LONDON IN THE POETIC IMAGINATION OF THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract: This paper explores the changes in the representation of the urban space in poems written during the long eighteenth century. After analysing and comparing poems written in the last decades of the seventeenth century with poems by eighteenth-century authors, the contention of this paper is that there was a clear movement away from idealization and mystified representations, which often served political agendas, and towards quotidian and familiar versions of urban experience, which would comment on urban mores and social values. This shift was mainly caused by the dissolution of the traditional system of patronage and is attuned to the period's dominant literary tendency of favouring daily life and the presumption of plausibility over abstract descriptions and idealised projections.
Keywords: London, urban space, poetic representation of urbanity, poetry and the city, English poetry, the long eighteenth century

"When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life…"
(Samuel Johnson)

The long eighteenth century[1] witnessed an extensive movement from the countryside to the town, especially to London, which confirmed the growing importance of the urban space in the social, political, and cultural lives of the period. Beginning with the Civil War, London consolidated its role as a centre of influence, and its specific culture strengthened its magnetism. This trend continued to amplify, under different auspices, after the restoration of the monarchy. The political scene, the complex religious life, the economic opportunities, the

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[1] The temporal boundaries of what is meant here by 'the long eighteenth century' extend to encompass the Restoration, since, as Michael Alexander claims, "'eighteenth-century' qualities can be found in literature from 1660 to 1798, the publication date of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*" (see Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature*. London: Macmillan, 2000, 156). This study does not cover the representation of London in the works of the Romantic poets.

flourishing cultural life as well as the pleasures of urban leisure and refinement drew an ever-larger population to the capital. As Harold Love explains, during the last period of the Interregnum and the years following the Restoration, the migration to the capital increased; the pattern of travelling to London for business or political affairs was replaced with the practice of bringing the family along and staying for a longer period of time or even moving to the capital.[2] Moreover, for literary men, London was the place to be. It was the centre of printing and, after the reopening of the theatres, there was hardly any theatrical activity elsewhere in the country. Therefore, with everybody coming to London, most literary works promoted the ethos of urbanity, with urban preoccupations and themes pervading the literary productions of the second half of the seventeenth century. Even before the return of the monarch, "many of the literary and cultural forms associated with the Restoration … were already a feature of 1650s literary London."[3] After the restoration of the monarchy, urban witty flippancy bloomed in satires and plays alike. The comedies of the period perpetuated and reinforced "the values of the town: loyalty to the monarchy, the established church, and a reworked cavalier code of ethics; urbanity, sophistication, classical education; a self-reflexive interest in and commitment to a small, close-knit, privileged, ruling class, firmly based in London."[4] Although the Royalist sympathies were the most conspicuous, the city's literary culture also "admitted various kinds of Puritan and republican dissent back into its ranks."[5] Therefore, although completely different in ideology, the works of Republicans and Royalists often share an intensely urban view. Moreover, these urban inflections would help writers move away from the strain of previous works. As James Grantham Turner explains,

> To distance themselves from the old 'Puritan' tone both prose and verse aimed to appear *urbane*, metropolitan or 'Augustan', and in many cases this stylistic gesture was reinforced by literally concentrating on the fashionable world of London: the site depicted merges with the site of production. Topographical poetry, for example, continued to appear in the decade after *Coopers Hill*, but it focused much more narrowly upon London, and 1660s drama set virtually no scenes in rural England or in the other British nations.[6]

[2] Harold Love, "Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama" in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780,* ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 122–123.
[3] Nigel Smith, "Literature and London" in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature,* ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 735.
[4] Corman, Brian. "Comedy" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre,* ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.
[5] Smith, "Literature and London", 723.
[6] Turner, James Grantham, "From Revolution to Restoration in English literary culture" in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature,* ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 815.

Hence, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, London was the largest city in England and the most important literary stage of the country. The development of the printing trade and of the literary market made it the most appropriate place for pursuing literary careers. Printers and booksellers contributed to changing the old system of patronage and offered writers the means to make a living out of writing. Besides the economic aspect, the entire cultural atmosphere of the capital, with its literary circles and coffee houses, where the most important intellectual debates of the day took place, increased the attractiveness of the city for literary men. As Richard Terry noted, "some writers whose upbringing was in the English provinces (such as John Gay and Samuel Johnson) relocated to London to find literary work, and numerous others flooded in from Scotland and Ireland."[7]

This urban strain that pervaded the literary productions of the long eighteenth century is visible in all literary genres. The cultivation of urban wit and sophistication in the Restoration plays, the urban decadence of Rochester's work, the urban setting and preoccupations of early modern fiction, the exclusive concern with the city life in the periodical essays, the exploitation of urban topics and topographies in the novels, the comic urbanity of Pope's verses and the ironic urban realism of Swift's, all these indicate the intensely urban view that shaped the literary works of the period. In poetry, the urban enthusiasm began a descent after the first decades of the eighteenth century, when "a kind of rural nostalgia became important,"[8] but it regained its strength in the second half.

With this urban impetus behind the literary productions of this period, several poets turned the city of London into poetic subject. During the Restoration, London was generally imagined as a mythical place, the space of fabulous and legendary accomplishments, as if in an attempt to infuse some sense of heroism into a completely un-heroic reality. London was presented in abstract descriptions, sometimes personified as the addressee, and the attachment to the city is easily detectable in the speaker's exaltation. Abraham Cowley exploited the strategy of personification to enable parts of the city to voice the praise of the whole in the occasional poem "On the Queens Repairing Somerset House," written to celebrate Queen Henrietta's project to restore the building, in 1661. The strategy of personification assigns the role of speaker to the building. The poem begins in the spirit of the country house poem, with the building describing itself, its sorrows and humiliating decay caused by "the Common Foe,"[9] and its joy at the prospects of being restored by its goddess-like rightful mistress. It quickly moves to offer a topographical description of London, as seen from/by Somerset House.

[7] Richard Terry, "Key Critical Concepts and Topics" in *The Eighteenth-Century Literature Handbook,* ed. Garry Day and Keegan Bridget (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 127.

[8] Hunter, J. Paul. "Political, satirical, didactic and lyric poetry (I): from the Restoration to the death of Pope" in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780,* ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 204.

[9] This is a clear reference to the Interregnum, when Somerset House was used to provide accommodation to members of Parliament and served as Army headquarters.

The building assumes a panoptical position ("The Midst, the noblest place, possess'd by Me; / Best to be Seen by all, and all O'resee."[10]), surveying and depicting its surroundings. It catches the hectic atmosphere of the city whose streets "with Waves of crowding people [flow]" and contemplates its own image as reflected by Thames, "the best Mirrour that the world can show."[11] The poem also elaborates on the dual origin of London as "two joynt Cities,"[12] the City of Westminster and the City of London, and their complementary role. Cowley writes:

> Which way soe'r I turn my joyful Eye,
> Here the Great Court, there the rich Town, I spy;
> On either side dwells Safety and Delight;
> Wealth on the Left, and Power upon the Right.[13]

By describing these "two vast cities" as "troublesomely great," Cowley hints at the recent past, when the struggle between revolutionary convictions and royalist allegiance defined the dynamics of the city's public life. As Erik Bond notes, this phrase "also gestures towards a growing perception that the geographic distance between Court and City belied an even greater political distance between the two entities."[14] However, the vocabulary of the poem insists on creating the impression of safety and newly-found stability after the destabilization of sovereignty that had marked the country's recent past and continues with praising future glories and triumphs. The reconstruction of Somerset House and the projection of London's greatness derived from the dynamics of the "two vast cities," the Court and the City, combine the vitality of celebration and optimistic projections, thus becoming instrumental in what appears to be an attempt to consolidate the confidence in the restored monarchy.

Although not focusing exclusively on London, John Dryden's panegyric *Annus Mirabilis* also uses the urban space to serve political and ideological purposes. Written in iambic pentameter quatrains, the first part of this 'historical poem'[15] consists of the narrative of the Anglo-Dutch sea battle of august 1666, which resulted in England's victory, while the last part, considerably shorter, is descriptive of the Great Fire of September 1666 and London's reconstruction after this disastrous event.

[10] Abraham Cowley, "On the Queens Repairing Somerset House." *The Abraham Cowley Text and Image Archive,* ed. Daniel Kinney, in University of Virginia Library, http://cowley.lib.virginia.edu/works/somerset.htm (accessed 23.08.2015).
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Erik Bond, *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 4.
[15] Dryden himself gave this generic label to the poem.

The Great Fire was, indeed, "one of the most formative events of the city's history"[16] and still is "the most arresting image of the seventeenth century."[17]The symbolic potential of the Great Fire spread across wide political and religious spectra and fuelled the competing interpretations of republican nonconformists and Anglican royalists. Seen as the materialisation of the divine wrath triggered by the beheading of the king or, on the contrary, by the restoration of a morally corrupt monarch, and used to support theses of purge, purification, and rebirth or, on the contrary, to support the scientific and objective outlook of the newly founded Royal Society,[18] the Great Fire was used to serve various agendas.

In depicting London during and after the Great Fire, Dryden uses the tension of destruction to fuel the vitality of rebirth. The story of disaster and revival is told in powerful and eloquent poetic images, which, at times, slide into fantastic exaggeration. However, the magnificent imagery, the lofty diction of the iambic pentameter, and the forceful pace of the verses imprint a sense of gravity upon the description. The city is first depicted when besieged by fire, a "dire usurper", an "infant monster"[19] that, feeding on London and fuelled by the sabbatical dance of ghosts, would become a mighty predator:

> The fire, meantime, walks in a broader gross;
> To either hand his wings he opens wide:
> He wades the streets, and straight he reaches cross,
> And plays his longing flames on the other side.[20]

The poem continues with a long succession of similarly powerful and nightmarish images, intensifying the sense of chaos and doom. But, however strong the devastating power of the fire, however bleak the despair to which the inhabitants of London had been driven, there is a force that can raise hope, offer comfort, and fight the destructive effects of the "marching foe," namely the faith in the king:

> While by the motion of the flames they guess
> What streets are burning now, and what are near;
> An infant waking to the paps would press,
> And meets, instead of milk, a falling tear.
>
> No thought can ease them but their sovereign's care,
> Whose praise the afflicted as their comfort sing:
> Even those whom want might drive to just despair,

[16] Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001), 223.
[17] Ibid, 227.
[18] Ibid, 228–29.
[19] John Dryden, "Annus Mirabilis." Project Gutenberg's The Poetical Works of John Dryden, posted March 7, 2004. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11488/11488-8.txt (accessed 12.07.2015).
[20] Ibid.

Think life a blessing under such a king.[21]

Hope sets in upon acknowledging that the ruins and ashes can be revived by the "royal bounty." At this point, from distant commentator and reporter, the speaker assumes the role of prophet, anticipating and celebrating London's glorious revival and future:

Methinks already from this chemic flame,
I see a city of more precious mould:
Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,
With silver paved, and all divine with gold.[22]

His description of the city is reverential in tone, celebratory, and grandiose. Drawing on classical mythology, the poem personifies London as a mythical being, re-emerging from its ruins and ashes like the Phoenix:

More great than human now, and more august,
Now deified she from her fires does rise:
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
And opening into larger parts she flies.[23]

The disaster thus becomes the facilitator of metamorphosis: before the fire, London was but a shepherdess, too "rude and low"[24] to match her fame, but she rose as queen, to whom both the East and the West would pay respect and tribute. This new perspective on the Great Fire undermines the moralizing fatalism generally associated with the disastrous event, seen by many as divine punishment for the actions and conduct of the monarch, and replaces penitential reactions with the energies of celebration. As Turner points out, Dryden had to "redefine the Year of Wonders as a triumph for the royal family, when many of their subjects regarded them as monsters of incompetence or iniquity, justly struck down by plague and fire in the *mirabilis annus* predicted by George Wither and the Book of Revelation."[25] The providential intention associated with the purge is preserved, but justified by the profanation of the city's values and religion during the Civil War and the Interregnum and reinterpreted so as to serve consolidate confidence in the monarchy:

The daring flames peep'd in, and saw from far
The awful beauties of the sacred quire:
But since it was profaned by civil war,

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Turner, "From Revolution to Restoration in English literary culture," 817.

Heaven thought it fit to have it purged by fire.[26]

Although rich in imagery and description, neither Cowley's nor Dryden's poem is preoccupied with rendering the atmosphere of contemporary London. The two poems elevate the subject of their description to a point where it becomes clear that their purpose is not poetic reconfiguration, but political and ideological support. The poems are more engaged with attempting to rebuild the confidence in the recently restored monarchy through the projection of the urban space as a mythical realm, than with exploring the qualities of the urban experience. Although both poems contain long strings of descriptive verses, they are general and abstract in their description of London; they excel in celebrating an idealized version of the city, but lack the vividness of detailed description.

Moving on to the eighteenth century, we notice a change in the poetic perception and representation of the city of London. The abstract and festive portrayal meant to serve political purposes is replaced by the freshness of immediate experiences and commentaries on social decorum, sometimes sprinkled with the arguments of personal agendas and literary feuds. In the eighteenth century, the city began to be perceived differently; it was seen "as more than an accumulation of buildings, or a concentration of people" and rather as "a set of human interactions."[27] Urban energies fuelled the reinterpretation of classical genres traditionally used for rural subjects and were put to new use.

The tradition of the town eclogue, for example, initiated by Jonathan Swift and used parodically by the Pope-Swift-Gay triumvirate to fight their literary battle with Ambrose Phillips over the pastoral, became increasingly fashionable. The genre's conventions were transformed to accommodate the ethos of urbanity and render urban preoccupations and decorum. The dialogical quality of the eclogue succeeded in capturing urban social interaction, and other classical forms traditionally associated with the description of rustic bliss, namely the georgic and the pastoral, were hybridised and revised in order to reflect urban realities and temperament. This revision was performed under the influence of a kind of ironic urban realism, resulting in the replacement of the venerating tone of the Restoration's enthusiastic panegyric with immediate representations of the quotidian that often touched the burlesque and the abject.

Realistic images of London are captured by Jonathan Swift's poems, "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower," both published first in *The Tatler* and admired by Richard Steele in the "Preface to the Octavo Edition in 1710" for their ability to "raise such pleasing ideas upon occasions so barren to an ordinary invention."[28] In the essay introducing "A Description of the Morning," Steele noted the realistic portrayal of urban life and appreciated the way in which the poem distanced itself from the imagery and vocabulary

[26] Dryden, "Annus Mirabilis." n.p.

[27] Markman Ellis. "Poetry and the City" in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry,* ed. Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 535.

[28] Richard Steele, "Preface to the Octavo Edition in 1710" in Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, *The Tatler,* ed. Alexander Chalmers (London: G. Woodfall, 1822), viii.

of the pastoral. He claims that the poet "described Things exactly as they happen: He never forms Fields, or Nymphs, or Groves where they are not, but makes the Incidents just as they really appear."[29] Indeed, Swift's "A Description of the Morning," is a dynamic documentary of the teeming streets of modern London at daybreak. Rather than depicting the urban landscape at dawn, the speaker focuses on the working class and their chores:

> Now Betty from her master's bed had flown,
> And softly stole to discompose her own;
> The slip-shod 'prentice from his master's door
> Had pared the dirt, and sprinkled round the floor.
> Now Moll had whirl'd her mop with dext'rous airs,
> Prepared to scrub the entry and the stairs.[30]

The shepherd and the shepherdess of the pastoral are replaced with maids, servants, coalmen, chimneysweepers, bailiffs, or schoolboys late for school. They are all carrying out their specific tasks as if they were performing "some kind of 'urban cosmetics' to the city of London,"[31] in order to hide all nocturnal misdoings and prepare the city for the new day. The felonies and misdemeanours of the night captured by Swift's poem are, indeed, indicative of London's high criminality rate at the time, but they also metaphorically illustrate Swift's view of the moral corruption and villainies of man and his distrust in human benevolence.

With Swift, no subject is considered unpoetic. On the contrary, he explores the most banal and plebeian actions and succeeds in capturing the "vulgar energies of city life."[32] In its insistence on action and motion, Swift's poem is a strikingly vivid description of city life. If "A Description of the Morning," was meant to serve the purpose announced by Steele, namely to reproduce the atmosphere of the urban morning by presenting things 'exactly as they happened,' "A Description of a City Shower" is more nuanced and complex, richer in social commentaries and political innuendos. The urban space is easily identifiable as London due to the topographical indications present in the verses: Smithfield, St. Pulchre, or Holborn Bridge.

Like Swift's description of the awakening city, "A Description of a City Shower" also shows concern with creating a mosaic of ordinary people and their reactions to the downpour: Brisk Susan whipping her linen from the rope, the sauntering coffee-house 'Dulman,' the law student, the hasty sempstress, or the beau in a sedan chair. However, here the speaker shows more interest in description, extending his attention to encompass both the intimate sphere of human physiology and the urban landscape. The descriptive passages of the poem reflect

[29] Richard Steele,"The Tatler No 9." Steele, Richard and Joseph Addison. *The Tatler.* Ed. Alexander Chalmers. Vol. I. (London: G. Woodfall, 1822), 77.
[30] Jonathan Swift, "A Description of the Morning" in *Jonathan Swift's Poems/ Poemele lui Jonathan Swift* by Jonathan Swift (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2010), 48.
[31] Mihaela Mudure (ed.), *Things of Beauty, Things of Joy. An Interpretative Anthology of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century British Poetry* (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2013), 71.
[32] Ellis, 537.

Swift's notorious fascination with ordure and filth. The first lines of the poem introduce the addressee, presumably a Londoner, with shooting corns, throbbing aches, and bad teeth. The decay of the individual is then echoed by the degradation of the city. The perspective widens to include the offensive odours of the houses and the disgustingly dirty streets of London, culminating at the end of the poem:

> Sweeping from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
> Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drench'd in mud,
> Dead cats, and turnip-tops, come tumbling down the flood.[33] (56)

The exploration of the abject removes any aspiration of urban greatness and functions as social commentary meant to expose the degradation and perversion of urban life more overtly than through the allusions to nocturnal misconduct and illegal behaviour from "A Description of the Morning." Moreover, these images add comments to the revision and reinterpretation of the generic conventions of the pastoral and the georgic, as the vocabulary of abjection opposes and mocks the language of classical descriptions of the bucolic. The generic commentary is reinforced by the mock-heroic overtones of Swift's poetic representation of the urban downpour, emphasized by the association with the storm in Virgil's *Aeneid* in Richard Steele's introductory text prefacing the poem in *The Tatler.* The mock-heroic quality is supported by the formal and the linguistic levels of the poem, both "at odds with its vulgar subject."[34] In revising form, Swift skilfully balances urban rapidity and the pace of the decasyllabic couplet, while in terms of language he mixes frivolous terms with the highly poetic lexicon to address trivial subject matter.

The sense of perverted urbanity rendered though the exploration of the abject extends to encompass political allusions. The poem mocks the volatility of political convictions by introducing a truce between "the triumphant[35] Tories and desponding Whigs,"[36] whose differences are put aside when facing the common threat of having their wigs ruined. Thus, the poem's involvement with various, overlapping layers of city life adds to its complexity and increases its ability of capturing and rendering eighteenth-century urbanity.

John Gay's mock-georgic "Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London" continues the tradition initiated by Swift's urban georgics, showing similar interest in the exploration of sordid aspects of city life. The peripatetic speaker of Gay's poem is reminiscent of Richard Steele's essay in the *Spectator No. 454*, recording his twenty-four hour casual and aimless walk on the streets of London. Gay's speaker also documents his urban ramble, but depicts London as the city of sewers, under the dominion of Cloacina, "Goddess of the Tide/

[33] Swift, Jonathan. "A Description of a City Shower" in *Jonathan Swift's Poems / Poemele lui Jonathan Swift (*Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2010), 56.
[34] Mina Gorji, "John Gay, The Shepherd's Week" in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 151.
[35] The poem hints at the Tory victory in the British general election of 1710.
[36] Swift, "A Description of a City Shower," 54.

Whose sable Streams beneath the City glide."[37] Although the speaker seems more concerned with prescribing rules of proper urban conduct and attire, he does capture the atmosphere of the city, with its specific noises and restless motion:

> When the *Black Youth* at chosen Stands rejoice,
> And *clean your Shoes* resounds from ev'ry Voice;
> When late their miry Sides Stage-Coaches show,
> And their stiff Horses through the Town move slow;
> When all the *Mall* in leafy Ruin lies,
> And Damsels first renew their Oyster Cries:
> Then let the prudent Walker Shoes provide,
> Not of the *Spanish* or *Morocco* Hide;
> The wooden Heel may raise the Dancer's Bound,
> And with the scallop'd Top his Step be crown'd:
> Let firm, well hammer'd Soles protect thy Feet
> Thro' freezing Snows, and Rains, and soaking Sleet.[38]

The references to classical mythology reinforce the parodical and the burlesque as they are used to adorn a swampy urban landscape, made of overflowing kennels, "muddy Torrents," "Ungrateful Odours." With "Trivia," Gay succeeds in rendering "a powerful, and nearly unique, description of eighteenth-century urbanism" and, in a Swiftian manner, his insistence on London's offscourings and filth serves as a critique of "its latent corruption and immorality."[39]

Swift's interest in capturing the atmosphere of the city at daybreak is echoed, at the end of the century, by Mary Robinson's "London's Summer Morning," a very dynamic and lively poem.[40] Like Swift, Robinson carefully selects characters representative of the urban population and explores their specific tasks and behaviour. However, her poem testifies for a different kind of poetic sensibility. Robinson skilfully alternates auditory and visual images, so as to imitate the awakening of the senses. At first, Robinson's London is "noisy London", as she chooses to begin her poem by painting the portrait of the city in sounds. The vocabulary of the first part of the poem creates powerful auditory images that seem to flow into each other due to the poet's mastery of the enjambment:

> The sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face
> And tattered covering, shrilly bawls his trade,
> Rousing the sleepy housemaid. At the door
> The milk-pail rattles, and the tinkling bell

[37] Gay, John. "Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London,". Cardiff University, posted January 16, 2002, http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/skilton/poetry/gay01b.html (accessed 12.08.2015).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ellis, 542.
[40] Mudure, 141.

Proclaims the dustman's office; while the street
Is lost in clouds impervious. Now begins
The din of hackney-coaches, waggons, carts;
While tinmen's shops, and noisy trunk-makers,
Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,
Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries
Of vegetable-vendors, fill the air.[41]

As the summer sun takes dominion over the city, auditory stimuli make room for the visual exploration of the city streets:

… Now the sun
Darts burning splendor on the glittering pane,
Save where the canvas awning throws a shade
On the gay merchandise. Now, spruce and trim,
In shops (where beauty smiles with industry)
Sits the smart damsel; while the passenger
Peeps through the window, watching every charm.
Now pastry dainties catch the eye minute
Of humming insects, while the limy snare
Waits to enthrall them. …[42]

The last part of the poem offers a mix of sounds and images that drive away the "busy dreams" of the poet and determine her to write about that very summer morning.

Of course, not all eighteenth-century poems tackling London focused on describing and commenting on urban realities. For some poets, London became instrumental in fighting their literary feuds or in expressing their political views. For example, Alexander Pope used the city of London to express his profound disapproval and outright rejection of the literary world of London. In "A Farewell to London," Pope marks the decadence of urban culture by continuously associating the literary life of the capital with promiscuity and depravity. In its insistence on the city's wantonness and low moral standards, the poem is reminiscent of Rochester's bawdy poetic imagination, while its attacks against fellow writers anticipates Pope's vitriolic criticism in the *Dunciad*. However, the poem is not a description of city life proper; it only reflects Pope's aesthetic bias and his subjective perception of London's cultural life as a literary brothel.[43]

[41] Mary Robinson, "London's Summer Morning" in *Things of Beauty, Things of Joy. An Interpretative Anthology of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century British Poetry,* ed. Mihaela Mudure (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2013), 139.
[42] Ibid., 140.
[43] Alexander Pope, "A Farewell to London" in *The Major Works,* ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118–119.

While the motto of this study, expressing strong allegiance to London, is a quote from Dr. Samuel Johnson, his poem "London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal" fails to express the same enthusiasm for the city. Dr. Johnson transforms London into poetic pretext to express his strong dissatisfaction with the politics of what he sees as "these degenerate days."[44] Samuel Johnson uses London in his imitation of a classical model as a means of manifesting his discontent with the state of affairs in Britain under the administration of Sir Robert Walpole. Nostalgic for the glories of the Elizabethan rule, when Britannia was "...triumphant on the main/ The guard of commerce and the dread of Spain,"[45] the speaker in Johnson's poem sees London as a site of decay, a "morally un-British city,"[46] whose heroes were replaced by villains, whose triumphs were corroded by venality, and whose honour became but mere jest. The malfeasance of the public sphere is mirrored by the high crime rate on the city streets:

> London, the needy villain's general home,
> The common-sewer of Paris and of Rome,
> With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,
> Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted state.
> …
> Prepare for death, if here at night you roam,
> And sign your will before you sup from home.
> Some fiery fop, with new commission vain,
> Who sleeps on brambles till he kills his man;
> Some frolic drunkard, reeling from a feast,
> Provokes a broil, and stabs you for a jest. [47]

Samuel Johnson's speaker, a Londoner likely to fall victim to malice, rapine, accidents, ruffians, unscrupled attorneys or female atheists, exposes the vice and corruption of city life seen as symptomatic for the decay of the entire nation and decides to leave the city in sign of protest. However, despite the keen exploration of the shadowy underworld of crime, the poem does not capture the energies of city life in the spirit of Swift, Gay, or Robinson.

If late seventeenth-century poets solemnised urbanity with a view to supporting political agendas, in the eighteenth century, the urban space is generally celebrated for the energies of quotidian life and immediate experience. The imagination of eighteenth-century poets removed any aspiration of greatness in favour of exploring the pulse of the city streets

[44] Samuel Johnson, "London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal" *London and Literature in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Anthony Mandal, posted January 16, 2002. http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/skilton/poetry/johns01.html (accessed 12. 08. 2015).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Howard D. Weinbrot, "Johnson's Poetry" in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 46.
[47] Ibid.

and succeeded in transforming even the most trivial matter into poetic subject. Of course, eighteenth-century poets also had their own personal or political agendas and references that would often creep through their poetic discourse, but the description of the city was generally used to reflect and comment on urban issues.

The cultural logic guiding this shift relies greatly on the changes of the traditional system of patronage, which afforded writers independence from a patron whom they would have to flatter and please. As Dustin Griffin points out,

> a culture in which an author typically sought to please the court gave way to a culture in which an author typically addressed a broader 'reading public'; … the typical social gathering in which literature was discussed and even produced shifted from the aristocrat's coterie to the public coffee house or the meetings of the famous Kit-Cat and Scriblerus Clubs, where social rank counted for less than wit; … the limited circulation of writing in manuscript within narrow circles gave way to the wider dissemination of written texts in 'print culture'; that the writer emerged from dependence on various forms of patronage into increasing financial independence; and that, added together, these several changes pointed towards the gradual liberation and professionalisation of the writer.[48]

This change gave writers more liberty in choosing their approach to various subjects. Therefore, politically engaged celebrations of the urban space were replaced by colourful pictures of the ordinary and of the everydayness, which afforded a glimpse at the new urban realities and miseries. While general and abstract descriptions still represent the preferred model for the treatment of other poetic subjects, the poetic representation of the urban space reflects a change in poetic vision, a growing interest in everydayness. This movement towards the commonplace, the habitual, the immediacy of plausible situations is attuned to the dominant tendency of eighteenth-century literature, i.e. that of attempting to capture and explore ordinary life.

[48] Griffin, Dustin. "The social world of authorship 1660–1714" in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780,* ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42.