

Landscape and Locomotion: Coleridge the Walker

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THE STUDENT of Romantic art is accustomed to making discriminations among the multifarious representations of 'figures in a landscape':^[1] Gainsborough's peasants resting by the side of a path or feeding horses at a stream, Constable's labourers at work in the fields or around the mill, or the lonely figures absorbed in contemplation of nature in the mysterious landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich. In this paper, however, I am more interested in the perspective *of* the figure in the landscape *on* the landscape—by which I describe the phenomenon whereby, at the very end of the eighteenth century, a whole new interest emerged in the experience of moving through a landscape, specifically of moving through a landscape *on foot*.^[2] I shall be drawing my examples from the life and work of the poet of particular interest to us here at Kilve, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the most energetic of literary walkers in the period and probably the most creatively original writer *about* walking.

My argument rests very much on the idea that there was something new, exciting and rebellious about walking for pleasure in the 1780s and 1790s as a member of what we would now loosely call the middle classes, and that there was therefore something new and exciting about the way the natural landscape was being seen and experienced. It is perhaps generally true that significant changes in the perception and appreciation of landscape will always accompany major changes in transport technology, and it might be helpful to begin by recalling a few of the major developments in transport that have taken place over the last two hundred years and how these have been represented and interpreted in our literature.

In the second chapter of Kenneth Grahame's popular children's book and pastoral fantasy, *The Wind in the Willows*, first published in 1908, Toad, Rat and Mole take a holiday in a horse-drawn caravan that is brought to an abrupt and spectacular end. Grahame describes this as a 'disaster momentous indeed to their expedition', and it is a symbolic one in terms of literary representations of travel. They have come out onto the high road for the first time, and are strolling beside their caravan, when suddenly they are forced to confront the

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shock of the new:

Glancing back, they saw a small cloud of dust, with a dark centre of energy, advancing on them at incredible speed . . . in an instant (as it seemed) the peaceful scene was changed, and with a blast of wind and a whirl of sound that made them jump for the nearest ditch, it was on them! . . . they had a moment's glimpse of an interior of glittering plate-glass and rich morocco, and the magnificent motor-car, immense, breath-snatching, passionate, with its pilot tense and hugging his wheel, possessed all earth and air for the fraction of a second, flung an enveloping cloud of dust that blinded and enwrapped them utterly . . . [3]

The mercurial and fashion-conscious Toad had previously been passionate about the gipsy-caravan, a form of transport which enjoyed a vogue among the bohemian classes at the turn of the century: it had promised 'Travel, change, interest, excitement! The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing!' From being one moment completely absorbed in the constantly changing but 'peaceful' scene that unfolds before them as they move along the road, Toad and his friends become marginal and bewildered figures in a landscape 'possessed' by the inhuman speed of the motor car. Rendered inarticulate by this 'heavenly vision', Toad instantly recognises a higher form of transport and discards his 'horrid little cart' in favour of its evolutionary successor. What an exciting new way of travelling, of seeing the world, it seemed to offer: 'Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped—always somebody else's horizon! O bliss! O poop-poop! O my! O my!' [4]

This episode is a particularly vivid example of the appearance in literature of a form of travel that is recognisably new, which alters the texture of lived experience and promises to alter the ways in which creative writers interpret the world and imagine our relations with it. Reviewing the last 250 years of innovation in locomotive technologies, there is no doubt that the 'signature' of the early decades of the twentieth century, the signature of Modernism, is that of the car.

Sharing Toad's enthusiasm for the car was H. G. Wells. In his astonishingly prophetic book, *Anticipations*, published in 1902, Wells looked ahead to a century of development of private motor transport, guaranteeing 'a fine sense of personal independence', and foresaw unconcernedly an English landscape of 'new wide roads—swarming always with a multitudinous traffic of bright, swift (and not necessarily ugly) mechanisms'. [5] But the year after *The Wind in the Willows*, C. F. G. Masterman, in his influential study of *The Condition*

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of England, shrunk from the spectacle of 'Wandering machines, travelling with an incredible rate of speed, [which] scramble and smash and shriek along all the rural ways'. [6] In so doing he epitomised a very significant strain of feeling in the Edwardian literary imagination. The association of the car with the destructive character of a new social and economic order can be found in works as diverse as E. M. Forster's *Howard's End* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. In the latter, one recalls in particular the opulent 'death car' which symbolises the protagonist's contaminated wealth, and which 'came out of the gathering darkness' towards Myrtle Wilson, 'wavered tragically for a moment—then disappeared around the next bend'. [7] Whatever the exact symbolic

weight attached to the car, one element in the negative portrayal is the disconnection between the car and its surroundings, the arrogant disregard for human figures in the landscape.

Looking backward from Modernism, the key moments in transport history are plainly legible. In the mid-Victorian period it is, of course, the railway that is the engine of change. Perhaps the best-known piece of literary evidence of this is Chapter 15 of Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, which describes the transformation of a slum area by the railway and the operation of the steam trains in language reminiscent of that which the Romantic poets had applied to great forces of nature:

Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved.^[8]

Although these 'great powers' and 'strong purposes' are here seen as largely benign, the novel as a whole is more ambivalent, as Raymond Williams has pointed out:^[9] the train is at once the 'life's blood' of the nation and 'the triumphant monster, Death'. Rather like the car for early twentieth-century writers, the train is an ambiguously charged symbol of dominant social and economic trends.

There is less ambivalence in another celebrated passage of fictional reflections on the railway, the 'Author's Introduction' to George Eliot's *Felix*

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Holt. Here a slow journey by stage-coach north-south across the central plain of England, a metaphor for the slow, organic social change Eliot favours, is contrasted with the way in which the modern traveller is 'shot, like a bullet through a tube, by atmospheric pressure from Winchester to Newcastle', with little chance to observe the 'ruined country' through which he passes. For Eliot the railway, as did the car for many early twentieth-century commentators, meant speed, self-aggrandizement, and desensitising to one's environment. Against the evidence already available to her, Eliot claims that the railway 'can never lend much to picture and narrative'.^[10]

Literary commentators on locomotion are prone to compound blindness and insight in this way. Although H. G. Wells, for example, foresaw the supersession of the railways by private motor transport, he refused to believe that flying would 'ever come into play as a serious modification of transport and communication'.^[11] What Eliot's Introduction *does* register clearly is the revolution in the conditions of mobility occurring between the time her novel is set (around 1830) and the time in which she is writing (the 1860s). For the locomotive signature of the 1820s and 30s, referred to by transport historians as the 'golden age' of coaching, is indeed that of the stage-coach. *Dombey and Son* may resonate with the magnificent energy of the railways, but early Dickens, like *Pickwick Papers* (1836), speaks rather of the undeparted glory (to

paraphrase Eliot) of the coach roads. Late-Romantic essayists like William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and Thomas De Quincey are eloquent on the speed and efficiency of travel by stage- or mail-coach, made possible by improved carriage design and macadamised roads: it was the Bath mail, the ‘ideal perfection of mechanical conveyance’, cutting ‘through the air like an arrow’, that Hazlitt took to get to the bare-knuckle fight in Newbury which was the subject of one of his best-known essays.^[12]

It will be apparent that all the developments in transport technology discussed so far (the stage-coach, the railway, the car), which leave such a deep mark on our literature, are all synonymous with modernity in their respective periods. In all three cases, those experimenting with the new form of travel were gripped by the rapidity of motion, were conscious of a new degree of personal empowerment in relation to motion through space, felt that their senses were being challenged in new ways, and felt in general that they were seeing the world from a quite different perspective. And for all those taken with the spirit of progress, there were as many who were disturbed by the social, moral and aesthetic dimensions of each revolution in travel. In sharp contrast with all this, there is little doubt that the most remarkable innovation

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in travel practice and travel writing in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was of a very different order: the most radical development in transport in the early Romantic period, and the one with the most dramatic consequences for the way landscape was seen and valued, was the revolution in walking.

The very words ‘pedestrian’, ‘pedestrianise’ and ‘pedestrianism’ enter the language in the 1790s and early 1800s, providing us with linguistic evidence of what was evidently a significant cultural phenomenon. Certainly, the last quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed a rapid increase in recreational walking among the middle orders of society, the pedestrian tour being the most personally and socially challenging form of such activity. Such tours were taking place on the Continent in the 1780s—the poet William Bowles and the Cambridge philosopher William Frend both made notable expeditions—and were not entirely arrested by the upheavals of the revolutionary decade: William Wordsworth’s famous Continental walking tour of 1790 (2000 miles in 3 months) was repeated in most particulars by his schoolfriend Joshua Wilkinson in two tours in 1791 and 1793, the latter seemingly undertaken after the outbreak of hostilities between England and France.^[13]

The Revolutionary wars did, however, greatly accelerate the growth of domestic touring, an increasing proportion of which was taking place on foot. The Wye Valley, North Wales, the Lake District and the Highlands of Scotland were the most popular destinations, and the most hospitable to pedestrian travellers. On the main roads of England it was a different story: incivility, bad service and even outright hostility greeted visitors arriving on foot. The German Carl Moritz, who walked from the south to the north of England in 1782, found that he was considered as ‘a sort of beast of passage—stared at, pitied, suspected and shunned by everybody who meets him’.^[14] His reception was by no means solely the result of his being a foreigner; native pedestrians have the same story to tell of their travels in the south of England. By contrast, Thomas De

Quincey toured Wales on foot in 1802, after running away from Manchester Grammar School, and later recalled in his *Confessions* that the majority of fellow-tourists he came across were pedestrian travellers, and that no ‘disgrace’ attached to this mode of transport.^[15]

A considerable body of travel writing grew out of this new form of tourism. By 1798, an anonymous reviewer in *The Monthly Magazine* is observing with pleasure ‘an increasing frequency of these pedestrian tours’; ‘it grieves one’, he says, ‘to see a man of taste at the mercy of a postilion’.^[16] Now, walking

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had historically been identified with the lives of the lower orders: put simply, before the period under discussion, if one walked it was because one had to, because one had no choice. Walking carried strong associations of poverty, unrespectability and possible criminality; conversely, passenger travel by any but the cheapest vehicular means connoted money and status. So for the ‘man of taste’ to be recommended the pedestrian option, as in the review just quoted, is an indication that a major reversal of opinion regarding the social acceptability of walking is under way. By the 1810s, the proliferation of written tours for all parts of Britain, and the incorporation of specific information for pedestrians in general tourist guidebooks, demonstrate clearly that what was once unconventional or rebellious has become safely institutionalised, and in 1815 the editor of the *Bristol Journal*, reporting the completion of a walk of 1000 miles in 20 days by a local resident, referred to it smugly as ‘the climax of what this age of Pedestrianism has afforded’.^[17]

There is no simple explanation of why this explosion of walking took place in the 1780s and 1790s.^[18] The first generation of pedestrian tourists had a variety of motives, which cannot be reduced to a formula. Undoubtedly there was an element of deliberate social rebellion in many early pedestrian expeditions, and this might seem natural when one considers the evidence that many of them were either undergraduates, yet to be dragged fully into social slavery, or members of the lower clergy, a notoriously hard-up and disaffected social group. In some cases, as with the radical lecturer John Thelwall’s tour of the southern counties of England in 1797 or Coleridge’s tour of North Wales with Joseph Hucks in 1794, this rebelliousness appears less like escapism and more like a serious political statement: it has a democratic, egalitarian aspect to it, and often goes along with a well-meaning desire to find out how life is really lived among the lower orders. However, not all pedestrian tourists of the 1780s and 1790s fall into this category, and we need to take on board other motivations. Among these is the still forceful Enlightenment tradition of scientific or philosophical travel, as manifested in hundreds of amateur botanists, geologists and so on, who found that walking perfectly suited their methods of observation, note-taking and record-keeping. Then there is the evolving culture of aesthetic travel—the search for the picturesque, the sublime and the beautiful—to which again walking, as the most flexible, slow-paced and independent mode of travelling, seemed well adapted.

At the most general level, the origins of voluntary, pleasurable walking have to be seen in terms of what walking *signified* to those who practised it, and

to society at large. Undoubtedly, the first pedestrians were prepared to challenge social attitudes. In a culture where there was strong peer and class pressure to declare one's status in the manner of one's travelling, they chose to ignore or confront those prejudices, and their pedestrianising became thereby a kind of social performance that said something about themselves, about their beliefs, needs or desires. When the first pedestrians comment themselves on their mode of travel, the things they usually mention are independence, variability of pace, and unlimited freedom of movement, and these were certainly huge material gains which provided ample reward in themselves. But beyond this, it is clear that for many pedestrians walking signified and enacted other kinds of freedom: freedom, however temporary, from one's upbringing and education, from parental expectations and class etiquette, from a hierarchical and segregated society, from the strains and pressures—in the 1790s—of a nation at war. What is in the making here is a whole Romantic ideology of walking of which, in many ways, we are still the inheritors.

The second generation of Romantic pedestrians inherited this ideology ready-made, and could be more relaxed, reflective and ironic about it, as William Hazlitt was in his wonderful essay, 'On Going a Journey', written in 1821. But for touring writers in the 1780s and 1790s it seems certain that walking as a premeditated choice of mode of transport would have been a more deliberate, self-conscious, even subversive undertaking. The normalisation of this pedestrian revolution happened, given the weight of history and social attitudes which it overturned, in a remarkably small span of years.

It would be a separate and longer undertaking to follow some of the later stages in this history: the widening participation of the middle classes in walking and climbing in Victorian times, together with the establishment of related bodies like rambling clubs and footpath preservation societies, and then, in the twentieth century, the further popularisation of walking as it evolves such new forms as adventure travel, organised trekking and special expeditionary walking, all the time becoming more and more remote from developing transport technologies. But my purpose here is to concentrate on just one member of that first generation of Romantic pedestrians, and on the contribution which his writing made to exploring the possibilities of self-locomotion. Coleridge is our figure in the landscape.

Coleridge was a regular and highly energetic walker for about ten years of his life, from around 1794 to the time of his departure for Malta in 1804—a period corresponding to that of his greatest creativity as a poet. In the summer of 1794, at the time that he was fully enthused about the Pantisocracy scheme he had concocted with Southey, he went on a pedestrian tour of Wales with a fellow Cambridge undergraduate, Joseph Hucks. Upon his return, he went off with Southey on a walk through Somerset, still talking about Pantisocracy. A year later, when relations between Coleridge and Southey were a little cooler,

they went on a walk up the Wye valley with Joseph Cottle and the Fricker sisters; Cottle gives an amusing account of this in his *Reminiscences*. Every student of Romanticism knows that hill-walking was part of the daily routine of life during the *annus mirabilis* of 1797-8, when Coleridge was living in the Quantocks with the Wordsworths in close proximity. 'Kubla Khan' was composed in the course of a long unaccompanied coastal walk to Lynton and back, and 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' was conceived during a walk of several days to Dulverton in the company of William and Dorothy. This regular pedestrian activity was continued during Coleridge's stay in Germany in 1798-99, and included a week-long tour of the Harz mountains of which we have a full account in his Notebooks and letters. In the next few years after returning to England, he went on a walking tour of Devon with Southey, a three-week pedestrian tour of the Lakes with William and John Wordsworth in 1799, and a circular fellwalk in the same region of some 100 miles over nine days in August 1802, taking in the summit of Scafell. Perhaps Coleridge's last significant pedestrian expedition was in 1803, when he abandoned William and Dorothy early on in their carriage tour of Scotland and continued alone on foot, covering about 260 miles in eight days.

To begin a closer look at the link between walking, landscape perception and writing during these years of Coleridge's life, it might be useful to go back first to the tour of Wales in 1794. This is a pedestrian tour which illustrates well the political character of much walking in the 1790s. On the evidence of Hucks's printed tour and of Coleridge's surviving letters, the tour was undertaken on both sides in a spirit of youthful Republican ardour: this is plain on Coleridge's side not only from the explicitly anti-monarchist sentiments in his letters and the anecdotes of him scandalising Welsh loyalists in pub conversations, but also from the general irrepressibly buoyant tone of the letters, which convey a mind as enthused with the prospect of political change as it is with the daily passage through new scenes and encounters. Even Coleridge's style—full of similes, for which he says he has a 'canine' appetite—reinforces the idea of someone addicted to novelty, refusing to stand still. Perhaps this is best summed up by a passage from one of the political lectures Coleridge wrote a few months later in Bristol. Here he is describing the true patriot: 'theirs is not that twilight of political knowledge which gives us just light enough to place one foot before the other; as they advance, the scene still opens upon them, and they press right onward with a vast and various landscape of existence around them.'^[19] Here political commitment is signified by a striking pedestrian metaphor: the reformer, the true patriot, walks ever onwards to explore that huge landscape of existence which has yet to be created.

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As for the real landscapes that Coleridge was passing through on this tour, his letters give some sense of the heightened sensory appreciation of landscape that comes with walking through it: he writes of the intense heat and dazzling whiteness of the roads which seemed to undulate in the haze, of stone walls that were scorching to the touch, and describes putting his mouth to the sides of rocks and sucking in the dew

that was as cold as ice. These perceptions combine with political aspersions in the best of the few short poems Coleridge wrote on the tour:

The Dust flies smothering, as on clatt'ring Wheels
Loath'd Aristocracy careers along.
The distant Track quick vibrates to the Eye,
And white and dazzling undulates with heat.
Where scorching to th'unwary Traveller's touch
The stone-fence flings it's narrow Slip of Shade,
Or where the worn sides of the chalky Road
Yield their scant excavations (sultry Grot!)
Emblem of languid Patience, we behold
The fleecy Files faint-ruminating lie.^[20]

The 'fleecy Files' at the end are a bit of a let-down, but the poem vividly conveys the kind of physical exposure to landscape—the receptivity that is so much more than just visual—which the pedestrian experiences; and Coleridge's comments on 'Loath'd Aristocracy' give a political edge to what is really a more general implied comparison with the limited perceptions of carriage travellers.

To get the full measure of Coleridge's originality as a writer about landscape, however, it is necessary to move on a few years. In Coleridge's *Notebooks* and letters we find an approach to landscape description that has no precedent, and few parallels in writing of the Romantic period, and the novelty of this approach is rooted very much in Coleridge's pedestrian habits. It might be useful to begin by asking what *are* the distinctive features of the pedestrian's experience of landscape—features which we now take for granted, but which it is fruitless to search for in literature prior to the Romantics. What follows is a rough checklist:

- Firstly, The pedestrian's experience of landscape is a participatory one: there are no barriers between the walker and the worlds he is moving through. Walkers are entirely responsible via voluntary movements of their limbs for the way they move through the landscape and for what they allow themselves to

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see of their surroundings.

— Secondly, walking is the only kind of locomotion that puts one on equal terms with the world; it does not allow one that feeling of the personal mastery of space which other forms of self-transportation provide. As such it encourages a more genuine sense of scale or proportion between humanity and the natural environment.

— Thirdly, pedestrian travel is typically undertaken at a moderate, steady pace, and allows complete freedom to pause, to look around, and restart at will. One's field of vision is slowly but continuously changing: as one moves through the landscape one

sees the same objects from different heights, angles, and distances; they subtly change their outlines, appearance and relations to each other.

— Fourthly, as a pedestrian one experiences the landscape as a sequence of sights, sounds, and other sense-perceptions. On a long pedestrian tour, in particular, the form of this sequence is likely to dominate one's mental impressions and recollections, however much one may strive to organise them in other ways. To some extent, of course, this is true of most forms of travel. It may also seem a very obvious point. However, the serial, progressional aspect of travel experience is something that is obliterated in most travel writing even in the modern period: it is the interruptions of the journey—the key destinations, the privileged viewpoints, the moments of particularly intense experience—which are the stuff of the writing; all the in-betweenness is forgotten. My point is that it might be the pedestrian, whose journey from one place to another is never effortless, who would restore the 'middle passage' of the travel experience—everything that comes between departure and arrival.

— Fifthly, as a pedestrian, because of the moderate rate of travel and close contact with the environment, one might be expected to notice more than other kinds of traveller; one's experience of landscape should be more detailed, more particularised.

— Sixthly and finally, though, this kind of close, detailed attentiveness is not something that most walkers maintain for any length of time. Most walkers will find quite the opposite occurring: that the regular, rhythmic character of walking encourages a sort of hypnotic inwardness in which one becomes completely absorbed in one's thoughts whilst letting one's feet get on with the work. Some people enjoy walking precisely because it allows them to rid their mind of all its everyday clutter and think about more important things, or think more imaginatively. Probably most long-distance walking involves an alternation between these two states: between a turning inward to one's thoughts, and a turning outward onto a world which is seen, heard and felt more intensely than is normally the case.

Of course, if there is any experiential or psychological truth in this analysis, that is no guarantee that writing, especially 'literary' writing that is the product of aesthetic intentions, will reproduce such features in any straightforward or transparent way. Nevertheless, I want to argue that in

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Coleridge's prose writing these qualities of the pedestrian experience of landscape *are* captured vividly, perhaps for the first time, in a rhetoric that pleads its truth-to-life above all else.

The first passage I would like to consider comes from a letter Coleridge wrote to Tom Poole from Germany during his walking tour of the Harz mountains in 1799:

Hills ever by our sides, in all conceivable variety of forms and garniture—It were idle in me to attempt by words to give their projections & their retirings & how they were now in Cones, now in roundnesses, now in tonguelike Lengths, now pyramidal, now a huge Bow, and all at every step varying the forms of their outlines; or how they now stood abreast, now ran aslant, now

rose up behind each other or now, as at Harzburg, presented almost a Sea of huge motionless waves too multiform for Painting, too multiform even for the Imagination to remember them yea, my very sight seemed *incapacitated* by the novelty and Complexity of the Scene. Ye red lights from the Rain Clouds! Ye gave the whole the last magic touch! I had now walked five & thirty miles over roughest Roads & had been sinking with fatigue but so strong was the stimulus of this scene, that my frame seemed to have drank in a new vitality; for I now walked on to Goslar almost as if I had risen from healthy sleep on a fine spring morning: so light and lively were my faculties.[21]

Certainly Coleridge is fully immersed in the landscape he is describing. It makes no sense to try to separate out the physical dimension of walking from the writer's observations and reflections: body and mind are closely intertwined, each governed by the other. On the one hand, the 'new vitality' Coleridge feels in his body is a response to the mental stimulation provided by the ever-changing landscape; on the other, that stimulation has its source in movements of the body, in the conditions of pedestrian motion: the hills Coleridge is fascinated by, 'all *at every step* varying the forms of their outlines...'. It is also interesting how Coleridge, in seeking to give some idea of the variety of forms, uses not only geometric figures ('Cones', 'roundnesses', 'pyramidal') but also a number of metaphors that describe the landscape in terms of the human body: 'tonguelike lengths', 'stood abreast', 'ran aslant'. This is a common trait in his prose landscape descriptions, and it is tempting to relate it to pedestrianism: being ever-aware of his body as a walker, the figures *he* sees in the landscape—the figures composed *by* the landscape—are figures derived from the body. A final point about this passage is how well Coleridge's style

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represents the effects of being in motion through a landscape: the dismissive reference to Painting underlines the fact that Coleridge rarely gives us anything resembling conventional picturesque description; instead his breathless syntax strengthens the impression of ever-changing natural patterns. One critic has said that whereas Dorothy Wordsworth tells us of the changes she observes in nature from one season to the next, Coleridge is more interested in the changes he observes from one *moment* to the next,[22] and his letters and notebooks are full of evidence to support that argument.

Next, a passage from the account in Coleridge's Notebook of his fellwalk in August 1802—a formidable expedition for its time, especially since it involved traversing the southwestern part of the Lake District which successive picturesque tourists had regarded as beyond the pale for civilised travellers. This excerpt comes from the first day of Coleridge's walk:

Buttermere, the mere in what a singular Embracement of naked Rock/exactly an enormous Stone Bason, of which one half is gone/ascend by Scale force/gain a level—mossy soft ground, every man his own path-maker—skip & jump—where rushes grow, a man may go—Red Pike peeps in on you

upon your left/on the right ~~Herdhouse with Flatern Tarn~~ Melbreak ~~which you do not see~~, but you cross the pretty Beck that goes to Loweswater—you again ascend & reach a ruined sheep fold—here I write these lines/a wild green view, bleating of Sheep & noise of waters/right opposite the upper Halves of Grasmere/& the huge mountains, his Equals, with Skiddaw far behind/Two fields peep, the highest cultivated Land on the Newland side of Buttermere—and the Trees on these are the only Trees to be seen/I write this, the sun with a soft & watery gleam setting behind the hill which I am now to ascend/I am to pass with a bulging green Hill to my left—to the left of it a frightful craggy precipice with shivers, & all wrinkled—& a chasm between the Hill & it—I ascend/straight before a high round-headed Hill, (the Dodd) evidently the highest point between Buttermere & Ennerdale, ~~parts~~ bisects the ridge/I take it on my right hand/get above the bulging green hill on my left—and am now just above it—on its Top is a small Tarn, <Flatern Tarn> about a 100 yards in length, & not above 7 or 8 in breadth/but what a noble Precipice it <Herdhouse> has for its left Bank—the farther part black with green velvet moss cushions on the ledges/towards Buttermere, the half is a pale pink/— and divided from the black by a stream of Screes—. I never beheld a more glorious view of its kind—I turn & look behind me/what a

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wonderful group of mountains—what a scene for Salvator Rosa/and before the glorious Sea with the opposite high shores & mountains/not a single minute object to break the oneness of the view, save those two green fields of Buttermere^[23]

These lines capture vividly the sensations of someone walking in the hills, someone who pauses occasionally, as he does here at the sheepfold, to make sure that his observations are transcribed as fully as possible. The progressional perspective of the walker, and the variety and particularity of the observations he makes, are very much in evidence: as fragment follows fragment, attention shifts from the ground, to the middle distance, to the horizon, to the sky. The reader accompanies Coleridge's progress intimately, informed as to when he turns to the left or the right, and when he turns and looks behind him, and senses the exhilaration that comes when a fine view has been gained with strenuous physical effort. What is remarkable is that Coleridge, who was certainly well-versed in the pictorial norms of landscape appreciation, writes with almost complete disregard for those popular standards: the reference to Salvator Rosa here is little more than a throwaway line; accuracy and precision are more important to Coleridge than the borrowed splendours of Italian painting.

The accuracy and precision are, however, counterbalanced by occasional metaphorical excesses. The screes on Wastwater are compared to an 'apron—or a pointed Decanter, or tumbler turned upside down—or rather an outspread Fan'; at Conistone two black peaks are described as 'perfectly breast-shaped and lying abreast of each other, the whole Bosom of a Brobdignag Negress'.^[24] Sometimes these passages

convey a genuine search for verisimilitude, a desire to find the most telling comparison; sometimes they are more playful, and suggest more the excitement of a mind addicted to change of scene and overwhelmed with visual novelty.

A study of Coleridge the walker would be incomplete without some reference to his description of his ascent of Scafell. Here, Coleridge's letter to Sara Hutchinson, worked up from the entries in his Notebook, provides the richest account. It is a celebrated letter, partly because Coleridge's is the first recorded ascent of Scafell by a visitor to the Lake District. For the full effect, the letter needs to be read in its entirety, but the following describing what he saw from the summit allows certain key points to be made:

surely the first Letter ever written from the Top of Sca'Fell! But O! what a look down just under my feet! The frightfullest Cove that

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might ever be seen/ huge perpendicular Precipices, and one Sheep upon it's only Ledge, that surely must be crag! Tyson told me of this place, & called it Hollow Stones. Just by it & joining together, rise two huge Pillars of bare lead-colored stone— / I am no measurer/ but their height & depth is terrible. I know how unfair it is to judge of these Things by a comparison of past Impressions with present—but I have no shadow of hesitation in saying that the Coves and Precipices of Helvettin are nothing to these! But [from] this sweet lounding Place I see directly thro' Borrowdale, the Castle Crag, the whole of Derwent Water, & but for the haziness of the Air I could see my own House—I see clear enough where it stands—[25]

Exclamations of awe when confronting mountain landscapes were, of course, very common in late eighteenth-century travel writing: under the aesthetic rubric of the sublime, such passages become mechanical, stylised, even perfunctory in many travel texts. Expressions of terror by tourists intimidated by their surroundings, who felt that straying from their path would swiftly lead them to destruction, were part of the conventional repertoire. The difference in Coleridge's case is, firstly, that Coleridge is looking *down* on the sublime landscape, on the perpendicular precipices and two huge rock pillars (most sublime descriptions, as with the picturesque, were written from a low elevation, with the spectator spatially dominated and psychologically diminished); a radical alteration of perspective is achieved by situating at this height a speaker who has walked up through a landscape before which other tourists would have pictured themselves shuddering in terror. The continuation of this passage, the famous and lengthy description of Coleridge's hazardous descent via Broad Stand (still a major obstacle to walkers on Scafell), reveals him in a genuinely life-threatening situation: he presents not the manufactured thrills of popular sublime accounts but the 'real' emotions of someone who overcame his physical distress in a position of considerable risk to discover a kind of spiritual composure. (From another point of view, it is still a

rhetoric that sustains this effect of authenticity, but one that still has power to move us.)

What the passage above also illustrates, finally, is the sense of proportionality vis-a-vis the natural environment, and the respect for natural objects and forces, which I have suggested pedestrian travel encourages. It is worth noting that at the same time as he is contemplating the huge precipices and stone pillars, Coleridge has found shelter on the summit and is writing his notes and beginning his letter; he then looks further afield, across the fells towards Derwent Water, implicitly taking stock of the distance he has travelled, and picking out the location of the home to which his circular walk will

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eventually return him. Although Coleridge says he is ‘no measurer’, there is a fine sense here of silently estimating the modest scale of human presence and participation in the landscape.

This paper has concentrated on Coleridge’s prose landscape contributions, because that is where his originality can most readily be demonstrated. But, of course, Coleridge is known best as a poet, and it is worth considering to what degree, if any, Coleridge’s remarkable career as a Romantic walker affected the treatment of landscape within his poetry—a part of his output as a writer which was intended for publication, where traditional forms and stylistic conventions exert a great deal of pressure, and where one might expect that the experimental descriptive techniques of his Notebooks and private letters would not find so comfortable a home. In fact, pedestrian perspectives are very much a factor in some of Coleridge’s best poems, and to conclude this paper I shall briefly acknowledge this complementary aspect of his work.

The area of Coleridge’s poetry where one sees the closest links between his walking and his writing is the numerous poems he wrote in blank verse, and to a lesser extent those in irregularly or alternately rhymed pentameter, between 1794 and 1804. The more natural, improvised quality of blank verse, the relative freedom of its syntax and its run-on lines, and its steady, alternating rhythm, made it the preferred metre for poets, Coleridge included, at the end of the eighteenth century when the conventions of topographical poetry began to lose their grip and nature began to be perceived through the eye of the walker. In the broad category of Coleridge’s ‘conversation poems’, there are many which focus on the speaker’s pedestrian progress through a landscape, and it is in pentameter that he achieves his best results. ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ has a strong claim to be regarded as Coleridge’s greatest pedestrian poem.^[26] Here, however, I shall make brief remarks on a much shorter early poem, ‘Lines Composed while Climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb, Somersetshire, May 1795’.

With many a pause and oft reverted eye
I climb the Coomb’s ascent: sweet songsters near
Warble in shade their wild-wood melody:
Far off the unvarying Cuckoo soothes my ear.
Up scour the startling stragglers of the flock

That on green plots o'er precipices browze:
From the deep fissures of the naked rock
The Yew-tree bursts! Beneath its dark green boughs
(Mid which the May-thorn blends its blossoms white)
Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats,
I rest:—and now have gain'd the topmost site.

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Ah! what a luxury of landscape meets
My gaze! Proud towers, and Cots more dear to me,
Elm-shadow'd Fields, and prospect-bounding Sea!
Deep sighs my lonely heart: I drop the tear:
Enchanting spot! O were my Sara here!

Brockley Coomb lies about fix or six miles to the south-west of Bristol, off the main road to Weston-super-Mare. Nowadays the ascent of the Coomb is made rather easier than in Coleridge's time by the presence of the B3130, which passes right through it. What is not well known is that Brockley Coomb was in no sense 'discovered' by Coleridge on his pedestrianising around Bristol, but was an established beauty-spot in the 1790s: it is mentioned in topographical and picturesque guides to the Bristol region published before Coleridge's visit, and is the subject of extravagant lyrical description in another such guide published a few years later. John Evans's *The Picture of Bristol* talks of the richness and diversity of its woodland, and calls it 'a kind of paradise, which the sylvan deities would be pleased to call their own'. Trees are scattered in 'interesting confusion', and flowering shrubs wind themselves around more sombre trees. The limestone cliffs on one side of the combe are interspersed with vegetation, so as to resemble, Evans says, 'a garden fantastically suspended in the air'. In spring, it is said to be 'vocal with the music of a thousand birds'.^[27] Rays of sunlight falling through gaps in the trees onto the broken ground below complete what is a very typical assembly of picturesque objects and effects. Coleridge's poem incorporates many of the same elements. They are, however, arranged along the line of a walk, which takes the reader, in a manner prefiguring many of Coleridge's conversation poems, from a situation of natural seclusion and refuge to a situation commanding a wide prospect of the surrounding landscape. (Unlike most of the conversation poems, however, the poem does not eventually return us to the original position of refuge.) The pedestrian perspective is plain in the references to pausing and resting, to broad smooth stones appraised as mossy seats, to sheep startled by the passage of the walker. Coleridge's Brockley Coomb is palpably the same location visited by other contemporary tourists, but he describes it not in the objectively summarising manner of topographical prose but with the angled vision of one who has made the ascent on foot and noticed particular things on a particular day in the year.