting of subject and world begins to emerge, as external influence quickens the sense and cognitive capacities, allowing them to interact better with (and become more sensible to) external influence. Thus, Wordsworth’s environmental epistemology is not only necessary for effective engagement with the world but also develops the capacity for psychological and poetic growth. This environmental epistemology proves, then, the basis for Wordsworth’s psychology and for his epic song.\footnote{I offer this sense of environmental epistemology not only as a counter to psychoanalytic readings of this scene and \textit{The Prelude} as a whole, but also as an alternative to Alan Liu’s sense of historical epistemology, which takes the “epistemological constructs” of culture as the determining form of knowledge. Certainly, I agree that cultural epistemes are at work in \textit{The Prelude}, and my discussion on how material culture offers key epistemic artifacts will bear that out, but I want to emphasize how the these cultural constructs are always superadded to an environmental epistemology that is already in place. The cultural epistemes, like epistemic artifacts that are their concretized form, are a part of rather than a dominion over the engagement between subject and environment. In other words, both historical epistemology and environmental epistemology prove an “orbit of signification” that encapsulates the subject, but the environmental epistemology is ultimately the larger orbit, the only one a human being is necessarily born into and can never leave while living. The need to view culture and history through the perspective of environmental epistemology will be developed in the final section of this chapter.}

First the mother and then the immediate surroundings prove an enriching environment that fosters sensorial and cognitive development. As new objects and influences are experienced, the mind gains information, combining it into the subjective conception of the external world – that “Invisible workmanship” that makes sense of the external world and the meanings and influences it affords. Through this process of association and combination, the child begins to experience structures of influence that exist externally to itself – first the mother and then in specific localities. Because this
capability is initially developed via engagement with the mother’s features, I argue, Wordsworth correlates topography to the lineaments or features of a face. For instance, he describes how the scenes of his youth “on my mind had stamped / The faces of the moving year” so to have “[r]emained, in their substantial lineaments / Depicted on the brain” (1.560-61, 600-01). The mention of faces not only recalls the early influence of the mother but also points to how the engagement between child and environment bears an affective tone. In another instance, Wordsworth cites one particular evening that “soon brought on / A sober hour,”

not winning or serene,

For cold and raw the air was, and untuned;

But as a face we love is sweetest then

When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look

It chance to wear. (4.133-137)

Often, scholars have read such scenes as a humanization of the natural world that leads toward transcendence, a form of mental projection\(^\text{18}\); while there is a great deal of cognitive engagement at work, such moments would be better regarded, I find, as a sort of skeuomorph.\(^\text{19}\) The face metaphor emphasizes a fundamental schema of association, one predicated on habits developed from prior engagement with the mother, now applied

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\(^{18}\) Raymond Williams (133-34), Geoffrey Hartman (xiii), and Onno Oerlemans (34) all point to this humanizing of the landscape as linked with the project of transcendence where the projection of personal feeling is either a self-conscious detachment from nature (Williams and Oerlemans) or a peroration for apocalyptic separation (Hartman). Hess’ argument about Wordsworth’s photographic subjectivity also reinforces a sense of how human framing of the landscape leads to a form of detachment (22-23).

\(^{19}\) Skeuomorph refers to terminology or ornamentation on a derivative or advanced form of technology that represents older or original qualities of predating forms. For example, internet technology uses a variety of terms correlated with paper media (pages, scrolling, etc.); a plastic object might replicate stitching or rivets so as to appear like an older form of the object. Here, I am suggesting that the use of facial features to describe topography proves a similar extrapolation, one Wordsworth uses to signify the continued affective engagement with external objects.
to the external sphere so as to make sense of its features and their psycho-physiological effects. Like facial expressions, the features of the scene have an affective influence, making the connection between feeling and image indexical rather than symbolic: the dampened air effects a feeling of sorrow, thus Wordsworth codifies the external space with the emotions it is likely to produce.

Wordsworth’s sense of the external environment as a form of psychological enrichment is further expounded in his associationist discussion of education. Taking on a Priestleyan notion that “the most effectual discipline of the mind is that of experience” (Miscellaneous Observations 3-4), Wordsworth attacks the contemporaneous trend in British education to confine students and to subject them to rote learning, taking direct aim at teachers “who in their prescience would control / All accidents, and to the very road / Which they have fashioned would confine us down / Like engines” (5.380-383).20 By controlling the educational environment to an outrageous extent, such teachers severely limit the experiences students can have and thus the knowledge they might gain. Through such methods, the child learns only abstracted information: “He knows the policies of foreign lands, / Can string you names of districts, cities, towns, / The whole world over” (5.332-336); and yet, the “old Grandame Earth is grieved to find / The playthings which her love designed for him / Unthought of” (5.346-348; emphasis added). Rather than a mechanical form of knowledge acquisition (making “engines” of

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20 Given Wordsworth’s brief engagement with Unitarianism, it is likely he would have been influenced by Priestley and associationism in general in terms of his thought on education. Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) and Rousseau’s Emile (1762) have also been identified as key influences on Wordsworth’s attitudes towards education, though neither proves a perfect match. For more on Wordsworth’s engagement with eighteenth-century theories on education, particularly Rousseau, see James Chandler’s Wordsworth’s Second Nature (1984), 93-199; and Alan Richardson’s Literature, Education, and Romanticism (1994), 33-43, 48-58.
the students), Wordsworth champions an education via organic experience, where the objects of the world become playthings from which to learn – a somewhat crude but remarkably prescient sense of epistemic activity. That Wordsworth refers to the material and objects of the world as “playthings” is particularly significant, for it correlates the affective quality of the natural world already emphasized by “old Grandame” and “her love designed” to the developmental component of play and psychological development.

Antithetical to the mechanical students, children who learn via environmental engagement are able to generate epistemological gain within a beneficial, affective influence. Such a process of engaging the world, however, is not without pain:

    Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft
    Bending beneath our life’s mysterious weight
    Of pain and fear, yet still in happiness
    Not yielding to the happiest upon earth.
    Simplicity in habit, truth in speech,
    Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds!
    May books and Nature be their early joy,
    And knowledge, rightly honored with that name—
    Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power! (5.441-449).

Allowed to make mistakes, allowed to suffer and delight in nature, children will learn, Wordsworth suggests, the correct habits to lead them through life. While knowledge might be gained via rote learning and book reading alone, a steady diet of both books and environmental engagement will allow for a knowledge that is fostered by and fortified in
the experience of the external world. Such knowledge is infused with power because it manifests through healthy physical engagement and maintains an affective component that Priestley and Hartley argue is essential to associative processes. For Wordsworth, the affective component not only underwrites the process of association but also encourages further forms of engagement and fosters a positive sense of one’s interrelations with one’s ecological system.

Thus far, I have established Wordsworth’s sense (based on associationist theories) of the external world as an enrichment environment, one that begins with the mother and then expands as the child’s mind is quickened. I have also emphasized the sense of affect inherent in external objects and the feelings gendered by them in the subject. This affective quality, resulting in various forms of pleasure and pain, becomes the basis for the expansion and discipline of mental activity. From the discussion of education and environmental engagement, a significant component of Wordsworth’s psychological schema comes to the fore: the “invisible workings” of cognitive development are often sensed but not fully understood in the moment, causing the epistemic gain of the experience to remain latent. In the discussion on education, when referring to his Hawkshead playfellows, Wordsworth notes the experience of “a gentle shock of mild surprise,” which “Has carried far into his heart the voice / Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene / Would enter unawares into his mind” (5.407-413). While the subject seems to be aware of the gentle shock – the immediate physiological response to the external stimulus – the total structure of influence is not yet realized. In other words, the subject does not yet comprehend the full extent to which the external world works upon the psyche. Yet, such influences can, according to Wordsworth, manifest years later,
replete with the epistemological and affective values inherent to the original experience. For instance, Wordsworth assures the reader that it is “not in vain / Nor profitless” if external objects or circumstances are “impressed” on the mind if only “doomed to sleep / Until mature seasons called them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind” (1.619-625). In the psychic economy outlined, not all assets received from the external sphere are immediately utilized – many cannot be utilized until the mind sufficiently matures.

A key example of latent psychological value occurs in Book 1, when young Wordsworth steals a boat at night and then, while rowing into the lake, is frightened by the apparent ascension of Black Crag from behind a nearby hill. The experience makes an impression deep in his mind, as Wordsworth claims, “for many days my brain / Worked with dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being” (1.415-420). The scene continues to haunt Wordsworth, producing strange and “mighty forms” that “moved slowly through my mind / By day, and were the trouble of my dreams” (1.420-426). While aware that some unconscious workmanship is occurring, young Wordsworth does not fully grasp the process, its function, or its content. The scene and its import seem destined for a future day in which a riper mind will make better sense of it. Also significant in this scene is the “dim and undetermined sense / of unknown modes of being,” which speaks to a burgeoning awareness of the malleability of self and the potential of experience to engender new subjectivities. Each experience leads to new ideas, as do reflections on those experiences, and inevitably alters the self predicated on them – this is a fundamental tenet of the empiricist / associationist model from which Wordsworth draws.
While the Black Crag scene exemplifies the “Invisible workmanship” going on perpetually in the human mind, both in its wakeful and sleeping state, it also provides an example of how we might understand the developmental role of play or engagement with the environment. Wordsworth tests out new activities and from these activities gains new feelings, new thoughts, and even new modes of being. While he focuses by and large on the mental result of this play, we must also recognize that the psychological development at stake depends upon the embodied experience within the physical world. For Wordsworth, then, the mental realm is not discrete from but interfused with the materiality of body and environment.

In addition to the organic or natural playthings provided by the “Grandame Earth,” Wordsworth depicts the value of man-made playthings on several occasions, which establishes a precedent for playhouses, visual technologies, and the city itself. In a subtle and likely unintentional echo, the first game Wordsworth depicts is noughts and crosses (or tic-tac-toe), a game brought to England by the same culture that brought the urban grid pattern to Western civilization: the Romans. With its “square divisions parcelled out, and all / With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o’er” – that is with the grid pattern and signage – the game foreshadows the fundamental components of the urban scenes to come later (1.536-537). More important to the scene, the game offers a playful and adversarial pursuit, one that required Wordsworth and his sibling to have “schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head” (1.539). Similarly adversarial, Wordsworth describes the playing of a card game as a form of “combat” (1.543). The scene reinforces how games activate cognitive function, requiring one to scheme or
puzzle out strategies. An imaginative component exists as well, particularly in terms of the card game, which becomes an opportunity for the children to imagine in a detached manner the gains and losses of warfare. In short, these games provide more than simple pleasures; rather, they provide new experiences that exercise and develop a variety of mental functions.

The most significant human-made objects for Wordsworth’s cognitive development, though, are his books, which help to reveal both the potential for thought to be externalized and shared and the potential for ideas to shape how one mentally engages with the external world. It could be said that Wordsworth’s discussion of literature often stresses the power of the mind to separate its activity from the immediate environment; certainly his discussion of literary experience poses some of the most solipsistic moments in *The Prelude*. For example, Wordsworth recalls repeating verses to himself and claims that one might “be glad, / Lifted above the ground by airy fancies / More bright than madness or the dreams of wine” (5.590-592); yet, even here, the reference to madness and drunkenness suggests not transcendence but mis-fitting between mind and world.

Rather than escape from the world, books offer Wordsworth another form of environmental enrichment, a technological device that allows him to alter his associations and cognitive processes and thus play with his method of external engagement. In other words, books become an apt example of how “man and the objects that surround him” are

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21 The significance of this sense of play as cognitive activation should not be overlooked. The two most important treatises on education in England up until this point, Locke’s *Thoughts on Education* and Edgeworth’s *Practical Education*, addressed play but said little about its value beyond attempts to turn more proper education into types of games. Certainly card games or typical household games were not seen as a mental boon but mere distraction. Wordsworth, of course, does not extensively elaborate on his educational theory of playthings, but given this description of household games in light of his reference to “playthings” in the Book 5 discussion of education, I feel there is sufficient evidence to make such a claim.
always “acting and re-acting upon each other,” and it is for this reason, I feel, that Wordsworth suggests in the section on education that “books and Nature” should be the child’s “early joy.”

By the end of Book 5, Wordsworth suggests that literature is more in correlation with nature than adversarial to it. The poet claims that one who has been “intimate” with rural nature, who has wandered “among the woods and fields” and developed his or her sensibility via external stimulus, will more likely “[r]eceive enduring touches of deep joy / From the great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty poets” (5.611, 612, 616-618).

This reception of joy, combined with the imaginative processes attendant to reading, recalls the discussion of infant sensibility and the initiation of the “poetic spirit,” where the child is both receiver and creator. The passive and active creation, or the “blended might” of mutual fitting, appears in Book 8 as well, where Wordsworth returns to the relationship of literature and nature. Here, Wordsworth points to the time when his “poetic faculty” first began “to have some promptings to put on / A visible shape,” a phrasing that recalls the prior conversations of associative inner-workings as an “invisible workmanship” (8.511, 515-516). Working on the visible shapes of the world – the material necessary for mental agency and for understanding cognitive operations²² – young Wordsworth’s imagination would mold “works of art” or “the images of books” (8.516-517). “Nature and her objects beautified” those stories and verses that

²² In discussing how both sensation and reflection contribute to the mind’s store of ideas, Locke claims, “as the mind is wholly passive in the reception of all its simple ideas, so it exerts several acts of its own, whereby out of its simple ideas, as the materials and foundations of the rest, the others are framed” (II: 12.1). Simple ideas are the result of the sensation, generally the sensation of external stimulus, and this material (a metaphoric material based on the sensation of actual material) proves necessary to mental operations and, ostensibly, the perception of them: “This shows man’s power, and its way of operation, to be much the same in the material and intellectual world; for the material in both being such as he has no power over, either to make or destroy, all that man can do, is either to unite them together, or to set them by one another, or wholly separate them” (II: 12.1).
Wordsworth had read, allowing the conceptions of the literature he read to take on a material presence (8.523-24). From this new form of mental play, Wordsworth admits, “Nothing was safe” – a well-known elder-tree takes on a “dismal look” while “the yew-tree had its ghost / That took its station there for ornament” (8.525-29). The mind plays with these objects in a more imaginative way, but the “poetic spirit” still points to a reciprocal creation and reception of affect and ideas. This activity does not obscure but rather plays with the given structure of influence, suggesting a reciprocal creation of meaning.

The visibility of imagination and the associative processes on which it is based become clearer as Wordsworth ages within the poem. At Cambridge, when Wordsworth is most dedicated to literature, he acknowledges in true Lockean fashion how he “perused” the face “of earth and heaven, / And, turning the mind in upon itself, / Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts” (3.110-115). In the quasi-urban space of Cambridge, Wordsworth begins to indulge in his sense of his own “visionary mind” (3.556). But even here, Wordsworth emphasizes how locality engenders his experience: he recalls waking “from street to street with loose and careless heart. / I was a dreamer, they the dream; I roamed / Delighted through the motley spectacle” (3.27-29). Much like his experience with books, Wordsworth’s urban experience initially appears as a mad or drunken dream, but, given reflection, Wordsworth will again recognize the role of the environment, and the epistemic artifacts within it, upon his psycho-physiological experience.

23 Compare this to Locke’s sense of reflection as occurring when one’s “understanding turns inward upon itself, reflects on its own operations, and makes them the objects of its own contemplation” (II: 1.8).
The Epistemic Artifact(s) of the City

Wordsworth makes quite plain that his rural upbringing fostered in him the proper habits and sensibility; to be sure, he was “doubly fortunate” for living amongst “native man” and “objects that were great and fair,” as these provided “a sure safeguard and defense” against the “meanness” and “selfish cares” of “the ordinary world / In which we traffic” (8.447, 451, 453-457). No doubt Wordsworth has in mind Cambridge, London, or Paris – the places where he most clearly identifies such negative threats and attitudes. As a result, scholarship has by and large rendered Wordsworth’s view of the city as entirely or primarily a critical one. However, the urban spaces of The Prelude, particularly London, do much more than expose Wordsworth to “wretchedness and vice” (8.66). “In presence of that vast metropolis,” that place of “strong sensations teeming,” Wordsworth is “pleased” more than he is alienated or overwhelmed (8.741, 752, 754). London, through its various structures of influence, enriches his imagination rather than impeding it, leading him to forms of mental empowerment and epistemological gain that are only partially realized by the end of Book 7.

Reflecting on his experience in the city, Wordsworth writes that he “sought” and “craved for power—and power I found / In all things” (8.752-756). The power he finds externally becomes a power within; just as Wordsworth takes in and gains from the

24 See footnote 9 above.
25 Boyson provides a compelling reading of Wordsworth’s depictions of pleasure as echoing “the neuro-physiological theories of David Hartley, John Brown, and Erasmus Darwin,” while offering his own sense of how the pleasure of “poetry and our enjoyment of nature are life-enhancing” (123-24). I certainly agree with Boyson’s sense of pleasure as life enhancing, and I have already suggested a further sense of how pleasure was a necessary reinforcement to the “first-born affinities” that draw the subject to the environment in playful and thus psychologically beneficial forms of engagement. In this section, I want to add to this sense of pleasure and play by exploring the pleasure gained from the enriched urban environment.
beauty of nature, so too does he open his mind to the influence of the urban sphere and the objects in it. Reflecting in Book 8 on “the presence of that vast metropolis,” Wordsworth notes how his “imagination also found . . .”

An element that pleased her, tried her strength
Among new objects, simplified, arranged,
Impregnated my knowledge, made it live—
And the result was elevating thoughts
Of human nature. (8.794, 797-802).

Each object affords Wordsworth the potential for epistemic action, allows him the opportunity to make connections he could not have made in other localities. This is quite the opposite of Raymond Williams’ sense that the cities of *The Prelude* ultimately engender “strangeness, loss of connection” (150). Rather, Wordsworth makes a myriad of new connections amongst a world of objects more various then he had engaged before. In London, Wordsworth not only gains in imaginative potential, he also more fully recognizes the capacity of the urban sphere to enrich the mind.

Among the other critics noted above, Keith Thomas suggests that Wordsworth felt the need to write Book 7 a month after completing Book 8 so as to “elaborate the problem” of London’s “disturbing reality,” a reality that supposedly obstructed his psychological development towards a transcendent poetic spirit (125). However, given Wordsworth’s reflections in Book 8, I would argue that the narrative of Book 7 means to show the continued progression of Wordsworth’s education amid the pleasures and pains of urban life. In his biographical study, Kenneth Johnston provides a most succinct articulation of Wordsworth’s attitude towards the metropolis: “Wordsworth loved
London, but he also feared its temptations” (133). The narrative of Book 7 focuses on a four-month period that Wordsworth spent in London beginning in early February of 1791. Over these months, Wordsworth’s life was an extended, urban tour; he was “cheerfully abroad / With fancy on the stir from day to day,” with all his “young affections out of doors” (7.78-80). Johnston also suggests that Wordsworth’s London was “very specifically the political and cultural London of spring 1791 that affected his development with a vigor that shines through—‘deconstructively’ —his own efforts to control it for different purposes in the poem on the growth of his mind” (241). I agree that Wordsworth’s fondness for the urban experience manifests itself within *The Prelude*, even as the poem also points to concerns about the effects of urban life. I would take Johnston’s sense of poetic “control” a step further and suggest that Wordsworth’s narrative decisions, such as ending Book 7 with the hellish scene of Bartholomew Fair, reflect an effort to undermine, and thus an anxiety over, the urban sphere’s influence. Yet, even Wordsworth’s remembrances of his youth in the country are intermixed with pleasure, pain, confusion, and realization. Wordsworth’s urban experience is very much a continuation of his own natural form of education.26

We might also consider that while Wordsworth presents the urban milieu he experienced while living in London over the course of 700 lines, he resided in the city for four months in 1791, had been there several times prior, and would frequently return

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26 As we saw at the beginning of this chapter in Wordsworth’s “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, pain is as much part of the process of psychological growth. The psychological spur of suffering or pain is also articulated on a few occasions in *The Prelude*. In addition to the passage from Book 5 explored above (5.443), Wordsworth writes in Book 8 that the images of “Man suffering among awful powers and forms” from his youth “took deepest hold of me” and made “The imagination restless” (8.213-16).
again before writing Book 7 and 8 in the fall of 1804.\textsuperscript{27} Over his four-month stay in London in 1791, a longer duration than his European tour depicted in Book 6, Wordsworth had no employment or significant obligations; rather, he spent much of his time walking, and the area of London he regularly traversed could be easily covered in a day. In fact, “the greatest number of Wordsworth’s urban references fall within the compass of less than a square mile around” the location of his residence (Johnston 241).\textsuperscript{28} And while Wordsworth at times portrays the city for the reader as through a first viewing, he establishes prior to such depictions that he “looked upon the real scene, / Familiarly perused it day by day” (7.139-140). In short, Wordsworth had plenty of time to acquire an intimate awareness of the London he describes, to regularly and fully take in its many sights, plays, and cognitive playthings.

Wordsworth’s articulation of the city as an enriched environment occurs most clearly in Book 7: after a 400-line litany of various, confusing, delightful localities, objects, and people, Wordsworth finds himself a spectator in a theater. Here, the sensorial stimulations teem, overflowing the basin of psychological depth and spreading across his conscious mind:

\begin{quote}
Through the night,
Between the show, and many-headed mass
Of the spectators, and each little nook
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{27} While much of Book Seventh and the urban sections of Book Eighth maintain historical accuracy to 1791, some of the particulars would have only been seen by Wordsworth before or after; for instance, Johnston points out that \textit{The Beauty of Buttermere}, a play Wordsworth claims to see in 1791, was about an event that occurred in 1799 and was not depicted on stage until 1803.

\textsuperscript{28} In \textit{The Hidden Wordsworth} (1998), Kenneth Johnston provides a remarkable discussion of Wordsworth’s London walks, charting to courses in particular that Wordsworth could have likely followed based on the details provided in Book 7 (247-255).
That had its fray or brawl, how eagerly
And with what flashes, as it were, the mind

*Turned this way, that way—sportive and alert*

*And watchful, as a kitten when at play,*

While winds are blowing round her among grass
And rustling leaves. Enchanting age and sweet—

Romantic almost, looked at through a space,

How small, of intervening years! For then,

Though surely no mean progress had been made

In meditations holy and sublime,

Yet something of a girlish childlike gloss

Of novelty survived for scenes like these—. (7.466-488; emphasis added)

Like the “many-headed mass” of spectators, this scene provides a singular structure of influence that yields an assortment of associations and effects. Sublimity mixes with a girlish gloss of novelty, and all the while Wordsworth surveys vulgar crowds, brawls, and a show of low production. Like a small animal among blowing leaves, Wordsworth’s mind pounces in various directions, his sight turning to various objects, his consciousness to the variety of ideas attendant to each.

The metaphor of the kitten highlights important aspects of Wordsworth’s urban experience. Here, Wordsworth brings to the city a sense of environmental enrichment that had been cultivated in his rural life – the kitten’s playthings are not of the urban sphere but rather objects of nature. This is but one of many examples where Wordsworth turns to prior rural scenes – functioning in his memory as an index for the influence or idea.
elicited from that prior experience – to make sense of the present moment. Of course, cognitive engagement with a particular environment engenders modes of thinking that will be carried over and utilized in other spaces so long as their association is applicable and/or valuable. Thus, Wordsworth brings his sense of environmental engagement as a form of cognitive play to the theaters and streets of London, where his experiences maintain a certain youthful luster. Even in the city, the “old Grandame Earth” provides playthings from which the mind can learn.

In the discussion of the blessed babe, Wordsworth notes how, as a result of the child’s continued exposure to external stimulus, “His organs and recipient faculties /Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads, / Tenacious of the forms which it receives” (2.251-254). Such a Priestleyan sense of the mind dilated by external stimulus becomes a key component of Wordsworth’s urban narrative. Amid the “strong sensations teeming” in London, Wordsworth cultivates for himself “Capaciousness and amplitude of mind” (8.752, 759). Such teeming sensations are perfectly evident in the following passage, which emphasizes the unique physiological and psychological experiences created by the urban sphere:

And first, the look and aspect of the place—

The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din,
The endless stream of men and moving things . . .

Wordsworth proceeds to describe the general “bustle” and the numerous “Stalls, borrows, porters” in the middle of the street. We also find the “rash speed” of coaches with their
blowing horns and the “punctual skill” of horses “striking right across the crowded
Strand”; furthermore:

Here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng,
The comers and the goers face to face—
Face after face—the string of dazzling wares,
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,
And all the tradesman’s honours overhead
Here, fronts of houses like a title-page
With letters huge inscribed from top to toe. (7.154-177)

The complexity and chaos produces a uniquely urban experience: a keen awareness of the
fragmentary nature of sensory stimuli, a persistent sense of the motion and fluidity of
objects and subjects in space and time, and ultimately the highly phatic quality of the
urban sphere.29 These aspects of the urban experience, more so than the one afforded by
the country, stress the semiotic and epistemological engagement between external
environment and perceiving subject.

In such moments, the “material substrate of urban perception and signification”
described by C. R. Stokes takes full possession of Wordsworth’s mind (206), but, as we

29 Each of these elements constitutes what Stokes refers to as “the material substrate of urban perception
and signification” (206). In addition to Stokes’ emphasis on the purely physiological engagement with the
city, I want to emphasize how these substrates – components of the structure of influence – establish new
lineaments for cognitive processes. Stokes, I find, makes a similar misstep as Gabrielle and Keith Thomas
in their assessment of Wordsworth’s cognitive processes in London. For each of these scholars, an
emphasis is placed on the overtly empiricist aspect of atomic or fragmentary stimulus that Wordsworth
records in his urban experience, and for each scholar, Wordsworth’s efforts to process and assemble this
information via the imagination is regarded as move away from empiricism, as “Romantic organicism”
(Stokes 220), “idealized intuition” (Gabrielle 369), or “autonomous inward meanings” (Thomas 127).
Such a dualistic reading ignores the role of the associative account of imagination as organizing and
combining sensations and ideas, which Wordsworth initiates in the discussion of “infant sensibility” and
reinforces throughout The Prelude.
have already seen in the example of the kitten, such preoccupation with external stimulus does not negate the potential for cognitive exercise and enrichment.\footnote{Going against the general criticism, which sees such stimulus as an impediment to the imagination, Stokes and Gabriele view such depictions of intense stimulus as essential to Wordsworth’s poetic project, suggesting a boon rather than a detriment to Wordsworth’s overall growth as a poet. Stokes refers to this as confronting “rhythm, pitch, intensity, tone, velocity, density and pattern: the material substrate of urban perception and signification” (206); Gabriele similarly works against the critical tendency to prioritize the organization of visual content, particularly in moments of stasis or leisure, focusing instead on “the semiotic inscription of movement in time,” which, in the case of Book 7, leads to a disjointed and fragmentary accumulation of subjective experiences that is rendered in similarly disjointed and fragmentary lines of poetry (366-367).} As Wordsworth suggests in Book 1, direct or unselfconscious experiences are not necessarily “profitless” because often the influence or potential meaning of external “objects and appearances” are “doomed to sleep / Until mature season called them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind” (1.619-625). In Book 7, he reaffirms this sentiment: London offers Wordsworth a “motley imagery” that proves “[a] vivid pleasure of my youth” and, in his later years, becomes “[a] frequent daydream for my riper mind” (7.148, 150, 151, 153). Cambridge again foreshadows this aspect of London. Referring to its small town and college buildings, Wordsworth describes himself “roving as through a cabinet / Or wide museum, thronged with fishes, gems / Birds, crocodiles, shells, where little can be seen”; as in London, at Cambridge,

does every step bring something forth

That quickens, pleases, stings—and here and there

A casual rarity is singled out

And has its brief perusal, then gives way

To others, all supplanted in their turn.

Meanwhile, amid this gaudy congress framed
Of things by nature most unneighbourly,  
The head turns round, and cannot right itself;  
And though an aching and a barren sense  
Of gay confusion still be uppermost,  
With few wise longings and but little love,  
Yet something to the memory sticks at last  
Whence profit may be drawn in times to come. (2.651-669)

It is worth noting that Locke refers to the mind as a cabinet in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a book Wordsworth undoubtedly read at Cambridge. Here, the external cabinet becomes a mental construct, though one seemingly out of sorts as its rarities and various objects *seem* “unneighbourly” or poorly associated. The physical proximity of the objects in the cabinet symbolize a mental association that Wordsworth cannot quite grasp, though the perception of this disjunction is a “gay confusion” rather than one of consternation. While Wordsworth’s head turns in all directions within this enrichment environment, his confusion is accepted because he trusts, apparently, that some later profit will be had from these objects and experiences now part of his own mental cabinet.

Indeed, London is just such a construction: an assortment of various experiences and shows, a crowd with “all specimens of man” that can be seen “haply,” a series of spectacles of “wild beasts” to be viewed “at leisure” (7.234-236, 244-248). While the hubbub can overwhelm, Wordsworth shows the potential to take the crowds and spectacles in stride, which is, I argue, his predominant mode of being in Book 7. Within this urban cabinet, various experiences and structures of influence occur that prove highly
profitable to Wordsworth’s psychological growth, even if this profit is not immediately recognized. In many cases, these urban experiences become the under-presences or informing structures of Wordsworth’s riper mind, reappearing in localities away from the city. In highlighting these experiences, I want to show how the fluid experience of the city brings together several structures of influence in succession, which work together as a syntagmatic sequence to create ever more complex meanings for Wordsworth to take in and take with him.

The first experience of note occurs subsequent to Wordsworth’s walk down the broad thoroughfare of the Strand, which is described above. As “the roar continues,” he, or rather “we,” turn “[a]bruptly into some sequestered nook, / Still as a sheltered place when winds blow hard” (7.185-187). Moving through “[p]rivate courts” and the “labyrinths” of the inns of court (7.196, 201), we are eventually expelled or exhaled “back into the throng, until we reach— / Following the tide that slackens by degrees— / Some half-frequented scene” (7.205-207). The shifts from various localities – from open but crowded streets, to courts, to maze-like alleys, and then back to a slackening tide of people in the “wider streets” – reveals both a varying spatial compression but also various physiological and psychological flows (7.207). Emerging into a widening avenue, we feel some “straggling breezes,” the sign of creative influence in Book 1, and see:

Here fliers of ballads dangle from dead walls;
Advertisements of giant size, from high
Press forward in all colours on the sight—
These, bold in conscious merit—lower down,
That, fronted with a most imposing word,
Is peradventure one in masquerade. (7.209-214)

The posters of various plays and romances seem to require little imaginative assistance as they “Press forward” their imagery on the eyes and mind of the observer. Yet, as with the Cambridge cabinet, Wordsworth finds a variety of disparate scenes – motley images of other imaginations but similar in kind to the romances he read and dreamt of as a child. Gazing on these scenes, Wordsworth can take them in and cognitively associate and manipulate them as he chooses. Thus, the scene suggests both the potential of the external world to offer new structures of influence as well as new models for the mind and its cognitive processes. In this latter sense, the dead wall proves an epistemic artifact by which Wordsworth learns about and/or shares with his reader a model for mental life. In the diegetic moment, it is unclear to what degree the space around Wordsworth, plastered as it is with romances and imaginary scenes, affects his psyche, but the street itself becomes a “broadening causeway” on which “we advance,” which seems to suggest a similar broadening of the mind (7.215). Wordsworth says nothing more about this scene, but its underlying structure seems to stay with the poet, as it will reappear in the Book 8 “caverns” discussed in the next section.

Wordsworth proceeds from here to offer several forms of visual technology that were popular at the time and were being exhibited in London in 1791. Like the wall of advertisements, these visual technologies become epistemic objects through which Wordsworth learns about his own epistemological and ontological relationship with the world. In fact, the panorama in particular becomes an apt synecdoche for the city’s role at large, as well as for criticism’s approach to it. It may be unsurprising that many critics have seen the panorama as a negative influence, noting its “mimic sights” and suggesting
that Wordsworth identifies this mode of perception as “delusive” or even as an “enemy to imaginative power” (7.248; Ellis 145; Wood 109). Liu, to provide a counterexample, sees the panorama as symbolizing for Wordsworth “the imperialism of Mind” and thus proving quite antithetic to Galperin’s sense that the panorama represented for Wordsworth a loss of control in the activity of perception (Liu 211-12; Galperin 55). Yet, Galperin does make the cogent point that the “visible order” of the panorama, by challenging the cinematic subject-position that he finds more akin to Romantic vision, reveals “competing orders of culture” (71). J. Jennifer Jones, who in the wake of the above criticism acknowledges a middle ground of ambivalence in Wordsworth’s attitude toward the panorama, comes closest to my own thinking on this issue when she argues: “Rather than defining his aesthetic resolutely against mimetic representation and new media, then, Wordsworth is thinking through the new technologies” (375). Wordsworth often stresses the more active use of imagination in The Prelude and even in the city, but it seems short sighted, I find, to assume Wordsworth gained no sensorial pleasure or intellectual gain from experiencing this new mode of vision.

Jones, in describing her approach to the panorama, states that she places the two “aesthetic idioms” of virtuality and the sublime into “a feedback loop, a genuinely reciprocal, mutually illuminating means of studying” the cultural meanings invested in both idioms (363). Such a conception equally applies, I would think, to Wordsworth’s own project, as cultural artifacts of experience and his own direct experiences enter into a reciprocally informing cycle of meaning. What seems of particular import to Wordsworth, and is largely missed in the above readings, is how the panorama exemplifies mental fitness to the external world, offering “mimic sights that ape / The
absolute presence of reality” (7.248-249; emphasis added). The panorama offers, I argue, a figure for the mind’s perception of the external world, its attempts at fitting or “fashioning a work / To Nature’s circumambient scenery” (7.256-257). And even this activity, passive as it may seem, becomes a form of agency or work, but one that the viewer can casually enjoy as though pacing the theater of his or her own mind. Such opportunity for enjoyment and reflection is itself a form of empowerment, symbolized by the elevated platform on which the viewer stands within the panorama and the elevated position of the panorama’s perspective: “with power / Like that of angels or commissioned spirits / Plant us upon some lofty pinnacle” (7.259-260). In the panorama, which exhibited in 1791 a prospective image of London, Wordsworth is able to look over the city he has previously walked through, and the ability to conflate both modes of experience conceptually will become integral to Wordsworth’s articulation of the sublime experience at Mount Snowdon. But for the moment, I want only to affirm how such technological experiences like the panorama offer Wordsworth new methods for viewing that can be incorporated into his growing conceptualization of the city, his experience of it, and in turn his sense of self. Providing an artifact of visuality, these technologies concretize the ways humans can experience the world around them, and this concretization then allows for a self-awareness of modes of viewing not previously realized, whether in the culture at large or particularly in The Prelude.

In addition to the panorama, Wordsworth views miniatures and visual apparatuses like the Eidophusikon, each of which affords him a new understanding of his own ocular and subjective orientation to the world. Chandler and Gilmartin provide a succinct description of the latter apparatus, which utilized “layers of display, some transparent and
some not, some two-dimensional and some three-dimensional” along with natural and artificial lighting to create realistic representations but also alterations in scene, such as changes from day to night (9). Such layered effects can be observed in the following lines from Book 7, which follow upon the heels of Wordsworth’s panorama discussion:

And to these exhibitions mute and still
Others of wider scope, where living men,
Music, and shifting pantomimic scenes,
Together joined their multifarious aid
To heighten the allurement. (7.281-285).

Chandler and Gilmartin provide a convincing discussion of the importance of the *Eidophusikon* as a symbol for “a kind of mutual projection” between the city and country, which results in both an “image of nature projected from the metropolis” as well as “naturalized image of the metropolis” (3, 12). But rather than seeing this visual technology as a model of projection between different environments – that is, rather than concern ourselves with the content itself – I want to highlight the form or action of the visual technology. While the panorama signified the fitness of mind to external world, the scene above – with its emphasis on a wider scope, shifting scenes, and “multifarious” components – highlights a more dynamic process of perceptual engagement. In other words, the visual technology again externalizes mental processes while at the same time symbolizing those processes. The diorama portrays the associative nature of the mind and its very necessary ability to combine multiple layers of scene, action, and abstraction, emphasizing the psycho-physiological depth in such layering. And such depth works to
“heighten the allurement,” invoking again a sense of pleasure connected with the
cognitive engagement with external objects.

The structure of influence of a given locality, a “multifarious” arena of numerous
layers – material, mnemonic, imaginative, cultural – is well exemplified by the
Eidophusikon, and Wordsworth extrapolates this model not only to the city at large but
also to his depictions of the theater. That is, with this model already in place, the reader is
primed for the type of layering Wordsworth subsequently explores. Shifting fluidly from
“living men” as “multifarious aid” to scenes depicting “the dramas of living men,”
Wordsworth not only blurs visual technology with theater but also theater with real life
(7.313). The first play Wordsworth describes, “The Maid of Buttermere,” follows the
story of Mary Robinson, whom Wordsworth knew from the Lake District and who was
mislead into a bigamous relationship. The structure of influence before Wordsworth in
this moment is vastly complex, and his sense of “sundry forms / mingled” echoes the
“multifarious” quality of the Eidophusikon, emphasizing how structures of influence
might be layered onto one another (7.348-349). Wordsworth is both engaging his
memory of Robinson and watching a play about her: both memory and stage are set in the
same “spot” where he and she were “born and reared,” those “same mountains” on which
they both “were nursed” (7.352). The “spot,” like the other spots of time, holds
Wordsworth in a temporal duality of past and present, and the reference to nursing recalls
the physiological and affective link to the external world established in the discussion of
infant sensibility. Thus, two structures of influence are at stake, the one afforded by the
mountains of his youth and the one afforded by the playhouse, so that their respective
meanings begin to play upon each other. This scene, then, establishes a kind of feedback
loop between multiple scenes, which becomes in and of itself a form of epistemic play. This looping proves a key model, I argue, for the dialectic of urban and rural scenes to be discussed in the last section.

The theater scenes also perpetuate and thus build upon the experience of the dead wall. As opposed to his childhood days when the fancies he took from literature occupied his mind and were read into his external world, here the romances are concretized within the frame of the stage before him. Such externalization of mental content does not impede mental activity but rather provides new constructs that the mind can better manipulate, critique, dismantle, and/or conjoin, evoking Andy Clark’s and David Chalmers’s sense of epistemic action explored in the introduction. Indeed, this scene exemplifies what the poet does: “He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other” (“Preface” 605).

But more than just considering a new mental construct for young Wordsworth to absorb and mold for his own creative purposes, we might also consider what Wordsworth realizes about the functioning of the mind through this epistemic action. The first recognition Wordsworth makes has to do with the power of contrast. Wordsworth, recalling his attention from his remembrances of childhood to his 1791 context, begins to describe a particular scene amongst the “numerous scenes” from those days, one that proves the “foremost” of his “remembrance” (7.365-366). Wordsworth goes on to describe a baby of twelve months sitting on a bar with his dissolute mother nearby. The child in particular sticks out to Wordsworth, “A sort of alien scattered from the clouds” (7.388). The child appears not of this place, an “unneighborly” being within the cabinet of city life. Atop the bar, the innocent child “sate environed within a ring / Of chance
spectators, chiefly dissolute men / And shameless women” (7.386-88). Wordsworth reinforces the disparity of the scene by describing the “lovely boy . . . among the wretched and the falsely gay” as “one of those who walked with hair unsinged / Amid the fiery furnace” (7.396-99). Here, in this hellish context – made hellish in contradistinction to the perceived divinity of the child – Wordsworth finds an idea of great significance to his progression: the necessity of contrast to make beauty approach the sublime.\textsuperscript{31} The child is not harmonized with his surroundings but rather becomes adorned with “beauty in such excess” in contradistinction to his context (406). The moment seems to suggest a semiotic autonomy: the child’s ability to symbolize innocence even in hell. And perhaps this could affirm the sense that “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven” (Paradise Lost 1.254-55); however, the power of the scene results from the relational meanings of child and environment, each requiring the presence of the other. The scene is not a terror to Wordsworth but a further recognition of reciprocity and the potential of epistemic gain from the association of discordant elements. From this moment, Wordsworth proceeds to the kitten metaphor discussed at the opening of this section, suggesting how the associative work occurring in the theater scenes reveal the mind at play with its external context, not an inmate of its own interiority.

\textsuperscript{31} For more on the tension between the sublime and beauty, see Theresa Kelly’s Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics (1988). For Kelly, London represents the monstrous sublime Wordsworth will come to associate with revolutionary Paris; in this way, she supports the typical reading of London as a detriment to Wordsworth’s poetic project, which is for her the usurpation of the beautiful over the sublime. While certainly Wordsworth finds the sublime in London, and a particularly frightening version of it at Bartholomew Fair, I would argue that London overall puts the aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime in near relation, even layering them at times. In London, and particularly in this scene, Wordsworth exemplifies the triumph of beauty amidst the Miltonic sublime, though Kelly, of course, overlooks this example.
Critics often point to Wordsworth’s claim a few lines later that, even during the excitement of his theater-going experience, his “imaginative power . . . slept (7.499-500)”; yet, this languishing of the creative faculty occurs only when the scene he watches causes him to be “passionately moved” as well as to be “yielded to the changes of the scene / With most obsequious feeling” (7.504-506). Though clearly moved, Wordsworth argues that “all this / Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind” (7.506-07). This moment reflects an anxiety over urban influence that critics have sensed and have generally overemphasized to the detriment of their readings of Wordsworth’s urban experience. Wordsworth both claims that this particularly urban experience does not reach the true depths of his psyche; yet, at the same time, the fact that Wordsworth has chosen an urban metaphor for the self does belie the degree to which his sense of self has been altered.

Wordsworth himself capitulates his resistance to the influence of city and theater. “If aught there were a real grandeur here,” he admits, “‘Twas only then when gross realities” of the performance of Shakespeare’s play on stage “called forth / With

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32 In accord with the general emphasis of scholarship on the urban sphere, both Mark Bruhn and David Francis Taylor emphasize Wordsworth’s mention of imaginative powers languishing while watching the theater and then suggest the theater as a microcosm of the urban experience at large: for Taylor London proves “an illegitimately theatrical space” that “evokes a rough and sometimes dystopian landscape of spectacles” (82); for Bruhn, in the theater Wordsworth is “passively obedient to its mimetic demands” (168-169). Bruhn, however, goes on to make a point that accords with my own sense of the city and theater as epistemic playground; he argues that the theater scenes in Book 7 prove “a study and illustration of different orders of mimesis and their cognitive effects” that then “teaches with considerable clarity how to discriminate and value genuinely imaginative forms of representation” (180). I disagree that any of the forms of mimesis engaged in the city are necessarily less valuable, and would revise this statement to say that these different modes of visuality bring Wordsworth to a greater awareness of multiple perspectives that can be adopted given the context or the desired mode of feeling they create. I am also partial to Taylor’s sense that controlled theatricality “becomes part of the poetic economy” in other parts of The Prelude as “its spectacles of aestheticized suffering, centering on feelings of delight and rejuvenation, serve to organize the narrative and direct the imagination” (90). Taylor only mentions the “spots of time” passages, and I would suggest that this sense of urban visuality as a means of “organizing” the perceptions relayed in other scenes of The Prelude deserves greater exploration.
distinctness” the “contrast” with his own reading of the scene (7.509-12). The “grandeur” of this moment results from the fact that it causes Wordsworth “to recognize / As by a glimpse, the things which I had shaped / And yet not shaped” (7.513-15). Again, the city produces a moment of clarity through its “sundry forms,” which in turn produces a feeling of grandeur. Here, Wordsworth provides the clearest articulation within *The Prelude* of how the mind, a more mature version of the child’s mind described in Book 2, “[e]ven as an agent of the one great mind, / Creates, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds” (2.272-75). 33 Through contrast, through the moments of slippage between what Wordsworth sees on stage and what he had expected to see based on his own reading, he experiences the mind’s dual role as creator and receiver in context. While Wordsworth elsewhere describes this duality from his authorial vantage point, Book 7 offers the first example where the diegetic Wordsworth recognizes this condition for himself, which is evident via the past tense of “made me recognize.”

The last sequence of urban experiences to be explored in this section is one that proves uniquely urban, as it produces a “feeling” that “belonged / To this great city by exclusive right” (7.593-594). But equally important to this conversation, the scene of the urban masses set in contradistinction to the Blind Beggar incorporates the technological and theatrical forms of layering, particular of contrasting registers or tones, and applies it

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33 This scene provides, in fact, a much clearer articulation of Wordsworth’s experience at Simplon Pass, where his expectation of what the Alpine pass would look and feel like proves contrary to the actual scene before him. In that scene, Wordsworth famously exclaims the power of imagination but never actually explains why the moment produces this realization. Here, however, the scene much more clearly describes the disjunction between internal expectation and external reality, and how such disjunction allows Wordsworth to see the otherwise invisible workings of the creative mind. We will return to the Simplon Pass scene in the last section.
to an experience that is not prefabricated. Returning to the experience of moving through the urban crowd, Wordsworth recalls thinking, “The face of every one / That passes by me is a mystery”; as he tries to scan each, he becomes “oppressed” by his contemplations, unable to take them all in (7.597-98). As a result, these “shapes before my eyes become / A second-sight procession, such as glides / Over still mountains, or appears in dreams” (7.601-603). In other words, Wordsworth’s effort to catch each face that blows by him – like a kitten pawing at passing leaves – leads to the ocular phenomenon known today as railway nystagmus – the rhythmic, oscillating motions of the eye such as that which occurs while watching passing scenery from a train. The oscillating eye movement creates a sort of trance effect, causing the scene of passing faces to take on an illusory aspect – significantly, Wordsworth’s first example also points to visual illusion. Furthermore, the sense of psycho-physiological disturbance is reinforced by Wordsworth’s resulting feeling, like the “ballast” to his usual ways of “acting” and “thinking” has been removed (7.604, 606). Wordsworth, then, establishes a strong external influence and its clear physiological and psychological effect upon him, and this is the context he establishes for the initial layer to his most transcendent image in Book 7.

The faces continue to pass by Wordsworth in fluid mass, a “moving pageant,” when “[a]bruptly” he is “smitten” by the view of the “blind beggar” (7.610-12). The

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34 This form of ocular illusion is first experience by Wordsworth in a childhood recollection in Book 1 where, after spinning on his ice skates for a time and then stopping, the surrounding cliffs seem to whirl about him. Alan Richardson connects this ice skating scene with Edmund Burke’s discussion of sublime visual illusions, where the mind repeats the idea of something long after the repeated sensation has ceased; see The Neural Sublime (2010) 31-32.

35 W.J. B. Owen follows Z. S. Fink in correlating the reference to images gliding over a still mountain to a passage in An Evening Walk, which describes the images of ghostly soldiers ascending the side of a mountain (49-50). Both are supposedly based on an optical illusion caused by the descending sun and the interplay of ascending shadows on the mountains in the Lake District.
beggar stands “propped against a wall” with a sign on his chest that briefly explains his story. In this moment, Wordsworth describes his mind as being “turn[ed] round / As with the might of waters” – a description of his interiority based on the fluid crowd moving around him (7.616-17). The sign on the man’s chest, explaining his story, proves to Wordsworth an “emblem of the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe”; on the motionless beggar with “fixed face and sightless eyes” Wordsworth looks “[a]s if admonished from another world” (7.619-23). Scholars have had a notoriously difficult time coming to any consensus on the import of this moment, their readings ranging from it being a key example of transcendence (particularly over the urban milieu) to the impossibility of knowing anything beyond our own bodily and earthly existence. Given the diversity of readings of this scene, we might question to what degree any concrete meaning is offered, though I am partial to Jonathan Wordsworth’s sense that the imagination is clearly at work, even if it works to recognize its own limits – that is, metaphorically constricted to the size of the beggar’s sign.

The meaning of the Blind Beggar in this moment is not clear, nor is it clear that, beyond the feeling of sublimity, the import of the moment is fully realized by

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36 Bruhn concurs with James Heffernan that Wordsworth is “admonished to close his eyes to all the sights of the city” and thereby become a “universal man” – an imperialist / idealist self (439). This reading, no doubt, follows from Rzepka’s and Hartman’s sense of the scene as exemplary of Wordsworth’s visionary solipsism (Rzepka 38-43; Hartman (241-2). Fulford (53) and Sharpe (440) see the beggar as indicating a threat to individuality. Keith Thomas and Mary Jacobus both read the scene as an instance of the negative sublime, where the mind reels at the infinitesimal quantity of its knowledge in relation to a more vast realm it can sense but never know; Thomas explicitly refers to this as “disingenuous, transcendental close” (145), while Jacobus sees this traumatic realization as par for the urban course. Jarvis also reads the beggar as microcosm for the city at large, as a spectacle sans any real activity of value (218). Stokes, moving purposefully away from emblematic readings, sees the beggar as restoring the values of the human to a dehumanized city” by restoring a sense of embodiment (205, 214). While I offer my own analysis in conjunction to others, I offer all these alternate readings to suggest that the scene is decidedly ambiguous, and all that is truly available to the reader is the structure of the signification based on the environmental elements, not the associations Wordsworth creates from them.
Wordsworth. As with various other scenes in Wordsworth’s text – such as the Black Crag scene – the invisible workmanship of the mind has become more visible, but Wordsworth’s mind does not yet appear ripe enough to articulate the product of that work. While the meaning of the scene remains nebulous, I do want to counter what I believe, in concert with Keith Thomas, is a false sense of idealism. While Wordsworth emphasizes the dream-like, visionary quality of the moment, this quality is produced by an illusion based on a physiological response – the idealism is, in fact, sensationalism. While the un-ballasting of Wordsworth’s mind mimics the “abyss of idealism” Wordsworth had written about in the letter cited above, so too does the Beggar propped against a wall save Wordsworth from that abyss, providing him something legible and stable amidst the illegible faces of the oceanic crowd. Even if the beggar is read as emblematic of divine meaning that Wordsworth truly grasps, the phrase “As if admonished” undercuts such a reading, especially as it highlights “As if” by placing it at the beginning of the line.

Ultimately, Wordsworth wants to convey an experience, and if we cannot grasp the import of it, we should come to understand the structure on which the meaning is predicated. Here, I find the readings offered by Geraldine Friedman and M. H. Abrams to be particularly helpful. Friedman and Abrams similarly describe the structure of the scene as a foreground figure set against or in relief to a background crowd, creating what Friedman calls “a sustainable monument . . . in the midst of flux” (48). Building from this reading, I would suggest that the monument of the beggar is not in the midst of flux but in a more reciprocal relationship with it. Wordsworth’s perception of the crowd is no longer of something around him or around the beggar but is now a part of his perception
– he sees the beggar immediately after he notes the nystagmus or ocular rhythm. Such ocular muscle movements do not immediately cease but continue even after the eye has begun to focus on a still object from a stationary position. Thus, Wordsworth continues to sense the crowd as a second sight even as he stands still to look upon the stationary beggar. Here, the “material substrate of urban perception,” as Stokes refers to it, overlaps the image (or emblem) of the beggar, their oppositional structures and meanings merging, reciprocating.

Immediately after this scene, Wordsworth writes not of idealism or transcendence but of the cognitive structures he has gained from his psycho-sensorial experiences in the city:

Though reared upon the base of outward things,
These chiefly are such structures as the mind builds for itself. Scenes different there are—
Full-formed—which take, with small internal help,
Possession of the faculties. (7.624-628).

In the city, the mind finds new objects and builds from them both meaning and systems for deriving meaning.37 At times, Wordsworth must build for himself the structure of associations that connect unneighborly things, but at other times, such as with the Blind Beggar, the scene appears “full-formed,” such that it strikes the conscious mind or

37 This articulation of structures derived in total or in accumulation from external objects seems inherently associationist; thus, it is rather surprising the Keith Thomas, who argues for the empiricist undertones of Book 7, refers to this passage as “Wordsworth's confident transcendental theory about structures that the mind builds for itself on the base of outward things” (145). Thomas, despite his well-reasoned argument for Wordsworth’s empiricism, seems ultimately to accede to the transcendentalism argued for by other scholars despite his own efforts.
unknowingly takes “possession of the faculties.” Much of what the urban sphere teaches Wordsworth has to do with the machinations of his own mental processes and by extension the workings of human nature. In the city, though, cognition, behavior, and physical structures prove extensions of each other, and this is central to Wordsworth’s realization; as he articulates more clearly in Book 8, “human nature” is seen as “not a punctual presence, but a spirit / Living in time and space, and far diffused” (8.761-764).

Like the second-sight of faces, the presence of humanity in the material presence of the urban environment becomes exemplary of Wordsworth’s case that the poetic mind can see “among least things / An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole” (7.711-713). As with the child whose affinities are first applying their power, the mind in the city must again learn the process of collating elements into whole presences, even while it still recognizes the disparate elements of that assemblage. The knowledge and power afforded to Wordsworth via the enrichment environment of the city – that structure he gains from the city’s disparate elements or its pre-formed structures of influence – have a lasting effect on the poet, informing how he views the world, for “not seldom” had his “remembrances” of the urban sphere and urban experience,

By working on the shapes before my eyes,
Became like vital functions of the soul;
And out of what had been, what was, the place
Was thronged with impregnations, like those wilds
In which my early feelings had been nursed. (8.786-792)
The cognitive structures that the urban sphere engenders not only possess Wordsworth’s faculties but seem almost grafted onto his very soul, enmeshed with the root structure of his psyche. Wordsworth’s shaping vision can no longer be seen as simply rural; Wordsworth’s poetic eye must be considered an urban eye as well.

**Sublime Feedback Loops**

So far I have argued that the urban experience was truly formative in Wordsworth’s psychological development; yet, in order for such a claim to be credible, I find it necessary to show how urban structures of perception and cognition inform Wordsworth’s engagement with the external world even after he has left the urban environment. That is, if the city only produces “floating visions” that have no lasting influence on Wordsworth’s psyche, then it cannot be said to have truly participated in his psychological development. In such a case, my argument would falter, leaving undisputed the sense of London as an impediment to psychological progress, as Liu, Hartman, and Thomas suggest; as a hell from which to ascend, like Jonathan Wordsworth claims; or as a form of representational self-critique, as Friedman suggests, among others.

But perhaps this is a false dichotomy – one could point out that Wordsworth’s first departure from the urban sphere in Book 1 only proves that the city had a rather traumatic effect on the poet, given that he presents it as a “a house / Of bondage” from which he has escaped (1.1-2). Indeed, Wordsworth’s articulation of the “burthen of my own unnatural self,” ostensibly produced by his city life, does not seem an affirmation of positive psychological development, even if it does reinforce a sense of the malleable self
Wordsworth even claims the city to be a habitation for “weary day / Not mine, and such as were not made for me” (1.23-24). And certainly he seems most glad to be suddenly “free, for months to come” now that he “May quit the tiresome sea and dwell on shore” (1.33,35). Even so, even after bidding “A farewell to the city left behind,” Wordsworth refuses to detach his mind from urban influence (1.98). Wordsworth continues to point to the physiological and psychological aftermath of the city in Book 1, even if in indirect ways. He complains of an "over-anxious eye / That with a false activity beats off / Simplicity and self-presented truth” (1.249-251). He also metaphorically figures his mental activity in the form of a “mother dove” who “[s]its brooding” (1.150-152), evoking a Miltonic reference to the Holy Spirit watching over chaos or “hubbub wild” – a phrasing Wordsworth twice uses in reference to the urban sphere (Paradise Lost 1.21-22; 2.951).38

I elaborate on this negative depiction of the urban aftermath because I find that, like Book 1, much of The Prelude provides a meditation over urban experience that ultimately recognizes its positive, if latent, influence. While chaos is vast and overwhelming, it is also the ultimate state of potentiality, truly the substrata from which meaningful forms can be created. Indeed, I do not find it a coincidence that by the end of Book 1 Wordsworth refers to the “ministry” of nature that has “impressed” upon all material forms their affordance to the viewing subject – “the characters / Of danger and desire” – and likens the earth’s semiotic-infused “surface” to a “sea,” invoking the same word used earlier for the city. Nor do I find it a coincidence that Wordsworth repeatedly

38 See Wordsworth’s references to “thickening hubbub” of London as well as the “hubbub wild” of Paris (7.227; 9.56).
returns to urban environments throughout *The Prelude*, acknowledging how they have changed him, if only to a degree: we have already seen Wordsworth’s mention of the “suburbs of [his] mind,” and when he moves to Cambridge, Wordsworth acknowledges, “I had made a change / In climate, and my nature’s outward coat / Changed also, slowly, and insensibly” (2.207-209). Yet, the alteration made to Wordsworth’s psyche is not superficial, I argue, and this is evident in the fact that the most climactic scenes in *The Prelude* – Simplon Pass and Mount Snowdon – both occurred in Wordsworth’s own life soon after he left the urban sphere and both reveal within the poem evidence of an urban “under-presence” in their representation.

In discussing first the Simplon Pass scene and the complex of urban moments with which it is intertwined, my effort is to show how both the city and rural areas worked together as mutual epistemic objects, much like in Jones’ sense of the feedback loop. In other words, the experiences in London, Simplon Pass, and later in Paris are all part of an interconnected cognitive process through which Wordsworth contemplates his historical moment. In this way, I work to revise rather than overturn the relationship Liu identifies between history and the Simplon Pass scene. This landscape does not reflect a Wordsworthian self or mind beyond history, as Liu suggests. The scene is not a mirror but rather an extension of mental processes, processes working to understand their place

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39 Here I am building on Abrams’ sense of “the circular shape” of *The Prelude*’s narrative and how “[t]he circularity of its form, we now see, reflects the circularity of its subject matter” (*Natural* 79, 288). Yet, rather than see the whole as a circular narrative, I argue that there a number of circular constructs, of mutually informing moments within the narrative that function as feedback loops. While future moments echo a particular affective tone, phrasing, spatial structure, and/or psychological structure of a prior scene, both work to expound upon and inform the other. This process, as Abrams says, certainly reflects the subject matter, though rather than simply seeing this circle as the marriage union between mind and nature, I would suggest that these multiple feedback loops reflect the associative growth of the authorial poet who depicts the psychological growth of himself based on an associationist schema.
within the self / environment dynamic that involves the cultural events tied to the subject’s environment.

To begin our discussion with Simplon Pass in Book 6, we must start with a moment that occurred before it in Wordsworth’s personal history but does not appear until Book 8. In the latter book, Wordsworth depicts his first arrival to London in terms that bear a remarkable similarity to crossing the Alps. “Never shall I forget the hour,” Wordsworth claims, “when having thridded [sic] / The labyrinth of suburban villages, / At length I did unto myself first seem / To enter the great city” (8.689-93). There, Wordsworth sees the “vulgar forms” of buildings, streets, and people all around him, and he recognizes that he has crossed “the threshold” to the city (8.695, 700). Two realizations occur to Wordsworth upon this occasion. First, he exclaims, “great God! / That aught external to the living mind / Should have such mighty sway, yet so it was” (8.700-02). The “mighty sway” would seem to be the immediate, psycho-physiological experience of urban stimulation, thus pointing to Wordsworth’s direct experience of external influence. To this structure of influence, though, Wordsworth adds a second meaning when he states: “A weight of ages did at once descend / Upon my heart” (8.703-04). Though Wordsworth reaffirms the “weight and power” of this feeling, “Power growing with the weight,” he claims that the feeling was momentary and that only in recollection does he see the moment as “a thing divine” (8.710). Even so, the import of the moment is reaffirmed soon after, as Wordsworth senses in the presence of the city “a spirit / Living in time and space and far diffused” (8.763-64). While “spirit” suggests a rather metaphysical tone, the meaning has more to do with concretion: the city proves a spatial index of its temporal construction, a palimpsest layered through ages and ages of
human cultivation. Thus, in the city Wordsworth can see how the human spirit has, through its agency, materialized within the environment.

The city, then, becomes a critical epistemic artifact for Wordsworth’s discovery and contemplation of history, one that he subsequently correlates with geological activity. In his subsequent discussion of the Yordas cavern in the Craven Mountain, we see the feedback of another urban scene: the poster-covered wall from Book 7. Wordsworth describes entering the cavern (much like he enters the city) through a narrow passage that then widens “itself on all sides” (8.716). The roof is not quite visible at first and appears to “shift and vanish” as the eyes adjust and the walls first become visible, creating an uncanny echo of Wordsworth’s experience on the broadening Strand (8.723). This cavern scene, immediately following the story of Wordsworth’s first arrival into the city, becomes a type of allegory to consider the influence of humans on their environment over time, an influence likened to geological formation. In this activity, another structure of the city appears, one that points back to the accumulation of images envisioned by other people. The cavern wall offers its “projections,” its “surface, with all colours streaming, / Like a magician’s airy pageant” (8.732-34). Thus, similar to the city’s giant advertisements that depict scenes from the romance plays they promote, Wordsworth sees on these stony surfaces a series or “pageant” of “forests and lakes” (8.737). While the scene speaks to how Wordsworth’s imagination works upon these walls, creating from their forms images of his liking, it also ties together the “weight of ages” and the collective imagination of humanity. The three scenes thus become linked concepts; like the self, society, and history, they are irrevocably intertwined.
It is of no little significance that the lines depicting Yordas cavern in Book 8 were initially composed as part of the Simplon Pass sequence, appearing right after Wordsworth realizes that he and his fellow traveler had unknowingly crossed the threshold of the Alps. In many ways, my suggestion that Yordas cavern reveals significations of another time or scene not fully present mimics Liu’s own argument that the Simplon Pass scene reveals “no single piece of evidence” but rather a myriad of traces that show Wordsworth’s preoccupation with history, particularly Napoleon’s military campaigns. Liu asks us to take on a “second-sight” much like the one Wordsworth experiences when seeing the passing faces in the streets of London, which Wordsworth equates to the vision of a troop that “glides / Over still mountains” (6.602-03). And this is only one of the two correlations in Book 7 between the effect of mountains or “ancient hills” and the effect of the city on “the prospect of the soul” (7.727, 725). Of course, Liu’s argument, which he bases not on a singular piece of evidence but series of suggestive details, is well made and has proven incredibly influential, but I find his assumption that the scene works to create a “historically free personality of ‘The mind’” to be a suspect conclusion (23).

The strophe that begins upon Wordsworth’s recognition that he had already crossed the Alps offers, as both Liu and Hartman suggest, an image of the mind, or more specifically “Imagination!” (6.525). However, instead of offering a mirror of the self that blocks out nature or history, the scene reveals to Wordsworth how the mind, particularly the imagination, is always engaged in its reciprocal fitting with the external world. Except here, looking back on this scene in the moment of its composition, Wordsworth is only able to recognize the mind’s contribution when it is disjoined with the
environmental reality, i.e. his present location in regards to the pass. The invisible workmanship of the mind becomes visible in this failure. The recognition is powerful, but it also confuses the “progress” of Wordsworth’s “Song” of psychological development – the “Power” of the imagination is seen but only because, as Wordsworth acknowledges, it “came / Athwart me” (6.626-28). Wordsworth’s own ideal of mutual fitting, where both external world and imagination reveal their “blended might” is not realized in this moment (“Prospectus” 68).

Wordsworth’s experience crossing the threshold of the city provides an original structure of experience, and thus a structure of meaning, on which the Simplon Pass scene builds. Both portray a particularly significant journey, both highlight the crossing of a threshold, and both show how the import of the environmental experience was only realized later via a riper mind. Given that Wordsworth’s urban experience occurred not long before the Alpine one, and given how the former was one he would “never” forget, it is reasonable to assume that it was in the back of his mind in 1790, just as Napoleon was in 1804. There are key differences between the urban and alpine scenes, though: in London, Wordsworth sees the threshold and feels the mighty “sway” of his locality; in the Alps, Wordsworth misses the threshold and feels the sublime influence of his own imagination. The scenes, I argue, work together as a feedback loop, offering in a shared cognitive construct the dual sides of the mind / world dynamic.

Returning to Liu’s historical concerns, the military language in Wordsworth’s 1804 reflection on the Simplon Pass scene certainly invokes, as Liu suggests, the military advances of Napoleon. Liu says little about the following strophe, however, claiming at first that it is merely the descending echo of Wordsworth’s confused ascension to the
pass. Yet, after the moment of cognitive disjunction, Wordsworth proceeds to work through his sense of history in the same fashion as his urban experience, even if the kind of history under consideration has changed. Descending down Gondo gorge, the poet sees not the ages of man but a deeper history:

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,

Were all the workings of one mind, the features

Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,

Characters of the great apocalypse,

The types and symbols of eternity,

Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (6.567-572)

It is here, rather than in the portrayal of “Imagination,” that Wordsworth's “Song” progresses. Not only does the scene continue to follow the structure outlined by the initial arrival to London, but Wordsworth reaches back even further, showing how the “first-born affinities” that the child applies to the face of the mother and then to the lineaments of material environment have here developed into a deeper sight. The sense of eternity is grounded as the “characters” of “apocalypse” point not only to the eschatological but also to contemporaneous geological theories concerning the remnants of the apocalyptic flood – an event of both religious and environmental import.40 Here, Wordsworth links both, departing neither from nature nor history but seeing them in the same face.

Through the first two scenes – the entry into London, the crossing of the Alps – Wordsworth begins to recognize his capacity to gain a sense of history through

40 In the Norton Critical Edition of The Prelude, annotated by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, the note to these lines emphasizes the geological theory of Wordsworth's day, which “held that all but the highest alpine peaks had been created by the retreating waters of the Flood. The features of the landscape would have been engraved, ‘charactered,’ by the first great apocalyptic event” (218).
environmental heuristics. This form of reading becomes most pronounced when Wordsworth returns to France in Book 9. After living for a time in Paris, initially feeling like a potted “parlour shrub” or a “greenhouse” flower, Wordsworth is only able to feel “the soil of common life” and its “earthquakes” once he has engaged with the public places and common people (9.89, 169, 182). It is then that Wordsworth says to himself, “Now do I feel how I have been deceived, / Reading of nations and their works in faith,” reading which he refers to as a “mockery . . . of history” (9.171-74). Thus, in feeling the soil of the place, Wordsworth is able fully to engage its historical moment.

Subsequently leaving for Orleans and returning to Paris after the September Massacre, Wordsworth can only experience the true import of that historical event once he crosses Carousel Square, the place where the bodies of the massacred were burned. Carousel Square becomes the third part of the feedback loop, building upon the under-presence or mental structures already established in London and Simplon Pass. Whereas Liu argues that the scene figures a crisis of reference in Wordsworth’s project, arguing that “reference to history . . . is the only ‘power’ of Wordsworth’s Imagination,” a power that proves only more persistent in Wordsworth’s poetic attempts to deny its influence (35), I would argue that history is not the power of imagination but rather the product of imagination. The power derives instead from the associative structure that has been built up and has accrued meanings, both in regards to the manifestation of human spirit in place and the potential for apocalyptic signification. In each location, Wordsworth works

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41 Liu provides a compelling case for this scene as an echo of the Simplon Pass scene, and certainly the numerous parallels between them, not to mention the temporal proximity of their composition, affirms Liu’s argument (34); though, in establishing the London and Yordas cavern scenes that become the under-presences of Simplon Pass, I have worked to show that Paris is yet another layer to a deeper structure of signification than Liu acknowledges.
to progress his psychological development and his song about it, the two being inevitably linked even if disjointed in the conflicts between narrative and biographical timelines. What is fundamental to each scene is how Wordsworth experiences a different state of being (understood within a different conception of history) that is ultimately located through his environmental engagement. History is not the underlying epistemological ground, as Liu suggest in his assertion of a historical epistemology (40-42); rather, it is the environment itself that provides a medium for history. In the environment, history, like the human spirit, is infused and through the environment it can be read.

The prior feedback loops illuminate the Carousel Square scene, but still its meaning is not at first recognized. Initially, Wordsworth looks upon the blackened area of the square like “a man” who looks “Upon a volume whose contents he knows / Are memorable but from him locked up, / Being written in a tongue he cannot read” (10.49-52). Only later, in his Paris hotel – which Liu rightly correlates to the Alpine House where Wordsworth restlessly struggled with the meaning behind Simplon Pass (34) – does Wordsworth finally take in the message and meaning of the square: the sense that the Revolution is no longer something to praise but to fear. Significantly, Wordsworth’s realization comes not in the form of a divine idea but rather in something “felt and touched” (10.66); thus does history become yoked in the affective tones of environmental engagement. Wordsworth feels the mighty sway of the place, but also adds meaning that is “conjured up from tragic fictions” – either the stories that he has heard about the event itself or emotional imports taken from the tragic fiction of Macbeth, which is cited a few lines later. Ultimately, Carousel Square offers a tragic historical meaning as well as the “blended might” of mind and place; this is not, then, a “lapse of mental discipline” as Liu
suggests but rather an initial recognition of the power of such blending, of the need to emphasize equally the might of the mind and the might of the external world.

Looking back across Wordsworth’s narrative, we see a progression from the infant’s initial sensorial engagement with the mother to a reciprocal engagement with external influences, which led to an increase in psychological reach and associative activity. Taking in the larger environment, and taking in the objects of material culture, Wordsworth works up to books, to cities, and through the latter he finds an environmental understanding of humanity and history – a history of both geological and human ages. Not only does Wordsworth’s mind grow capacious with each new engagement, spurring it on to further engagements, but he also reveals in his narrative’s layering and looping how associations from one scene become the under-senses or mental structures on which new realizations are built. The mind proves much like the palimpsest of the city or the layered effects of the diorama.

Through my final exploration in this chapter, one that will lead quickly to The Prelude’s climax at Mount Snowdon, I argue that Wordsworth, in conceiving of the mind as a part of nature as much as a self-made (and thus man-made) entity, he must find a means of representing its natural and constructed qualities. Of course, the urban sphere, the sphere of human construction, is not truly distinct from the natural world. What we will see in the following discussion is a rural application of Wordsworth’s shift from street scenes to the urban panoramic, as was discussed in the prior section. Both the urban and rural scenes offer divergent modes of vision and differing modes of subjectivity, and I argue that in the following two passages, Wordsworth works to conjoin these divergent modes so as to produce an ultimate image of reconciliation between “Discordant
elements” and to make “them move / In one society” (1.348-355). In this way, I argue that the climax of Mount Snowdon portrays not a recapitulation of Simplon Pass’ affirmation of transcendent poetic vision, as Hartman suggests, but rather the ultimate recognition of what Wordsworth experiences in Paris. The convergence of urban and natural structures, of embodied feeling within a scene and the abstracted prospective view of it, and the joining of these divergent elements reinforces the full degree to which the “individual Mind” and the “external World” make through their mutual fitting a “creation” of “blended might” (“Prospectus” 63-68).

In Book 8, the echo of the structure of the street scenes from Book 7 slowly and subtly emerge as Wordsworth recalls walking through a “narrow valley” where the sun shines through several, quiet “eyelet spots / And loopholes of the hills” despite the “mists and steam-like fogs / Redounding everywhere” (8.92, 89-90, 85-86; emphasis added). Certainly such a scene could be found in the mountainous area around Grasmere, and yet, the place seems highly evocative of the city Wordsworth has just left, with its own narrow streets, small offshoots of alleys, and industrial steam turned fog. In this moment, Wordsworth notices a shepherd and his dog high up the mountain’s edge, which is “Girt round with mists” so that they appear to stand on an “island floating” in the fog (8.96, 98). While the image is short lived, Wordsworth seems to provide the exact opposite view offered in Mount Snowdon, as though he were looking up at himself in that later

42 Even Hartman does not seem fully convinced that Snowdon does recapitulate Simplon Pass, which reveals to Hartman the potential of the mind to transcend nature (226, 256). In addition to working to revise Hartman’s sense of Snowdon as a failure in Wordsworth’s transcendent progress, I also work against the assumption that Snowdon, as Theresa Kelly suggests, “restores the aesthetic perspective absent in Books 7 and 10, where London and revolutionary Paris present unmanageable spectacles. Now the speaker is a full participant who can make something of what he sees” (128). Rather, Snowdon significantly builds from the under-presences of Paris and particularly London, carrying their “aesthetic perspective” into this new context and there expounding and expanding on its import.
scene. In that later scene, Wordsworth similarly stands as though on an island, surrounded by a “sea of mist” that touched his “very feet” (13.43, 54). That Wordsworth would have Mount Snowdon in mind here, and would allude to it in the book succeeding Book 7, makes sense given that Wordsworth’s actual ascent of Mount Snowdon occurred soon after he left London in 1791.

But the image of the elevated shepherd quickly gives way to another memory, where a shepherd guided his dog with signals “in the bottom of a vale . . . thus teaching him / To chase along the mazes of step crags / The flock he could not see” (8.105, 108-110). As the dog advances and retreats – “Through every pervious strait, to right or left, / Thridded a way unbaffled” (8.113-114) – the scene echoes of Wordsworth’s own animalistic pursuit of sensation amid the pleasures and blazoned store fronts of the city, but a pursuit still guided by the signals of natural habit. The language of mazes and “thridding” makes the connection difficult to overlook, as the only other times these terms are used is when Wordsworth describes his London experience earlier in Book 7 or his London arrival to appear later in Book 8.

Just like in Book 7, the embodied experience amidst the rural mazes in Book 8 precedes the panoramic view over it in Book 13. Ascending Mount Snowdon at night, Wordsworth and his friend, Robert Jones, are guided by a shepherd and his dog. While it is daylight when they set out, the night soon comes on as Wordsworth leads the group with “forehead bent / Earthward, as if in opposition set / Against an enemy” (13.29-31). In this figuration of the head bent downward in opposition to an antagonist, we might read an allusion to the Revolution, but the image also recalls the playing of games and
cards with “head opposed to head,” suggesting that Wordsworth is once again engaging in a form of psychological play (1.539).

Wordsworth eventually climbs above the fog that has girded the mountain, and in the sudden transparency of the air, the moonlight falls on the “turf” of the mountain “like a flash,” which inaugurates, supposedly, the transcendent moment to come (13.39-40). The scene Wordsworth describes is this: a sea of mist has filled the valley that leads to the ocean. From the encircling hills and mountains – a sort of shoreline around the body of fog – streams and torrents descend, then conjoin, and then roar towards the ocean. Of course, Wordsworth cannot see the valley floor, he can only hear “the roar of waters,” which seem to rise up through a fissure or “blue chasm” in the middle of the sea of mist (56-58). Wordsworth describes the streams as “roaring with one voice,” and while the scene is “[g]rand in itself alone,” Wordsworth is particularly struck by

. . . that breach

Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,

That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged

The soul, the imagination of the whole. (13.59-65)

Wordsworth goes on to call this the “perfect image of a mighty mind” a mind that is “exalted by an under-presence” (13.69, 71). The under-presence of this scene seems highly evocative of the under-sense of the city, the place where he had found “among least things / An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts / as parts, but with a feeling of the whole” (7.711-713). On Mount Snowdon, then, Wordsworth looks down upon his prior experience – the inverse view from Book 8 and his experience amongst the roaring streams of humanity in the thoroughfares of the city. Not only the roaring crowd but also
their sublime conflation with the homeless figure that seemed to speak of “another world” becomes present at Snowdon, as the former scene had been one of those “Collateral objects and appearances” that had been “doomed to sleep / Until mature seasons called them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind” (7.623; 1.619-625). In accord with Langbaum, then, I find that Snowdon offers “the delayed effect of epiphanies” (29).

The sublimity of the Snowdon scene results in large part, then, from an urban experience that is now one of those “structures” that “the mind / Builds for itself” but is “reared upon the base of outward things” (7.624-26). The mighty mind, Wordsworth suggests, functions just as the “mind [of] Nature,” which is itself “a genuine counterpart / And brother of the glorious faculty / Which high minds bear” (13.74, 88-90). The “[r]esemblence” of mind and nature results, as Keith Thomas has well argued, from the associative functions that Wordsworth sees inherent to each, for each exerts “upon the outward face of things” a certain “domination” in that each “so moulds [external objects], and endues, abstracts, combines” them (13.77-79). Like the mighty mind, like the mind of Nature, Wordsworth’s own mind shapes what he sees based on the association of past experiences internally held and the outward forms before him; here, Wordsworth too “endues, abstracts, combines” the various images of his progress into a coherent whole. He comes to a full recognition of the familial bonds within nature, within the mind, and the affinity that holds the two together, whether that be understood as a “sense of God, or whatso’er is dim / Or vast in its own being” (13.72-73). The scene does not evince mental transcendence over the material world but rather the power of associative affinities predicated upon and engaged with the external scene.
For higher minds, “[t]his is the very spirit in which they deal / With all the objects of the universe . . . . They build up greatest things / From least suggestion” (13.91-92, 98-99). This is the recognition of mental empowerment through “blended might,” a sense of the mind as building great works, but works still tethered to the material world, still needing “suggestion” even if “least suggestion.” Those who have argued for Wordsworth’s transcendent vision have generally found the Snowdon scene lacking. Rzepka doesn’t even mention it, while Hartman says of the scene: “In it the poet comes face to face with his Imagination yet calls it Nature. It is the Prelude’s supreme instance of the avoidance of apocalypse” (226). While Abrams argues in Natural Supernaturalism for a sense of transcendent environmental engagement like Hartman does, Abrams also claims that at Snowdon Wordsworth sees the “mighty mind . . . in its free and continuously creative reciprocation with its milieu” (78). Here, Abrams claim is much closer to my own thinking in regards to the epistemic function of the environment.

Also informative is Abrams’s sense that this “conclusion goes on to specify the circular shape of the whole” (79). Indeed, Wordsworth acknowledges in Book 13: “From love, for here / Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes, / All truth and beauty” (13.149-151). Yet, I would add to Abrams’ claim that there is not one circular motion here, but several, and I would add to Wordsworth’s own claim that it is not only love to which we keep returning but also the city. Further on in the “meditation” that arises from the sublime image of the sea of fog around Snowdon, Wordsworth describes two loves, one that is the sensual enjoyment of nature and one that “proceeds / More from the brooding soul, and is divine” (13.66, 164-65). Thus, from the roaring chaos that was an under-presence to the sea of fog, we come to a sense of brooding, which points to Book 1 where
we first saw the “tiresome sea” of the city and the “meditative mind” that like “the mother dove / Sits brooding” over the vast abyss of chaos (1.35, 150-53). That Wordsworth has such brooding in mind is further concretized in the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, where he more pointedly refers to the mind “that broods / Over the dark abyss” while looking over the valley from Snowdon (1850, 13.71-72). Over the under-presence of urban chaos, Wordsworth again sits brooding, further contemplating the structures and visual modes presented to him in the city and now reworked in the mountain scene – an inverse of the allusions to mountainous nature that Wordsworth makes while in the city. Such is the repeating gesture of *The Prelude* – seen in Book 1, Book 7, Book 8, and implicitly in Book 13 – Wordsworth leaves London only to look back upon it, to consider not just the city itself but also how his psyche and poetic spirit have progressed through his engagement with its chaotic and enriched environment.
CHAPTER 3 – THE MAKER OF HER OWN FORTUNE:
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM AND SELF-FORMATION IN
ELIZABETH GASKELL’S NORTH AND SOUTH

The previous chapter on William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* reconsidered the dominant, critical understanding of the Romantic subject – that inward, autonomous, transcendent self – by showing how Wordsworth’s exemplary depiction of mental growth revealed a subject who was psychologically enmeshed in, engaged with, and shaped by the modern human environment. This argument must necessarily proceed into the Victorian era, in which the environmental paradigm for subjectivity continues with increasing visibility and stronger scientific affirmation; yet, the assumptions behind the “inward turn” also remain, particularly in Victorian criticism that explores the reception of Romanticism’s key tenets.¹ For example, Angus Easson has recently argued that the

¹ As discussed in the introduction, studies on the self by Charles Taylor, Dror Wahrman, and Nancy Armstrong have proposed that the inward turn continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. One of the key critical texts on the urban space as literary subject, Richard Lehan’s *The City in Literature* (1998), argues that the urban experience at midcentury further promoted the inward turn, entrenching its cultural influence. Scholars have suggested that the Romantic subject continues to be a dominant model in Victorian literature. For instance, Jay Clayton famously argues for the presence of Romantic visionary experience and transcendent selfhood in Victorian novels; see *Romantic Vision and the Novel* (1987). Perpetuating the inward turn with a form of linguistic turn, E. Warwick Slinn claims “that the metaphysics of Romantic idealism give way to the more problematized perceptions of a consciousness tied to textuality,” pointing a self that was “inseparable” from the abstraction of language and thus equally conscripted to interiority (2), whereas Andrew Elfenbein suggests that the Victorian period continued to see the author’s product as a “expression of the most authentic depths of his or her personality” (4). More recently Lynn Voskuil has argued that Romantic subjectivity continues in a form of theatrical self-expressions (23-26). This brief list does not include those works that have worked backwards from Freud (rather than forward from the Romantics) to espouse a form of deep and autonomous psychology at work in Victorian literature, such as Jill Matus’s *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (2009).
work of Elizabeth Gaskell evinces the Romantic “concept of the creative power of the imagination” and its redemption of the human subject from an empiricist psychology with its “mental processes inevitably determined by association” (19). Given my previous claims regarding the associationist underpinnings of Wordsworth’s environmental psychology, I find that Easson misreads Gaskell’s inheritance, which leads to a misconception of Gaskell’s own depiction of subjectivity and subject formation.

While I disagree with Easson on these significant points, he succinctly highlights a key dilemma within Victorian conceptions of the self: the apparent paradox of determinism and the individual will. In this chapter, I argue that Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) exemplifies the Victorian struggle with this paradox and, more significantly, resolves it via the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning. Informed by an associationist psychology and Unitarian thought, Gaskell’s bildungsroman offers a powerful and profoundly environmental take on psychological development, one in which the conscientious and willful heroine, Margaret Hale, develops the capacity to control her mental life and even effect a desired selfhood by choosing to actively participate in, rather than remain passive to, external influences. Margaret Hale moves back and forth between urban and rural spheres, and while these removals deliver their own hardships, they also provide an education based on direct experience – much like the one Wordsworth championed – through which Margaret realizes the interconnections between geographical place, climate, modes of life, and selfhood. As a result, Margaret becomes able to identify and control the environmental influences that shape her.

In her seminal *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (1985), Catherine Gallagher asserts that nineteenth-century novels in general, and in particular industrial
novels like Gaskell’s, were torn over the “deep contradictions” behind a deterministic understanding of the self and a belief in free will (34). As a result of evincing these contradictory “assumptions,” the industrial novel manifests conceptual and narrative disruptions, and Mary Barton exemplifies this literary phenomenon (5, 62-87). After first exploring the debate over determinism and free-will amongst Unitarian circles, Gallagher then shows how it leads to a similar “irresolvable paradox” within the novel, particularly in the character of John Barton (74). Gaskell is unable “to commit herself to a causal scheme” that grows “inconsistent” across the narrative, and critics may need to concede, Gallagher argues, that “causal interpretations” of the novel are “irrelevant” (67). Both locally and in general, Gallagher suggests that human agency and determinism were understood to be incompatible in the nineteenth century.

Gallagher’s study remains a touchstone for Gaskell and Victorian scholarship – the result being a critical lineage that not only accepts its terms at face value but also equates the industrial urban environment with a determinism that proves the master of the individual will.2 Yet, individual will and external influence are only paradoxical if we assume that external influence can be nothing more than a disruption to the autonomy and /or essentiality of the self; thus, such an assumption expands beyond the free will /

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2 Rosemarie Bodenheimer continues Gallagher’s sense of the inconsistency of determinism in Gaskell’s work (7), and argues that Gaskell, among others, “carr[ies] on Romantic critiques of social determinism” (116) where the pastoral or true nature proves “antideterminist” by existing outside and arguing “against conceptions of socially determined development” (116). Hilary Schor, in her opening discussion of Mary Barton, refers to Gallagher’s reading of free will vs. determinism as “the most intriguing and enlightened consideration of Mary Barton” (211 fn1). Kristina Deffenbacher does not cite Gallagher but offers a similar position when she presents external determining influences and psychological control as antithetical. For more examples of Gallagher’s influence in Gaskell criticism, see Amanda Anderson 28, 115; Moira Ferguson 274; Patsy Stoneman 137-38; and Tamara Ketabgian 187 fn52. For treatments of other Victorian authors, see Susan Zlotnick, who cites Gallagher in her discussion of determinism/ free will incompatibility in Hard Times, 36. See also Joseph Bizup’s Manufacturing Culture (2003), 74-75 and Lauren Goodlad’s Victorian Literature and the Victorian State (2004), 43. Gallagher herself returns to this issue in The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy (2009).
determinism debates and into the contending views of selfhood in Victorian culture. In this vein, Sally Shuttleworth suggests that “two conflicting models of psychology” existed in Victorian medical and cultural discourses: in one “the individual is figured both as an autonomous unit, gifted with powers of self-control”; in the other, the individual proves “a powerless material organism, caught within the operations of a wider field of force” (28). This dualism stems, I argue, from a cultural resistance to and anxiety over a materialist view of subjectivity espoused by contemporaneous sciences. The result was a tendency to emphasize the interiority of mental life – a tendency that Freudian psychoanalysis would further popularize. Even in contemporary scholarship, critics continue to isolate interior mechanisms as the means by which a sense of self can be stabilized – whether through the unconscious, imagination, or reason – while conceiving of external influence, particularly the shocks attendant to modern life, as a destabilizing force.

Gaskell’s model for the self greatly complicates this dualism, as she argues for the potential to control one’s psychology and one’s subject formation through the same materiality and the same sciences that were supposed to destabilize them. North and

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3 Such an dichotomy has certainly been registered by other critics and has recently been noted by William Cohen, who highlights opposition presented by mass industrialism and “[d]iscoveries of an evolutionary biology and geology” to “the notion of the soul” (1). Furthermore, Athena Vrettos has recently substantiated Shuttleworth’s dual sense of Victorian psychology, though the former does briefly acknowledge the potential for these two forms to be conjoined; see “Victorian Psychology,” 68. Gregory Tate, in The Poet’s Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry 1830-1870 also highlights the “dual account of psychology,” one that contrasts “the metaphysical soul” with “the physical brain and the embodied mind”; this particular formulation is in regards to Tennyson, though it mirrors a more general duality in Victorian psychology, as Tate sees it, between the philosophical and physiological (21, 4).

4 Through a largely psychoanalytic approach, Matus explores the destabilizing effects of mental shock in Gaskell’s North and South but also “the threat to self-possession and governance that a non-unitary model of mind entailed, and how that threat implicated the already fragile illusion of an individual subject in possession of itself” (3). Of the criticism interested in subjectivity to be referenced in this study, the works by Louise Henson come closest to recognizing the potential of a stable subject formation through agency, which takes the form of active reason and scientific education (in opposition to the unconscious); see, for example, Henson 2003 and 2006.
South, I argue, portrays external influence in a manner that is neither inconsistent nor necessarily threatening; rather, the novel proves progressive in its effort to show how the structures of influence of a given locality, particularly the city, can be the very tools needed to cultivate an autonomous and empowered self. In prioritizing the externality and materiality of psychology in Gaskell’s writing, this chapter will be in dialogue with more recent scholarship that focuses on the body’s importance to Victorian conceptions of subjectivity.\(^5\) While this scholarship does recognize the external environment as one of many causes for psycho-physiological effects, its general thrust, as William Cohen argues, is to advance “the primacy of the body in the idea of the human” (xii). It does little, however, to advance an understanding of environmental engagement and self-fashioning that is integral to Margaret Hale’s self-formation and to Victorian psychology at large.

Building on the environmental understanding of subjectivity seen in Radcliffe and Wordsworth, Gaskell further develops the spatial practices and habits that allow one to engender particular states of being and to cultivate certain characteristics. Yet, more so than these previous proponents of environmental self-fashioning, Gaskell shows how the externality of psychology, rather than an assumption of autonomous inwardness, allows for the resolution of what had long been seen as competing elements of self and place – the will and deterministic influence. In bringing the theoretical debate over determinism and will into play, Gaskell’s portrayal of self-development more effectively addresses the

\(^5\) Rick Rylance’s *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* has proven an influential text on this topic, and many other studies that take a physiological approach to Victorian psychology and subjectivity have followed, including Matus’, Cohen’s, and Garratt’s, along with others like Anne Stiles’ *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (2009) and Nicholas Dames’ *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (2007).
contemporary debates amongst science and society regarding the nature of the self and the external forces of the world, particularly those in the urban sphere. This chapter contends that, in recognizing the individual as an agent within a materialistic, cause-and-effect system, Gaskell encourages the reader to extend his or her own understanding of psychology, to see the self as enmeshed within its modern circumstances. While such a conception allowed Victorian culture at large to address social problems and effect social progress, more important to Gaskell, and more central to her bildungsroman, is the sense that each individual can learn to become the architect of his or her own existence.

Margaret Before Milton

Throughout *North and South*, Margaret’s selfhood is defined in terms of place, whether in personal characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors that link her to certain environments and the modes of life associated with them. In this way, the novel keeps Margaret’s subjectivity in causal and conceptual proximity to each locality’s structure of influence. In exploring Gaskell’s portrayal of Margaret before her arrival in the industrial city of Milton, the present section works to establish the influences of her first two homes – rural Helstone and London – and how they shape the core attributes that Margaret will go on to develop, alter, or even protect in the industrial city of Milton-Northern. In short,

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6 Here, my thinking is in accord with Michael Wheeler’s sense that *North and South* offers “an environment of circumstances” that is a “central concern” in Gaskell’s fiction (68-69). Margaret and Gaskell’s other characters “are inseparable from the places in which they live” (69). However, Wheeler proves more interested in Margaret’s social interactions than her psycho-physiological engagement with the environment.
I will establish that Gaskell’s bildungsroman is predicated on an environmental sense of psychological development.7

While yet unaware of determinism’s authority over the self, Margaret Hale’s psyche and self are shown to be preoccupied with place in the first chapter of the novel. Drawn by duty into the pomp and circumstance of her cousin Edith’s wedding to Captain Lennox in London, Margaret thinks regularly of her imminent return home to rural Helstone (6).8 Edith’s character seems typical enough of her circumstances and station. She is described as “a spoiled child” who is “too careless and idle to have a very strong will of her own” (6); in clear contrast, Margaret looks forward to the duties she will soon take on as “only daughter in Helstone parsonage” (6). Margaret’s clear distinction from Edith, despite the fact that the two have lived together for much of their young lives, appears to result from Margaret’s early childhood in the country. Significantly, while meditating upon the nursery she had shared with Edith, Margaret recalls “when she was brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, the lessons of her cousin Edith” (8). Also recalled are the “wild passions of grief” she felt when her parents first brought her to London with the idea of her being improved by the culture and luxury afforded by her widowed Aunt Shaw (8). Unlike Edith, then, Margaret has grown up in

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7 Despite the critical attention to the novel’s social and material conditions, the influence of such conditions on Margaret’s own psychological development has gone largely unexplored. Wheeler’s study, perhaps the most environmentally oriented study on North and South is noted above. The majority of studies focus on her social relations and maturation, emphasizing her unifying influence on industrial society; see, for instance, Horton 205, Shirley Foster Elizabeth Gaskell 108-110, Schor 92, Zlotnick 110, Jane Spencer 91, Jenny Uglow 366-386, Valerie Wainwright 95-102. Raymond Williams points to Margaret’s “developed sensibility of the Southern girl” (92), but he does not expand on the causal or environmental implications behind this statement (Culture and Society, 92). Deffenbacher is the only critic, as far as I can tell, who develops an argument around Margaret’s psychology and environmental determinism, but she regards Margaret’s psychological control as antithetical to the deterministic influences in the novel, and her study takes on a largely metaphorical reading of the connection between psyche and place (123-125).

two distinct environments, which have both had their influence upon her. Sharing Edith’s home and experiences has tempered Margaret’s untamed nature rather than making her indolent. The wild passion of her former life in the country has been transformed into one of duteous volition.

In her return to the rural parsonage of Helstone, Margaret’s affinity for the rural environment becomes clear. She quickly reacquaints herself with the “multitudes of wild, free, living creatures, reveling in the sunshine” (17), and the rural environment just as quickly begins to influence Margaret’s psyche as “her cares were all blown away as light as thistle down, and she thought of nothing but the glories of the forest” (22). Taking in the beauty of the woodlands, Margaret recognizes how the “many luxuries” of her London life “had only been troubles and trammels to her freedom” – the first of many connections that Margaret will make between an environment and the mode of life it affords (18). In Helstone, Margaret’s “out-of-doors life was perfect” (17), and much of this perfection has to do with the beneficial climate, which in turn allows for such a life spent out doors. In the country, Margaret is able to run through open spaces and “broad commons” (17). The spaces of Helstone, in clear distinction to the confining spaces of London (or any nineteenth-century city), provide a physical freedom that begets a feeling of freedom: here, Margaret can go where she pleases, guided only “by her own sweet will” (70-1). While Margaret’s will is emphasized, these feelings of freedom are afforded to her by the space she engages; her willfulness is thus dependent on her present context.

Yet, the relationship between influence and will works both ways, as Margaret’s inclination towards Helstone results in her more willing subjection to its structure of influence. Rather than resist, Margaret takes on characteristics from Helstone in way that
she never did from London. This last point is reinforced when Henry Lennox, brother-in-law to Edith, comes to visit. Henry attempts to send Margaret signals of his imminent marriage proposal, signals “a regular London girl would understand,” but Margaret does not (26). When Henry makes his offer, she rejects him, and she further reveals the extent to which she is not like London girls when she rationalizes this rejection by pointing to his urbane qualities as flaws.

Margaret does retain some of the social airs she took on in London, however, which are most evident when she disparages certain neighbors for being “shoppy people” (19). Margaret is not so country-simple after all; it would be more precise to say that Margaret’s selfhood proves rather multifarious and heterogeneous. The dual influence of Margaret’s London education and country freedom establishes a core self defined by graceful simplicity and volition. Both localities, then, contribute to Margaret’s subject formation, but these are not the only spaces she will inhabit.

Determinism and the Influence of Circumstances

Before we continue with Margaret’s own self-formation, a few words will be necessary to better understand the dynamics of the determinism in *North and South*, a dynamic that proves more complex than criticism has acknowledged thus far. This section first turns to Gaskell’s relationship with early Unitarian beliefs and environmentalism in order to establish the theoretical concepts of determinism with which her novel engages. While Gaskell’s firm adherence to Unitarianism has been documented in the relevant criticism, disagreement remains as to whether Gaskell
subscribed to Joseph Priestley’s Unitarianism (as defined by a strong belief in
determinism or necessitarianism) or to the more transcendent Unitarian beliefs espoused
by William Channing and James Martineau.9 For this reason, it proves necessary to
affirm Gaskell’s belief in the psycho-physiological influence of external conditions as
such a belief is a prerequisite for the environmental self-fashioning paradigm.

In the late eighteenth century, the associationist psychology developed from
Locke’s and Newton’s studies of the mind became – thanks in large part to Joseph
Priestley – foundational to the Unitarian understanding of human behavior, morality, and
the role played by experience in shaping the self. Taking on a Newtonian understanding
of the nervous system and cognitive function as within the purview of natural laws,
Unitarians understood the need to address physiological conditions when considering
mental development. As Priestley acknowledges, “the perfection of thinking should
depend on the sound state of the body and brain in this life” while disease proves
debilitating to the faculties of the mind (“Disquisition,” 244-45). Given this materialist
understanding of the human mind, it is not surprising that Unitarians readily adopted, as
Henson observes, a “scientific attitude towards the influence of environmental
circumstance on physical well-being and moral character” (2002, 31).

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9 As Henson points out, scholars have positioned Gaskell “both within the traditional Priestleyan camp, and
associated with James Martineau’s new style Unitarianism, with its emphasis on free will over
predetermined law” (2006, 86). R. K. Webb argues that Elizabeth and William Gaskell were more
amenable to Priestleyan Unitarianism, even if they agree with Martineau’s desire for a more heartfelt form
of worship and social engagement; see "The Gaskells as Unitarians" (1988). In Victorian Literature and
the Victorian State (2004), Lauren Goodlad suggests that Gaskell was influenced by Channing, who “urged
spiritual rather than materialistic progress,” though she does not go so far as to say Gaskell denied a
deterministic view (47). Jenny Uglow suggests that Gaskell finds a middle ground between the two
perspectives or styles (Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories [1993] 131). Similarly, Knight and Mason
(2006) position Gaskell’s beliefs between those of James Martineau and William Johnson Fox, the latter
also hoping to revitalize Unitarian beliefs but still subscribing to much of the same principles as Priestley
(77).
In addition to one’s mind being shaped via its corporeal base, the human mind was, according to Priestley, also determined by the experiences afforded by one’s circumstances. In summing up Hartley’s view, Priestley writes:

all our intellectual pleasures and pains [and] all the phenomena of memory, imagination, volition, reasoning, and every other mental affection and operation, are only different modes, or cases, of the association of ideas: so that nothing is requisite to make any man whatever he is, but a sentient principle, with this single property . . . and the influence of such circumstances as he has actually been exposed to. (Hartley’s Theory, xxiv)

Within associationist psychology, experience was the principle material in the construction of ideas, and repeated experiences allowed for those ideas to be considered in relation to each other so that resemblance, contiguity, and cause-and-effect patterns might be learned – the tendency or habit to make these connections was called, of course, association. The development of associations leads to the growth of knowledge and morality. Through the associations of pleasure and/or pain with past experiences, the subject develops a sense of right and wrong actions, so that “The moral sense is therefore generated necessarily and mechanically”—that is, the moral sense is necessarily determined by past experience (Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind, 338).

Priestley’s sense of “influence of [one’s] circumstances,” what I will refer to as a structure of influence, thus determines a certain set of associations and, in turn, a certain mode of consciousness.10 This structure of influence proves integral to Gaskell’s

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10 In the next section, I will further interrogate the relationship between structures of influence and determinism, both as it applies to Priestley’s necessitarian philosophy and Gaskell’s novel.
portrayal of realistic characters: characters reflective of people living in her own time and place. Stacey Gottlieb also highlights this “materialist, cause-and-effect” depiction of character in Gaskell’s fiction (60), which can be seen most succinctly in the opening pages of *Ruth*. There, Gaskell highlights “the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character” and the “daily life into which people are born” that “forms chains” of causation that are reinforced through “daily domestic habit” (*Ruth* 2). This depiction of character surmises well the associationist psychology discussed thus far, affirming that this environmental psychology informs Gaskell’s portrayal of character.

In *North and South*, the deterministic influence of place is often made evident through the characters that surround Margaret Hale; through these characters, Gaskell establishes the structures of influence to which Margaret is also subjected, and it is through them that Margaret begins to understand the chain of cause-and-effect within which she must operate. Scholarship on Gaskell’s fiction has well established the environmental influence of urban and industrial spaces, particularly on Margaret’s mother and the factory workers of Milton-Northern. Also identified by scholarship is

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11 In addition to Gottlieb, Webb argues for the centrality of cause and effect in Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels, as well as in William Gaskell’s religious outlook (164-65); see also Henson 2006, 103.
12 When considering the psychological influence of urban influences in *North and South*, scholarship has tended to focus on working-class characters or Mrs. Hale; see, for example, Katherine Byrne 62-67, Mariaconetta Constantini 122; Henson 2002 36-38. Over the last three decades, studies on urban influence in Gaskell’s fiction typically focus on *Mary Barton or Ruth*. Gallagher, one could argue, begins this trend by treating *North and South* for its portrayal of paternalism and focusing her discussion of free will and determinism on *Mary Barton*, the latter becoming the primary text considered by scholars writing on working-class conditions, the most recent (and perhaps best) being Ketabgian’s *Lives of Machines*; see also Stoneman 138; Henson 2002, 35-36; Joseph Childers’ “Industrial Culture and the Victorian Novel,” 81-82. *Ruth* and “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras” are also often studied in this context; see, for example, Moore; Gottlieb; Foster “Shorter Pieces,” 112; and Bodenheimer 163-164.
the ameliorative influence of rural spaces.\textsuperscript{13} In addition to a rural / urban spectrum, Gaskell presents, rather obviously, a northern / southern spectrum in this novel.\textsuperscript{14} More than rehearse these discrete discussions, though, my purpose here is to take into consideration the full spectrum and complexity of environmental influence in Gaskell’s novel. In recognizing these dual spectrums, we must also take into consideration the various conditions within each place, conditions made even more various once we include the different types of housing and even the distinctions between various rooms. When viewed this way, a simple one-to-one determinism of place and self developed in the scholarship above becomes increasingly difficult to rationalize and increasingly insignificant to Gaskell’s project. Instead, Gaskell portrays within many of the locations of \textit{North and South} a heterotopia of micro-localities, which are nested within larger structures of influence that they mitigate or reinforce.

Perhaps the most pervasive influence of circumstance in Gaskell’s novel is the quality of the climate, which is determined by the region, place, and micro-locality. The first emphasis on climatic conditions and their psychological influence occurs when Margaret returns to her rural home of Helstone. Helstone appears bathed in “sunbeams” and affords much “reveling in the sunlight,” evoking the association between well-lit

\textsuperscript{13} Scholars have often accepted the initial dichotomy of corruptive city and healthful country presented in the novel; see, for instance, Williams \textit{Culture}, 91-3; Wheeler 70; and Nils Claussen 5-6. Others have, to my mind, correctly identified that Gaskell’s use of rural settings, traditional romance elements, evades a clear-cut dichotomy of country and city with intimations of a more complex reality; Lynette Felber points out the anti-pastoral representations of country life in \textit{North and South}, particularly the last third of the novel (64); see also Martin 104.

\textsuperscript{14} It is important that we see these spectrums as potentially overlapping instead of as conflated. For instance, Jenny Uglow points to a common view of the geographical dynamic as “the industrial ‘North’ and the rural ‘South’” (373). A similar conflation is suggested by Williams \textit{Culture} 92. Yet, Gaskell provides examples of urban spaces in the south (London) and rural spaces in the north (the areas surrounding Milton). In short, we should recognize that the north / south and urban / rural spectrums are dual axes by which Gaskell charts an array of place-types.
spaces and positive mental states (17). Characters frequently note the “fragrance” of the “delicious air,” and Gaskell emphasizes the boon of Helstone’s southern bearing when she describes the air as “warm scented” (17, 41). Because of such qualities, the rural air affords a “revivifying principle” (88). In prioritizing the climate of the southern countryside, Gaskell stresses only one of its circumstances, though she will show how the larger structure of influences complicates this particular “principle.”

Similarly, Milton-Northern’s general environment is closely tied with its climate. A manufacturing town that Gaskell has modeled after Manchester, Milton-Northern takes on many of the negative attributes identified by Sir James Kay in *The Moral and Physical Conditions of the Working Classes* (1832), as well as those espoused by Frederick Engels and others who argued for the connections between the physical and moral conditions of the working classes. Milton-Northern is such “an unhealthy place,” and so influential upon its inhabitants, that its poor conditions become a constant focus of the novel (N&S 66). The Hale family worries over its poor air quality long before the reader first sees the industrial city; and the reader is never allowed to forget the “horrid air” either, as it is referenced upward of ten times in the novel (365; see also 45, 51, 59, 65, 88, 132, 185, 251, 363, 365, 418). Mrs. Hale’s worsening physical and mental condition, as well as her eventual death, is repeatedly linked to the conditions of Milton, even if her symptoms

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15 The Gaskells were good friends with Sir James Kay and Lady Kay Shuttleworth, and much of the concerns Gaskell portrays in her novels regarding urban poverty match the “environmentalism” of Kay’s “a logic wherein the working-class's moral condition followed from its physical condition” (Goodlad 49). Other correlations between Kay’s and Gaskell’s sense of material causality and progress include, Deffenbacher 124; Joseph Childers 77; Ketabgian 74-77; John Chapple *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 422. Moore also places Gaskell’s depiction of urban poor in relation to the environmentalism of Kay and Chadwick, though Moore will go on to suggest that Gaskell’s portrayal of Lizzie Marsh ultimately rejects the their sense of determinism, seeing the living conditions of urban poor as a potentially transformative experience (74). Moore’s position, I argue, reaffirms the need to clarify Gaskell’s understanding of the environment as a structure of influences rather than a machine that turned out uniform subjects, a clarification that will begin in this section and continue in the next.
initially appeared in Helstone (88, 110, 139, 238). While the air quality of Milton is poor overall, particular micro-localities greatly worsen it and thus exacerbate its negative influence.\textsuperscript{16} Bessy Higgins’ own illness, colloquially referred to as “a waste,” is caused by the contaminated air of the factory. In her own words, she is “poisoned by the fluff” (102). Along with highlighting the conditions within the factory, Bessy’s illness illustrates the connection between environmental conditions and psychological suffering.\textsuperscript{17} For Margaret, Bessy is not simply a human being in need of sympathy but also a strong example of determinism’s cause-and-effect chain – the despotic influence of the environment.\textsuperscript{18}

The homes of the poor, according to Kay and reflected in Gaskell’s novel, only reinforce the cycle of squalid conditions and the subjects they determine. Kay mentions how the houses of the working classes in Manchester are “uncleanly” and have “an air of discomfort if not of squalid and loathsome wretchedness,” which “pervades them” and which are only exacerbated by the “gross” habits of the tenants (15). In this way, the squalor of the laboring class’s environs “is exceedingly promoted by their reflex influence on the manners,” leading to a cycle of degrading conditions that evinced the determinism of industrial conditions (15). With their squalid state and general fatigue, the laborers were likely to fall “the victim of dissipation,” indicating the depletion of mental energy and fortitude (11). Gaskell represents a similar scene in the Higgins and Boucher

\textsuperscript{16} In nineteenth-century Manchester, the air in factories was particularly a concern for Kay, Engels, and Gaskell alike (Kay 10; Engels 162).

\textsuperscript{17} Kay similarly shows how the physical degradation caused by factory conditions would lead to the failing of one’s strength, until “the paroxysms of corporeal suffering are aggravated by the horrors of a disordered imagination, till they lead to gloomy apprehensions, to the deepest depression, and almost to despair” (11).

\textsuperscript{18} Constantini makes a similar point when she argues that “both Mrs. Hale’s and the others’ deaths are meant to convey and reaffirm a deterministic, almost amoral view of human life, a view that the ’strong’ characters have instinctively learnt to accept and cope with” (122).
households. The attempt of Mary Higgins to try to clean their home – which consists of scouring the central area of the floor with a stone and wet sand so as to loosen the caked on, ground in filth – only succeeds in accentuating the areas around the furniture and nearer the walls that “retained their dark unwashed appearance” (99). The Boucher household affirms the trend: it appeared to Margaret “as if it had been untouched for days by any effort at cleanliness” (295). On the other hand, the Thornton household proves immaculately clean, well decorated, and affording of cultivation through musical instruments and craftworks. Having lived most of her life in this environment, Fanny Thornton appears rather languid and spoiled, and thus proves rather similar to Margaret’s cousin Edith who had grown up within the confines of similar (though more tasteful) luxury. Through the portrayal of these poor and wealthy households, Gaskell affirms the environment / subject cycles of causation that occur when the “daily life into which people are born . . . forms chains” that are reinforced through “daily domestic habit” (Ruth 2).

Two other conditions of the daily life in Milton-Northern equally affect the diverse classes, even Margaret herself. First, Gaskell extrapolates the psychophysiological results of monotonous activity beyond that of the laborer’s, and thus expands on the implications of Kay’s Moral and Physical Conditions. Margaret suggests to Mrs. Thornton, mother of manufacturer John Thornton, that any mind “too long directed to one object only . . . will get stiff and rigid, and unable to take in many interests,” a comment that implicated the factory owners as much as the factory workers

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19 Kay claims that prolonged factory work “continued from day to day, and from year to year, is not calculated to develop the intellectual or moral faculties of man. . . . The mind gathers neither stores nor strength from the constant extension and retraction of the same muscles. The intellect slumbers in supine inertness” (7-8).
Thus, the inflexibility and single-mindedness seems applicable to all the inhabitants of Milton; indeed, Mrs. Thornton claims it to be a beneficial quality: one “ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed” in the singular task of “to-day,” he explains (113). Even so, such single-mindedness proves unsavory to Margaret, who takes note of the non-descript “crowds” with faces “set in lines of eagerness or anxiety” as they “jostled each other aside in the Mart and in the Exchange, as they did in life in the deep selfishness of competition” (418). In Gaskell’s most overt depiction of determinism, the people of Milton appear (with few exceptions) rigid in body and mind, a quality widely applied to most “Milton men,” and women, as they are noted for their “iron” or “granite” constitutions, their “inflexible” ways of thinking, their “unfeeling” natures. They are, persistently and ambivalently, seen as “hard” and as commanding great “power” (65, 163, 166, 308, 416). The repeated insistence on the uniform qualities of the men and women reinforces a sense of environmental determinism, which seems to undermine the willfullness ascribed to Milton inhabitants.

Compounding on the sense that industrial work or narrow focus leads to inflexibility, we must also consider that medical treatises had established a correlation between colder climates, decreased plasticity of the nerves, decreased sensibility, and greater activity. The influence of the northern climate is not exclusive to Milton, of course, but it is also evident when the Hale family first stops in the seaside town of

20 Gaskell’s description also recalls Engel’s famous description of town life, where he points to the “brutal indifference” and “the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interests” (24). Such indifference results, according to Engels, from a dehumanizing effect of monotonous modes of town life (i.e. a life of capitalism and specialization) on the subject, as “a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully” (23-4).

21 According to Falconer: “COLD, by blunting the power of feeling, in the manner above described, tends greatly to diminish the sensibility of the system in general” (14). Furthermore, “The diminution of the sensibility, contributes to make the people who live in cold countries less timid” as well as making them braver and more active (16).
Heston. Margaret observes that the shopkeepers of Heston are highly industrious and just as bustling as their Milton counterparts. Even though their fresh air seems more akin to the rural south, Margaret immediately contrasts the shopkeepers of Heston from their southern counterparts, as the latter would often be seen “lounging a little at their doors, enjoying the fresh air” and taking in the scene on the street (59). The colder temperature causes the denizens of Heston to adopt more self-enclosing customs, customs that seem interconnected with a more business-like mindset. Beyond forcing inhabitants indoors, colder weather had, in clear contrast to the southern climate, been seen as diminishing bodily and mental sensibility as well as inducing a more industrious and more frank dispositions. All of this can be seen in the behaviors and fashions of the Heston people, which so differs from Helstone and which makes such an impression upon Margaret that it “struck upon her mind” (58). While Heston does not afford the same exact structure of influence as Milton, it does offer many similarities. In highlighting numerous localities beyond Milton and Helstone, Gaskell depicts the great complexity of deterministic structures and how the overall climate, the structure of space, and the daily habits of denizens participate in conjunction, effecting a complex structure of influence upon the subject.

Margaret’s travels from place to place begin to impress upon her not only the influences of those localities but also an awareness of the environment’s capacity to shape the psycho-physiological constitution of the subject. And through the most geographically distant character, Gaskell makes this capacity the most evident. Margaret’s brother, Frederick – who travels to Cadiz, Spain, amongst other localities far
south of Helstone\textsuperscript{22} – returns to the family at Milton when he finds out that Mrs. Hale is gravely ill. From his time in tropical climates, Margaret notices that his features have become “redeemed from effeminacy by the swarthiness of his complexion,” a visual signifier for the climatic conditioning that has changed his character, seemingly for the better. Along with his skin tone, he now shows a “quick intensity of expression” indicative of “latent passion,” attributes that are regionalized when Gaskell identifies Frederick’s “instantaneous ferocity of expression” as that which “comes over the countenances of all natives of wild or southern countries—a ferocity which enhances the charm of the childlike softness” (247; my emphasis). Interestingly, the ferocity engendered by the southern climate does not negate the Helstone “softness” but rather offsets it, enhancing its charm. In this way, Gaskell reaffirms that when considering the influence of place, we must consider all the localities in which the subject has lived. As is evident in Wordsworth’s own use of associationist principles, as explored in the pervious chapter, Gaskell reveals that each individual brings their own associative affinities and physiological preconditions to each experience, which greatly complicates the process of determination.

Also important to note is how Frederick’s transformation follows a rather typical script that had been repeated in medical, anthropological, and travel literature for

\textsuperscript{22} The critical discussions of North and South that touch on Frederick focus, by and large, on his role in the mutiny and how it reinforces the concerns about authority and independence represented in the novel; see, for example, Stoneman 81, Uglow 372, Bodenheimer 88, Martin 101-02. Frederick is also brought up in discussion of international trade such as in Lee (450) and Byrne (66). Shuttleworth suggests that Frederick proves exemplary of “contemporary anthropological thought which cast women, children, southern, and primitive on a lower evolutionary level than that attained by the white Anglo-Saxon male” but, as Frederick is of the latter type, this reading seems flawed (“Introduction,” xvi); rather, it seems more accurate to attribute his alteration, and Gaskell’s scientific understanding of it, as having to do with climatic change on individual constitutions. Constantini does point to Frederick’s adaptations, though she uses it to reinforce her evolutionary reading of North and South rather than to affirm climatic determinism.
decades: the warmer environments, it became widely believed, increased one’s receptivity to external stimulus through its material influence on the body, and such receptivity, when taken to greater extremes, was tied to increases of passion and potential for mental distemper.\textsuperscript{23} No longer overly soft or relaxed, Frederick has become more passionate, even, at times, fierce.\textsuperscript{24} To Margaret, the far southern climates, along with his wild career, had “almost substituted another Frederick from . . . whom she remembered” (248). Because related to her, Frederick affirms for Margaret the malleability of her own physical and psychological being.

Helstone, then, becomes more of a middle ground within the geographic spectrum of the novel, one with a rather various climate. Its “sultry” summer weather places it closer to the far south on the climatic spectrum than to Milton-Northern (17). As physician Thomas Trotter highlights in his View of Nervous Temperament (1808), the “warm summer” in southern England “has a similar effect” to climates further south in that its ”[e]xcessive heat . . . powerfully increases the sensibility of every part; and renders the mind more susceptible of pleasurable sensations” (101). Thus, it is no wonder that Margaret correlates Helstone with pleasure and fine feeling, but her views of this

\textsuperscript{23}According to the late-eighteenth-century physician William Falconer, an arid climate “increases the faculty or power, as well as the accuracy, of sensation or feeling” in both the body and mind, and “[f]rom this sensibility arises the passionate temper of those people, which was observed from early antiquity“, and their impatience under several circumstances of behavior” (I: 4, 1; pg. 6). More recent to Gaskell, James Johnson wrote in his 1827 The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions of the “general languor of body and mind” as well as the “irritability of temper” that results from life in southern climates (15). See also Thomas Trotter, A View of the Nervous Temperament.

\textsuperscript{24}Edith reinforces Margaret’s sense of how circumstances in southern climates can shape one’s character. In a rather straightforward acknowledgement of this influence, Margaret says to Edith: “Do you know, Edith, I sometimes think your Corfu life has taught you . . . Just a shade or two of coarseness“ (409). Here both the influence of experience and the influence of climate: Edith is taught coarseness, but coarseness also implicates Edith’s sensibility, thus her psycho-physiological alteration, and thus the potential influence of a southern climate that was believed to produce savage behaviors. Edith’s son, who is born in Corfu, also appears to have a rather bestial aspect to his character.
locality prove more medical than idealistic. For instance, when discussing Nicholas Higgins’ desire to leave Milton for the south, Margaret tells him that the diversity of the climate, with its cooler, rainy season, would “kill you with rheumatism” (306). Margaret warns Nicholas of a rural life that sounds, in terms of the labor, much like the one he has known: “The hard spade-work robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toiled deadens their imagination” (306). What particularly concerns Margaret is that Nicholas is ill suited for such work and for such a climate because he has too long been conditioned by Milton. For instance, she notes how the food “is far different to what you have been accustomed” and how he would not find any of the “companionship” he has amongst his fellow workers in Milton (306). “What would be peace to them,” Margaret explains, “would be eternal fretting to you. Think no more of it, Nicholas” (306). In making these distinctions, Margaret provides a much more extensive view of the Helstone structure of influence; however, of greater consequence is that this particular structure of influence is class specific, including the modes of living afforded to person’s of the laboring class, but also the influence of these circumstances have been rendered differently for Nicholas than for the laborers who have lived there all their lives. Nicholas’ own psychological and physiological condition becomes a key variable within the structure of influence that he experiences.

Conditions, Influences, and Sentience

Over the course of her time in Milton, Margaret comes to a greater awareness of external influence, which will ultimately allow her to recognize the ways in which human
subjects can shape the environment so as to engender positive effects. Yet, to do so she must first recognize the complexity of each locality’s structure of influence and to acknowledge that each locality can have negative affects on the body and mind. In a quintessential scene, which occurs after Mrs. Hale has died and after Margaret has witnessed the depraved living conditions of the Boucher family, Margaret acknowledges to her father:

‘It is the town life . . . Their nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them, to say nothing of the confinement in these pent-up houses, which of itself is enough to induce depression and worry of spirits. Now in the country, people live so much more out of doors, even children, and even in the winter.’

‘But people must live in towns. And in the country some get such stagnant habits of mind that they are almost fatalists.’

‘Yes, I acknowledge that. I suppose each mode of life produces its own trials and its own temptations’ (301-02).

This moment well summarizes many of the key points developed in the last section: the medical understanding of external influence as indicated by “nerves”; the sense of micro-localities (such as the “pent-up houses”) that amplify the larger structure of influence; the interconnection of physiological and psychological conditioning; and the recognition that each locality affords certain modes of living and that all such modes come with their own structure of influence. The country, Margaret has realized, offers temptations as well as benefits: for the country dweller, life “tempts him to revel in the mere sense of animal existence, not knowing of, and consequently not caring for any pungency of pleasure for
the attainment of which he can plan, and deny himself and look forward”’ (302).

Significantly, the rural laborer gives himself over to an unthinking sensual existence, and
this is precisely the opposite of what Margaret is currently experiencing: a growing
consciousness of external influences that the individual subject must learn to properly
navigate in order to cultivate a healthy life and sense of self.

By remaining cognizant to causes and effects, writes William Gaskell, we observe
the “natural consequences of our actions . . . , to trace our errors and vices to their issues
and our miseries to their causes” (qtd. in Webb 152). Thus, rather than something innate,
moral understanding results from external circumstances and one’s skill at perceiving
cause and effect. Again, the key components of mental and moral development,
according to Priestley, were the combination of a “sentient principle” and “the influence
of [one’s] circumstances.” I find it rather interesting that the argument provided by
James Martineau – which Gallagher provides as the epigram to her chapter on Gaskell
and the free will / determinisms debate – provides a similar construction to Priestley’s
summary of associationism. Claiming that Necessitarian theory works “to annex human
nature, and put it under the same code with the tides and trees and reptiles,” Martineau
argues, “Our personality . . . is sure to recover from the most ingenious philosophy, and
to re-assert its power over the alternatives before it” ("Three Stages of Unitarian
Theology" 575). While I do not want to ignore the differences between Priestley’s set
(sentience and influence of circumstances) and Martineau’s set (personality and external
alternatives), I do want to suggest that their distinctions are not so great as Gallagher or
Victorian criticism has suggested.
For Priestley, the conflict of free will and determinism has more to do with semantics than with the nature of human agency. Priestley argues that humans absolutely have “volition” even if he cannot attribute “self-determination” to them in the strictest sense of the word (*A Free Discussion* 127-28, 136, 145-48). The point is made more clearly in *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illuminated*, where Priestley argues that by free-will one means “the power of doing what a person desires or wills to do, or deliberating, suspending, choosing, &c. or of resisting the motives of sensuality, ambition, resentment, &c. free will, under certain limitations, is not only consistent with the doctrine of mechanism, but even flows from it” (335). The will and the capacity to make judgments are, under Priestley’s view, the result of a sentient being coming to awareness within a world of cause and effect determined by absolute laws. This kind of free will is what Priestley calls “the popular and practical sense,” which is in contradistinction to “free-will in the philosophical sense,” that being the freedom to make choices outside of the influence of all other stimulus – to make choices as if every alternative was possible (335). In the most basic form of his argument, Priestley writes in a letter to Dr. Horsely: “I choose to say that motives determine the mind, whereas you say that the mind determines itself according to the motives; but, in both cases, the determination itself is the very same, and we both agree that it could not have been different. Our difference, therefore is merely verbal” (“A Letter” 224).

In short, Priestley suggests that all decisions are informed and motivated, and that philosophical free-will means, in its strictest sense, the possibility of decisions to be made outside of information, outside of circumstances. Priestleyan Unitarianism is, then, a religion that esteems information, a religion that accepts and embraces the influence of
circumstances. In his *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illuminated*, Priestley acknowledges the difficulties that arise from a deterministic view, from the fear of a puppet-master God, particularly in the questioning of why one need act at all if everything is already predetermined. Priestly asserts that one would not need to act at all, of course, “if their own actions and determinations were not necessary links in this chain of causes and events, and if their good or bad success did not, in the strictest sense of the word, depend upon themselves” (502). By placing human actions within the chain of cause and effect, Priestley opens up both his religious determinism and his materialist understanding of selfhood to the influence of human behavior. By engaging with and shaping one’s environment, one becomes a part of the determining force. Thus, Priestly argues, “the system of necessity makes every man the maker of his own fortune” (503).

In light of the above discussion, the paradox that Gallagher identifies between causality and a moral conscience, between individual agency and external determinisms, proves to be rather un-paradoxical after all. Gallagher, in following Martineau, assumes that external influence negates the potential agency of the inward subject, but I argue instead that, as Priestley himself suggests, external influence provides the means by which conscious decisions are made. The fact that the present consciousness of the subject has been determined (or we might say built from) knowledge gained via past experiences does not render that subject a passive receiver of influence; rather, because of sentience, each subject becomes an agent working within a complex world of influences. Only when we set in opposition a view of an autonomous self and a conception of determinism do we come to a paradox, and I would suggest that Priestley’s sense of determinism is not what scholars often assume: a mechanical system where
circumstances produce uniform subjects. Rather, as Gaskell has shown, the system of
determinism proves much more complex, and for this reason I believe that Priestley’s
articulation of the sentient being amidst the “influences of [his or her] circumstances”
proves more accurate for Gaskell’s own sense of environmental influence than the term
“determinism” and the despotic nature often associated with that word. It is for this
reason that the term “structure of influence” has been utilized in the present discussion
and throughout the dissertation.25

The more despotic sense of determinism only proves applicable to Gaskell’s
novel where the author identifies, largely through Margaret, the ways in which certain
subjects are forced to develop within particular circumstances – a concern that reflects
Wordsworth’s own critique of strict educational practices that do not allow one to learn
from a variety of organically occurring experiences. Such despotic determinism is the
function, then, of both material circumstances and the social constructs that bind subjects
to those circumstances, and such a situation becomes a focal point in North and South,
particularly in the chapter entitled “Masters and Men.” Here, Margaret asserts her
concerns about the working class and their slave-like servitude to their factory masters.
Taking on the parent-child model, Margaret likens the factory workers to “tall, large
children” who are kept in ignorance so as to assure their “blind unreasoning kind of
obedience” (119), this “unreasoning” aspect going against the fundamental Unitarian

25 In the introduction of this dissertation, I explain how I have coopted and revised Raymond Williams’s
term “structure of feeling,” which identifies the experience or feeling of living within a set or system of
social conditions that have a strong sway on self formation; Williams uses this expression instead of
determinism so as to acknowledge that social institutions are never static, are always shifting, and within
this shifting the individual still maintains some degree of agency; see Marxism and Literature 131-32. in
Subjectivities, Regenia Gagnier’s provides an excellent example of the term’s definition and further critical
engagement, though another excellent example relevant to Victorian literature can be found in Ruth
Livesey’s more recent work, “Communicating with Jane Eyre: Stagecoach, Mail, and the Tory Nation.”
tenet that each individual must determine his/her world-view for him- or herself.
Margaret’s implicit argument is that the laborers must be provided with better guidance and education (in a general sense). In response, Thornton continues using the child-parent metaphor, claiming that the working class is “happiest under the unfailing laws of a discreet, firm authority” (120). Mr. Hale furthers Margaret’s point, by retorting that children do need to be made obedient at first, but that “a wise parent humors the desire for independent action so as to become the friend and advisor when his absolute rule shall cease” (120-1).

While there is much that has been said in regards to Mr. Hale’s paternalist model, I want to focus not on whether Gaskell ultimately subscribes to this model as the correct way of addressing the conditions of the poor; rather, I want to explore momentarily its assertions about the human subject, determinism, and agency. Within Mr. Hale’s model, a rather Unitarian model, the child grows into their individuality through an education determined by their parents. Unitarians especially promoted the controlling of circumstances and stimulus in the education of children. Through these educational practices, parents could “check whatever is wrong and vicious . . . before it be fixed into a habit”; indeed, the habits and minds of children were seen as “exceedingly pliable,” giving parents an “uncontrolled authority over” their children and allowing these authors “almost to mould them as [they] please” (“A Serious Address to Masters of Families,” 453). Yet, as Margaret and Mr. Hale affirm, the ultimate goal of their own social theory is to lead the subject to a state of independence – that is, to teach them the ability to operate as an informed and active agent amidst the influences of their circumstances, circumstances they must learn to shape for their own improvement.
A similar perspective can be found in Kay’s *The Moral and Physical Conditions*:

If we would really improve the condition of the lower classes . . . we ought to endeavor to make them acquainted with the principles that must determine their condition in life. The poor ought to be taught, that they are in a great measure the architects of their own fortune. (62)

The model Kay suggests here is certainly in accord with Priestley’s, Unitarian educational reform in general, as well as the Hales. Gaskell offers Nicholas Higgins as an example of how guidance can lead to individual agency and self-determination. While at first a prime example of the lower-class worker whose circumstances led him to a life of squalor and intoxication, with the guidance of the Hales – a guidance that is by no means forceful or domineering – Nicholas is encouraged to take better care of himself and to even become a positive influence on those around him. Towards the end of the novel Nicholas has cleaned up and shows “a sober judgment, and regulated method of thinking, where were at variance with his former more eccentric jerks of action” (338). Equally significant is that Nicholas gains, through his own determination, employment with Mr. Thornton and goes on to help the latter plan and build a communal dinning-room for the workers of Thornton’s factory (361). In this way, Gaskell provides a physical index of Nicholas’ increasing capacity to effect changes within his own world.

Yet, within this bildungsroman, Margaret is the key figure and though she shows a great deal of agency throughout the novel, I believe it is in the discussion of the factory workers, her interactions with them, and her observations of their own outcomes that she begins to sense the dual potential for positive external influence and positive social influence within the urban sphere. Gaskell thus provides a sense of environmental self-
fashioning that was integral to Unitarian educational beliefs (and the associationist psychology on which it was based), which ultimately led to “a new kind of human making” (Mason 159). Of course, the belief in a malleable self, I have shown in previous chapters, proves a continuation of eighteenth-century empiricism. Yet, what Mason means to highlight, I believe, is Unitarianism’s more systemic and aggressive approach to human malleability, an aggressiveness intended to make the most of the individual’s capacity to be improved via the proper circumstances and conditions. As Margaret sees and articulates the potential for human improvement in others, she also becomes more conscious of her own agency within the chain of deterministic causality. It is precisely Margaret’s agency to control her own psychological state and self-formation that proves the focus and argument of Gaskell’s bildungsroman.

Margaret Hale’s Environmental Self-Fashioning

Over the course of the novel, as we have seen, Margaret realizes the authoritative influence locality has on subjectivity, particularly the influence of Milton-Northern. Also in continual focus are the forces and forms of authority and independence. Given Margaret and Mr. Hales’ assertions to John Thornton that authority and individual agency can co-exist, it seems logical that a similar attitude be taken towards the seemingly contradictory powers of determinism and individual will. This final section, then, explores how Margaret Hale proves a paragon of environmental self-fashioning and how, in the process, she reveals the compatibility of external influence and personal volition. Margaret’s self-formation reveals to other characters within the novel the potential for
psychological control and self-cultivation that external conditions affords those who are willing to become active agents in the cause-and-effect chain of determinism. By portraying this paradigm of environmental self-fashioning, Gaskell resolves larger Victorian concerns about selfhood addressed in the introduction of this chapter, particularly the sense that external influence must necessarily be seen as antithetical to the individual will, self-control, and moral responsibility.

In exploring Margaret’s environmentally oriented subject formation, I also want to stress the spatial practices she enacts to become an active agent in the chain of causation and thus control (to some degree) the condition of her psyche and her sense of self. Through place-oriented habits, customs, home fashioning, and her efforts to control her own mobility, Margaret exemplifies a profound, if not always self-aware, form of psychological control, which is based on a contemporaneous understanding of external influence and psycho-physiology. Such practices, along with habits of thought, do not dismiss structures of influence; rather, they allow Margaret to mitigate and even utilize external influence for her own purposes, for her own environmental self-fashioning. In presenting Margaret’s subject formation amidst a deterministic milieu, North and South provides a conception of self and psychology as a function of engagement with external conditions rather than as an autonomous entity.

To begin my analysis, I will return to where we left Margaret in the first section. Margaret does not have much time in Helstone, and her hybridity and heterogeneity becomes all the more evident when the Hale family relocates to Milton-Northern in Darkshire. Her London refinement is particularly on display when she interacts with John Thornton, his mother, and his sister, Fanny. When dining at the Thornton home, the
elaborate and superfluous spread proves oppressive to Margaret’s “London cultivated taste” (160). Her “habits of society” prepare her for many interactions and new situations in Milton, but they also elicit criticism, particularly from Mrs. Thornton (61). Margaret’s rural habits, however, appear more readily, perhaps because of the way they stick out in Milton. For instance, Margaret gathers some “hedge and ditch flowers” from the fields just outside town, causing Nicholas Higgins, who she is meeting for the first time, to say, “Yo’re not of this country, I reckon?” (72). After speaking with Nicholas and Bessy awhile, Margaret offers to visit them at their home. Such visits were seen as part of a philanthropic mission to assist the poor, a type of kind gesture that certainly qualifies as one of “the old Helstone habits of thought” (157); of course, these visits were a habit of Margaret’s at Helstone, where they were “an understood thing” (73). Nicholas Higgins understands, too, but his response suggests that he finds the gesture an “impertinence on her part” (73). Margaret’s habits often mark her as foreigner while she resides in Milton, and her social customs in particular lead to many misunderstandings with Milton residents.

What is not lost in translation, however, are the qualities Margaret has cultivated from her rural life, which come through in her sympathetic and sunny countenance. As we have already seen, such qualities were identified with inhabitants of warmer climates and contrasted with the frank and unfeeling natures of northern inhabitants. Bessy Higgins highlights this connection between affect and place after a visit from Margaret: “I wonder if there are many folk like her down South. She’s like a breath of country air, somehow. She freshens me up above a bit” (138). At first blush, the lines might suggest a merely symbolic use of climate for affect, which happens frequently across Gaskell’s
novel and many other literary works in the nineteenth century. Yet, given the novel’s persistent and associationist-informed focus on the correlation between external conditions and subjectivity, to say that these moments are merely symbolic robs them of their full import and impedes our own critical understanding of Gaskell’s project. More than just metaphor, the ease and frequency with which Gaskell uses climatic conditions to depict internal feelings and the expressions they engender further reinforces the extent to which she saw the external world as interconnected with human interiority. To reinforce the revivifying influence Margaret has on urban residents, Gaskell frequently describes her face as a “sweet sunny countenance” or uses some similar reference to sun, brightness, or sweetness, words also used to describe Helstone (124; see also 72, 192, 340, 415). Such moments reinforce the extent to which Margaret’s subjectivity has incorporated the influence of her rural home.

Still, Milton offers its own structure of influence, one that Margaret finds rather abrasive at first but to which she will inevitably assimilate and adapt. For instance, Margaret initially finds the streets to be a “disorderly tumult” that forces her take on a “pace” that the traffic necessitates (70-71). Yet, in time, Margaret learns “to thread her way through the irregular stream of human beings that flowed through Milton streets” (171).26 Margaret’s adaption is itself an effect of determinism, but it is one that simultaneously restores her agency. In addition to learning how to navigate Milton spatially, Margaret also learns to navigate Milton socially, becoming more involved in the lives of Milton people while she takes on their own customs and language (237). In

26 The key variable here is Margaret’s adaptation, as gained through experience. Initially, Margaret seem feel to have any willpower within the stream of humanity – she had to match its pace and struggle with its currents. Second, as with my discussion of determinism, which has prioritized the term “environmental” over “social”; here too we see how easily the social becomes contextualized as a part of one’s environment.
time, Margaret finds herself acclimating to Milton because she is disposed to doing so – having found a “human interest” in the Higgins – though interestingly this results from her continuing the social practices she had learned in Helstone (74). It would seem, then, that while Margaret adapts – alters certain habits, activities, and attitudes to be in tune with the place and people – she also maintains core aspects of herself that were explored above, such as her warmth, grace, and individual agency. All of these characteristics the Milton milieu appears to work against.

Margaret’s ability to retain what might be referred to as her Helstone aspect is, in part, through mental determination, but there are external practices at work, too. Significant to Margaret’s efforts of maintaining valued characteristics is her affinity for fashioning. We see this in her fashioning of clothes – Bessy comments on how Margaret’s dresses are not like those of other middle-class women in Milton – as well as in her fashioning of Hale home in Milton. When Mr. Thornton first enters their warmly lit living room, he notices how,

with country habits, they did not exclude the night-skies, and the outer darkness of air. Somehow, that room contrast itself with [his own, which was] twenty times as fine; not one quarter as comfortable . . . . It appeared to Mr. Thornton that all these graceful cares were habitual to the family; and especially of a piece with Margaret. She stood by the tea-table in a light-coloured muslin gown, which had a good deal of pink about it. (78)

In this scene, familiar habits, the materiality of home decor and clothing, and the fashioning of a psychological atmosphere of peace and comfort all come together. The house the Hales rent in Milton had originally suffered from the “overloading” of gaudy
wallpaper and heavy cornices (61), a taste connected with commercial people and their general insensibility. Such is the case with the Thornton’s own living space, which is so encumbered with color and ornament that “it became a weariness to the eye” (160). In rejecting the over-stimulating décor originally in the house, Margaret utilizes Helstone fashions and habits to create a psycho-physiological effect similar to that which Helstone itself produces: one defined by grace, relaxation, and softness. Margaret’s decorative touches also point to the power of association and habit of thought, as these familiar objects keep Helstone, and its positive valances, in the minds of the family.27 Such power is, of course, under Margaret’s control, allowing her to cultivate desired habits of thought.

The home becomes, in this way, a powerful technology for producing a desired structure of feeling and structure of self; it also allows for a degree of psychological management as it provides a space in which Margaret can gain control over external forces and internal responses. One such example of this control is the “genius for management” Margaret exhibits when determining who will inhabit what rooms of the house. Focusing primarily on the affinities of each person, and prioritizing those who are most in need of positive influence, Margaret parcels out the rooms: mother takes the

27 The association of objects in the Hale home with Helstone is again revisited when Margaret prepares to leave for London. Interestingly, Margaret is described as setting out “again upon her travels through the house, turning over articles, known to her from her childhood, with a sort of caressing reluctance to leave them—old-fashioned, worn and shabby, as they might be” (366). Placing “travels” within the house not only speaks to the sense that these objects have travelled from Helstone to Milton but also how these objects and their signification of home have also become associated with this house in Milton. The associative power of domestic arrangement is also seen in a strange moment when Mrs. Thornton decides to warm up to Margaret because “a sudden remembrance, suggested by something in the arrangement of the room” brings back to Mrs. Thornton’s mind a child of hers that died in infancy. The remembrance “melted her icy crust” (181). Gallagher cites such moments as illogical, and her overall discussion of association in North and South greatly overlooks the centrality of place within the novel’s method of signification; see Gallagher 170-181.
“cheerful” sitting area as she has been the most discontented by the move; Dixon, equally disgruntled, receives a back room away from the noise of stairs about which she had “grumbled so” at Helstone (61). Much in the same way that environmental psychology is often put in practice today – in architectural planning and the layout of retail floor space – Margaret makes a concerted effort to use constructed space to create a positive psychological climate within the home (something she was unable to do in Helstone).

Another example of how home-space is used for psychological control can be seen in Margaret’s tendency to close herself off in various rooms when experiencing powerful emotions. While in Milton, and as her life becomes increasingly stressful from the labor riot and her mother’s worsening condition, John Thornton’s marriage proposal, her brother’s visit despite his being wanted for mutiny, her own trouble with the police, and the condescension of Mrs. Thornton, Margaret again and again uses the spaces of home to shelter herself, a physical withdrawal from the world that has clear psychological implications (191, 198, 254, 282, 345). In this private space, Margaret releases “her strong will” from the “laborious task” of keeping up appearances, keeping emotions at bay; here she can cry “most heartily” and thereby “allow herself this relief” (191, 254). Behind the locked door Margaret can pursue her emotional process without

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^28 Matus focuses on the moments in *North and South* where Margaret experiences intense emotions that have “destabilizing effects . . . on identity and self-knowledge,” including when she swoons after the policeman leaves; yet, the only agency Matus appears to grant Margaret is through unconscious or impulsive acts (such as when she mechanically lies to the policeman (74, 79-81). Because of her focus on interiority, Matus does not discuss Margaret’s attempts to deal with strong emotion behind closed doors and thus through spatial practices, which overlooks, I argue, Margaret’s agency and its significance to her character.
encroachment, or, as is the case when the policeman leaves and Margaret takes refuge in her room, she can sit tight until her “numbed faculties” return to working order (283).

Such moments and the corollary, metaphoric use of domestic spaces like “cupboards” to figure Margaret’s psyche reveal her ability to partition and privatize her psyche. We should not, however, lose sight of the causal relationship between space and psyche that allows for the metaphoric correlation to have any significance\(^\text{29}\); rather, the influence of her environment becomes a powerful tool by which Margaret can take some control over her mental life.\(^\text{30}\) Such portrayals of the domestic space – or the country or city-street – remind us that the psyche is not a discrete system but is quite integrated with an external world. They also remind us of the ability of individuals and society at large to control the environment controlling them.

Such practices might, however, increase Margaret’s metamorphosis via “town life” as she spends a good deal of her time “pent-up” in the Hale home – a spatial condition that “of itself is enough to induce depression and worry of spirits,” as we saw earlier. Yet, Margaret remains in a constant negotiation with the shaping forces around here, so that her control of space is not simply her ability to close psychic and physical barriers but to control them. Margaret’s control of domicile barriers becomes an

\(^{29}\) In their introduction to *Domestic Spaces*, Bryden and Floyd similarly point to how domestic space “participated in the formation of the psychical lives of those who inhabited it” while also mentioning how “the household interior becomes a metaphor for the psyche,” thus implying if not overtly stating the conjunction of causal and metaphorical aspects to the self/home relationship. More directly, Sharon Marcus points to the architectural determinism in Victorian thought and, particularly, architectural theory, showing how the belief in a physical structure’s “agency” over the human mind “contributed to the ease with which [the structure] could becomes personified as subjects that spoke to or influenced human beings” (118). My effort here largely builds from this understanding, which I argue allows for, amongst other structures of determinism, personal agency in subject formation.

\(^{30}\) For this reason, I disagree with Deffenbacher’s account of the “psychic barriers” or purely symbolic figurations of Margaret’s psyche as well as with her sense that Margaret is able to “elude the determining influence of her spatial environment” through these imaginary practices of compartmentalization (124-25).
important and repeated image throughout *North and South*, and it becomes a means for her to control psychological states and an important aspect of the independence integral to her sense of self. We have already seen that keeping an open window in the Hale home is a “country habit” that affords a sense of casual comfort, and we have also seen in reference to Heston shopkeepers how closed vs. open windows and doors has an inevitable affect on sociability – thus, while symbolic, the open window also has a causal relationship to sympathetic identification. The open window also has a mutually symbolic and causal influence on one’s psychological state, as is evident when Margaret, after John Thornton’s proposal, feels the closed bedroom fill with her own anxieties until “She went to the window, and threw it open, to dispel the oppression which hung around her” (198). While the air in Milton is, we know, less revivifying than air in the country, it can still prove more beneficent than the stifled air of a room.

In addition to opening up the home to outside air, Margaret also proves eager quit the household in an effort to find emotional release and/ personal efficacy. After Mrs. Thornton reproaches Margaret based on rumor, and after Margaret indignantly leaves the room to shut herself up in her own, she begins to pace “in her old habitual way of showing agitation” (321). But realizing that “every step was heard from one room to another,” she sits down until Mrs. Thornton is heard leaving the house and then leaves the room and home altogether, “going rapidly towards the country” (323). Thus, Margaret uses spatial practices to express and affect her psychological state: she is aware of her behaviors within spatial-social context and takes control of the barriers of that space to suit her needs.

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31 Moore makes a similar point in her discussion of “Libbie Marsh’s Three Eras,” 84.
Margaret’s control over domestic barriers is not limited to her own home, either. At the Thornton house, she leaves on her own will, and she earlier “threw the window wide open” on her own accord so as to get a better view of the strike mob outside (177). As a frequent visitor to the people of Helstone, Margaret became used to crossing the thresholds of others, and we see her continue this behavior in Milton. In one notable scene, Margaret even blocks the door of the Higgins home so that Nicholas cannot go out and drink (220-21). By taking control over domestic barriers, Margaret reveals her agency, controls her psychological state, and also seeks to affect the behaviors of others.

Margaret’s spatial control points to the importance of agency and efficacy to Margaret’s psyche and self, as well as to the value of having a variety of duties. After learning about the severity of her mother’s illness, but knowing there is nothing she can presently do, Margaret goes out, and “the length of a street—yes, the air of a Milton Street—cheered her young blood before she reached her first turning” (132). Rather than let the mood of the house stifle her, Margaret wills herself out into streets that revivify her. While Margaret takes control of her physical mobility, thereby affecting her psychological state, she also makes the choice to visit the Higgins rather than the nearby fields; “It would not be so refreshing as a quiet country walk, but still it would perhaps be doing the kinder thing” (132). Here, Margaret makes a difficult choice between a country indulgence to brighten her spirits and a social good. Both afford a sense of agency and freedom, but the latter affords a greater sense of personal efficacy.

Much of Margaret’s spatial practices amount to her exertion of agency, a willingness to take action, to be useful. Within the home, Margaret cultivates productive activity – whenever Gaskell depicts visitors to the Hale home, Margaret is always set to
some small task – and this greatly distinguishes her from the urban indolence of Edith and Fanny as well as from the poor domestic economy exhibited by the Higgins girls. Such habits also become a tool for dealing with her emotional states; for instance, when she learns that the legal attempts to set Frederick’s record straight are meeting little success, she becomes agitated, but then “she rose up, and determined at once to set to on some work which should take her out of herself” (345). Such moments may be minor in the scope of the narrative, but they point to habits that become integral to Margaret’s character, as well as to key scenes of the text. In the face of extreme situations, Margaret’s habit is to take action, such as when she protects John Thornton at the strike or agrees to tell Mrs. Boucher of her husband’s death (after all others refused to do so).

All in all, Milton does have its effect on Margaret, but it is one specific to her, shaped by her own spatial practices and disposition. “If you live in Milton, you must learn to have a brave heart,” Mrs. Thornton tells Margaret the first time they meet, and Margaret is willing to learn this lesson (116). Only a year or so later, Margaret assures Frederick that she can accompany him to the train station and then walk back home alone, explaining “‘I am getting very brave and hard. It is a well-lighted road all the way home, if it should be dark. But I was out last week much later’” (262). Margaret’s hard quality likens hers to the inflexible and iron nature of other Milton folk, and Margaret is herself aware of this transformation. She is led to reflect on how much she has changed, like Frederick, in the eight years since the mutiny, eight years spent mostly in London and Milton. This part of her life had “produced such great changes in herself . . . [H]er tastes and feelings had so materially altered” (248). Gaskell’s choice to incorporate “materially” is noteworthy, indicating the materialism that informs her understanding of
how tastes, feelings, and subjects are altered – and the correlation with Frederick only reinforces this materialist reading.

After the deaths of her mother and father, Margaret’s Aunt Shaw comes to retrieve her and insists they return to London as Margaret “would never regain her lost strength while she stayed in Milton” (363). In London, though, Margaret feels as though an inmate in luxury and is little inclined to engage with this environment, spending much of her time, instead, longing for her independent, Milton life (372). Finding London at odds with her habits and desires, Margaret makes for Helstone only to find that it is no longer the place she once knew. Her home has been remodeled, a school has been added, “a tree gone here, bough there, bringing in a long ray of light . . . a road was trimmed and narrowed, and the green stragging pathway by its side enclosed and cultivated. A great improvement it was called; but Margaret sighed over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days” (394). Its wild freedom mitigated, Helstone has become a produced space like any other, a space that is conditioned by individual and social agency, reflecting the needs and values of the inhabitants. Particularly significant is the narrowed road and enclosed pathway that curtail the wayward habits of foot and thought – the word “narrowed” recalling the correlation between the factory workers’ monotonous lives and narrow interests.

Because Helstone’s own unique structure of influence has been altered, the subjectivity it affords has also been changed, leading to Margaret’s crisis of self. There is also the sense that, if Helstone can become modernized, so too can the pure interiority it symbolized and effected. No longer can she rely on the clear dichotomy of north and south and no longer can she assume some deep, inner self will always remain unchanged.
She feels her own “individual nothingness” and laments: “I am … so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place” (400). Yet, upon Margaret’s later reflection, she realizes “I too change perpetually—now this, now that—now disappointed . . . because all is not exactly as I had pictured it, and now suddenly discovering that the reality is far more beautiful than I had imagined it” (401). Here, Margaret realizes the inevitability that places and selves will change, and that both she and Helstone have changed for the better. In this case, both have taken a firmer or more rigid feature, even as they retain much of their former brightness and warmth. Thus, we must note that Margaret, like Helstone, has not just changed for the sake of changing, for the evolutionary directive of progress through variation. Instead, Margaret has adapted herself and her surroundings to retain and cultivate certain core qualities of self, even if, at times, it required sacrificing past habits and affects. Margaret has changed, but this change has been a negotiation between her own desires and the structural influences of the environments she has inhabited, each one providing new influences and thus new effects within the structure of her own selfhood.

While Margaret has effected a great deal of agency in the control of her psychological condition and her developing sense of self, her agency has not always been entire. Of course, as Priestley argued, choices do not happen in a vacuum, so all agency is

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32 Mariaconcentta Constantini outlines a thorough and intriguing analysis of *North and South* from a evolutionary perspective, and while I am sympathetic to her sense of Margaret’s ability to adapt to her environment, I do think this argument, or rather its lens, falls short in a few critical ways. The key issue is in how Constantini represents Margaret as always seeking change and how, in a Darwinian sense, change necessarily equals progress. Yet, Margaret appears quite resistant to change at times, though, particularly when she first arrives at Milton and when she returns to Helstone, as we have just seen. Furthermore, we have seen how environmental determinisms do not always effect positive changes – indeed, one can become insensible so as to deal with the cold weather or overwhelming stimulus. Rather, Gaskell presents a much more conscientious approach to adaption that is predicated on reason and agency rather (simply) biological directives. For another look at *North and South* and evolution, see Martin’s “Gaskell, Darwin, and *North and South*,” which focuses on social Darwinism and the novel’s emphasis on struggle.
to a degree contingent on one’s circumstances. Margaret has had the advantage of experiencing numerous structures of influence and gleaning from each their potential effects on subjectivity, from which she has been able to make decision about what aspects of self she would like to cultivate; even so, she has been forced to deal with present contexts that do not always abide by the structures of subjectivity she wishes to cultivate – and we have seen this tension and negotiation played out in her Milton narrative. In short, Margaret still lacks control of her own mobility; up until now, she has been unable to choose the structures of influence that best suit her desired subjectivity.

Yet, Margaret has already shown a degree of agency in her mobility within Milton, and her decisions to move back to London is her own choice, even if that choice is encouraged by others. Her subsequent visit to Helstone is her choice as well, which comes in response to her sudden recollection that London life was a constrictive one. At her Aunt Shaw’s, she finds herself “an inmate” to the monotony that “the wheels of machinery of daily life” – a clear reference to industrial labor and an invocation of the rigidity it produces (372). Even more significantly, after Helstone, when Mr. Bell has returned to Oxford where his health takes a sudden turn for the worse, Margaret insists on visiting him, even by herself if she must, to the protest of her London company. The gesture of agency even catches her off guard: “she was surprised herself at the firmness with which she asserted something of her right to independence of action” (411). There is in this moment already a sense of how Milton has changed Margaret, who once accepted the luxurious prison of London, a sense of how Milton has afforded Margaret the hardness and bravery necessary to demand the independence that was so easily accessed (and so much beloved) in Helstone.
In taking increased agency over her own geographic movements, Margaret has, at the same time, taken full control over her subject formation. After visiting Oxford, and another brief stay in London, Margaret begins to plan where she will go next – and her choices are telling. At first, she hopes to travel to Cadiz to see her brother; and while the desire for familial comfort is at work in this choice, we must recall, too, how Margaret saw Spain’s climate as much improving Frederick’s character, a hope she might wish for herself. Yet, in realizing the improbability of a trip to Spain, she accepts that “she would have to content herself with Cromer,” but here the choice has little to do with her desire to accompany the London set. Instead, Margaret sees that this place might be “the best for her. She needs bodily strengthening and bracing as well as rest” (414). The physiological bolstering and psychological recuperation – the effects of Cromer’s structure of influence – become the decisive qualities in Margaret’s first application of her new-found independence. Gaskell had her own affinity for the rural, seaside towns, and how it allowed her to escape, albeit momentarily, from the anxieties of Manchester, and certainly Margaret chooses to undergo a similar convalescence. Watching the shore for long hours, noting the slightly agitated but “perpetual motion” of the waves, looking “out upon the more distant heave,” Margaret has a psycho-physiological experience (“She was soothed without knowing how or why”) bordering on the religious (she “heard, without being conscious of hearing, the eternal psalm”) (414). Of course, to conjoin environmental influence with the divine is not at all surprising given Gaskell’s background; Priestley’s belief in necessitarianism held that all determinisms and natural

33 Gaskell’s letters show that she was frequently prescribed the ameliorating effects of rural or seaside climate, either for herself and her daughter Marianne, and these prescriptions were often followed in the form of vacations to rural and/or coastal locations like Poulton-Le Sands, the family’s Boughton House, and Silverdale. See Chapple 83; and Foster 24.
laws led back to the same first cause, the creator. “The system of necessity makes every man the maker of his own fortune,” Priestley claims, and such is one’s “intcourse with the Deity” who through these determinisms condescends to offer the “familiar light of a parent or governor” (Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity 503-4). Even in this divine moment, Margaret’s selfhood is material, malleable, inherently unstable, but this selfhood is also autonomous and spiritual. Through the revivification Margaret acquires for herself via a beneficial, and beneficent, structure of influence, she is able to take stock of her life; this context for reflection “enabled Margaret to put events in their right places” (415). Margaret, it would seem, has cultivated a desired subjectivity that in turn has allowed her a profound degree of psychological control, an agency that will beget more agency. And this most recent change to her subjectivity and sense of self is apparent in “the look that Margaret’s face was gradually acquiring”; certainly, “Mr. Henry Lennox was excessively struck by the change” (415).

As a way of concluding, I would like to place two narrative moments in proximity to show how Gaskell’s novel has shifted from a self-fashioning mode to one of environmental self-fashioning. In the first chapter, a London-placed Margaret is forced to try on Indian shawls bought for Edith, the latter being disinclined towards the garments and the “gipsy” life with which they are associated (7). Gaskell writes:

Margaret’s tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father’s, set off the long folds of the gorgeous shawls . . . . Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there – the familiar features in the
usual garb of a princess. She touched the shawls gently as they hung around her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant colours.

(9)

With little narrative yet in place, the scene is all subtle and unstable allusion. Certainly the shawls have come from India, sent by Captain Lennox for Edith to try on so that she might wear them in Corfu. Yet, their significance to Margaret is never quite clear – but nonetheless we see something significant in her reaction to them. There is something she sees in the “brilliant colours” set off against the more austere black dress that accords well with her character, or, at least, the character she would like to be. She looks to Henry Lennox, who has just entered, “with a bright, amused face” (9).

At the end of the novel, in Cromer, Henry is again witness to Margaret’s fashions and self-fashioning. Henry comments on Margaret’s appearance, suggesting that “[t]he sea has done Miss Hale an immense deal of good” (415). Edith argues, self-importantly, that it is because of the bonnet she bought for Margaret, but Henry retorts: “I believe I know the difference between the charms of dress and the charms of a woman. No mere bonnet would have made Miss Hale’s eyes so lustrous and yet so soft, or her lips so ripe and red—and her face altogether so full of peace and light.—She is like, and yet more . . . . like the Margaret Hale of Helstone.” (415). Henry is right to associate Margaret’s luminous aspect with place, even if he fails to identify what exactly is the “more.” Before him, of course, is not just the Margaret of Helstone, rather the Margaret who has been industrially fortified through her Milton experience and then revivified through her southern travels. A vagabond unbounded by one locality but connected to many, Margaret Hale has successfully embodied the iron strength of Milton-Northern in
Darkshire while still exuding the bright warmth of the south. Alike but different from the Margaret before, the one who saw in the mirror an ideal self, the one whose dual-nature was defined by an austere black dress and a brightly colored shawl. By the novel’s close, this initial fashioning through clothes has become a more intrinsic and more willful fashioning through place.
CHAPTER 4 – ‘INFLUENCE OF LOCALITY’: DICKENS’S ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

In *Physiology of Common Life* (1859), G. H. Lewes provides a definition for life as “the dynamical condition of the Organism” (2: 415). This “dynamical condition” equates to “the mutual relations of organism and medium that determine the manifestations we name Life; and the error is great when men attempt to solve vital problems without duly taking all external conditions into account” (2: 426, 436). To explain the relation between mental being and place, Lewes adopts a Lamarckian view of psychology as Herbert Spencer had, suggesting that organisms acquire “characters and tendencies” through environment-mediated activities (2: 382). Lewes’s definition of life and understanding of the psyche offers a way to understand how organisms engage with their world as well as a standard by which to critique psychological verisimilitude in fiction. Adopting such a standard, Lewes famously criticizes Charles Dickens’ portrayal of human subjects, who have been given “mechanisms for minds, puppets for characters” (“Dickens in Relation to Criticism” 148). These figures, Lewes argues, act mechanically in response to external situations, suggesting that they do not learn or adapt in any clear or meaningful way. Their behaviors are “calculable”; they are like “frogs whose brains have been taken out for physiological purposes, and whose actions henceforth want the distinctive peculiarity of organic action” (148).
Lewes’s reproach brought scientific authority to similar complaints raised by literary critics of the time; George Eliot, for instance, had already praised Dickens’ “utmost power of rendering the external traits” but lamented the lack of “psychological character” in his fictional subjects (451). Both Lewes’s and Eliot’s complaints – the one outwardly focused, the other inwardly searching – have been critical touchstones ever since. What has resulted is a rather nuanced discourse over the status of subjectivity, ontology, and identity in Dickens’ fiction.\(^1\) Contemporary criticism has often accepted the supposed flatness of these characters, reframing it in some positive way.\(^2\) Others have sought to reclaim a sense of internal, psychological depth.\(^3\) Only a relative few of have prioritized external behaviors of Dickens’s characters, such as habits and mannerisms.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) For more on the debate over Dickens’s characters, see Chase 96-98; Rosenberg 6-30; Vrettos 2000, 401.

\(^2\) Ian Duncan argues that Bleak House can be read “as a massive critique of the humanist project of free indirect discourse” (19). See also James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction* (2005) 120-134. Karen Chase concedes the “incompleteness” of Dickens’s characterization, finding his fictional subjects to be inflexible and limited “features of personality,” going on to make the creative yet questionable argument that “If we must agree with Lewes that Dickens’s characters lack the ‘complexity of the organism,’ we can yet recover ‘organic action’ by taking a wider view. The plot is the relevant organism, because the plot is a system of embodied personal forces—guilt, aggression, innocence, authority, punishment, desire” (103). James Kincaid agrees that “we come to the novels equipped to detect a real essence behind that role, a face behind the mask. But in Dickens we are forced to wonder,” but, he argues that the portrayal of roles and roleplaying is a deliberate questioning of the stability of selfhood (82, 77). Michael Kearns both agrees with Lewes but still explores Dickens’s depiction of internal psychic processes (138).

\(^3\) Beth Herst and Andrew Miller similarly point to the alienated and fragmented psyches of Dickens’s characters, which result from modern life. John Kucich, focusing on repression, explores these characters’ “inwardly initiated self-conflicts” (246). For scholarship that more clearly engages Dickens’s portrayal of interior processes with the psychological theory of his era, see Harvey Sucksmith on memory (1970,166-180), and Nicholas Dames on déjá vu (129-147), Jill Matus on trauma (83-120), Kearns on tensions between reason and emotion (136-140), Anna Neill on mental disorders, particularly epilepsy, and Fred Kaplan on mesmerism (106-138).

\(^4\) Mary Noble discusses Darwin's use of Dickens's descriptions of expression for his own *The Expression of Emotions* (1871), which affirms the psychological / biological realism of Dickens's characters, at least in Darwin’s eyes. Vrettos makes the argument that the sometimes mechanical quality of characters in Dickens’s novels reflects the “competing narratives of mental flexibility and rigidity in nineteenth-century psychological writings” concerning the effects of habit (400); thus, it is precisely their repetitive aspects that prove their psychological realism. Interestingly, Vrettos points to evidence in Dickens’s work of “mental permeability and intersubjective exchange that radically challenged the boundaries of mind and coherence of the self” (411). While Vrettos claims this as a particular interest, she glosses over the subject. I hope to offer a more developed study of mental permeability in Dickens’s work, prioritizing the reciprocity between subject and place and its role in cohering a sense of self.
It is unfortunate, both for Dickens scholarship and for our critical grasp of the Victorian subject, that none of the relevant criticism has fully explored nor taken clear aim at Lewes’s primary criticism: the inability of Dickens’ characters to engage with their ecological mediums in reflexive, effective, and ultimately realistic ways. This omission highlights the general tendency in criticism to privilege the inward portrayal of character (much like Eliot does) and to neglect what psychological and evolutionary theorists of the mid-nineteenth-century were telling their contemporaries: the way subjects engage with their environment not only reveals their psychological capabilities, but also determines who they are and what they will become. These theories had taken a firm grasp on the literary culture of Britain by the time Dickens began writing his final completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, and to neglect the manner in which characters in this novel engage with and adapt to their environments is thus to ignore Dickens’s own evolving portrayal of the human subject. Furthermore, allowing Lewes’s criticism to go unchecked has encouraged scholarship to overlook Dickens’s efforts to portray urban organisms rather than urban puppets, efforts that highlight not simply the experience of the urban world but also the ways in which these characters respond in reflexive and adaptive ways. In this chapter, I argue that Dickens strives for a form of mimesis founded on biological and psychological principles and that the characters of *Our Mutual Friend* engage their diegetic environment in the adaptive and dynamic ways. By focusing more on external behavior in context to the world rather than on enclosed interiority, Dickens creates characters that his audience must meet, read, and learn in the same manner they would meet, read, and learn subjects in their own lives.
By the 1860s, Dickens had read various forms of ecological discourse and adaptive psychology. Furthermore, he was aware of the pressure evolutionary theory placed on subjects to acquire tendencies and characteristics so as to be well fitted with the external medium. He was equally aware that all environments – even highly constructed and civilized ones – were still ecological spaces that operated on the same laws of environmental engagement and competition. All this is evident when Mr. Boffin acknowledges to Mrs. Boffin, after their drastic social ascension via inherited wealth:

“Our old selves wouldn’t do here, old Lady. Haven’t you found that out yet? Our old selves would be fit for nothing here but to be robbed and imposed upon. Our old selves weren’t people of fortune; our new selves

5 Dickens owned many books espousing an associationist and/or Lamarckian perspective of the human mind, both of which stressed the adaptive capacity of psychology in response to the external world. Dickens owned Lewes’s *Physiology* and Bell’s *Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression as Connected with the Fine Arts* (1806), the latter of which points to “the adaptation of the mind to the various relations in which man is placed” and that “the sensibility of the external surface of the body is a special endowment adapted to the elements around and calculated to protect the interior parts from injury” (83, 86). Both Lewes and Bell stress the acquisition of traits by the individual organism, putting them in line with Lamarck’s own belief in acquired traits. Of course, both of these texts were written before Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), which Dickens owned and which referenced Spencer’s *Principles* as the best work yet written on the evolution of the human mind. Dickens also owned a number of books that took an associationist approach to the human mind, and thus an approach that stressed the mind’s acquisition from and adaption to the external world, including Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1824 ed.), Hume’s *Essays Treatises on several subjects* (Edinburgh 1825 ed.), Dugald Stewart’s *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), John Chapman’s *The Purpose of Existence popular considered, in relation to the Origin, Development, and Destiny of the Human Mind* (1850). In addition to theoretical works on human physiology, psychology, and evolution, Dickens also owned a wide variety of travel narratives with anthropological interests and books on natural history, including works by Cuvier, Buffon, Bewick, and Gilbert White, whose *Natural History of Selborne* [1825] has been described recently by Amy King as a pioneer in establishing an ecological world-view; see J.J. Stonehouse ed. *Reprints of the Catalogues of the Libraries of Charles Dickens and W. M. Thackeray* 1935. Dickens also wrote an article for *All the Year Round* entitled “Transmutation of the Species,” which includes a discussion of Benoit De Miallet’s, Lamarck’s, and Darwin’s theories of transmutation. Dickens did not own Spencer’s *Principles of Psychology*, but even if he never read *Principles* he would have come across Spencer’s general argument in Lewes’s *Physiology* as well as in an article by Spencer in *The Westminster Review*, “A Theory of Population, deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility,” that argues against Malthus’ theory of population by utilizing Spencer’s own theory of human evolution and adaption. It is worth noting that Dickens wrote a letter to *The Westminster Review* to compliment them on this issue (*Letters of Charles Dickens* 6:638).
are . . . And we must be up to the difference . . . we must be equal to the change. (464)

Stressing fitness to context, Mr. Boffin knows the dangers that their new, aristocratic environs pose to them – environs that Dickens terms “the dismal swamp” in reference to the myriad human “alligators” who attempt to make prey of the Boffins (213). Here, Dickens is in line with the scientists of his time but runs counter to a Victorian tendency to hold human civilization as separate from the world of beasts. As Herbert Spencer argues, “the environment of each organism comprehends all those other organisms existing within its sphere of life,” and “the most important and most numerous changes in the environment, with which each creature has to deal, are the changes exhibited by other creatures, whether prey or enemies” (382). Survival in the city is like survival in any other ecological system, and, throughout Our Mutual Friend, Dickens highlights the successes and failures of characters to adapt to the urban sphere.

By taking an approach that stresses adaptive psychology and the biological foundation of urban experience, I hope to reclaim a sense of agency as well as a degree of ontological and epistemological stability for the urban subject in Dickens’s fiction. Through such agency and stability urban subjects could maintain and even fashion their subjectivity rather than have it be consistently subjugated to external, modern, social forces. Particularly when addressing the urban experience of Dickens’s characters, scholars have performed a double deconstruction: they have claimed the urban space to be illegible, a chaotic space of undistinguishable localities and overwhelming phenomena, and they have connected this to a pervasive experience of alienation and
estrangement that deconstructs identity and even threatens one’s essential humanity. In this chapter, I reestablish the urban subject within a legible ecological locality. To be more precise, I argue that we cannot assume one kind of urban experience that determines one kind of subjectivity. Rather, we must first understand the complexity of the urban environment as providing both an infinite number of threats to survival but also an infinite number of ways to adapt. Second, we must recognize the ways in which characters acquire an environmental literacy – an ability to read place and other subjects within it – allowing for the epistemic stability necessary for one’s cognitive correspondence with the external world. Third, through the creation of a productive correspondence, selfhood is no longer destabilized by place; rather, physical localities become a productive and even necessary means for reconstituting subjective states of being and a sense of self. Even in moments where subjectivity is formed through

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6 In *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams points to the “the coexistence of variation and apparent randomness with what had in the end to be seen as a determining system,” thus leading to a “common condition and destiny” (154). Williams also writes, “Dickens’s ultimate vision of London is then not to be illustrated by topography or local instance. It lies in the form of his novels” (154); Williams makes clear that what is alienated in the urban system is some essentially human quality, though it is not an “absolute” obliteration (1970, 124). Some combination of Williams’ sense of a pervasive, determined alienation, the shift from geographical place to language as focus, and the sense of some essential human quality lost is by and large repeated in recent scholarship on urban experience in Dickens’s novels. In his “Reading Dickens Writing London,” Murray Baumgarten writes: “As place is destabilized, time may warp too, and the spatio-temporal instability becomes a feature of character identity, a sociological reality, a psychic condition, and a moral destiny” (224); see also Baumgarten 2006. Efraim Sicher claims that “[t]he city’s geography is mapped out through the reading of signs—linguistic as well as topographical – but the itinerary works against mimeses and represents the city’s illegibility by making it visible” (xix). For loss of psychological control in the urban space in regards to *Our Mutual Friend*, see Robert Alter, 50. See Jeremy Tambling 201, See Wolfreys 1996; in his 2012 book on Dickens, Wolfreys similarly suggests “if subjectivity is always tied to place, as I have argued, and if, moreover, place is not fixed as a series of objects but protean … then subjectivity is always unstable” (2012, 160). For Wolfreys, “Dickensian subjectivity is always estranged” because “London shapes – or deforms – subjectivity” (2012, 70, 76).
language and performance, the stability of place proves necessary for the stabilization of these more abstract and ephemeral methods of subject formation.\(^7\)

Like the precursors discussed in the previous chapter, *Our Mutual Friend* offers a paradigm of environmental self-fashioning as it highlights the influence of various localities and the capacity of characters to not only recognize external influences but also utilize and alter the external environment so as to promote and control self-formation. Like Wordsworth, Dickens depicts an environmental epistemology; but rather than exemplify the capacity to gain knowledge and meaning from the environment for the sake of creative prowess, Dickens shows how such a capacity is necessary for survival in the urban milieu. While highlighting the environmental literacy of characters – their ability to read both the environment and other organisms within it – Dickens requires his own readers to forgo their dependence on free indirect discourse and to begin to develop an environmental literacy of their own, a literacy that Lewes either lacked or failed to bring to his reading chair. The other form of adaptive psychology that Dickens develops is the role of cultural artifacts, such as the home, to serve as extensions of psychological functions. Like Wordsworth, then, Dickens recognizes the potential for external objects

\(^7\) I must be clear here – I do not mean to suggest that physical place and language are two separate variables in subject formation – certainly, language informs how one views the environment while environmental circumstances in turn shape and limit language. Still, Dickens’s novel shows that construction of self via language or role-playing is insufficient on its own. To alter selfhood regardless of place is to create a false correspondence, is to make place a theatrical space in which selfhood is wildly abstract and unstable. But by correlating the projects of language and environmental self-formation, a more productive and stable identity can be fostered. For scholarship on self-formation through language or role play, see James Kincaid, who argues convincingly that while “roles or role playing almost inevitably suggest to us a departure from a real self,” we should see in Dickens work an effort to question “the idea of selfhood as an isolated and stable entity” (77). Baumgarten (2001) and Cheadle both stress a similar sense of performativity as being integral to Dickens’s sense of character. John Farrell, who sees in *Our Mutual Friend* a “dialogical self” that is achieved via personal interaction, also suggests identity as influx and as a culmination of social experience. Pam Morris similarly looks to *Our Mutual Friend* and identifies a “lack of any stable or coherent meaning to ‘I’ [that] puts the self in process, enabling a continuous, contingent invention of identity as performance,” a performance that general happens in language, and with various levels of efficacy (2006, 205).
to assist in epistemic gain, but Dickens more clearly portrays how particular artifacts (like the home itself) become a form of prosthesis of the psyche – quite literally a technology of the self. More so than the previous texts, then, Dickens externalizes the human psyche to the point that the self is relational with the external world but also concretized within it, providing characters a greater ability to consider the person they are and to achieve the person they want to become.

Dickens’s Ecology and Environmental Literacy

Much of the scholarship on the landscapes and cityscapes in *Our Mutual Friend* has prioritized the symbolic valences of place. What gets lost in such an approach is Dickens’s depiction of a realistic engagement with the environment, an engagement based on material realities and adaptive capacities as they were understood by the science of the nineteenth century. For instance, these scholars prioritize moments of transcendent transformation through symbols of baptism – particularly in the narratives of Eugene Wrayburn and John Harmon – rather than recognizing the novel’s more pervasive portrayal of adaptive behavior, the latter proving a more stable, biologically-oriented, and

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8 For symbolic readings of Dickens’s cityscapes, see Alexander Welsh’s *The City of Dickens*, Karl Ashley Smith’s *Dickens and the Unreal City*, and Avrom Fleisham’s “The City and the River: Dickens’s Symbolic Landscape.” Other symbolic readings, which largely focus on the Thames as a source of spiritual regeneration, has caused critics to focus on the sudden transformations of John Harmon and particularly Eugene Wrayburn while they leave unexplored the slower adaptive processes exhibited by other characters. Smith, while focusing on this symbolism, points to the “river’s failures to signify in a religious way” (162). Adelene Buckland specifically challenges an evolutionary reading of *Our Mutual Friend* suggesting instead a geological catastrophism that stress transformation rather than adaptation (691). Even Catherine Gallagher stresses “the novel’s use of apparent death and resurrection as a metaphor” (107), and Sicher, who spends much of his attention on sanitary conditions, largely reads the river via religious symbolism (346-369). Elizabeth Ermarth takes a somewhat different but still symbol-oriented approach as she focuses much of her reading on the river and dust mounds as “emblems for the linear flow of time and the disconnected heaps of rubbish produced by it” (197).
realistic form of self-development. Dickens lends his diegetic setting a firm, biological groundwork, and in conjunction with his persistent portrayal of adaptive processes, Dickens ultimately depicts in this novel a scientifically accurate view of the engagement between a subject and their environmental niche. This model provides a causal foundation for much of the novel’s symbolic content, particularly as applied to the interconnection of place and psychological behavior.

Much like Gaskell’s depiction of Milton men, whose iron constitutions and grey dispositions reflected the influence of the industrial city, Dickens signifies the deterministic effects of place by creating semblances between the characters and their environment. We see it in the form of the Veneerings, as new as their new home (6); in Young Blight, as “dismal” as his “dismal window” above a “dismal” churchyard (86), and in Mr. Lammle and his cohorts, who shared with Mr. Lammle’s office “strong points of general resemblance” (261). The most obvious example, however, is the semblance between Gaffer Hexam and the muddy, polluted Thames. Dickens highlights the environmental influence of the polluted Thames – in fact, he names it – when Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood explore the riverside in search of Hexam. After Eugene expresses his feeling that the environment has permeated him, Mortimer pithily responds: “Influence of locality” (164). The polluted water and its “spoiling influences” affect everything around it, from the buildings and boats to the bodies and minds of those who inhabit its shores: even “the water-side heads . . . (like the water) were none the clearest” and “harbored muddled notions” (172, 63).

Through this proliferation of place / person semblance, Dickens’s proves more successful than Gaskell in pointing to the micro-localities within the urban environment
and their unique structures of influence. The London of *Our Mutual Friend* proves not the monochrome Milton-Northern nor the city of fog in *Bleak House* but rather a conglomerate of waterways, streets, deserts, churchyards, parks and sanctuaries, varnished dining rooms, and dusty parlors. Equally significant in Dickens’s portrayal is that these micro-localities are not discrete but rather overlapping or nested. The blurring between localities and their structures of influence becomes clear in the depiction of water-side alleys covered in mud from “ill-savoured tides” (24), or when Dickens refers to the “back-alleys of water” created by the complex of docks on the Thames (171). The polluted river proves a key example of how the material conditions and influences of one locality could overreach its own boundaries. Whether it be the physical waste that drained into the Thames or the “moral sewage” that lived on its banks, such elements would not stay confined to its banks (21). While some of the “influence” here works on an abstract or symbolic level, we must not lose sight of the ecological underpinnings that tie the rest of the city to the Thames. Under such an ecological model, no space is truly discrete and no object or subject is truly autonomous, all are interconnected. The pervasive dust reinforces this condition, as it gets into the nested homes and even the nested minds of

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9 I use the term “nested” here as I did in the introduction, where I referred to Malpas’s sense that smaller localities “however well-defined and apparently self-contained, remain open to [external] influences and resonate so to speak, in response to them” (29).

10 Pamela Gilbert’s “Medical Mapping: the Thames, the Body, and *Our Mutual Friend*” provides a compelling discussion of the polluted Thames’ influence on the health of the city, pointing in particular to the impact of John Snow’s studies on sanitation on the potential for filth in one area to contaminate water elsewhere; in “A More Expansive Reach: the Geography of the Thames in *Our Mutual Friend*,” Michelle Allen also points to “the river’s topographic and imaginary reach” in *Our Mutual Friend*, as a totality that extend across “an assemblage of local communities” as well as the river’s impact on the city’s global image (88, 90).
characters – after falling into dust pile, Silas Wegg has his sense “brushed…into him and the dust out of him” (489).11

Within this environmental context, Dickens’s characters feel strongly the sway of external influence, but they do not remain passive to external forces. Instead, they prove active and adaptive agents in a reciprocal relationship with place. While I will contest Lewes’s conclusion throughout this chapter, I vehemently agree that the way in which subjects engage with their environment should be integral to how we read character, as it reveals conscious choices about who subjects are and what states of being they want to foster. In Dickens’ understanding, the process of environmental self-fashioning is never complete, it is necessarily an ongoing negotiation.

Dickens begins his narrative with the most savage characters of the novel within the most natural part of the city: the Thames River. Here, Dickens establishes a form of evolutionary ground zero within mid-nineteenth-century London, revealing some of the most fundamental forms of acquired characteristics, which can be understood as a form of environmental literacy. On the first page of Our Mutual Friend, and between the Southwark and London Bridges, we find “a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance” (1). Gaffer Hexam is presented as a “[h]alf savage,” attuned to his natural environment through the two Lamarckian principles of acquired modification: direct influence from

11 Like the water, the dust that pervades the novel equally pervades the city, permeating the boundaries between one location and another, between the inside of houses (constantly being dusted) and their exterior, but also between people and place. Many scholars have discussed that the dust likely included human waste as well as other forms of rubbish, most pointing back to Sucksmith’s “The Dust-Heaps in Our Mutual Friend” as the source of this argument, which has become a commonplace since.
conditions and acquired habits. Hexam’s “grizzled” appearance, complete with “bare brown arms” and a “sun-browned face,” emphasize the environment’s direct influence (1). Hexam also appears in “such a dress . . . seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimmed his boat,” which is equally “[a]llied to the bottom of the river” by the “slime and ooze” with which it is covered (2,1). Such semblances reinforce that Hexam’s and Lizzie’s present activity was “something that they often did,” thus something habitual (1).

Stressing the habitual nature of their present actions on the river explains the semblance between Hexam and the river environment; it also sets up the notion of repeated behaviors and how they can lead to “functionally produced modifications” in the physiology of the subject according to Lamarckian theory (Hughes xxxviii). Hexam was not born with but rather acquired the characteristics of one “of those amphibious human-creatures who appear to have some mysterious power of extracting a subsistence out of tidal water by looking at it” (74). Likening Hexam to a “bird of prey” (3), Dickens stresses Hexam’s keen ability to see the most subtle nuances of the Thames’ surface: “he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze”; “his eyes watch every little race and eddy in its broad sweep”; “[w]heresoever the strong tide met with an

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12 I see Dickens as being more engaged with the evolutionary models of Jean Baptiste Lamarck and Herbert Spencer, both of whom adopted and expanded on an associationist understanding of adaptive psychology. Thus, my approach differs from other scholars who have connected Our Mutual Friend with evolutionary theory, as they have by and large argued for Darwinian influences in the novel. Ernest Fontana and Nicola Bown have pointed to the selection of mates in Dickens’s work. George Levine and Howard Fulweiler have argued that evolutionary theory informs the tangled web of Dickens’s narrative structures. Yet, Our Mutual Friend barely considers phylogeny; rather, Dickens proves more interested in how individual subjects are able to cope with, adapt to, and succeed in the complex human environments (where social and physical are as interconnected and organism and external medium). Joseph Carroll’s Literary Darwinism (2004) also maintains a Darwinian perspective, though he does address “a passionate responsiveness to place” and the “sense of interdependence between place and person” appearing in nineteenth-century literature, but explains that such phenomena are the result of adaptations gained through natural selection (90, 98-101). While Carroll states numerous times that place is essential to experience and even that place can be understood to shape the self in nineteenth-century literature, his readings of these works repeatedly fall short of showing how this process occurs within the narrative.
impediment, his gaze paused for an instant” (1,2). Through his regular habit of searching
the river, Hexam has adapted to his particular environment in order to make a living.

Hexam’s adaption to his environment for the purposes of survival exemplifies the
key tenet of Herbert Spencer’s Principles of Psychology (1855): the sense that life
equates to the “definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and
successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences” (368; original
emphasis). Spencer’s definition precedes and informs the one offered by Lewes; it also
proves far more explicit. For Spencer, this creation of correspondence with or fitness to
the environment includes,

all those activities, bodily and mental, which constitute our ordinary idea
of life; but it also comprehends, both those processes of growth by which
the organism is brought into general fitness for these activities, and those
after-processes of adaptation by which it is specially fitted to its special
activities. (375)

Spencer, like Alexander Bain, stresses the importance of sight to adaptive processes,13
arguing that increased sensory capacities lead to the comprehension of a larger and more
complex environmental sphere in which an organism can operate (Spencer 1855, 407).
Spencer also points to the cognition of the environment beyond (but based on) direct
sensation that allows for behaviors even more specialized in terms of space and time,
“where the action of the organism is in correspondence with the changes of a particular
thing in a particular spot at a particular period” (433; my emphasis). Hexam’s

13 Bain points to the importance of sensorial accuracy when he argues that a principal form of “human
intelligence” is the adherence of “sensations of sight . . . into an intellectual product” – that is a cognitive
model of an object or place that can be integrated into complex thoughts and activities (411).
correspondence with the Thames environment proves similar as he is able to anticipate the trajectory of objects in the water based on the confluence of current and tide, which is evident given his directions to Lizzie on where to position the boat (1, 2). These adaptive capacities – in addition to proving Hexam is more than a mechanized frog – ensure the maintenance of a stable epistemological relationship with locality, allowing Hexam to develop an environmental literacy that is not only helpful but also necessary for survival.14

Like Hexam, Lizze also displays an acquired environmental literacy: in addition to watching the water’s surface, Lizzie reads Hexam’s face so as to respond to his expressions with the appropriate action. Like Wordsworth’s discussion of the blessed infant discussed in Chapter 2, Dickens extrapolates one form of literacy to another, emphasizing how the ability to read gestures and expressions – typically regarded as a social endeavor – originates in basic modes of survival. While this literacy proves Lizzie’s adaptive potential, it also offers a model of reading for the audience to follow. Lizzie’s habits of reading and her own expressions clue the audience to how they are

14 By emphasizing the epistemological stability that results from adaptation, I mean to show how such processes work to overcome the illegibility of the environment, which allows us to rethink the human experience of the chaotic city. Furthermore, I want to build from John Glendening’s sense in The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels that “human understanding as it receives and processes data about the universe is . . . entangled with it in an epistemological sense,” which creates what I refer to as an epistemological fluidity where meaning and knowledge are not transferred but rather interconnect, effecting, as Spencer would say, greater correspondence with the environment. However, I want to challenge Glendening’s subsequent notion that this human understanding “is subject to the very same tension between order and chaos, with the latter exerting continual influence on the former. The indeterminacy inherent in evolutionary development imbues these novels and their characters with perceptual and cognitive confusion about both nature of external reality and their own natures” (31). Of course, Glendening focuses on the late-Victorian period so he is not particularly concerned with Dickens. Even so, I find misguided the fundamental notion that the external world is chaotic to those who comprehend the system of their present locality as well as the notion that engagement with the external world necessarily leads to a state of perceptual and cognitive confusion when understood via evolutionary theory. Spencer’s theory very specifically argues that the process of adaptation works towards greater epistemological scope and stability.
supposed to acquire knowledge from the diegetic environment. When Lizzie reads Hexam’s face with “intensity” and “a touch of dread” on the first page, we learn to acquire information in a similar manner. We watch Lizzie as she shivers from anxiety and as her own face goes pale when Hexam finally eyes the sought-for object (2-3). In this first scene, Dickens offers not free indirect discourse; instead, he offers the reader a truly mimetic experience of life – like the characters in the text, we must gain information from context, behavior, and expression.

While Dickens initially depicts environmental literacy within the quasi-natural space of the Thames between the Southwark and London Bridges, he also shows how such forms of literacy prove integral to quintessentially urban figures like the police inspector. Through his environmental literacy, the Night-Inspector engages a legible urban sphere, and his ability to read this space and the subjects in it provides him with epistemological security – what Pam Morris refers to as “the sharp wisdom of street culture” in Dickens’ work (2006, 209). The Inspector’s character is based largely on the eponymous detective of Dickens’ “On Duty with Inspector Field,” published in Household Words in 1851. In the article, Dickens emphasizes Field’s ability to look at someone and attain a “perfect mastery of their character” (267), as well as his ability to navigate the urban labyrinth. Following Field through a series of alleys and doorways,

15 Pam Morris’s article provides a point of departure for my own thoughts on knowledge, identity, and place. Much of her analysis focuses on Bradley Headstone, a “taught-self” who disavows his class origins and whose “rote education has dislocated [his] words from his own passion and desire” (2006, 207-208). The result is loss of his “capacity for playful self-invention” (207). Morris provides Jenny Wren as a counter example, who is street wise and fashions her own identity through language. Morris does not acknowledge the environmental underpinnings of this discussion, which is my own undertaking. I will argue that Headstone’s rote education also dislocates himself from place, which further undermines his sense of self. Wren and the Night-Inspector both learn from their environment and in turn learn how to use that environment to supplement their psychological processes, including a sense of self and subject formation. However, only the Night-Inspector will be discussed at present; Miss Wren will receive more attention later in the chapter.
Dickens describes the scene as “the flapping and counter-flapping, like the lids of the conjurer's boxes”; despite the perplexing scene, however, Inspector Field is able to read and demystify these urban spaces as he “shows their secret workings” (268).

The Night-Inspector, also referred to as Mr. Inspector, reveals the same capabilities, as Dickens portrays early on his astute assessment of Hexam’s character and his survey of Julius Handford’s appearance and behavior to the extent that he takes “note of every hair of [Handford’s] head” (Our Mutual Friend 24, 26-27). Equally important, Mr. Inspector performs a type of cognitive engagement with place that proves integral to this study. In the activities of Mr. Inspector and other characters to be discussed later, Dickens portrays, I argue, a form of epistemic action that Andy Clark and David Chalmers refer to as “active externalism” of the mind – that is, the active use of external objects and spaces to assist cognitive processes. More obvious examples of this active externalism can be seen when Noddy Boffin uses chalk on a stool to total the wages he has agreed to pay Silas Wegg (51). Similarly, Bradley Headstone considers how he might have utilized the surrounding environment in his attempt to murder Eugene Wrayburn, Headstone, and standing in front of his class, he “had half a mind to draw a line or two upon the board, and show himself what he meant” (709). While the context is rather dramatic, the quotidian use of chalk proves, in fact, a perfect example of how external objects are commonly used to assist in cognitive operations.

16 Clark and Chalmers are both practitioners of philosophy and cognitive science, which they integrate in their joint study, “The Extended Mind” (1998). Their contemporary example of epistemic action that externalizes mental functioning is the manual rotation of blocks (by pressing a button) in the game of Tetris rather than the mental act of rotating the block within one’s own mental model. They point to a study by David Kirsh and Paul Maglio (1994) that documents how the use of the external device speeds up the process of cognition. To rotate the block physically is still an Epistemic action” even if it occurs outside the mind. Epistemic actions, then, are those that “alter the world so as to aid and augment cognitive processes such as recognition and search” (Clark and Chalmers 8).
In terms of the Night-Inspector, such epistemic actions are coupled with the faculty of imagination in order to derive information from the environment, such as when he is working on the Harmon case. Upon hearing the Jury’s report on Harmon’s death, Mr. Inspector becomes “additionally studious”; the report, caused him to stand meditating on river-stairs and causeways, and to go lurking about in boats, putting this and that together. But, according to the success with which you put this and that together, you get a woman and a fish apart, or a Mermaid in combination. And Mr. Inspector could turn out nothing better than a Mermaid, which no Judge and Jury would believe in.

(31)

Rather than rotate an object to better understand it or diagraming a scene, the Night-Inspector moves himself within the physical environment, gaining different vantage points and culling different information from the objects about him. This action allows him to take in every aspect of the environment and piece together how each element might have participated in the overall action of the crime. It reveals environmental literacy to be more than a reading of one’s environs: it also serves as a form of cognition through space and external objects.

The Night-Inspector proves more successful when he uses the same processes to get to the bottom of Hexam’s death later on in the novel (174); still, his lack of success in this first instance is worth considering a little longer, as it points to the role of imagination in the cognitive engagement with place. In associationist psychology, the imagination helps to conjoin ideas into larger, more complex cognitions. This is precisely what the Inspector does, taking a multitude of discrete ideas about this object or this
space and putting them together with the known facts of the crime in an effort to reach a conclusion. The mermaid image highlights Dickens’s associationist sense of the imagination, as it was believed that new objects or ideas could only be imagined by imaginatively conjoining already experienced objects and ideas: hence, the ideas of fish and woman would become a mermaid. That Mr. Inspector’s end result is compared to a mythical creature offers a moment of levity, to be sure, but it also stresses another key principle of environmental epistemology: despite the fact that all information is subjectively acquired, it is still being tested and retested against a continuous, objective reality.\(^{17}\) While this failure might seem to call Mr. Inspector’s capabilities into question, as Farrell has suggested,\(^ {18}\) I argue that it highlights the ongoing dynamic of a cognitive engagement with the external world, one comprised, inevitably, of trial and error. That Mr. Inspector recognizes his error – suggested in the correlation of his conclusion to a mythic being – points to his ability to learn from his experience, which is to say, points to his ability to adapt. Through such adaptation, Mr. Inspector can gain epistemic certainty and, as a result, psychological stability, making him an apt foil to the estranged urban subjectivity explored by Williams, Baumgarten, Wolfreys, and others.

\(^{17}\) Evolutionary anthropologist Konrad Lorenz argues that practices just like those exhibited by the Night-Inspector are quintessential to learning, the ontological form of adaption: human beings gain information from their environment, work that information into their cognitive patterns and then “match[...] their results against reality” and in this gain from and comparison back to reality, human beings learn both from their success as well as their failures (24).

\(^{18}\) Farrell argues that “there is a curious ineffectuality about the Night-Inspector in spite of the keenness, neatness, and knowingness that we are meant to admire in him. For all his prowess, the Night-Inspector "could turn out nothing" (31; 1.3) and thus he disappears as a significant character” (785). Yet, as I show, the Night-Inspector does try his hand again later when solving the death of Hexam. Also, the Night-Inspector does reappear later in the novel when he goes to the Rokesmith home to interrogate John Rokesmith about his falsified identity as Julias Hansford. Last, while the Night-Inspector struggles to solve the Harmon murder, the fact that Harmon is not murdered makes the Inspector’s difficulty not only understandable but even reinforces why his conclusions should be compared to a mermaid – there is no way his conclusions, based on the information he has, could fit the reality of what had happened.
Returning to Lizzie and Hexam, two more examples of active externalism can be noted, which further show how characters in Dickens’s novel create a productive correspondence with the external world. In Lizzie’s example, Dickens follows a pattern established in the preceding chapters and shows how an affective response to landscape can prove an effective means of contemplating one’s own relationship with that ecological niche. Though Lizzie has adapted to life on the urban Thames, she attests that she does “not like it,” and her feelings for this habitat are shown in even greater complexity when she looks on “the great black river with its dreary shores” and sees it “dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death” (3, 71). Such moments are not the imaginative act of projected feeling term “pathetic fallacy” but rather an evolved mechanism for registering a locality’s structure of influence – its personality – and one’s own attitudes about it. What might seem like a visionary experience, then, becomes a moment of psychological verisimilitude, a recognition of psychological engagement with the locality’s particular structure of influence.

Spencer offers a rather similar take on aesthetic responses to place in his *Principles* when he acknowledges how various stimuli of a place lead to larger structures of influence. He notes that “daily experiences” with a place and its various objects will result in an accumulation of each feeling induced by each object over time, leading to

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19 A similar description of the Thames can be found in an article Dickens wrote for *Household Words* called "Down with the Tide" (1853): “[T]his river looks so broad and vast, so murky and silent, seems such an Image of death in the midst of the great city's life” (527). As with the scene in *Our Mutual Friend*, the deathly aspect of the river results from the overall effect of its various elements and associations.

20 See the prior discussions of the blessed infant in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and Gaskell’s tendency to intermix facial and landscape features, which is a means, I argue, of codifying the affective influences of a given locality. Wordsworth’s uses the term “lineaments” as a type of skeuomorph when the infant’s psychological engagement with the face of the mother expands to a wider engagement with its material environs. The continued use of lineaments and expressive features not only suggests how reading a locality’s structures of influence builds from the initial practices of reading the mother’s facial expressions but also evinces how external objects continue to have an affective sway over one’s state of mind.
composite states of feeling and still “larger aggregation of states,” which ultimately merge into “a more complex feeling . . . produced by being in that locality” (589).

Through her engagement with place as well as her evolved capacity for feeling, Lizzie acquires a more complex view of her current mode of survival, an acquisition that is necessary for her future growth. By allowing her thoughts to mingle with the external space as she meditates on her present circumstances – her mind entangled with the associations the river carries for her (pollution and corpses)⁰²¹ – Lizzie thinks through her present environment and recognizes its utter undesirability.

Lizzie and Hexam engage with the same environment and adapt certain tendencies so as to effect a productive correspondence with its conditions and influence; yet, they develop in remarkably different ways, which is most clearly indicated in their feelings toward the mode of life this locality affords. Lizzie’s imaginative tendencies not only allow her to think critically about the environment but also to consider other possible modes of living, which she frequently does while “reading” her or her brother's future in the fires kept at home. Hexam, on the other hand, more willingly engages with his present mode of life, and he actively uses the space and structures around him to improve his correspondence with his present environment. In the scene when Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood visit the Hexam household, Gaffer Hexam exhibits his knowledge of the handbills regarding dead men, which were “stuck against the wall” of the house. Despite his illiteracy, Hexam claims, “I know ‘em by their places on the wall. . . . I know ‘em all. I’m scholar enough!” (22). Similar to Lightwood’s datebook

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⁰²¹ Here I am again adding to Glendening’s sense in The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels that “[h]uman understanding as it receives and processes data about the universe is . . . entangled with it in an epistemological sense” (31).
kept by Young Blight or Mr. Boffin’s paperwork filled by Mr. Rokesmith, the wall of the
house provides a material form by which to store and recover information – a mnemonic
extension that allows Hexam to remember for whose body he is searching, where they
might have drowned or been dumped, and what personal effects they might have. Of
course, having the images and personal information also allows Hexam to identify the
bodies he has found and to know whether or not there is a reward for them. That Dickens
means for us to read the scene as indicative of the externalization of mental activity
becomes clear through the mixture of metaphor and causation when Hexam moves the
lantern “over the whole” of the wall “as if to typify the light of his scholarly intelligence”
(23). Here, light directs attention and marks its place, thus proving an indexical rather
than purely symbolic sign for consciousness.

Lewes had claimed that Dickens’s characters offered only “calculable” behaviors,
that they were like brainless “frogs” lacking “organic action” (148). Yet, when read with
a sense of environmental literacy (rather than a desire for direct access to a character’s
interiority), we begin to see several forms of dynamic engagement with external
conditions, forms in accord with the theories of psychological adaptation in Dickens’s
own time and forms that even anticipate more recent theories regarding mental
engagement with the human environment. Building on the theme of environmental
literacy, I argue that an ability to gain positive information from one’s environment (and
other subjects in it) is necessary to a productive correspondence between internal
psychological states and external conditions. I also want to argue for a positive rather
than negative approach to epistemology and place where the urban sphere is concerned.
From Raymond Williams to more recent scholarship by Baumgarten and Wolfreys, the
city is portrayed generally as an illegible space, one lacking in identifiable localities, which induce experiences of estrangement and alienation.\textsuperscript{22} Such is the result of a purely phenomenological approach to urban experience, one that limits itself to the reception of the external stimulus rather than going on to explore the dynamics of reciprocity and adaptation. An approach that reinforces the environmental underpinnings of epistemology yields different results, reinforcing the potential for positive knowledge and stable subject-formation as gained through engagement with place, even in the modern urban environment.

**Urban Adaptation, Prosthesis, and the Home**

Much of the discussion thus far has focused on environmental forms of literacy and epistemology, and while the next section will continue to show how Dickens’s characters successfully adapt to and correspond with their external environment, it will also explore some of the more ontological implications of urban engagement in *Our Mutual Friend*. In this discussion, I argue that the active externalization of epistemic action begets not only knowledge but also a sense of self as infused in the material objects and cultural artifacts with which a subject frequently engages. The home, in particular, proves such an artifact, one that had evolved into a tool for conscious self-development and, importantly, self-adaptation. Much more than a kitsch trope of Victorian culture, more than an apparatus for reinforcing bourgeois norms, the ideal home of Dickens’s novel proves an evolutionary technology, one that confirms his

\textsuperscript{22} See footnote 6.
characters’ psychological engagement with the external world but also one that exemplifies the externalization of self and its value to adaptive processes.

The externalization of self in Dickens’s novel is also of value to contemporary criticism, as it reminds us of Lewes’s declaration: “the mutual relations of organism and medium [are what] determine the manifestations we name Life; and the error is great when men attempt to solve vital problems without duly taking all external conditions into account” (436). No analysis of subjectivity in any age, particularly an age in the process of developing a completely new paradigm for the self/world relationship, is complete unless it is willing to explore subjectivity beyond the confines of interiority and beyond the confines of the body. What we gain by addressing psychological processes of engagement with, adaptation to, and even cognition in the external world, is a much fuller recognition of how psychology is formed and how it actually functions as contextualized within the objective reality of biological conditions. While such externalization might seem to render the subject unstable and exposed to external influence, it in fact allows for an ontological fluidity, a certain flexibility of self that reinforces its capacity to adapt.

This section explores the externalization of the self through the technological supplement, i.e. prosthetic, of the home and how such externalizations allow for the conscious development of the self in the act of adaption. The conception of prosthetics I use is developed in part from Spencer’s evolutionary psychology but is based in Dickens’s own depiction of the home as prosthesis.

Spencer offers numerous insightful approaches to the current status of the human psyche and environmental context based on his fundamental definition for life: the “heterogeneous changes . . . in correspondence with external coexistences and
sequences” (368), which includes not only the simultaneous and successive changes in an organism,” whether in the body or mind, “but also those structural arrangements which enable the organism to adapt its actions to those in the environment” (374). By structural arrangements, in this instance, Spencer follows Lamarck in suggesting that the structure of the organism becomes developed through use or disuse, thus restructuring itself so as to be best adapted to the processes and habits needed to survive in its given environment. But what about the arrangements made outside the organism?

The question leads to one of Spencer’s most important claims in Principles regarding the “mutual dependence of the operative and cognitive faculties” (457). Spencer begins by discussing how organisms that develop complex “fore-limbs,” in becoming more sophisticated in their ability to manipulate objects, gain the ability to observe qualities of objects and, as a result, contemplate new uses for them. From there, Spencer argues that human arts (sophisticated physical manipulations) and sciences (sophisticated perceptions of external phenomena) lead to ever greater and more complex forms of operative and cognitive faculties (457-461).23 As humans develop higher “cognitive and operative processes, the advance is towards a reciprocity so active that each further cognition implies elaborate operative aid, and each new operation implies sundry elaborate cognitions” (461). This proves a key point within the critical conversation as it highlights the ways in which all technologies assist in the development of cognitive function – whereas scholars taking a Marxist perspective and/or focusing on

23 Engels makes the same argument in “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man,” which was written in 1876 – twenty years after Spencer’s own account.
industrial machinery have either left out the psychological ramifications of prosthetics or have seen them as degenerating the mind by fostering mechanistic tendencies.\textsuperscript{24}

From this approach to arts and sciences and the reciprocity of cognition and physical operation, we begin to see that culture – in both its material and mental sense – is an extension of biological processes rather than something altogether separate from nature.\textsuperscript{25} But also, the arts and sciences become extensions of the human organism as well, so that thermometers and microscopes are “artificial extensions of the senses” while wheels and hammers are “artificial extensions of the limbs” (461). As extensions of the evolutionary process, prostheses prove to be extensions of an organic, adaptive process. They represent inherently human activity rather than a demarcation of the post-human.\textsuperscript{26}

Such an understanding of prostheses (one that predates Marx’s and the notion of post-

\textsuperscript{24} Implicated in this statement are the two main critical works with which I am engaging, Elaine Scarry’s \textit{The Body in Pain} (1985) and Tamara Ketabgian’s \textit{The Lives of Machines}, both of which chart a Marxist rather than evolutionary perspective on the extension of the human subject through tools and machines. For Ketabgian, given her focus on the “human-machine complex,” industrial prostheses largely subjugate the human being in body and mind rather than facilitating a productive development for the subject or its psychological process in particular – though she does stress that Marx’s utopian hopes make room for such a possibility (20-23, 26). When discussing Dickens in particular, Ketabgian highlights “a form of subjectivity that is an effect of repetition,” which “creates a suspicion of psychic depth that infuses its most docile characters with a threatening mechanical aspect” (12). In turning to \textit{Our Mutual Friend}, and away from industrial prostheses per se, I recognize a much more productive prosthetic program that specifically affords both psychological development as well as human agency in that process. For Scarry, the purpose of all made objects is to “remake human sentience” (307), that is, to assist the human in its life project in some way. Yet, her models for this discussion – a coat and the nation state – emphasize the bodily and political aspects of the human life project, whereas cognitive development (and the deliberate manipulation of one’s sense of self) are left unexplored (307-313).

\textsuperscript{25} As Spencer notes, “even the most transcendent achievements of rationality are but the carrying still further that specialization of the correspondences between the organism and its environment, which is displayed in the evolution of Life in general” (435-436). He also argues that humans have “been adding to their physical environment a social environment that has been growing even more involved” (381). Thus, the cultural aspects of the human species prove an extension of nature rather than an antithesis.

\textsuperscript{26} Here I am specifically challenging Herbert Sussman’s and Gerhard Joseph’s sense that “Dickens's novels occupy an important place in the historical transformation of the human into what has become known as the ‘posthuman’” (617-618). While I find Spencer’s articulation of the human nature of prostheses to be more convincing that Marx’s, it is worth noting that Scarry similarly points to the making of tools and artifice as both a very much human act and as potentially leading to prostheses. Even so, Scarry only addresses prostheses in the modern sense of artificial organs implanted through surgery, but her discussion of how tools become “a literal prolongation of the working body” certainly participates in the prosthetic conversation (248).
humanism) reinforces the sense of human nature as an environmental engagement in the conscious effort of self-improvement rather than a subjection to social forces or the historical moment. Prostheses, ultimately, are a tool for perpetual self-becoming.

Spencer’s discussion of cognitive and operative functions also points to an ontological slippage or fluidity between the organism and the environment. This fluidity is evident not only in his discussion of tools as extensions of the body but also in his discussion of body parts, such as the “fore-limbs,” as tools themselves. In Spencer’s discussion, hands do not have a clear ontological distinction from external tools as both are mechanisms that assist in the life-project of the human organism. With this in mind, I would like to return to Lizzie Hexam as we initially found her on the Thames River. Here, Dickens highlights the efficacy of Lizzie’s “lithe action” when rowing, stressing again that such behaviors are acquired from “usage” (2). Upon Hexam’s signal, Lizzie “instantly answers to the action in her sculling” and “presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk” (2). The scene reinforces the sense of prosthetic extension that Spencer outlines, as the boat is both symbolically and literally an extension of Lizzie’s anxiety and movements, respectively. What is more, the sense of Lizzie’s hands as tools can be seen in the following sentence: “Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards [Hexam]” (3). Analyzing this sentence, Andrew Miller smartly points to “the use of body parts as objects,” which “slides from the syntactic to the ontological” (150). But rather than stress the dismemberment that Miller, Albert Hutter, and Leslie Simon see as central to the novel and its concern over fragmentation, this moment reveals instead a sense of ontological fluidity. Whereas fragmentation breaks down identity and meaning (breaks
down what was once fixed or essential), ontological fluidity allows for meaning and identity to be transformed, exchanged, gained and/or given. Ontological fluidity, however, does not necessitate a conflation of subject and object, or between subject and environment, but rather reflects the circulation of information and meaning inherent in an ecological perspective.27

Admittedly, Lizzie’s example of prosthetic extension is a bit ambiguous and might only be understood within a theoretical perspective (whether Spencer’s or Marx’s); however, given the extent to which prosthetics abound in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens certainly exhibits a clear interest in such notions of extension, ontological slippage, and person-object semblance. The most obvious example is the wooden leg of Mr. Wegg, which Dickens describes early in the novel. Altered by the “dusty corner” where he spends his days, Wegg has become “a knotty man, and close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material” (45). As a gnarled tree in the desert, Wegg’s wooden leg synecdochically completes the picture. Yet, correspondence with an unhealthy places is not particularly beneficial, and Wegg’s prosthesis often complicates as much as it improves his ability to adapt to other environments. In one representative moment, where Wegg searches the Boffin Bower for hidden treasure, he “hops up ladders, like some

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27 I want to stress the importance of “ontological fluidity” in this context, a notion that revises what I see as an error in Marx’s thought on human use of tools. Perhaps it is the emphasis on making rather than simply the use of technological supplements, but in Scarry’s discussion of the made object as a “projection of the human body,” such extension works “to deprive the external world of the privilege of being inanimate” – of, in other words, its privilege of being irresponsible to its sentient inhabitants on the basis that it is itself non-sentient (281, 285). I would argue that a prosthetic extends the self into the world and creates ontological fluidity, but it does not entirely negate the external sphere of its own ontology. Rather, ontological significance, I am arguing, moves back and forth between environment and subject. Granted the subject can choose to shape that environment, but doing so never makes that space the kind of “lever” Scarry outlines, where production of a tool leads intentionally and directly back to a remaking of the subject. Even in shaping the environment, humans do not possess full control over it, hence my emphasis throughout the dissertation that environmental-self fashioning is always a process of negation. I believe Dickens’s novel, along with Spencer’s theory, confirm this sense of negotiation.
extinct bird” (213). Here, Wegg’s prosthesis both effects and symbolizes his unfitness for the actions connected with that environment.

Most prostheses in the novel, however, stave off extinction rather than induce it. In a rather brief instance at the Podsnap residence, Dickens depicts a gent “with one eye screwed up into extinction” while the other is “framed and glazed” by a monocle. It is with the latter “organ” that he peers down at Georgiana Podsnap as if she were at the bottom of a well (139). Here, the prosthetic does not cause or mark extinction but attempts to thwart it. Its success is questionable, however, as the somewhat functional ocular organ appears like one of Mr. Venus’ specimens “framed and glazed” behind glass. Other prosthetics crop up throughout the book. Several characters wear spectacles. Jenny Wren’s crutch-stick becomes a fixture of the character over the course of the novel and allows her the mobility necessary for her work. While Dickens, through these characters, points to prostheses in a stricter sense, he shows a willingness to expand the notion to other technological enhancements, which we have already seen with Lizzie. A similar instance occurs when Dickens depicts Rogue Riderhood with several blunt weapons on his person that are referred to as “appendages” (354). Also through Riderhood, Dickens again identifies the body as a biological tool – when Riderhood nearly drowns, the narrator questions whether the lifeless body is still Riderhood “in sooth” or rather “the outer husk and shell of Riderhood” (443).

The last scene offers, then, a conception of the body as one of many possible

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28 The choice of the word “organ” is also significantly ambiguous, as it could potentially refer to both the ocular organ of the eyeball or the prosthetic itself. Ketabgian makes the cogent point that organ can refer to both vital body parts as well as “tools, instruments, and mechanical contrivances” (19). This blurring inherent in the word organ reaffirms Spencer’s own argument, of course, about how external devices can be understood as artificial senses or limbs.
shells or external devices by which the human being is protected and in which he or she can develop. Another is the home. That Dickens understands the home as a prosthetic tool in a biological and evolutionary sense is made clear when he writes the following in regards to Boffin’s Bower: “Whatever is built by man for man’s occupation, must, like natural creations, fulfill the intention of its existence, or soon perish. This old house had wasted more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use” (183). Invoking the Lamarckian paradigm that regards evolution of an organism’s structure as resulting from use or disuse – a phraseology that reappears in Spencer, Lewes, and even the associative psychology of Bain – Dickens depicts the home as an evolutionary extension of the inhabitant. Rather than a metaphorical projection, the image suggests an ontological fluidity that extends from subject to home. Without depriving either of their individual status, they mutually create and maintain a productive fitness in correspondence with the external world.

The home, then, becomes a tool of self-extension for the purpose of self-evolution, a conception that will be born out over the following analyses of the Boffins’ home. When Silas Wegg first visits the Boffins, upon entering the parlor he notes this “queerest of rooms,” which appears to be split down the middle in terms of its décor. On one side, it appears “more like a luxurious amateur tap-room than anything else” with its comfortable seating, its floor covered in “sand and sawdust,” its shelves that offer various foods, and a table on which rests “eight volumes” of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (55-56). On the other table is a set of “case-bottles of inviting appearance,” and that side of the room reveals more “garish” décor replete with “a flower carpet” and such “hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxon fruits under glass shades” (55). Queer,
perhaps, but Boffin’s explanation is simple enough: Mrs. Boffin is “a highflyer at Fashion” while he does not “go higher than comfort”; thus, Mr. Boffin claims, “Mrs. Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine” (56). As Wegg looks around, Mr. Boffin assures him, “you begin to know us as we are” (57). Such a statement certainly affirms the notion of the home as an expression or reflection of the owner’s personalities.

Yet, the parlor does not reflect who the Boffins are so much as it shows who they want to be and what kind of subjectivities they want to foster. Mrs. Boffin’s rather sophomoric attempts at domestic fashion affirm that this is new to her; in this space she can test out her tastes and cultivate them. That their next house proves more sensibly furnished and suggests the advances she will make. Furthermore, Mr. Boffin’s life has not been one of comfort, nor of literary tastes, and thus these are qualities of being that he wishes to promote, rather than ones he has already acquired. As a prosthetic, the home proves an artificial environment where the inhabitants control, to varying degrees, the influences working upon them. This sense of the home as constructed nature is even suggested by the floral carpets and taxidermy animals. A space of ontological slippage between self and world, the home also marks the link between biological systems and psycho-social cultivation – an evolutionary conception that Spencer names and Dickens portrays.

In addition to the home itself, the objects within the home also prove useful tools for psychological adaptation: Mr. Boffin’s collection of The Decline and Fall offers an apt example. Again, Spencer’s evolutionary psychology provides a valuable lens. Much of what distinguishes humans from other animals, Spencer suggests, is their “secondary
process of extension,” or the means to conceive and thus potentially utilize environments beyond that which is immediately present. One of the most important modes of indirect perception is acquiring the perceptions of others through “maps” or, we might infer, literature (Principles 409). Boffin’s collection of the Decline and Fall provides him with the perceptions of others, about a place and a cultural dynamic through which he gains valuable insights about his own circumstances and the threats they pose. Reminiscent of Priestley’s sense that the mind dilates in response to the world it perceives, Boffin listens to Wegg’s reading of the volumes while “intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans” (59). Not only are Boffin’s horizons widened – he now conceives of a much wider world – but he also begins to identify with the Romans’ plight and to recognize the potential threats that lead to a fall. As Boffin admits, these narratives “are scarers. And even now . . . I don’t see a way to our bettering ourselves” (60). The “our” implies the Romans with whom Boffin identifies, but Boffin recognizes the need for himself and Mrs. Boffin to adapt in order to avoid a similar fate, even if he cannot quite conceive of how to do so.

The tool of the book reflects the house’s own function as a form of identification with something outside the self, which then leads to self-realization. By identifying the

29 Priestley argues in Lectures on Oratory that the mind is only conscious of “the ideas that are present to it”; it must “conform itself to them,” and “enlarge or contrast with its field of view” (126-27).
30 Boffin is particularly concerned with the trials of Commodus, who Wegg pronounces “Commodious” and who “fights in that wild-beast-show, seven hundred and thirty-five times.” Also concerning to Boffin is “Vittle-us” who has spent an entire fortune in only seven months (59). The mispronunciation of Commodus seems to invoke the word commodious, which, in its meaning of spaciousness and utility, ties together the functionality of the parlor, the content of the Decline and Fall, and mind-expanding lessons Boffin is learning.
31 My reading of Boffin goes against the grain of the usual scholarship, which suggests that Boffin’s virtue is based on that which is good in him and does not change throughout the novel. Many see Boffin as unaltered by the novel’s end, but like Margaret in Gaskell’s North and South, Boffin must necessarily adapt to his new conditions in order to retain his positive qualities. While rather simple and trusting at first, Boffin develops a shrewdness and capacity for scheming so as to defend himself.
self with the external object, the self becomes present in the external sphere where it can be considered objectively or put in relation with new ideas. The ontological fluidity of the prosthetic, then, allows for epistemic action. Paradoxically, it is the grounding of the self in the external space that allows for a profound awareness of the self’s malleability. Through such actions, the self becomes simultaneously stable and changeable. The process of altering the self becomes domesticated, no longer an estrangement but rather a self-conscious form of adaptation that prepares the subject for external conditions with which it must inevitably contend.

As with all prosthetics, as with all organs, the home must continue to be functional, must continue to support the growth of the organism. The Boffins eventually come to realize that the “gloomy house” of the Bower no longer serves their needs. A new home will provide the Boffins with enough space for their philanthropic intentions as well as a new template through which to continue the process of self-extension and alteration. Besides, the Bower, because of its old age and the neglect from its previous owner, has taken on “[a] certain leanness” that inevitably “falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with life (as if they were nourished upon it)” (183). Dickens goes on to write that the house had “an air of being denuded to the bone,” a phrasing that proves significant because it points to the house as a biological structure (“bone”) and because it utilizes terminology – “an air of” – used throughout the book to signify the external expression of characters’ psychological states. Like Lizzie on the bank of the Thames, the Boffins appear to cognize the structure of influence of their home in an anthropomorphic fashion, and this allows them to conceive of the health of their home and the kind of health it will provide them. The language is metaphorical, but, as I have argued
elsewhere, its effectiveness is predicated on underlying, biological functions. The Boffins appear to sense the home is a biological extension, but, as prosthesis, it is one they can cast aside and replace.

Approaching the relationship between self, home, and city in such a manner provides a new way of thinking about the status of each and their interrelationship, particularly in terms of Dickens criticism. One of the primary notions this reading revises is the sense of a dichotomy between home and urban space, where the former is pure and transcendent and the latter is the source of social ills and corruption\(^\text{32}\); Alexander Welsh puts it rather simply: “if the problem that besets [Dickens] can be called the city, his answer can be named the hearth” (142). Many of Dickens’s novels do champion the domestic space, as does Our Mutual Friend, but the home’s function is not simply to fortify the subject from the external world but rather to provide the materials and space to help the subject psychologically adapt, thereby achieving a state of fitness with his or her external world. Part of this process requires that elements of the external world be brought into the home, whether in the form of other subjects, the ideas of others, or through social influence.

In thinking of the home as a prosthetic extension of self, I agree with other scholars that the home often comes to reflect the self or even to work as a site of self-expression,\(^\text{33}\) but I also argue that such a function is only a small part of the home’s

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\(^{32}\) See McCarthy’s “Making for Home: David Copperfield and His Fellow Travelers”; Efraim Sicher’s “Bleak Homes and Symbolic Houses: At-Homeness and Homelessness in Dickens”; also see Allan Grant 87-88.

\(^{33}\) Armstrong, for instance, points to the home as a sight of self-expression or as a reflection of the self throughout her rather thorough study Dickens and the Concept of Home (1990), such as on 2, 36, 92, 106, 127, but does not come to an understanding of the reciprocal nature of the home, which thus ignores its more important function as a space to actively shape the self.
purpose in Dickens’s novel. As Grier points out, and as I have argued in the previous chapter, the Victorians were well aware that the “physical setting and details” of the home had “the power to shape human character” (6). But the question becomes: for what purpose was the subject being shaped, and how does the prosthetic model of evolution alter the way we think of this capacity for self-shaping? Frances Armstrong suggests that in *Our Mutual Friend* the struggle the characters face is not “to be home in one’s home” but rather “to be at home with oneself” and, as distinct for the first two, “the main priority is to be at home in the world” (139). Each of these senses of home are necessarily interconnected, however, when we consider the home proper as an extension of the self, a micro-environment within the larger sphere, and also an apparatus with the express purpose of adapting the subject to external conditions. Dickens certainly stresses the necessity of using the home to fashion the self – not one’s ideal or “real self,” as Armstrong suggests, but one that is best fit for its social and biological context (150). Such is the dynamic of the negotiation with the urban environment within the paradigm of environmental self-fashioning.

**Designing Women**

In this last section, I turn our attention to the two characters that most clearly exhibit the processes and results of psychological adaptation to place: Bella Wilfer and Jenny Wren. This will allow me to bring together the ideas that the previous sections have established regarding the influences of heterogeneous localities, environmental literacy, and ontological extension. It will also allow me to work against a trend in
criticism on *Our Mutual Friend* to focus on John Rokesmith (aka Harmon) and Eugene Wrayburn, prioritizing a narrative and an ideological account of sudden, and often religious, transformation. While Bella and Jenny take different paths, both engage a variety of external spaces replete with their own unique set of influences and affordances, and both characters respond to those localities in reflexive, adaptive, and ultimately realistic ways. I also want to continue to outline the ways in which *Our Mutual Friend* teaches us to read characters via context, via the same forms of environmental literacy that the characters themselves exhibit and that human beings utilize in their own daily engagement with the modern world.

Bella Wilfer offers a prime example of adaptation as her sense of selfhood changes more than any other character in the novel. Bella also highlights that adaptation does not always mean self-improvement, but she ultimately learns to recognize environmental influence and how to use it for positive ends. The hypothesis for Bella’s trial in the novel seems best summed up by Rokesmith’s view that “there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something enduringly good under favourable conditions” (372; my emphasis). Implicit in Rokesmith’s sense of “conditions” is both a social and environmental meaning. As I have argued in the last chapter and this one, the two are hardly separable since social conditions manifest in physical forms and since people and culture are components of the environment.

Willful since a very young age, Bella suggests that she only became a “mercenary little wretch” after the expectation of great wealth through marriage to John Harmon and

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34 See footnote 8.
the disappointment of his supposed death (319). While Bella has learned to crave money, her change in attitude towards Rokesmith also provides evidence of how she has been conditioned by her circumstances. Initially curious to the point of having an interest in him, Bella grows to be “contemptuous” of Rokesmith and eventually rejects him as a lover (308). What has changed between her initial and subsequent responses to Rokesmith is her invitation to live with the Boffins in their mansion. Dickens emphasizes this very point by noting that it was “not so very long ago that Bella had been flustered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seemed to like her,” yet that was before “the eminently aristocratic mansion and Mrs. Boffin’s dressmaker had . . . come into play” (309). It is not simply that Bella’s social status has altered but that she has been moved to an environment where that social status manifests in a physical form, which inevitably bears its influences on her sense of self and how she relates to others.

The influence of the Boffin mansion on Bella’s outlook is also registered in her attitude towards other spaces, particularly her family’s home. The initial portrayal of the Wilfer home suggests that it is not exactly commodious; in fact, little mention is made of the home’s interior appearance as Dickens emphasizes instead the family’s engagement, then Bella sitting on a rug by a fire, and later the family sitting around a white-clothed table to eat a dinner as pleasant as it was uncommon given their means. In short, the emphasis is more on comforts, even if meager. When Bella first returns for a visit, we see the home through a rather different lens, namely Bella’s altered view of the world: “The family room looked very small and very mean, and the downward staircase by which it was attained looked very narrow and very crooked. The little house and all its arrangements were a poor contrast to the eminently aristocratic dwelling” to which Bella
had become accustomed (310). Upon returning to the mansion, we again see the space from Bella’s view: “the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home” (322). Rather than provide a view of Bella’s interiority as discrete from the world, Dickens reveals Bella’s thoughts through external contextualization. The figuration is simultaneously symbolic and indexical: the furniture, as part of the environment that shapes her attitudes, also begins to reflect her changing character. Such active externalization allows for the possibility of self-critique and thus a more active approach to subject-formation.

Bella has certainly adapted to her new environment, and Dickens makes Bella’s adaptability an integral part of her identity when her father states, “Now what I will say for you, my dear . . . is, that you are so adaptable. So adaptable” (317). Yet, Bella also reveals that adaptability can be a double-edged sword, its value being predicated, ultimately, on what kind of person the individual becomes. After viewing her two homes in relation to one another, Bella laments that “my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be!”(322). With such diametric conditions, manifested in diametric places with which she identifies, Bella’s selfhood becomes rather dubious.

The aristocratic influence appears to win out for a time, but Bella also seems self-conscious and even displeased with this change. Her descriptions of herself as “mercenary” and “avaricious” are certainly not meant as sources of pride, and she begins to exhibit behaviors that she then immediately regrets, such as when she opens up to Mrs. Lammle about Rokesmith’s affection for her. But if her exposure to two diametrically opposed, external conditions correlates with her internal struggles, she at least recognizes
that external influence: this is evident both in her sense that the furniture of the mansion looks smug upon her return but also in her acquisition of self-extending habits. For example, Bella later looks at herself in the mirror in a moment of self-critique: “You have been positively swelling your features,” she accuses her image, “you little fool!” (378). Here, the mirror performs the same prosthetic extension as the home, offering a form of ontological extension so that Bella can adopt an objective approach to herself.

In contradistinction to Eugene Wrayburn, who attempts to understand himself by turning inward and finds only an “embodied conundrum” (286), Bella increasingly utilizes her environment to make sense of what kind of person she should become and to engage the process of self-fashioning. In addition to her use of the mirror to achieve an objective view, Bella begins to compare herself to other models who are also contextualized by place. She recognizes how Mr. Boffin’s circumstances are changing him, telling her father that “Mr. Boffin is being spoilt by prosperity, and is changing every day” (460). Of course, we find out latter that Mr. Boffin has intentionally behaved as such a model to prove just such a point, but Bella still deserves credit for recognizing Mr. Boffin’s behavior as undesirable, for connecting said behavior to his circumstances, and for identifying with his behavior-circumstance dynamic in a manner that leads to self-consciousness.

Dickens provides Bella with a more positive model for selfhood in Lizzie Hexam, whom she finds in the more healthful environment of the country. Just before Bella has the chance to meet Lizzie, Bella begins to experience the “softening influence” of the rural sphere for herself (518). Here again, Dickens indicates her change of character via her changing attitude towards Rokesmith. After “leaving the little street and emerging on
the wooded landscape by the river” on their walk, everything about her interaction with Rokesmith becomes more “natural,” a word they use three times in their conversation (518; 518-20). Dickens stresses again and again the affective qualities of the scene, particularly when he points to the river in this locality free of urban pollutants as a “mirror” that reflected only “what was peaceful, pastoral, and blooming” (523). In contrast to the last mirror into which Bella gazed, she sees that this one reflects a rather different type of self, one predicated on peacefulness and health rather than on avariciousness and contradiction. Bella is able to occupy, for a moment, a different structure of influence and thus a different subjectivity. Subsequently, she meets Lizzie and thus witnesses a simpler, rural selfhood. Bella must soon return to the city, but only after being impressed by Lizzie to the extent of feeling sharply her own failings in comparison.

From this point on, at least until the final chapters of the novel, Bella increasingly takes control of her engagement with space, choosing which spaces she occupies, how she occupies them, and how they should influence her. In the scene where Bella finally decides to confront Mr. Boffin regarding his altered character, she ceases with her passive and silent state and bursts forth with animation and passionate words. As the other characters remain still, Bella moves back and forth across the room as she addresses Mr. Boffin, Rokesmith, and Mrs. Boffin in turn. Eventually, she decides to leave the house that has been both a home and a corruptive influence upon her. Significantly, she not only says goodbye to the Boffins but also to her “dear room,” with “a parting kiss of her fingers,” and to the house in general, as she kisses the outside of the front door after
“softly closing it upon herself” (601, 602). Such actions reinforce the affective connection with place and the sense of the home as an extension of those who inhabit it.

Thus, Bella quits the Boffin mansion, and its influences, on her own accord. She walks to the business district of the city to see her father, who is shocked by her intrepidity. When Rokesmith enters the office, having followed Bella there, he hugs her, and she seems to disappear completely in his embrace. The image seems to obviate her independence and identity, and certainly we must acknowledge that, as Bella soon becomes Mrs. Rokesmith, this obviation of her identity will occur again but nominally (604-06).35 Yet, on a spatial level, the representation of Bella’s identity and agency suggests a different story. It is Bella who decides that they should be married in Greenwich and Bella who decides where they, along with Mr. Wilfer, shall dine afterward. When Bella and John visit her family to acknowledge their elopement, Bella takes charge of the room: she runs into it, embraces the family, seats them, instructs John to kiss her mother and sister, instructs John to cut some bread and butter while she herself makes tea, and proceeds entirely to dominate the conversation. Her mother and sister, who usually dictate the action in the house, remain passive and “helpless” (678-79).

Bella also controls the house she comes to share with John in Blackheath. Dickens notes many of Bella’s household activities, which include cooking as well as “such dusting and washing and polishing, such snipping and weeding and trowelling and other

35 Many critics have had problems with the way in which Bella’s new found agency seems to be obviated by her marriage. James Marlow points to these concerns, (186), as does Gail Houston (181) and Philip Collins (128). Ermarth perhaps puts it best when she claims, “Bella suddenly seems lobotomized, no longer thinking of a self or even appearing to have one. Her ‘disappearances’ into husbandly embraces at the end are really no joke” (208). While I agree that Dickens eventually undermines Bella’s agency to a degree, I do think these critics have failed to see the ways in which Bella’s agency continues through the process of her marriage and even after, an agency based in her control over the environment and her self-formation.
small gardening, such making and mending and folding and airing, such diverse arrangements, and above all such severe study” (681-82). Here, Dickens invokes once again the positive psychological and moral associations attendant to good food, cleanliness, order, and fresh air. While Bella’s role, one could argue, is socially reductive, it also indicates a heightened evolutionary consciousness: Bella understands the role of environmental influence and takes firm control of her own environmental self-fashioning.

That Bella educates herself in her new home is also significant. The first object of study is her “sage volume entitled The Complete British Family Housewife,” which recalls Dickens’s attitudes about the need for educational reform, particularly the necessity of making one’s education practical to his or her own life and environment.36 And her education doesn’t stop with the domestic text or with the domestic sphere as Bella has taken to a daily “mastering of the newspaper”; in doing so, she does more than attain a knowledge of the city equal to Rokesmith’s; rather, her knowledge complements or even exceeds his, allowing her to “beamingly shed it upon John in the course of the evening” (682). Bella, then, informs John of the urban sphere rather than the other way around. Bella’s purpose in reading the newspaper complicates the typical figuration of the Angel in the House, which suggests a sheltering from corruptive worldliness. Bella, rather, actively studies the urban world, particularly its economic aspects. As with Boffin’s volumes of the Rise and Fall, Bella gains from the perceptions of others, which become a tool that expands her consciousness of and improves her correspondence with

36 For more on Dickens and the practicality of education see Marlow (140-143), Collins (81, 128-130), as well as David Paroissien. Both Marlow (143) and Morris (2006, 196) point to education as a form of adaptation or evolution, though they don’t connect it with a wider understanding of adaptive psychology or with an environmental perspective. Spencer also published on the practicality of education during the 1850s and 60s; see Essays on Education, 23-26.
the modern world. This activity does not entirely undo the limited role to which Bella is subjected, but the point is that she fashions this space and the knowledge she gains within it. In this space, Bella’s ontological fluidity and epistemological scope is within her own control; such control and efficacious use of place highlights her profoundly adaptive psychology.

It is unfortunate that Bella’s journey doesn’t end there. Eventually, John decides to reclaim his proper identity and inheritance, which inevitably relocates him and Bella from Blackheath to the Boffin mansion – the one environment she had rejected. Of course, John decorates the mansion in a fashion determined by Bella, so she does maintain her hand in the home’s fashioning and thus its structure of influence. Dickens, it seems, tries to engender a happy union between John’s search for self and Bella’s triumph through environmental self-fashioning, but still, this final relocation undermines the spatial agency that had become a central aspect of Bella’s character. All this being so, Bella still exemplifies how a self-conscious approach to one’s own adaptation, in conjunction with an awareness of environmental influence, becomes an effective, even necessary, means for controlling one’s own subject-formation in the face of modern pressures. Bella does not, I must emphasize, reject the urban sphere but creates her own niche within and correspondence to it.

If Bella proves the most malleable character in the novel, Jenny Wren proves the most adaptive, which is due in part to the necessity of overcoming her physical and familial hindrances. We first see Jenny Wren from the perspective of Charley Hexam, who is in search of his sister, Lizzie:
The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something—sitting on a little low old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

(222)

As Ian Duncan might say, Jenny Wren appears as one of Dickens’s grotesques or “transhumans” (18). Barely a girl, Wren is more “a something.” Wren, of course, names her physical affliction before we can even question it, saying that her “back’s bad” and her “legs are queer” (Our Mutual Friend 222). Yet, Jenny’s physical condition becomes an opportunity for Dickens to reveal the power of adaption: she not only exhibits her ecological literacy, prosthetic savvy, and environmental self-fashioning, but she does so both within the home and in the city at large. In other words, Jenny is able to extrapolate the domestic adaptation I have charted throughout this study to the urban environment. While numerous characters can read the urban sphere effectively and register its various psycho-physiological influences without a sense of estrangement or alienation, Jenny Wren takes her correspondence with the urban sphere even further. She reveals a profound capacity to refashion her mental engagement with the urban world in ways that are not delusional but rather quite productive. Truly the paragon of adaptive psychology in Our Mutual Friend, Jenny Wren exemplifies the human condition in the modern world, but even more importantly, she teaches the audience how to read the urban ecology and how to make it their own.

Like Bella and the Boffins, Jenny reveals a proficiency in fashioning her domestic environment to accommodate her needs. In the initial passage above, Dickens notes that
the door opened with “a spring and a click” and we soon learn that Jenny has “a handle within her reach” from the chair that allows her to open the door (225). There is also the sense that the “old fashioned arm-chair” has been refashioned, or, outfitted with “a kind” of working bench, suggesting that the bench is not typical but rather suited to the unusual “girl” and her industry of making dresses for dolls. This agency over space, as we have seen with other characters, translates to a sense of environmental control, and Wren is seen directing Bradley, and Headstone, who has come with him, to sit down and to “shut the street door” (222).

Jenny’s use of this space also reveals her capacity to fashion particular states of being through the structures of influence it affords. Not only is the house described as “orderly and clean” despite being somewhat “dingy,” a description that, again, points to an understood connection between physical, mental, and moral conditions, but Jenny and Lizzie also have a particular “arrangement” of the room, which they use to effect a positive emotional state: Lizzie places the candle on the mantelshelf, remote from the dressmaker’s eyes, and then put the room door open, and the house door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant towards the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fine-weather arrangement when the day’s work was done. To complete it, she seated herself in a chair by the side of the little chair, and protectingly [sic.] drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

‘This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time in the day and night,’ said the person of the house. Her real name was Fanny
Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren. (233)

Jenny shows the ability, with the help of Lizzie of course, to fashion her environment, to accommodate both her physical needs and to effect subjective states of being. It is not coincidence, I argue, that Dickens notes this particular arrangement of space, which exemplifies Jenny’s capacity for environmental self-fashioning, and puts it in direct proximity with her nominal self-fashioning. In these initial scenes, Jenny affirms that she is “the person of the house” (222), and Dickens reuses this phrasing four times on the following page, affirming the close interconnection between Jenny and the space she inhabits.

Indeed, the house appears as an extension of Jenny, just as her crutches do, but this also means that what occupies the house also occupies her psyche. Such is the case when Jenny’s alcoholic father comes home after an evening at the bars. Jenny’s relationship to her father is rather strange, or, more accurately, rather inverted as she plays the parent to his childish antics. After sending her father to his room, again showing her control of space, Lizzie tries “to bring her round to that prettier and better state. But the charm was broken. The person of the house was the person of a house full of sordid shames and cares” (243). Though the house is not specifically described as a physiological part of her body, it becomes clear that the house and Jenny are ontologically blurred if not indistinct.

While the house is an extension of Jenny’s subjectivity, she shows the capacity to use a variety of spaces and techniques to effect environmental self-fashioning. Outside the home, Jenny and Lizzie take up the habit of studying books with Mr. Riah in his
rooftop garden. The scene effectively mixes urban and natural aesthetics – they appear “against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some bumble creeper had been trained” and amidst “[a] few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens” – and thus suggests a means of augmenting urban structures of influence (281). When Mr. Fledgeby finds them on his rooftop (for he owns the building), Jenny says, “you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air” (281). Up here, Jenny suggests, they can distinguish themselves from the people below who “are alive, crying, and working, ...you seem to pity them so! And such chain has fall from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!” (281). Jenny goes on to imagine the rooftop as a type of heaven, where they can “be dead” and feel the weight of daily struggles, the chains of daily life, fall from their bodies and psyches. But, as the efforts of self-education and small garden suggest, their rooftop haven affords not stasis in death but transformative potential through personal rebirth. Thus, a metaphorical death of the past self becomes connected with causal processes of environmental self-fashioning, as both infer the emergence of a new sense of self.37

Perhaps the most significant adaption has to do with Jenny’s trade: doll dressing. While critics have tended to focus on her niche industry, in which she turns salvaged textile scraps into glorious, miniature dresses, I want to focus specifically on the sensory

37 F. S. Schwarzbach sees in the rooftop garden scene a microcosmic metaphor for how the city as a whole could be transformed from the “dehumanized wasteland” it otherwise appears to be” (210). In general, my own approach to Dickens’s portrayal of urban experience is most sympathetic to Schwarzbach’s reading than to the other scholars to which I have referred because of his emphasis on constructive changes that would improve urban existence. Yet, Schwarzbach’s sense of constructive change has to do more with urban planning than with individual adaptation, and most of his attention to individual characters emphasizes the more metaphysical transformations that other scholars of prioritized.
and psychological aspect of this endeavor. Jenny’s observational skills are perhaps her most defining characteristic, being mentioned far more frequently than her stature or crutches. In her first scene with Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone, Dickens writes, “she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness” (222). Jenny’s power of observation is again highlighted in an interesting moment where Wren signals to Bradley that she is watching him as he watches Lizzie: she “made a double eye-glass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried with a waggish shake of her head: ‘Aha! Caught you spying, did I?’” (226). Here, Jenny’s “double eye-glass” only mimics a technological extension of her senses, pointing to the heightened power of her observation. Jenny also shows a heightened sense of hearing, as she is able to discern the footsteps outside her door and identify to whom they belong, an ability that must certainly be acquired through repeated experience (225, 234). Jenny’s sensitivity to the minute variations around her certainly contradict Kearns’ assertion, following Lewes, that Dickens’s characters did not make for believable human organisms because they were not able to acknowledge and respond to minute variations.39

While Jenny’s observational aptitude proves her environmental sensitivity, the cognitive awareness to which it leads is equally significant. Repeatedly throughout the novel, Wren states, in regards to a variety of people, “I know their tricks and their manners!” (repeated four times on 224 as well as twice on 241, and once on 243).

38 Much of the scholarship to address Wren’s character focuses on her ability to utilize textile waste to make dresses and other outfits for dolls, see Gallagher 96, Talia Schaffer 124-25, Nancy Metz 68.
39 Kearns argues: “Lewes’ distinction between ‘moving like pieces of simple mechanism’ implies two important criteria for credible characters: they must be organisms, and they must demonstrate finely modulated responses to slight variations in stimuli. In assessing the achievements of Brontë and Dickens I will show that their metaphors of mind did not enable them to meet these criteria” (138).
Jenny’s ability to read other characters and contexts – to identify social and physical threats – allows her to gain psychological control over her urban environment. This environmental literacy does more than alert her to dangers, however, proving a significant component in her dress-making process. After her father’s funeral, Jenny sets straight to work upon a miniature version of the clergyman’s robes, acknowledging to Mr. Riah, “‘we Professors who live upon our taste and invention, are obliged to keep our eyes always open’” (734). Like the Night-Inspector, Jenny is a scholar of the urban sphere and its inhabitants, which suggests a degree of epistemological mastery.

Jenny’s creative process reveals other forms of psychological control over environment. As with her observational skills, Jenny’s imagination proves to be a psychological function that was developed through necessity and later applied to her industry. Early on in Jenny Wren’s narrative, she describes the visions she used to have of birds and angelic children who would visit her and take away her pain – presumably related to her disfigurement. Later on, Jenny uses this ability to augment her reality, to alter it in a way that proves professionally lucrative. Showing Mr. Riah a window case filled with dolls dressed in her own designs, Jenny explains to him that the source of her inspirations are the ladies who she observes at “a Drawing Room” or on “a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fete, or what you like.” When Jenny spots one “very suitable” for her endeavors, as she explains, “I take particular notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her.” While Jenny’s observational skill is notable, it is the way that she refigures the context of these moments through her agency of imagination that proves so compelling. While the women sometimes note her “staring,” they do not seem to mind. “I dare say,” concludes Jenny, “they think I am wondering and admiring with all my eyes
and heart, but they little think they're only working for my dolls!” (436). While, objectively, Wren appears the poor gawker, a cripple literally and socially beneath the women she watches, she has adapted this social context for her own creative and financial gain. Subjectively, then, the space becomes altered, refashioned to suit Jenny’s needs – no longer a red carpet, it becomes a runway on which the upper-class women are transformed into Jenny’s models.

In her capacity to refashion the social dynamic of this space through imaginative practices, she has added something to it – not something so tangible as a lever and spring system to open the front door, but certainly a mechanism that gives her power within a space where she would otherwise possess little to none. This moment proves rather significant as it shows how individual practices – whether physical or mental operations – can overcome the restrictive codes written into social space. Rather than let the scene, or should we say the social powers it manifests, shape her, Jenny reconceives the dynamic of the place. The subjective, imaginative lens through which Jenny views the urban world allows her to take something away from it: information from which to make a living, a sense of personal agency, and a sense of ontological stability. Unlike the other characters of the novel – who either accept the external environment as it is, physically leave it, or physically shape it – Jenny’s capacity to reconfigure her relationship with her milieu goes beyond the material. In making Jenny one of the weakest characters in the novel, physically speaking, Dickens points to the capacity of the willful mind to psychologically adapt, to develop new modes of thinking and states of being so as to survive an urban environment that for many is not easily left behind or kept outside. Jenny proves the most adapted to the urban environment, proves the most capable of taking what her
environment affords her and transforming it into a means of survival and even personal growth.

After explaining her creative process to Mr. Riah, the two head to the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, and in a single moment Dickens links the numerous extensions of Jenny’s identity. Upon meeting Miss Abbey, who pays special attention to Jenny’s crutch-stick, Jenny reaches into the same pocket that holds her house key and produces a business card on which is printed her name and profession (437). A crutch, a key, a business card – along this list of objects we move across three forms of self-extension, from physical, to psychological and emotional, to professional. Each item allows Jenny to engage with her external world and exemplifies her capacity to adapt to the difficult conditions of urban life.

Conclusion

Through the various forms of environmental literacy and self-extension presented in the novel, Dickens offers a template for adapting to what has been commonly regarded as a chaotic and illegible urban environment. The novel is not without moments of transcendence, but they are predicated, I argue, on more fundamental and biological processes of adaptation. If we ignore the capacity to utilize external spaces as ontological extension or for epistemic action as exhibited by numerous characters in this novel, then we will continue to miss out on what makes these characters truly human. We miss the psychological, biological, and urban realism of his characters and the opportunity to acquire our own environmental literacy and to implement it within our approach to
nineteenth-century British literature at large. Such an approach, I argue, is a necessity if
we are to appreciate the mastery in Dickens’s depiction of character (as well as
Radcliffe’s, Wordsworth’s, and Gaskell’s) but also his sense of how the world we make
proves a profound technology for self-shaping.
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VITA
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After finishing my M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Saint Mary’s College of California in May of 2007, I attended to Purdue University to earn an M.A. in English in the spring of 2009. I began the Ph.D. program in Literary Studies at Purdue University in the fall of that year. Course work covered the areas of British Romanticism, Victorian Literature, and Urban Studies. I also took a secondary area in Poetics. I passed the Preliminary Examinations in November of 2011; I then passed the Prospectus Defense in September of 2012. The Graduate Program in Literary Studies encouraged a rigorous and multifaceted engagement with nineteenth-century British Literature, and this dissertation reflects my training in this program as well as my commitment to an open-minded and interdisciplinary approach to scholarship.