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Research Statement

I am currently developing my dissertation into a book manuscript entitled *Romantic Suburbs: Greater London, Elite Urban Culture, and Fiction, 1780-1840*. *Romantic Suburbs* explores the central question of why and how the elite ranks—the wealthiest middling ranks, the gentry, and the nobility—lived in Romantic-period Greater London. This critical literary geography project focuses on fiction by writers including Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith. It intervenes in pre-railway suburban history and suburban literary Romanticism in three primary ways. Firstly, I move beyond the social classes and lifestyles conventionally included in suburban scholarship, such as virtuous middle-class activity. Instead, I explore how elite urban culture, centred on London's West End, significantly informed how the highest ranks experienced suburban domestic spaces. Secondly, this project challenges current scholarly emphasis on urban-suburban interpenetrations by considering how non-metropolitan spaces, like the European continent and the empire, shaped (via elite urban culture) the social spaces of suburban homes. So, for example, I consider how goods, people, and ideas move between various parts of the world and the suburban home, and how, as a result, these non-metropolitan areas impact the physical and social spaces of the residential suburbs. Thirdly, this project will be the first to argue for the central role of fiction in moulding cultural perceptions of Romantic suburbs. For instance, novels hierarchize the suburbs they represent, offering insight into how Romantic culture valued different suburban homes and experiences. Novels offer unmatched access to suburban homes and minds, which I take advantage of in order to explore the largely unexamined impact mass suburbanization had on Romantic domestic life. *Romantic Suburbs* thus has a three-part argument: that the elite ranks and elite urban culture significantly shaped domestic life in Romantic Greater London; that suburban homes exist at the intersection of regional, national, and global networks; and that fiction of the period vitally shaped suburbs' place in the cultural consciousness.

Romantic Suburbs investigates these ideas via a methodology that combines literary criticism and geography. Such an approach supports my explicit analysis of how literature, specifically the novel, represents and critiques suburban domestic geographies via genre, metaphor, and narrative. This allows me to explore fiction's role in creating a suburban discourse and cultural ideas about these emergent and changing spaces. Moreover, with a critical literary geographer's attention to conceptual and social space, I trace what the elite did in these homes, what they thought of them, and the kinds of social relationships that characterized elite suburban domesticity. As a result, I offer the first major study of what went on *inside* suburban domestic spaces in the Romantic period. Geography and spatial theory's attention to varying spatial scales and how they interpenetrate informs my reading of how the suburbs relate not only to urban spaces but also to regional, national, and global ones.

The book's first chapter, "The Many Elite Suburbs of the Romantic Period," introduces the important role that elite urban culture had in shaping experiences of suburban homes. Chapter 2, "The Global Suburb," considers the interpenetrations between suburban homes, elite urban culture, and a range of global spaces from the West to the East Indies in various novels including Medora Gordon Byron's *The Alderman and the Peer; or, The Ancient Castle and Modern Villa* (1810). Chapter 3, "The Suburb and the European Wars," focuses on the conflation of French military threat with the dangers of Gallic-inflected fashion and dissipation. Through a case study of Elizabeth Helme's *Modern Times; or, The Age We Live in* (1814), this chapter explores how the elite suburb is set up as both a retreat from the stereotypical hazards of a West End lifestyle and from the dangers of European war and potential invasion. Chapter 4, "Highbury, Weymouth, Bath, Bristol, and London: The Elite Suburb in Regional and National Context," turns to Jane Austen's *Emma*. I analyze how the residents of Highbury, 16 miles from London, are developing

suburban identities while negotiating versions of elite urban culture imported from various British locations. This chapter specifically focuses on Mrs. Elton, an emulative middling-rank version of the West End fashionable lady, who tries to impose onto Highbury her ideas of fashion gleaned from Bath and her upwardly mobile brother-in-law's suburban estate, Maple Grove, near Bristol. Chapter 5, "The Elite Suburb and the Silver Fork Novel," turns to an under-examined genre, with a particular emphasis on Catherine Gore's novels, to explore the persistence of the fashionable suburb in the 1820s and 30s. I conclude the book by reflecting on how Romantic novels seem to favor privacy, quiet, and close emotional bonds in suburban homes, but that in fact fiction presents a more complex picture of elite suburban life in the period.

The University of Toronto Press has accepted my manuscript for peer review and possible publication. A contract is pending. An article based on this work is forthcoming from the North American Society for Romantic Studies' peer-reviewed *European Romantic Review*; one of the anonymous reviewers wrote that this "essay offers a new approach to [Charlotte] Smith and promises to open up further research into suburban life during the Romantic Era." I also have an article in the peer-reviewed *Romantic Cityscapes*, part of the German Society for English Romanticism's *Studies in English Romanticism* series. Another article is under review with the University of California Press' journal, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

While *Romantic Suburbs* is concerned with the final glory days of the elite suburb before many were destroyed to make way for the homes of nineteenth-century middle- and working-class suburban commuters, in fact elite suburbs persist in the McMansions of today's suburbs and exurbs. This project thus contributes to a more complete picture of Romantic Greater London and, more generally, to better understandings of the mass suburbanization that has transformed society and the built environment in Britain and North America over the past two-and-half centuries.

My future project is *London's Green Geographies: Environment, Health, and Metropolitan Identities, 1770-1840*, which employs methods from literary criticism, urban environmental criticism, and geography/spatial theory. I explore the crucial question of how the inhabitants of the first mega city used and imagined green spaces in a period of environmental change and crisis. This project shows that green spaces are key sites where Londoners worked out whether metropolitan environments were conducive to their physical, emotional, and mental health. I also reveal how at a time of population flux and social and geographical mobility, these habitual experiences of green spaces shaped people's sense of belonging in the metropolis—or in particular areas of it—and their identities as Londoners. I engage with recent literary and cultural work on the Romantic city and with Romanticists' more traditional focus on the natural and rural, and I demand a realignment of how we define London, the urban, and the rural in the period. *London's Green Geographies* thereby advances scholarship on urban and green Romanticisms. *London's Green Geographies'* focus also dovetails with concerns about (sub)urban form, environmental degradation, and health that we face in today's age of rapid global urbanization and climate change. I expect my research agenda as a whole to contribute to debates in critical literary geography and to significantly shape urban Romanticism in the coming years.