The Peripatetic Ideal in the Romantic Period

by

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Delight in wandering, connection to nature
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the
Fields and hillsides,
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.

—Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

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To green, grassy fields, light paths through dark forests, and the benevolent sensations of a harmonious natural experience, I say thank you.

Introduction

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees,
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word,
That walk'd among the ancient trees.

—William Blake, "Introduction," Songs of Experience

In his most beloved and successful work, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the early Romantic William Blake directs his readers' attention to the prophetic power of the peripatetic Word. Obscured by the pastoral tradition and the evolving urban literary sphere, the peripatetic narrative was subsumed into the Romantic tradition, where it manifests as a changing relationship between country and city and between the poet and his natural inspiration. Through his walking, the wanderer is able to reconcile the rural with the urban, as well as the individual self with the natural world. John Keats walked hard, Scottish miles a in delicate condition;¹ Charles Lamb was known to stroll as many as thirty miles in one day, simply around the outskirts of London;² John Thelwall dedicated his major radical publication, *The Peripatetic*, to the narrative of the wanderer; and the pace of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth's peripatetic friendship is well encapsulated in the name for

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¹ Carol Kyros Walker, Walking North With Keats (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1.

² Joseph Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 154.

1798: the *annus mirabilis*.³ All of these Romantic poets believed in the importance of a peripatetic education; indeed, it was William Wordsworth who first used the adjectival form of the word "pedestrian," in a letter to William Mathews in August 1791. Wordsworth and Keats embody an evolving peripatetic ideal, created through cultural, social, political, and naturally experienced landscapes, which links them to the greater literary tradition of the wandering poet searching for Truth and Beauty in nature and its reflection of himself.

The Romantic era's tradition of peripatetic poetry is reflected in its reinterpretation and reification of the English countryside into an aestheticized landscape. Romantic poetry redefined the countryside, often ignoring the harsh realities of rural labor, favoring a vernal, inspirational natural ideal. Evocative of nationalism, radicalism, and art, the landscape of Romantic verse was not simply the English countryside, but an aestheticized, culturally loaded landscape; as Keats writes, "When holy were the haunted forest boughs,/ Holy the air, the water, and the fire[.]" Though the process began with the Grand Tours of indulgent aristocrats, the comodification of the landscape was furthered by Romantic landscape traditions, as John Barrell explains,

The contemplation of landscape was an activity with its own proper procedure, which involved recognizing the stretch of land under your eye not, simply, as that—as an area of ground filled with various objects, trees, hills, fields—but as a complex of associations and meanings, and, more important, as a composition in which each object bore a specific and analyzable relationship to the others.⁶

³ Stephen Gill, William Wordsworth A Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 122.

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⁵ John Keats, "Ode to Psyche" in *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 38-39.

⁶ John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 5.

As the countryside is translated into a composition, it becomes an object dependent on the scrutiny of its observer; it also becomes representative of a greater, imagined landscape—pregnant with "associations and meanings" for the pedestrian. These "associations" are political, as the British empire spread and nationalistic ideology imbued the landscape with an ancient superiority; and cultural, as traditions such as picturesque tourism provided travelers with narratives and the vocabulary by which to define their own consumption of nature. As Robin Jarvis writes, "certainly the pursuit of nature in search of aesthetic satisfactions grew massively in popularity in the last quarter of the century[.]" Searching for the same "aesthetic satisfactions" as the picturesque tourist, however, the pedestrian poet is more invested in the natural scene. More specifically, the "meanings" that the peripatetic finds in nature are personal and epistemological. For Wordsworth, as Susan Wolfson demonstrates, the most reliable road to greater meaning was walking: "that love of nature's 'beautous and majestic' scenes (*Prelude* I:636) was inseparable from, in a mysterious but absolutely certain way, moral growth, knowledge of the divine, and acceptance of the nature of human knowledge." Not only loaded with cultural meaning, the Romantics' consumption and reproduction of nature transforms the natural experience into a quasi-religious practice based upon the peripatetic's idealized experience of nature.

As the Romantic poet wanders through the landscape, he searches for a lost golden age divorced from the corrupting influence of the city, a quest that metaphorically reinforces the physical distance between rural and urban realities.

⁷ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1997), 49.

⁸ Susan J. Wolfson, "Wordsworth's Craft" in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

Indeed, the industrializing city formed the Romantic poet and his attitude toward the countryside, as Roger Ebbatson reveals:

The fundamental, indeed classical, binary opposition between town and country was inevitably sharpened by the consequences of the industrial revolution, but as Michael Bunce argues, 'the countryside ideal cannot be explained simply as a nostalgic reaction to urbanization.' It was rather the case, as he goes on to propose, that urbanization established the basic conditions for the growth of the countryside ideal[.]⁹

The narratives of the city and the country are crucially intertwined, and Romantic poets often struggled to define themselves in a changing, domesticated landscape. Any "binary opposition" of the country and the town, however, ignores their complex relationship of mutual dependence. As eighteenth-century London grew in industry, it grew in size, provoking the image of the city as a center of consumption without production. 10 Simultaneously, as Malcolm Chase observes, "at a time of unprecedented economic change and urban growth, attachment to 'the land' persisted among the working class, profoundly influencing the radical politics of the period."11 Searching for a dream of the past, the new industrialized workers kept strong attachment to 'the land,' especially as an idealized vehicle of radical politics. And Romantic poets shared that investment in the land as a tool for progressive change; whether through personal transcendence or political polemic, the Romantics imbued the land with their own meaning. The development of pre-conceived associations and meanings was not simply a centripetal force exerted on the countryside by the city, but also a centrifugal force pulling ideas, vocabulary, and mannerisms from the city

⁹ Roger Ebbatson, *An Imaginary England: Nation, Landscape and Literature, 1840-1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005), 10.

¹⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, "The 'cockney' and the nation, 1780-1988" in *Metropolis-London* (London: Routledge, 1989), 274.

¹¹ Malcolm Chase, 'The People's Farm' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 4.

into the countryside. Thus, Romantic poetry is a combination of forces—the powerful, natural forces of the countryside as evoked by rural poets such as Wordsworth, and the dramatic pull and power of the city evoked by urban poets such as John Keats and Leigh Hunt.

Yet another complication of the rural and urban relationship is the eighteenth-century development of suburbs. These suburbs of London, Hampstead, Islington, and Highgate mediate between country and city experiences in a space that combines rural and urban experiences. As second generation poets Hunt and Keats resided in Hampstead, the influence of a domesticated natural scene profoundly influenced the meaning they placed and found in the landscape, as Nicholas Roe writes: "Hunt's terrain is neither the awe-inspiring sublime nature of Coleridge, nor the 'houseless woods' of Wordsworth, contemplated in solitude, but a populated suburban landscape that welcomes 'approaching eyes'." Though first generation poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth are disturbed by and distanced by the "mighty heart" of the city, the second-generation Romantic poets have a much closer relationship to the city, which mediates their experience of the natural world through a critical urban lens.

As he searches for inspiration through walking, the peripatetic poet also evokes a greater literary tradition linked to the pastoral and the epic, a tradition that proclaims his cultural and literary legitimacy. In the same way that internal dissent complicated the political scene, critical disagreement over the essence of English poetry created artistic uncertainty and vulnerability for the politically alienated Romantics. Aligning themselves with the icons of English poetry, Milton, Spenser,

¹² Nicholas Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997), 127.

¹³ William Wordsworth, "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" in *William Wordsworth the Major Works* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984), 14.

and Shakespeare, the Romantics were attempting to legitimate their poetry and incorporate this new style of poetry into a greater, British literary tradition. As T.S. Eliot writes,

We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.¹⁴

Working to align themselves with the proven immortality of canonical British poets, the Romantics wrote under an intense vocational anxiety and desire for cultural legitimacy. Attacks by critics in Blackwood's magazine and The Edinburgh Review plagued Wordsworth, Keats, Hunt, Lamb, and other Romantics, 15 harbingers of what Hazlitt saw as a "new style and new spirit in poetry." Indeed, as Suvir Kaul writes, "eighteenth-century poets constantly work with a sense of vocational vulnerability—a sense that the new public sphere (and the 'republic' of letters it spawned) was marginalizing their work and their sociocultural aspirations." There is no doubt that the literary sphere during the Romantic's time was not much of a "republic," as radical, dissenting voices were tried for treason¹⁸ or imprisoned.¹⁹ The peripatetic ideal of poetic inspiration and creation, represented throughout history from nomadic bards to Romantic wanderers, is a powerful tool of cultural and literary legitimacy.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001),

¹⁵ Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent, 22.

¹⁶ William Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets" in Spirit of the Age (Grasmere: the Wordsworth Trust, 2004), 206.

¹⁷ Suvir Kaul, Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 42.

¹⁸ Judith Thompson, "Introduction" to *The Peripatetic* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 15. Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent, 92.

Not only does wandering evoke a link with the past, but it also provides the poet with a concrete, complex, and accessible site in which to locate his poetic inspiration. As the Romantic poet is inspired by the English scenery and the majestic power of nature, he claims authenticity as a naturally inspired poet, who derives his power from direct sensual experience of a beneficent nature.

The peripatetic narrative consists of an evolving history that traces the importance of an individual's movement through the landscape. The wanderer can either walk from necessity or pleasure, and his purpose or purposelessness informs his perception as well as his progress: he may be mindful only of the road, or open to the flood of sensual experience available to the walker. As John Amato writes, "The reason why the walker travels informs his steps from beginning to end." Caught in a metaphysical reverie, or alive to the abundance of sensual stimulus, the walker determines the road as he determines his thoughts, bound to straight and specific meditation, or deviating to explore the meandering paths of sensual experience. Walking can be a transcendent experience, as often in Wordsworth's poems, but wandering is also participatory, as Anne Wallace writes: "the physical act of walking restores the natural proportions of our perception, reconnecting us with both the physical world and the moral order inherent in it[.]" As the wanderer becomes alive to the depth of perception offered through the peripatetic's intimate experience with

²⁰ Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking, 3.

²¹ Anne Wallace, Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 13.

nature, he opens himself to a greater natural narrative. The Romantic era is a critical time in the history of the peripatetic because it was then that voluntary pedestrianism met mass acceptance and participation— as Amato writes, "romanticism changed walking. It took it from being a lower-class necessity and an upper class select activity, and transformed it for those with means and a certain subjectivity into an elevated vehicle for experiencing nature, the world, and the self." As the wanderer explores this new peripatetic self, he simultaneously participates in nature with each falling footstep as well as through sensual participation in nature. The peripatetic experience is defined by this duality of the individual's experience: through his body and organs of sense the peripatetic is physically connected with nature, but an even more complex bond is formed through the action of perception and the multiplicity of personal meaning already imbedded in each individual's experience of nature.

Caught between traditions of solitary meandering and social promenades, the peripatetic does not simply walk in a space, but participates in the scene, whether it is populated or not. First generation Romantic walkers such as Wordsworth, though often a social walker, propagated ideas about the necessity a of solitary, intense experience of nature. This highly individuated experience of nature focuses on the agency of the wanderer in his scene, or as Jarvis writes,

Most pedestrian travel is undertaken at a moderate, steady pace—in a broader, more finely grained perceptual envelop—that provides complete freedom to stop and restart at will, and allows for the lingering gaze and the backward look; it offers a subtly altering panorama or vista in which the same objects are seen and heard from different heights and angles and distances.²³

²² Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking, 102.

²³ Jarvis, Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel, 68.

Loading the scene with his own personal meaning, the pedestrian also controls the scene and participates in the process by which a specific local experience of nature becomes tied to a universal landscape. Jarvis's "perceptual envelop" extends to enclose not merely the walker, but also the landscape. Therefore, the peripatetic participates in the creation of the natural landscape (or at least manipulates it to conform to his pre-conceived structure of interpretation), which allows the wanderer power in his relationship with nature, the power of agency.

Indeed, the Romantic era is so important in the history of the peripatetic because the power of agency and walking is claimed and celebrated as a valuable activity for all classes. Previously, as Amato reveals,

People of innate superiority and true refinement would not deign to compete on the dirty streets and thoroughfares of city and business. Rather, in diametrical opposition to the rest of humanity, which walked when and where life, work, and lord commanded, they promenaded and strolled where they pleased.²⁴

During the reappropriation of walking that occurred throughout the eighteenth-century and in Romantic poetry, wandering was freed from class and social stigma. Though the lower classes still walked primarily because they had to, they might enjoy the comparative accessibility of a suburban perambulation. And though the upper class still traversed the heavily manicured, constructed landscapes of rural estates or the socially significant London parks, they also participated in a developing peripatetic tradition.

Though modern English has no paucity of words to describe walking, there is no word to accurately describe the French flaneur: a mix of walking and philosophic reflection, so central to the word peripatetic. Though the OED defines a flaneur as "a

²⁴ Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking, 73.

lounger," 25 this is an anglicization; in contrast, the French define "flaner" (the verb form) as "se promener sans hâte, en s'abandonner à l'impression et au spectacle du moment,"26 roughly translated: to walk without haste, while abandoning oneself to the impression and the spectacle of the moment. The increased emphasis on the primacy of perception and the appreciation of the spectacle of the natural world are what define the Romantic peripatetic. The closest analogous word in English, to saunter, was obsolete about two hundred years before the Romantic era.²⁷ as Amato explains, "the curious word *saunter* in the seventeenth century referred to a self-reflective form of walking. It had its origin in the Middle English word santer, which means 'to muse.",28 This walking and musing is the work of the peripatetic, who must be content to wander with an abundance of sensual stimulus, always reaching after something more. Keats describes this refuge of uncertainty in a famous letter: "I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason[.]",29 The peripatetic does not walk with the purpose implied by words such as striding or trekking. The wanderer does not promenade, walking in a leisurely or ostentatious way, 30 nor does he saunter, traveling vagrantly and without purpose.³¹ Rather, he walks in what Jarvis sees as a "hypnotically self-absorbed state" but what is more accurately simply an

²⁵ OED

²⁶ Le Robert Micro, ed. Alain Rey (Paris: Dicorobert, 1998), 562.

² OED

²⁸ Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking, 6-7.

²⁹ Keats to George and Tom Keats, Hampstead, December 21,27, 1817, in *John Keats Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 41-42.

³⁰ OED

³¹ OED

³² Jarvis, Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel, 68.

absorbed state. The peripatetic is absorbed in the spectacle of the moment, the impressions created through sensual experience, and the path that leads him forward.

The argument I develop in this thesis is founded upon a broad base of research, a mix of both primary and secondary sources that illuminate the complexities and omni-pertinence of the peripatetic narrative. By reading biographic materials on Wordsworth, Keats, and Hunt, I evaluate the importance of walking in their lives and in their poetry; furthermore, biography reveals the deep and intimate relationship these Romantic artists shared with nature. Using primary and secondary sources to illuminate the complexities of rural realities in the Romantic period as well as the new and bourgeoning worlds of cities, I place the Romantics in their time and their locality and then investigate their particular interpretation of peripatetic poetry. Sociological resources such as John Amato's *On Foot* help to illustrate the more general role of walking in our society since humans became Homo erectus.³³ Economists such as Peter Mathias and his investigation of the First Industrial Nation are important to understand the complex forces at work in both the city and the country, which formed the peripatetic in the tension between the rural and the urban. The political perspective of critics such as Nicholas Roe further complicates the relationship between the town and the country and between the poet and his landscape. By incorporating many, varying sources and interpretations of the Romantic era and the peripatetic tradition, I try to examine fully the importance of the peripatetic ideal in the poetry of John Keats and William Wordsworth as representatives of the Romantic poetic canon.

³³ Amato, On Foot: A History of Walking, 23.

The two main chapters of this thesis explore the evolving peripatetic ideal, which encompasses both the rural and city poets' experience of wandering. In my opening chapter I examine the perspective of a rural poet, William Wordsworth, who is distrustful of the city and firmly rooted in his natural environment. Due to political upheaval, nationalistic language, vagrancy caused by war and economic hardships, and epistemological concerns, however, Wordsworth's poems create a more complex landscape and are significant to an investigation of the developing peripatetic ideal. Whereas the rural poet draws legitimacy from his intimate relationship with nature, the city poet attempts to access this authenticity through wandering. John Keats, an avid walker, represents a new peripatetic ideal, as the Romantic walker becomes habituated to the influence of the city and the interaction with a domesticated landscape. These two poets, however, are not fundamentally opposed as city and country poets/walkers; rather, they are both participants in a search for natural truth that defines itself through pedestrian movement and peripatetic participation in nature.

In examining first and second generation Romantic poets, I am not merely charting the evolution of the peripatetic through the era of its great artistic embrace but also examining a crucial moment of change in peripatetic perspective, from a rural wanderer to a suburban observer. As the metropolis claims the landscape both literally and figuratively for its own, the peripatetic romantic reacts with the ambivalence typical of English pastoral poetry; but it is nevertheless clear that the poetry of John Keats, produced just a short period after Wordsworth's early creative activity, marks a profound departure in the gaze and perception of the peripatetic. No

longer a walker of rural sympathy, the new peripatetic, Keats, is an urban observer who maintains an objective distance from the landscape and from its productive capacities, but who is still intimately familiar with the Wordsworthian, idealized natural experience.

Using Wordsworth and Keats as primary examples of the Romantic, peripatetic poet, I explore the relationship between the peripatetic and the land, the people, and an idealized natural experience. In my first chapter, I trace the dual narratives of rootedness and independence that form William Wordsworth's rural interpretation of peripatetic poetry. Expressing nationalistic concerns, attempts at cultural legitimacy, philosophical traditions, and the recently popularized consumption of natural scenery, Wordsworth forwards a peripatetic ideal that is singularly rural and in opposition to the landscape of the city. As I trace Wordsworth's wandering, I explore his role as a peripatetic poet deeply rooted in an intimate experience of nature, both specific and general. An admirer of Wordsworth and a fellow peripatetic, John Keats is the focus of my second chapter, where I trace the evolving peripatetic ideal as influenced by an urban perspective. As London grew dramatically and became a center of the British countryside, it redefined the individual, and the poet's, experience of nature. Living in the suburb of Hampstead, Keats experienced a domesticated nature, where the true wilds of England were tamed into pleasant vistas for the urban visitor. Wandering, for Keats, was also an attempt at securing cultural legitimacy, as well as an attempt at reconnection with the land through observation, a detailed and intellectualized perception. As a citydweller, independent of the land, Keats's experience of nature was mediated through

this observation. Both Wordsworth and Keats are essential to the narrative of the peripatetic because they illuminate the influence of the poet and the people in defining the landscape, either through the mitigated experience of observation or through direct and intimate experience with nature.

As understood by both Wordsworth and Keats, the landscape was an expression of not only their own interiority, but also an idealized England—the mind of the individual as well as the mind of humanity. As they wandered through the countryside, their cultivated perception allowed them access to an inspiration compounded by a peripatetic history of natural consumption. In an era of reification of the natural experience, both Keats and Wordsworth found their way to ideals of Truth and Beauty by wandering and embracing an intimate experience of the commanding, majestic, and harmonious landscape created through the idealizing eyes of the peripatetic.

Chapter One: William Wordsworth

"Books...were in fact [Robert Southey's] passion; and wandering, I can with truth affirm, was mine,"³⁴ wrote William Wordsworth. Wandering, an often ignored or trivialized aspect of Romantic poetic inspiration and creation, was centrally important to Wordsworth's development. Much of his life shows his dedication to a peripatetic ideal; the strength and sense of purpose gained through his walking became the inspiration for creative innovation. As early as 1790, Wordsworth undertook a pedestrian tour of France, a choice radical for both its political implications and its aesthetic mission. Traveling nearly three thousand miles and walking at a rate of between twenty and thirty miles a day, 35 Wordsworth walked through a newly revolutionary France, and he must have thrilled as his peripatetic experience illuminated the ideals and realities of independence and revolution. Wordsworth, in his great years of peripatetic composition before 1805, resolves growing fears of industrialization, revolution, and empire by showing the Truth and Beauty of the harmonious countryside. Understanding Wordsworth's investment in nature, William Hazlitt in his essay, "Mr. Wordsworth," observes, "He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand

³⁴ Celeste Langan, Romantic Vagrancy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.

³⁵ Stephen Gill, William Wordsworth A Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 44.

feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart."³⁶ Simple and overlooked, walking serves to connect the poet with the landscape and the people, and Wordsworth shaped his poetics in accordance with this peripatetic ideal.

John Clare wrote in "To Wordsworth" an acknowledgement of peripatetic fellowship: "WORDSWORTH I love; his books are like the fields[.]"³⁷ And, indeed. Wordsworth does create in his poems a natural space, a space where the nomadic poet investigates the natural world and reveals its hidden harmonious truth. His famous ideal of poetry as a capturing of "spots of time" suggests that the world of his work is grounded in actual places, as well as in his own, firmly rooted, emotional consciousness. In these places the poet, and with him the reader, can wander freely and embrace the didactic influence of a natural environment, learning, like Jean Jacques Rousseau, that "There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts." The "something" that Rousseau refers to here is the independence of purpose that comes of a natural, peripatetic lifestyle. Walking is intrinsically linked to the poetic tradition not only through poetry's nomadic, oral roots, but also through the metrical possibilities of roaming footsteps, which are captured through the meter of Wordsworth's blank verse. As the poet wanders the landscape, love of nature becomes love of man and the peripatetic poet can explore the interconnectivity of human thought and action with the natural world: "Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local,

³⁶ William Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth" in *Spirit of the Age* (Grasmere: the Wordsworth Trust, 2004), 206

³⁷ John Clare, "To Wordsworth" in *The Invention of the Countryside*, by Donna Landry (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 136.

³⁸ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), Book XI, 208.

³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 158.

but general, and operative." Offering rooted ideals of Truth and Beauty, Nature is the space in which the poet may explore, both physically and lyrically, the myriad possibilities of peripatetic composition. Intertwined narratives of independence and rootedness run throughout Wordsworth's poetry and were central to the *spirit of the age*; ⁴¹ the peripatetic poet is tied to his localized environment through the direct natural discourse of walking, but he is also physically and mentally independent as he moves through the countryside.

Torn between a repressive political situation provoked by ideas of an idealized "Britishness" and the radical voices championing revolution and independence, Wordsworth turned to the consolation of a peripatetic lifestyle: to "clamber through the Clouds and exist." Throughout his life, Wordsworth would return to his own peripatetic philosophy and detailed, intimate knowledge of the countryside he traversed as fuel for poetic composition and the search for Truth. As a peripatetic poet, Wordsworth continues a tradition of minstrels composing as they wandered through green forests and of bardic inspiration provoked by the inspiring scenes of nature. Continuing to develop this ancient tradition of truth in nature, Wordsworth also embraces the duality of the peripatetic experience, in which the natural philosopher is also the nomadic bard:

We see how its [Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*] power derives from being poised between two conceptions of creativity; one which grounds the work of the poet in a habit and soil; the other which describes the formation of modern

⁴⁰ William Wordsworth, "Preface " to *Lyrical Ballads* in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. W.J.B Owen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 79.

⁴¹ Hazlitt's emphasis in his work *Spirit of the Age*, "Mr. Wordsworth," the close relationship between Wordsworth and rural scenes, as well as the extent to which Wordsworth had become the epitome of Romantic, natural poetry.

⁴² Keats to Benjamin Robert Haydon, April 1818, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 79.

inwardness, in which an autonomous self locates value within his or her own consciousness 43

This tension represents itself in all aspects of Wordsworth's poetry and life as a struggle between the strong, local ties of the bard and the independent wandering of the natural philosopher.

The peripatetic tradition both proceeds and succeeds Wordsworth's influence, mirroring the established Georgic and Pastoral forms, but is not usually seen today as an important category. Critics such as Anne Wallace argue for Wordsworth's stylistic similarities with the Georgic—that, "such walking [...] partially preserves the sites in which the ideal values of agrarian England were supposed to have flourished," while scholars such as Donna Landry argue that Wordsworth was a pastoral poet. I will argue that Wordsworth's poetry incorporates both styles, resolving the contradiction of labor and leisure through poetic action and walking. Furthermore, much of the criticism focused around Wordsworth's poetry privileges the Romantic struggle with interiority; indeed, John Barrell suggests that Wordsworth's relationship with nature is completely dominated by his own search for mental transcendence. But this interpretation is too absolute, and ignores the legitimate natural experience of the celebrated rural poet. Through Wordsworth's embrace of the peripatetic experience, he forms his own poetry, which is faithful to nature and to wandering.

In order to establish the influence of the peripatetic lifestyle, I will trace the dual narratives of Wordsworth's peripatetic poetry, the traditions of independence

⁴³ Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21.

⁴⁴ Anne Wallace *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 12.

⁴⁵ John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 182.

and rootedness. I show that Wordsworth's poetry explores the independence inherent in the poetry and lifestyle of the peripatetic by first establishing the literal relationship between walking and liberty, and then exploring the process by which independence is linked both philosophically and poetically to the peripatetic. This link precedes Wordsworth, but is compounded in the eighteenth-century by the expansion of the British Empire and the radical thought provoked by repressive government and internal dissent. Wordsworth's poetry is clearly founded upon a deep and abiding relationship between the poet and the place, mediated through the experience of walking. At the same time, rootedness was also a central theme in Wordsworth's poetry and in his era, resulting from the frantic eighteenth-century effort to create an ideal Britain and an ideal of Britishness to legitimate an increasingly global empire. Wordsworth's poetry portrays a continuing tension between narratives of independence and rootedness, both of which are evoked by the fullest embrace of a truly peripatetic lifestyle: an intimate experience of Nature forms and informs his composition, technique, and subject.

There is something soothing in the subtle power inspired by walking; traversing the landscape under one's own agency allows for musing, transition from thought to thought with the ease of motion generated by repeated footsteps. Suddenly, each thought is guided with the same purposeful purposelessness engendered by steady, slow progress towards an indistinguishable goal. Thus, the wanderer becomes the itinerant philosopher; exploring nature as he explores his own mind, independent in motion as he is in thought. Though a product of his nation or city-state, he is at liberty to traverse its territory as he is independent to pursue whatever meandering or

metaphysical speculation arises as he slowly surmounts any obstacle imposed by nature, mental or environmental.

"In one respect, at least, I may boast of a resemblance to the simplicity of the ancient sages: I pursue my meditations on foot, and can find occasion for philosophic reflection, wherever you fretted vault (the philosopher's best canopy) extends its glorious covering."46 This claim of Sylvanus Theophrastus, the wandering poet and narrator of John Thelwall's *The Peripatetic*, published in 1793, 47 emphasizes the link between the peripatetic lifestyle and independent thinking and discourse. In a strange work that combines the narratives of picturesque tourism, romantic and political novel, poem, and peripatetic narrative, Thelwall temporizes his radical free thought through the medium of Sylvanus in an almost Platonic manner—didacticism mediated through a peripatetic teacher. As Judith Thompson writes, "his very name unites two central concerns of *The Peripatetic*: nature (Sylvanus was a Roman woodland deity) and moral psychology (the Greek philosopher Theophrastus, [was] Aristotle's successor as head of the Peripatetic school in Athens[...]).",48 As Thompson points out, Sylvanus's self-conscious narrative and later works such as *The Prelude* share a dedication to an independent spirit fostered through rootedness in the landscape and the unification of natural truth and independent motion that creates the peripatetic philosopher. Though often dismissed as insubstantial, Wordsworth the philosopher presents himself to his readers as an interpreter of natural truth, and it is

⁴⁶ John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 78

⁴⁷ Thompson, "Introduction" to *The Peripatetic*, 11.

⁴⁸ Thompson, "Introduction" to *The Peripatetic*, 21.

thus crucial to examine his poetry according to his "taste", 49 and unique visionariness. Wordsworth the poet is a rural philosopher. Uniquely tied to the land, he still maintains an independence of thought that legitimates his work as it connects him with the broad narrative of independence running through his era, and throughout the peripatetic narrative.

Much like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wordsworth's peripatetic, poetic creation is an expression of an independent spirit and independent motion. Indeed, independence is a central narrative of the Romantic era, sung by revolutionary Frenchmen as well as dissenting clergymen, spread by Wordsworthian vagrants and the enlightened man. In this section, I demonstrate how the narrative of independence appears throughout Wordsworth's oeuvre and serves to contradict, i.e. further illuminate, the trope of rootedness. In tension with the established, idealized Britishness of Wordsworth's poetry is his early dedication to radical thought and poetic work. I trace here the importance of radical, independent thought to *The Prelude*, especially its earliest versions: the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 and the first book of *The Prelude* of 1805. I also discuss the curious elision that takes place in the mind, as mobility and pedestrianism become equated with independent thought and more literal freedom. This combination of ideas creates the romantic philosopher, Wordsworth, whose legitimacy is secured by his peripatetic, circular relationship with nature and whose poetic creations are both independent of and dependent on a unique experience of nature.

Only twenty-nine years after his death, Matthew Arnold, a friend of Wordsworth and an influential literary critic, dismissed Wordsworth's philosophy as

⁴⁹ Wordsworth, "Preface," 70.

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an illusion.⁵⁰ The debate over the legitimacy of Wordsworth as itinerant philosopher continues into the present, but it is less valuable to question the legitimacy of his thoughts than to recognize the effect of his philosophy. The truths with which he presents his reader are important because they were and are influential and meaningful. As John Stuart Mill, an unlikely poetic critic writes,

But Wordsworth would never have had any great effect on me if he had merely placed before me beautiful pictures of natural scenery...By their [Wordsworth's poems] means I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings, which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. I seemed to learn from them what would be the perennial sources of happiness when all the greater evils of life should be removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence.⁵¹

Inspired by Wordsworth as he discusses Wordsworth's effective "joy," Mill also displays his dependence on Wordsworth's truth. He becomes a "better" and "happier" man as he falls under the influence of Wordsworth's didactic nature. Indeed, in presenting nature as analogous to truth, Wordsworth presents his reader with an independent philosophy—one determined equally by Wordsworth and by the reader's peripatetic experience of nature.

Though his actual participation in movements for independence in his more radical youth was quiet, the importance of freedom, especially from the fiercest of all oppressors—the dreary stasis of the city—is shouted throughout *The Prelude* by Wordsworth the peripatetic poet. Indeed, Wordsworth sees England as essentially "a free country, where every road is open, where talents and industry are more liberally

⁵¹ Gill, Wordsworth and the Victorians, 47.

⁵⁰ Stephen Gill, Wordsworth and the Victorians (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), 171.

rewarded than amongst any other nation of the Universe."52 Despite the influence of radicals such as John Thelwall and Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the poetry of Wordsworth, he maintains the countryside and the "road" as the haunt of an independent man who expresses his liberty through wandering. Or, as James Thomson writes, "Man superior walks/Amid the glad creation, musing praise,/And looking lively gratitude."53 In his poem, *The Seasons*, Thomson celebrates rural pastimes and the wandering poet as the essence of Britishness. The British landscape expresses independence and allows creative inspiration because it separates the poet from society or "impediments" (I:141) such as the trials of radical thinkers Thomas Paine and John Thelwall, who were sued for seditious libel and accused of treason.⁵⁴ The opposition between the city and country runs throughout Wordsworth's poetry to express the independence of the wanderer; he is "enfranchised" (I:6-10), a word that is most frequently used in a political register. Enfranchisement and liberty are a direct result of wandering, as, "The earth is all before me—with a heart/Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty" (I:15-16). Indeed, both the poet and the earth are "joyous" and embrace their "own liberty" because Wordsworth the peripatetic subsumes its identity: "To Nature's vast Lyceum, forth they walk;/ By that kind School where no proud master reigns,"55 privileging an independent experience of nature over a structured society. In this way, he celebrates local heroes, such as William Wallace, for spreading liberty and fighting society, describing Wallace's work as imbuing

⁵² William Wordsworth to William Mathews, Blois, May 17, 1792, in *Early Letters of William & Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 76.

⁵³ James Thomson, "Spring" in *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 170-172.

⁵⁴ Thompson, "Introduction" to *The Peripatetic*, 15.

⁵⁵ Thomson, "Summer" in *The Seasons*, 1395-1396.

Scotland "with a local soul/Of independence and stern liberty" (I: 219-220). To be peripatetic, in Wordsworth's vocabulary, is to be free and to conform to the narrative of independence spreading throughout the British landscape and the greater world.

Often associated with a lower socio-economic status, walking became a democratizing ideal, calling the peripatetic poet to the road to escape the false imprisonment of society's class structure. Throughout Wordsworth's poetry, vagrant narratives inform the thoughts and philosophies of the poet as, "like a peasant, [I] pursued my road" (I:110) looking for "the life/In common things" (I:117-118). As Judith Thompson writes in her "Introduction" to *The Peripatetic*,

To be peripatetic, to deliberately travel on foot, was to make a political and aesthetic statement in the late eighteenth-century; it announced one's solidarity with the common people, a down-to-earth aesthetics that sees the world from the bottom up. For Thelwall this lowly point of prospect affords a broader, more representative and level(ing) perspective on life and society.⁵⁶

Thus, the peripatetic is a democrat whose wandering provides not only creative inspiration, but also a communal narrative, as the poet is not only in "solidarity" with the countryside, but also with the "common people." Thompson, however, conflates "down-to-earth" with an aesthetics of "bottom up," which obscures the peripatetic perspective. Though democratizing, the peripatetic experience is founded upon a claim that "Nature by extrinsic passion first/Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand/And made me love them" (I: 572-574). The peripatetic poet is primarily concerned not with democracy and the "bottom," but with Nature, the origin and root of all things. The creation of peripatetic democracy is an inevitable outcome of the experience of wandering, not a direct aim of the wanderer. According to William Gilpin, "We travel for various purposes; to explore the culture of soils; to view the

⁵⁶ Thompson, "Introduction" to The Peripatetic, 33.

curiosities of art; to survey the beauties of nature; to search for her productions; and to learn the manners of men; their different polities, and modes of life."⁵⁷ What Gilpin describes as *one purpose* of travel, learning about humanity, is in Wordsworth an inevitable *outcome* of wandering—as he encounters vagrants who inform his philosophies. Indeed, Wordsworth refuses to maintain the distance implied by Gilpin's description of travel, which negates independent thought and alienates the poet from the communal narrative:

But Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which depends on ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height, and, in order to excite rational sympathy he must express himself as other men express themselves.⁵⁸

By founding his poetry in the language of men in order to excite "rational sympathy," Wordsworth once again shows his readers that democracy is a necessary outcome of a universally accessible poetry. As he leaves behind abstract personifications, Wordsworth dedicates himself to a communal narrative, which is as accessible as the simple independence of walking; thus, "His muse... is a leveling one." ⁵⁹

Walking is freedom; the freedom to wander through the countryside is a celebration of agency and, in the peripatetic tradition, an invitation to commune with nature. Walking is both symbolic of independent thought and, more literally, an actual manifestation of that liberty. Through "Our human waywardness" (*Two Part Prelude of 1799*, 11), the wanderer distances himself from the regulating influence of society, and thus the wanderer "gradually produced/A quiet independence of the heart" (*Two Part Prelude of 1799*, 71-72). This independence through walking is a

⁵⁷ William Gilpin, Observations on the river Wye 1782 (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991), 1.

⁵⁸ Wordsworth, "Preface," 82.

⁵⁹ Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth," 203-204.

theme throughout the eighteenth century, for instance, throughout the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote in the *Confessions*, "Never did I think so much, exist so vividly, and experience so much, never have I been so much myself—if I may use that expression—as in the journeys I have taken alone and on foot."60 Through an increased perception (improved by the practice of walking), the wanderer feels an increased confidence in a cohesive self. This self must be formed independently of society in order to free the wanderer from any imposed conception. In his autobiographical *Prelude*, Wordsworth traces the process by which he becomes who he is as a poet and a man—the ways in which nature and, more specifically, the peripatetic experience of nature frees him from an imposed self:

A captive greets thee, coming from a house Of bondage, from yon city's walls set free A prison where he hath been long immured. Now I am free, enfranchised and at large May fix my habitation at my will. (I: 6-10)

The language of this passage is almost redundant in its opposition between the "bondage" of the city and the freedom of the escape to nature. Indeed, the liberty the poet experiences allows him to be "at large," a jarring expression which seems to portray the poet as a renegade from society whose peripatetic lifestyle both defines him in opposition to a regulated society and grants him a privileged status in nature: he is "at large" and roaming according to his "will."

His power of agency is not merely symbolic, but also quite literal: as the wanderer traverses the countryside, he is presented with paths, as John Thelwall sees, "faintly tracked through the luxuriant herbage of the fields, and which left me at liberty to indulge the solitary reveries of a mind, to which the volume of nature is

⁶⁰ Rousseau. Confessions. 158.

ever open at some page of instruction and delight."61 Thelwall demonstrates throughout *The Peripatetic* that walking allows for digression—the choice of pace and path are manifestations of the wanderer's independence, as Wordsworth writes: "Whither shall I turn,/By road or pathway, or through open field" (I:29-30). As Celeste Langan suggests, the Romantic poet reinterprets wandering, "giving the freedom to come and go a purely psychological *patois*: freedom is walking."⁶² Freedom of choice grants the peripatetic the power of decision, granting him an agency in the countryside denied to a passenger traveling on the post or in a carriage. As nature provokes the peripatetic into thought, through decision-making or simply through the varied and inspiring objects and prospects available to the wanderer as he explores the terrain, she also creates what Thomson calls "Freshness," or freedom of mind.

The independence of walking is celebrated through the peripatetic philosophic tradition, where teaching and disputation are wandering activities. Wordsworth embraces the independence of thought and action taught to the peripatetic through close experience with nature. As Thelwall writes in *The Peripatetic*,

thou wilt be kind enough to remember, that, as I am only a foot traveler, the by path to the right and left is always open to me as the turnpike road: and that [if], on the present occasion, I have been rambling somewhat too long among the fields and green allies of poetical digression, thou art, nevertheless, bound in gratitude to excuse me, since I have been induced so to do purely for thy sake[...]⁶⁴

The peripatetic experience is thus simultaneous motion and thought; it is inseparable from a philosophic experience of nature. Thelwall mentions a "poetical digression,"

⁶¹ Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, 78.

⁶² Celeste Langan, Romantic Vagrancy, 20.

⁶³ Thomson, "Spring," 104-105.

⁶⁴ Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, 123.

but he is more literally referring to the "rambling" progress of his mind as it jumps as easily from thought to thought as the peripatetic eye jumps from prospect to prospect. Similarly, as Thomson urges the people of Hartford to "walk the Plain/With Innocence and Meditation join'd" he is describing the experience of the peripatetic where "meditation" and "innocence," in the form of liberty from the reprobation of society, are intrinsic in the process of walking "the Plain." 65 The strange hero of *The Peripatetic*, Sylvanus, constantly emphasizes the conflation of walking and thought, especially when he agrees only to a philosophic discussion, "(Upon condition that it should be a pedestrian excursion.)"66 Another seminal philosopher of his time who concerned himself with the narrative of independence especially in his novel Caleb Williams, William Godwin reinforces the link between wandering in thought and throughout the landscape:

An attentive observer will perceive various symptoms calculated to persuade him that every step he takes, during the longest journey, is the production of thought. Walking is, in all cases, originally a voluntary motion...the distinct determination of a mind, preceding each step, is sufficiently perceptible.⁶⁷

In underlining the "voluntary motion" of walking, Godwin describes walking as expressive of thought. Each step is controlled and created by thought and thus in the Romantic vocabulary walking becomes thinking.

As the peripatetic poet wanders freely through nature, his mind is at liberty to pursue the vagaries of thought; he is taught the truth of a universal, harmonious nature that then informs his poetry and natural philosophy. Only after returning to nature can the poet throw off "that burthen of my own unnatural self," (I:23) and

⁶⁵ Thomson, "Spring," 6-7. 66 Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, 115.

⁶⁷ Langan, Romantic Vagrancy, 176.

"harmonize his Heart" with the simple truths of nature. This "unnatural self" appears throughout Wordsworth's poetry (see "Tintern Abbey") and is the poet or man separated from the truth of nature and forced to live within the static environment of the city. As he regains his independence in nature and allows his thought free intercourse with her, he realizes, "I cannot miss my way. I breathe again—/Trances of thought and mountings of the mind/Come fast upon me" (I:19-21). His peripatetic experience and continuing relationship with nature allow him access to "the vital soul" (I:161), which is natural truth:

The passions that build up our human soul, Not with the mean and vulgar works of man, But with high objects, with enduring things, With life and Nature, purifying thus The elements of feeling and of thought (I:434-438).

Wordsworth deliberately contrasts the low and "vulgar works of man" with the "high objects" of nature to reveal the philosophical peripatetic whose purified mind is thus receptive to "enduring" natural truth. Wandering is necessary to access this natural truth, "because in that condition [rural life] the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." Throughout his life, Wordsworth had access to this inspiring nature: "A child, I held unconscious intercourse/With the eternal beauty, drinking in/A pure organic pleasure from the lines/Of curling mist" (I:589-592). Wordsworth delineates a clear natural scene for his reader as the source of his inspiration and "a pure organic pleasure," something separated from man and therefore glorified. Wordsworth, "the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly

⁶⁸ Thomson, "Summer," 1383

⁶⁹ Wordsworth, "Preface," 71.

companion."⁷⁰ The peripatetic experience of nature is not alienating or creative of Romantic interiority, but rather allows the poet access to an independent self, separated from society and in tune with "general truths which are themselves a sort/ Of elements and agents" (I:162-163).

His affirmed "passion," wandering for Wordsworth is clearly a very important part of his identity, as a philosopher, poet, and man; this independence is in fact his poetic legitimation as well as his vocational individuation. Indeed, *The Prelude of* 1805 opens with an invocation to the breeze, the Romantic symbol of inspiration—for Wordsworth more than mere inspiration, but in fact, a "welcome friend!" (I:5). This intimate experience (that which makes every breeze a "friend") with nature separates him from other poets, and selects him as the poet "of the meadows and the woods" ("Tintern Abbey," 104). This is the poet who was dependent on "the rhythm of walking in a sheltered and confined space, such as a garden or small grove of trees, [which] was intrinsic to Wordsworth's method of composition. He seems to have walked his meter, or associated pedestrian movement with metrical generation."⁷¹ Walking is necessary to his poetry both as an expression of meter and as an illusive creative force that inspires composition. Wandering creates the meter, but it also creates the poet's song, as he has

[...]felt within A corresponding mild creative breeze, A vital breeze which traveled gently on O'er things which it had made, and is become A tempest, a redundant energy, Vexing its own creation. (I:42-47)

⁷⁰ Wordsworth, "Preface," 80.

⁷¹ Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, 214.

His peripatetic experience allows him access to the "vital breeze" of creativity and natural truth, which translates into a universally accessible poetry. This passage illuminates a tension in Wordsworth's poetry between the "within" and the creative forces flowing from without. Despite this seeming contradiction, Wordsworth illustrates a fundamental truth of the peripatetic experience and the duality of the experience of walking and thinking: the wanderer is inspired by the world without, which informs his "within" and thus informs his creativity. This circular flow of inspiration marks bards such as Wordsworth, with his "spirit, thus singled out" (I:62). Wordsworth, therefore, saw poetic legitimacy through a close relationship or constant "unconscious intercourse" (I:589) with nature.

The close relationship between the peripatetic poet and nature becomes, during Romanticism, a sign of his poetic legitimacy. This close relationship is further defined throughout Romantic work, as in James Thomson's *The Seasons*, as the peripatetic experience:

Now the soft Hour Of walking comes: for him who lonely loves To seek the distant Hills, and there converse With Nature; there to harmonize his Heart, And in pathetic Song to breathe around The Harmony to others.⁷²

The poet's "Song" is both legitimated through his walking and the ensuing conversation with "Nature" and also created by these same forces. The peripatetic has accessed "The Harmony" of the natural experience and now must "breathe around" his natural truth to others. The comfort of this legitimation is clear for the poet,

⁷² Thomson, "Summer," 1379-1385

Wordsworth, who was harassed by critics and whose song was devalued. Through his natural legitimation, Wordsworth can adopt the title of "great Poet" and claim that,

a great Poet ought to do more than this he ought to a certain degree to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane pure and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides.⁷³

Wandering not only becomes poetic legitimation, but also allows Wordsworth vocational individuation. As he cultivates his peripatetic poetry, he begins to "travel before men" and other poets. He develops the "taste" by which he is enjoyed and as such separates himself from the greater body of poets. Indeed as Coleridge once remarked to other poets, "He strides so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance!"⁷⁴

Though he traveled long distances on walking tours such as the one he took in 1790 in France, Wordsworth more often composed during habitual, local walks where the paths were created by the constant tread of his feet—allowing him a feeling of rootedness, both to the soil and to the people. Writing during the years when the English countryside assumed its modern aesthetic appearance, as land reform arranged the common landscape according to the taste of the picturesque and domestic tourism steadily increased, Wordsworth incorporated an idealized landscape into his poetry. This idealized landscape was also fashioned by nationalistic ideas that claimed "Britain as nature's inevitable product." Perhaps the early loss of his

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⁷⁵ Anne Janowitz, *England's Ruins* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1990), 4.

⁷³ Wordsworth to John Wilson, Grasmere, May 24, 1802 in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. W.J.B Owen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 106.

⁷⁴ William Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (Grasmere: the Wordsworth Trust, 2004), 70.

mother in 1778 and his subsequent impermanent home life⁷⁶ prompted Wordsworth to invest heavily in the importance of a rooted community of the 'British.' No matter what the impetus, however, Wordsworth's poetry is permeated with a feeling of immediacy and action that is closely tied to the peripatetic experience:

Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*.⁷⁷

This purpose, compounded by intense meditation, which usually corresponds to Wordsworth's pedestrian travel or a local peripatetic excursion, involves more than just conveying an interpretation of natural truth: it also utilizes natural truth to establish British superiority and community.

Though often considered as a poem of metaphysical rumination on the poetic mind, "Tintern Abbey" is also a highly localized poem that is presented (in the poem's subtitle) as composed in a specific locality and time, "On revisiting the banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798." However idealized Wordsworth's scene might seem, it is extremely specific; his are "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," in an intimate scene of reflection. The specifying adjectival qualification that is repeatedly found throughout the introduction to the poem, "these waters" (3) and "these steep and lofty cliffs" (5), underlies the immediacy and specificity of the countryside as well as the poet's philosophic musings on his "spots of time," which are located in and around "these forms of beauty" (25). In introducing a specific area, Wordsworth is both acknowledging his debt to this "secluded scene" (6) for its "life"

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⁷⁶ Gill, William Wordsworth A Life, 18.

Wordsworth, "Preface, " 72.

⁷⁸ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XI, 208.

and food/For future years" (65-66), and claiming the legitimacy of his natural truth and "sense sublime/Of something far more deeply interfused" (96-97) as harmonious with the idealized landscape. In much of Wordsworth's poetry, he reaches for this idealized past and landscape, populated by Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge, firmly rooted in the habitual footpaths of their adored landscape at Alfoxden.

Wordsworth evokes Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey" as his "dearest Friend" (116) and his "dear, dear Sister!" (121), revealing the importance of a localized experience as the driving force behind his idealized landscape. "Tintern Abbey" develops the peripatetic narrative of rootedness and resonates with the processes of idealization of the British community and landscape that reveals Wordsworth's dependence on the national narrative.

As British imperial power spread around the world and the British government recoiled from revolution, both colonial and continental, Wordsworth participated in the creation of the idealized Britain and British people. While wandering the British landscape, Wordsworth immortalized and aestheticized the countryside with its "pastoral farms" (17) and "sylvan Wye!" (57). Even travel writer and theorist of the picturesque William Gilpin admits to industrial reality as smoke pervaded the scene from the coal furnaces near Tintern Abbey. But for Wordsworth, this unsightly reality was transformed into "wreathes of smoke/Sent up, in silence, from among the trees" (18-19). It is through a localized inspiration that Wordsworth creates an imaginative, idealized scene, where nature is no longer "all in all" (76), as John Barrell writes, "the knowledge Wordsworth has arrived at by the influence of

⁷⁹ Gilpin, Observations on the river Wye 1782, 18.

natural objects can finally be discussed as separate from those objects[.]"* Though locally inspired by the Abbey, his scene is separated from the countryside and transformed into an idealized landscape. Through the same process, William Hazlitt reveals the Romantic dedication to aestheticizing the landscape: "In the meantime I went to Llangollen Vale by way of initiating myself in the mysteries of natural scenery; and I must say I was enchanted with it. I had been reading Coleridge's description of England in his *Ode on the Departing Year*, and I applied it, con amore, to the objects before me." Hazlitt shows the readers' investment in the Romantics creation of the landscape and manipulation of the image of the countryside to fire national pride. Though often faulted for his reclusive and quiet character during the radical 1790s in England, Wordsworth was deeply committed to the fashioning of a new England, established through another "glorious revolution," one that is internal, natural, and rooted in the soil and the people.

Despite Rousseau's insistence that he enjoyed traveling "alone and on foot[,]" walking was for Wordsworth and many of his contemporaries a social activity. Throughout his work, Wordsworth writes vagrant narratives such as "The Ruined Cottage" and "Resolution and Independence," which emphasize the community-forming aspect of the peripatetic lifestyle. In each of these poems an unidentified, traveling narrator, originally dejected and "With languid feet which by the slipp'ry ground/ Were baffled still" ("The Ruined Cottage," 20-21), meets with a vagrant, a man evocative of "naked wilderness" ("Resolution and Independence," 58). Through the sharing of the vagrant's experience, the poet rediscovers "the secret

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⁸⁰ Barrell, The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 182.

⁸¹ Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets," 74.

⁸² Rousseau, *The Confessions*, 158.

spirit of humanity" ("The Ruined Cottage," 503). Indeed, Wordsworth claims, in his *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, that

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.⁸³

The "knowledge" that the poet uses to bind this "empire" together is that which is gained through his peripatetic life; as he wanders with Armitage in "The Ruined Cottage" or the leech gatherer in "Resolution and Independence," he is taught the value of a localized experience of nature. Though Wordsworth often represents particular and specific communities in order to disseminate a more general truth, he is also firmly invested in the development a larger, more universal community.

In "Tintern Abbey" this community is created out of and through the natural scenery, which gives Wordsworth access to "The still, sad music of humanity,/Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power/To chasten and subdue" (92-94). Beginning his poem with the self conscious "I" of lines 1-43, Wordsworth locates his poetic wandering in personal experience and memory, in "this corporeal frame" (44). But, paradoxically, once freed from the "heavy and the weary weight/Of all this unintelligible world" (39-40), Wordsworth switches into a communal voice: "we are laid asleep" (46). Wordsworth continues the poem using "I" and returns to personal experience once he is beset by "the fever of the world" (54). The narrative created through this brief moment of communal identity is not simply imaginative, but powerful:

While with an eye made quiet by the power Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

⁸³ Wordsworth, "Preface," 81.

We see into the life of things. (47-49)

The repetition of "power" emphasizes not only the ability that Wordsworth derives from his communication of natural truth, but also the unifying power of natural experience. Only universally accessible natural truth has the power to unite communities through their shared experience of "something far more deeply interfused" (97). Indeed, Wordsworth claims, "I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood[,]",84 proving his investment in the communal immediacy of poetry.

The imagined community that Wordsworth evokes throughout "Tintern Abbey," which was written on one of many pedestrian tours, emphasizes his investment in the construction of British national identity. Though he speaks as the rural bard and mostly about the rural poor, he is also addressing the newly industrialized laborers who live in "lonely rooms, and mid the din/Of towns and cities" (27-28). But these urban workers were by no means divorced from the didactic influences of nature and the peripatetic experience. Indeed, as Malcolm Chase argues, "For such people 'Nature' retained a profound meaning, not sentimental or Arcadian in character, but ingrained, realistic, and born of continuing proximity (spatial and psychological) to the land."85 Wordsworth appeals to a general community of the 'British,' while arguing for the restorative and transcendent power of 'Nature,' more specifically the British countryside: "Therefore am I still/A lover of the meadows and the woods/And mountains; and of all that we behold" (103-105). In

Wordsworth, "Preface," 74.
 Malcolm Chase, 'The People's Farm' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 15.

this way, the "lyric speaks for transhistorical community[,]" and Wordsworth's poetry ties natural truth to communal identity: a community that is inherently British both in its appearance and history. As he imagines a greater British identity through nature, he employs what Janowitz calls,

The reparative action of the Imagination and of its nationalist function are inseparable: here in native geography, the country answers the poets, for here 'had Nature lodged/The soul, the imagination of the whole' (1805,XIII, 64-5). To speak of nature is to speak of the nation: the fragments cohere into a whole, the ruin is repaired, and as the nation moves through each person, so each person moves through the nation.⁸⁷

The active imagination allows the poet to translate natural landscape into national identity. And as Janowitz delineates the parallel movement of the nation and the people, she describes the process of peripatetic community and identity formation as inherently tied to the nationalizing impulses of eighteenth-century imperial Britain.

Much of this idealization of Britishness involved returning to historic traditions, which were revitalized and reformed to evoke mythic greatness, as is exemplified by Wordsworth's dedication, as bard, to Lyrical Ballads. The bard is exemplary of the tradition of peripatetic poetry, embodying the oral, nomadic tradition, but Wordsworth's ballads are typically strongly folkloric and often specifically localized. Indeed, Wordsworth was ambivalent about much of his own formal education, 88 but his father trained him to know Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser by heart—the 'great' Bards of English history. 89 Furthermore, in his early education at Hawkshead School, Wordsworth learned folk narratives from his host-

⁸⁶ Janowitz, Lyric and Labour, 6.

⁸⁷ Janowitz, England's Ruins, 144.

⁸⁸ Gill, William Wordsworth A Life, 40.

⁸⁹ Gill, William Wordsworth A Life, 17.

mother Ann Tyson, 90 thus linking him to localized bardic traditions. Because the bardic voice was firmly established in English tradition, its evocation was thus a transhistoric and nationalistic poetic device. For Wordsworth, natural authority and the authority of antiquity allow him to feel bardic authority: "with an eye made quite by the power/Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,/We see into the heart of things" (47-49). As Wordsworth argues in his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads, the nation and landscape legitimate his poetic vocation and allow Wordsworth access to "a sense sublime." This close link between nature and bardic power is reflected throughout the poetry of Wordsworth's era; in James Thomson's *The Seasons*, he explicitly states that, "These are the Haunts of Meditation, These/ The Scenes where antient Bards th' inspiring Breath,/ Exatic, felt; and, from this World retir'd[.]",91 And these natural scenes are also crucial to the identity and creative energy, or "breath" of the poet. This energy is stimulated and reinforced by wandering; the physicality of walking rouses the mind, and the freedom of walking encourages freedom of thought, allowing for a powerful bardic voice.

The creation of British national identity was aided by the increase in domestic tourism and the travel literature prevalent in the eighteenth century, which taught the reader how to enjoy and be informed by nature, specifically the British countryside. Wordsworth participated in and was a product of this tradition of travel literature. After the war between England and France made travel to the Continent more difficult, Wordsworth joined those who sought out the picturesque possibilities of the domestic "landscape," a word which Wordsworth might have even learned through

⁹⁰ Gill, William Wordsworth A Life, 26.

⁹¹ Thomson, "Spring" in *The Seasons*, 22-24.

Thomas Gray in his "Elegy" of 1750,⁹² and which certainly proves to be a keyword in "Tintern Abbey" and in Wordsworth's greater oeuvre.

Though Gray was a quintessential companion for the domestic traveler, it was William Gilpin who most popularized picturesque tourism, the practice of "examining it [the landscape] by the rules of picturesque beauty: that of not merely describing; but of adapting the description of natural scenery to the principles of artificial landscape." This adaptation is highly resonant with Wordsworth's work, where descriptions of scenery are transformed into an idealized image, "recollected in tranquility,"94 i.e. recreated through the powers of memory and imagination. This process is intrinsically tied to the Romantic Movement in art, as John Barrell writes, "A landscape was fitted into the established set of landscape patterns, and so became part of the universal landscape, which included any tract of land the connoisseur chose to examine.",95 As the British reorganized their landscape to conform to ideals of the picturesque, they were simply participating in the more general trend of eliding the natural countryside with the imagined 'landscape.' In "Tintern Abbey" this process reaches its apex, or as Anne Janowitz observes, the poem is the "terminus of the picturesque ruin poem: the building entirely eradicated from the landscape, and the monument figured as the workings of a redemptive poetic memory."⁹⁶ In removing the actual Abbey from the poem, Wordsworth affirms his dedication to a natural world that is ordered and even created by the mind. More specifically, the natural scenery that Wordsworth evokes in "Tintern Abbey" is then adapted and

⁹² OED

⁹³ Gilpin, Observations, 1.

⁹⁴ Wordsworth, "Preface," 85.

⁹⁵ Barrell, The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 7.

⁹⁶ Janowitz, England's Ruins, 126.

transformed into a figurative landscape of the mind—"Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,/And the round ocean, and the living air,/And the blue sky, and in the mind of man" (98-100). The landscape of "the mind of man" is then quickly brought back to the natural landscape: "Therefore am I still/A lover of the meadows and the woods,/And mountains" (103-105). In creating a circular movement, where nature informs the mind, which in turn submits to "nature [...] The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul" (109, 111), Wordsworth surpasses the picturesque in his poetry's firm rootedness: it is doubly dependent on the natural experience.

As well as expecting what Donna Landry refers to as the "amenity" value of a natural environment, the possibilities of leisure or popular activities such as botanizing, the picturesque tourist and the Romantic poet valued the didactic influence of immediate experience in a harmonious natural world. Certainly this tradition predates Wordsworth and his era; indeed, the word "peripatetic" comes from the Aristotelian school of philosophy and was used to describe their practice of walking while teaching and disputing (again, note the inherently communal aspects of the peripatetic narrative). In "Tintern Abbey" we see the climax of these ideals as wandering in nature is transformed into a didactic experience, which teaches the narrator and reader not to "the more/Suffer my genial spirits to decay" (114-115). Rather, the poet shows the instructive power of nature as it works through the mind of man, providing the illumination that James Thomson describes: "OH NATURE! all sufficient! over all!/ Inrich me with the knowledge of thy Works![...]thro' the

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38 OED

⁹⁷ Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, 11.

disclosing Deep/ Light my blind Way[.]"⁹⁹ Throughout his highly influential work, *The Seasons*, Thomson emphasizes educational nature, but he also overwhelms the reader with the pure joy of the harmonious energy and power of the natural world as experienced through the agency of the peripatetic poet. This joy runs throughout Wordsworth's poetry, manifesting itself in "Tintern Abbey" as the poet learns to be

well pleased to recognize In nature and the language of the sense, The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being. (108-112)

Thus, nature becomes the teacher not only of sensation, but also of the "moral being," a responsibility that also demonstrates the poet's agency in nature. It is the poet who can "recognize" and reveal to the reader the possibilities of the peripatetic experience of nature. Or, as William Gilpin observes, "Observations of this kind, through the vehicle of description, have the better chance of being founded in truth; as they are not the offspring of theory; but are taken warm from the scenes of nature, as they arise." For Wordsworth as well as Gilpin, nature is truth, and description thereof illuminates, defines, and delights the mind of man.

Much of Wordsworth's poetry mimics the heavy-handed language and ideas of the picturesque tourists, but it differs essentially in the immediacy of his interaction with nature as he makes his way on foot through the Trossachs of Scotland or conquers Mont Blanc both mentally and peripatetically. His poetry is more rooted in the natural environment than is the roving eye of the picturesque tourist. Indeed as Duncan Wu suggests, "Wordsworth's pastorals [...] do not contain the traditional

100 Gilpin, Observations, 2.

⁹⁹ Thomson, "Autumn" *The Seasons*, 1352-1359.

urban poet's meditations upon simple shepherds and their bucolic life. His stance is rather as a rural man himself, one who, because he belongs to the countryside and it to him, can write truthfully about his surroundings and his neighbors." No matter where his feet choose to stray, even as he wanders through Scotland, villagers address him as a kindred spirit. As Dorothy Wordsworth recollects in her journal, "One of them said to us in a friendly, soft tone of voice, 'What! You are stepping westward?' I cannot describe how affecting this simple expression was in that remote place, with the western sky in front, yet glowing with the departed sun." Wordsworth is able to access a universally available natural inspiration.

Only through extreme rootedness in his local environment does Wordsworth gain access to both a poetic legitimation and poetical individuation. Because he is an active participant in the countryside, primarily peripatetically, Wordsworth has gained access to the "ministry/More palpable" of nature. He also separates himself from the picturesque tourist by way of his unique imaginative experience of nature. William Gilpin describes the imaginative experience of the picturesque tourist:

This active power embodies half-formed images; and gives existence to the most illusive scenes. These it rapidly combines; and often composes landscapes, perhaps more beautiful, than any, that exist in nature. They are formed indeed from nature—from the most beautiful of her scenes; and having been treasured up in the memory, are called into these imaginary creations by some distant resemblances, which strike the eye in the multiplicity of evanid surfaces, that float before it. 104

Through his beautiful prose, Gilpin traces the construction of the imaginary landscape and the idealization of the "most illusive scenes" in the British landscape. As the

¹⁰¹ Duncan Wu, "Poetry to 1798" in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 467.

Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, ed. Carol Kyros Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 181.

Wordsworth, The Prelude, I:355-356.

¹⁰⁴ Gilpin, Observations, 45.

picturesque traveler wanders the landscape, he is continually involved in this constructive process of the imagination. John Barrell describes the imaginative recreation of the landscape of picturesque landscape artists as a physical distance between the observer and the observed: "I think that the attitude to landscape Claude and Thomson share—that, for example, it must keep its distance, and the features within it be kept in subjection to our sense of the general composition." Thus, the distance is the result of the artist separating himself from the scene and subjecting the landscape to his mind and "composition." In contrast, the peripatetic poet cannot be separated from the scene. In fact, throughout "Tintern Abbey" the poet sings of the constancy of his return to natural scenes as the inspiration of his thoughts and his song. Though echoing similar tropes of the picturesque, Wordsworth describes his thoughts and inspiration as rooted in nature, but also as a product "of all the mighty world/Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,/And what perceive" (106-108). Wordsworth constructs a parallel narrative to that of the picturesque tourist, underlining the creative aspect of imagination as it "half-create[s]" and as sensation is manipulated through the elision of the particular countryside with the universal landscape.

Despite these seeming similarities, however, Wordsworth is inherently more tied to his environment and closer to his natural inspiration as he has, "at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject." Though he acknowledges the inventive powers of the imagination, for him nature is the ultimate "anchor" (110) of his "purest thoughts" (110). For Wordsworth the landscape is not "evanid," i.e. fleeting,

¹⁰⁵ Barrell, The Idea of Landscape, 24.

Wordsworth, "Preface," 75.

but persistent and continually serving as "life and food/For future years" (65-66). It is not the result of insubstantial "imaginary creations" provoked by "distant resemblances," but it is sustinent and immediate: "food" that is "From this green earth" (106). Indeed, Wordsworth's dedication to the continually inspiring effects of the environment is echoed throughout the picturesque tradition, but the peripatetic immediacy of his work differentiates him from Gilpin and the other *tourists* of the picturesque.

As Wordsworth wanders through the natural environment and into the mind of man on his peripatetic expeditions, he inspires his reader with purposefulness and a belief in a harmonious, universally accessible nature. The poet expands beyond a simple bardic voice and as he moves through the landscape he moves through the communal mind of man. His peripatetic nature legitimates and inspires his poetry as it connects him with a rooted rural wisdom inspired by both an idealized Britain and British countryside, but also by the influence of a harmoniously didactic nature. In addition to his rootedness in nature, the wanderer is also liberated, both in mind and body. His independent mind exceeds the confines of his body through nature and natural inspiration. It is through a peripatetic expedition throughout Scotland that John Keats (echoing Wordsworth) declares,

I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows. I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely—I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest. ¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Keats to Tom Keats, London, June 1818, 97.

Retracing the steps of many Romantic pedestrian travelers before him, Keats was searching for the wandering wisdom, the feeling of greatness inspired as we abandon ourselves to the influence of benign nurturing nature, to the

Wisdom and spirit of the universe, Thou soul that art the eternity of thought, That giv'st to forms and images a breath And everlasting motion—not in vain[.] (I:401-404)

Second Chapter: John Keats

I go among the Fields and catch a glimpse of a stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose and its eyes are bright with it—I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a Man hurrying along—to what? The Creature has a purpose and his eyes are bright with it.

[...] Even here though I myself am pursueing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of—I am however young writing at random—straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness[.]

—John Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, February 14-May 3 1819

A product of a city lifestyle, the nineteenth-century, middle-class peripatetic has a changed relationship with nature and with poetry. As he hurries through busy streets, navigating not only the newer crowded thoroughfares, but also the labyrinthine network of darker roads of less recent London, the 'modern' peripatetic's eyes are bright with dreaming. His vision narrowed and intensified—no longer a creature of magnificent, unbroken views—the wanderer becomes an observer, distanced from a productive, bountiful nature and enclosed by an avid consumer reality. He turns inward, or backward, looking towards idealized cultural and literary productions, to prove that he is integrated within a greater natural tradition. And he intensifies his perception, privileging not a greater natural truth but a specific natural experience and a specific, mediated vision. Though wandering throughout the country was still immensely popular in the culture of nineteenth-century England and

certainly among Londoners of the higher classes, for John Keats, the peripatetic experience had been reified.

The city shifts perception and creates a world in which experience is mediated by an urban observation. As John Keats searches for knowledge and beauty "in the midst of a great darkness," he demonstrates a unique and evolving observational style that stems from an increased participation in the urban reality of the developing metropolis. In eighteenth-century poetry, Tim Fulford argues, this distanced relationship with nature had yet to develop:

Eighteenth-century writers were able to rework Virgilian epic and georgic into a panegyric on the national benefits deriving from a landscape 'naturally' productive of wealth, viewed from the commanding position of the nobleman and gentlemen who owned it.¹⁰⁸

As poetic creation shifted away from the countryside, however, and towards the metropolis, a center of consumption without production, the eighteenth-century close, if condescending, relationship to the environment was increasingly mediated by a lack of direct experience with the reality of a productive natural experience. The popularity of Grand Tours and picturesque tourism further commodified the peripatetic experience. As the peripatetic ideal became an essential element of poetic, and popular, cultural education, the goal of the wanderer shifted from searching for an undiluted experience of natural truth into the carefully controlled and interpreted natural experience of the observer, only accessible through "the medium of a world like this[.]" Keats was a participant in this interpretive tradition: he associated with

¹⁰⁸ Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, February 14-May 3 1819, 232.

the London bourgeoisie of Leigh Hunt's circle, for whom the peripatetic experience was intensely important:

The London bourgeoisie were flaneurs/euses—Baudelaire's strolling observers of the 'landscape of the great cities' who felt at home in the anonymous flow of the urban crowd. The sensitivity of the flaneurs/euses to the signs of and impressions of the 'outward show of life' gave them the analytical sophistication to reveal the meanings of the city[.]¹¹⁰

The interpretive, distanced sophistication that Dana Arnold describes here is directly a result of signs and impressions—manifestations of observable phenomena, "the outward show of life." Modern peripatetics were no longer integrated in the natural scene as a result of the interpretive distance of the urban observer and his physical distance from rural life. These new walkers were not only engaged in active observation but also aware of their analytical struggle for epistemological significance in the created, consumer-driven reality of the city. Indeed, for a peripatetic poet like Keats, the increased significance of analytic observation translated into a reaching after truth, complicated by the inundation of both sensual and intellectual experience:

The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snailhorn perception of Beauty—I know not you many havens of intenseness—nor ever can know them[.]¹¹¹

Instead of a rich natural experience translating neatly into a Georgic poetry, Keats's poetry is marked by an intense agitation of observation—a competitive cooperation between the interpretive mind and the sensual body as together they shape poetry.

¹¹⁰ Dana Arnold, Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840 (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2000), xvi.

¹¹¹ Keats to B.R. Haydon, April 8 1818, in *John Keats Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 79.

Early nineteenth-century London was a city of contradictions: modernity alongside revered and glorified history; the anonymous flow of people in, out, and around the city and the intimacy of crowded, social living. It was a familiar environment for Walter Pater, over seventy years later strolling through central London, though he preferred the manicured lawns of the city's universities. Indeed, Pater valued a distanced nature as an aesthete and an urban man. Yet his "favorite pastime was to walk in Blean Woods, reading [...] poems by Wordsworth and Keats." Despite his ardent interest in art for art's sake and the distance 113 necessary for art, Pater too was formed by and through peripatetic poetry. Both artists were concerned with the myriad impressions of an evolving natural reality and natural experience and both were participants in the development of distanced, observational literary styles to render an observed, interpreted reality. Pater recognized the mutuality of sensual perception and analytical interpretation—in Keats's words, the idea that "I[n]telligences are atoms of perception," 114 fundamental to the artistic process. Furthermore, Pater's small body of fiction parallels elements of Keats ideas of his own life. As Denis Donoghue writes, "In Pater's fiction, heroes die young, as if early death were in the nature of life and life itself a gratuitous concession. I am urged to live intensely, if only because my life is likely to be short, my death abrupt." ¹¹⁵ Keats died young, not without warning, but still abruptly, and he clearly dedicated himself to a life of poetic intensity. Not simply in his poetry, but also in his letters and

¹¹² Denis Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 26.

¹¹³ I am continuing the use of "distance" as articulated in the first chapter: the result of the artist separating himself from the scene and subjecting the landscape to his mind.

¹¹⁴ Keats to George and Georgiana Keats, February 14-May 3 1819, 232.

¹¹⁵ Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls, 24.

journals we see the specter of poetry and poetic composition haunting him, urging him to create intensely, until,

Now more than ever seems it rich to die To cease upon the midnight with no pain, While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad In such an ecstasy! ("Nightingale," 54-57)

In this chapter, I describe these evolutions in the peripatetic lifestyle; as the wanderer is transplanted unto an urban landscape, his relationship with natural experience is fundamentally altered. Indeed, the peripatetic becomes not so much a participant in an intimate natural experience as an observer, distanced by both a cultural and mental relocation to the city. By first illustrating Keats's naturalism, I demonstrate his devotion to the evolving peripatetic ideal—not simply an avid wanderer, he was an educated student of the peripatetic poetic. His strong education was in the natural sciences and his training as a surgeon developed his techniques of observation. But the distance between Keats and the natural scene is primarily a result of his urban, interpretation-based lifestyle. Using the great aesthetic critic, Walter Pater, I trace the role of observation in linking rural and urban experiences, allowing the city-dweller access to the informative and inspirational natural landscape. Keats examined all areas of the cultural, social, and political sphere—marking himself as a radical poet by his close association with Leigh Hunt as well as his own dedication to "delight and liberty." It is clear, however, that the joy and truth of Keats's natural experience cannot simply be reduced to either urban observation or the opulent fancy and imagination of aestheticism. The poetry of Keats demonstrates a unique duality,

¹¹⁶ Susan J. Wolfson, *John Keats* (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007), 12.

for he is both distanced observer of the natural scene and participant in a rich and luxuriant natural landscape.

Much early criticism of Keats labels him a tragic romantic hero, a youthful poet struck down on the cusp of his most mature and thought-provoking work. Recent studies, however, show a reconstruction of this interpretation; critics like Nicholas Roe and Susan Wolfson link Keats's work to the dissenting tradition and to thwarted love, respectively. But what this new scholarship crucially overlooks is the construction of the serious, poetic Keats at the expense of the naïve natural poet, impassioned by poetry and dedicated to the creation of song as he pursues his peripatetic path. It is necessary to see that Keats represents an evolution in the poetic mind-set, presaging even the aestheticism of Walter Pater. This analysis is significant as it attempts to connect the condescending early criticism with modern scholarship—showing that reducing Keats's poetry to either fancy or radicalism is too simple. Indeed, through his role as observer, Keats links the worlds of the country and the city, fancy and reality, opulence and mimesis, using his peripatetic lifestyle as a bridge.

A constant theme in British poetry, as in the greater literary canon, is the tension between an evolving urban lifestyle and an increasingly idealized countryside. Poetry of nostalgia is common, voicing a universal yearning for a lost golden age that romanticizes and obscures both the reality of rural life and the landscape itself, as well as demonizing and dismissing the complex reality of urbanism. Keats, however, represents a departure from this polarizing tradition. Though clearly a lover of nature and an adherent to the negative view of London, Keats is an urban, even a Cockney,

poet. Like his sometime patron Leigh Hunt, much of Keats's natural landscape is suburban, his poetry rooted more in fanciful imaginings than in the glorified Lake District or other picturesque destinations. Though he made a peripatetic expedition through Scotland in 1818, his habitual walks were through the streets and lanes of Hampstead and central London. An attempt at reconciliation with the natural scene, this local walking leads to an evolving relationship between country and city and a deep devotion to the natural truths of the British landscape. As he witnesses a country dance, Keats gestures at the importance of the people in his peripatetic experience, as opposed to the isolating narrowness of a purely country lifestyle:

I never felt so near the glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier. This is what I like better than scenery. I fear our continued moving from place to place, will prevent our becoming learned in village affairs; we are mere creatures of Rivers, Lakes and Mountains.¹¹⁷

Indeed, for Keats, "Scenery is fine—but human nature is finer—The Sward is richer for the tread of a real, nervous, English foot[.]" Keats is not the solitary peripatetic of early Romantic poetry, but an urban poet, a participant in politics and human affairs; maintaining ties to natural truth and the landscape while searching for cultural authority and poetic potency in the crowded streets of London.

The metropolis and its influence create tidy, green fields enclosed with hedgerows, encroaching on suburban towns like Hampstead, which cluster around the growing haze of London. The landscape evolves and the peripatetic poet finds "leafy

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¹¹⁷ Nelson Bushnell, A Walk After John Keats (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), 66.

¹¹⁸ Keats to Benjamin Bailey, Teignmouth, March 1818, 68.

luxury"¹¹⁹ and pleasant scenes in a suburban world or "within the sound of the Bow Bells."¹²⁰ John Keats is a Cockney poet, inseparable from this stigmatized label of Londoner, but simultaneously devoted to a poetic landscape that rejects and often bemoans the influence of the city. As Gareth Stedman Jones writes of the commercial reality of the metropolis:

What these continuities indicate is that London has always been first and foremost a commercial city, both in fact and in imagination. [...] It is noteworthy, as this essay will suggest, that the 'cockney has been represented in a succession of different occupational guises, but rarely if ever as a maker or producer of things. 121

As a consumer of nature and a translator of nature's innate poetry, Keats's singularity as peripatetic poet is that much of his style is highly resonant with the work of opulent urbanism—of aesthetes such as Walter Pater. Throughout Keats's work, and most especially his "Ode to a Nightingale," the peripatetic poet slips towards sublime melancholy, searching, as Pater writes,

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life[...] While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment[.]¹²²

As he searches for his "exquisite passion," Keats, importantly, turns to the natural landscape and the peripatetic experience to inspire and inform his poetry. Keats explores the aesthetics of observation to mitigate the tension between his urban lifestyle and his intimate attachment to the natural world.

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¹¹⁹ John Keats, "To Leigh Hunt, Esq." *John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 55.

Gareth Stedman Jones, "The 'cockney' and the nation, 1780-1988," in *Metropolis-London: Histories and representations since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989), 274.

¹²² Walter Pater, "Conclusion" *The Renaissance*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 61.

On July 3, 1818 Keats and his friend, Charles Brown, were up before 5:00 and walking before breakfast, ¹²³ proving their genuine dedication to the peripatetic ideal. Keats was an avid wanderer and had, indeed, so far embraced peripatetic conventions that walking had become an integral part of his poetic education. When traveling in Scotland, Keats writes,

I should not have consented to myself these four Months tramping in the highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes, load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among Books even though I should reach Homer.¹²⁴

He privileges the experience of wandering over the instructive power of classical literature, and it demonstrates his dedication to the importance of walking to "strengthen" the poetic mind. In Keats's mind, wandering has passed from vocational individuation into vocational education. Thus, he underlines the broader eighteenth-century trend of ecological consumption, which Ayumi Mizukoshi describes: "The rise of consumer culture transformed the natural world, be it a fashionable picturesque site, a landscape garden or landscape painting, into an object of consumption." The natural experience had become a necessary element of a refined taste and a cultivated education. Indeed, as Duncan Wu recognizes, Keats's poetics were strongly influenced by prescriptive natural writing such as Leigh Hunt's "Calendar of Nature," later re-titled "The Months." Wu writes, "To Autumn looks not to myth, art, or abstraction for inspiration but to the present English countryside, of

¹²³ Bushnell, A Walk After John Keats, 83.

¹²⁴ Keats to Benjamin Bailey, Inveraray, July 18 1818, 128-129.

¹²⁵ Ayumi Mizukoshi, Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure (Hampshire, Palgrave, 2001), 38.

the sort itemized in the *Examiner's* 'Calendar of Nature' for September, 1819 [...]" Because of his status as peripatetic poet, however, Keats surmounts the obstacle of a purely consumerist approach to nature.

To claim Keats as simply a result of a bourgeois, middle-class struggle for cultural legitimation, as Mizukoshi does, ¹²⁷ is to ignore a deeper complexity and intimacy in his relationship with nature. In his "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats has a stronger connection with nature; indeed, he is able to participate in the natural scene without sensual consumption:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows. ("Nightingale," 41-44)

While some critics may see this stanza as typifying the opulent imagery of a youthful poet, instead it is Keats's pledge of allegiance to a natural world that has become distanced and is not entirely accessible. The imagery of blindness and the register of covering structures the stanza—couched in negatives, Keats offers a stanza of observation where the poet proclaims, "I cannot see[.]" Hiding (and glorifying) in his "embalmed darkness," Keats introduces an olfactory register, while simultaneously evoking preservation, as of the embalming of natural specimens, or by oil and spices. Continuing his sensual evocation with the word "sweet," Keats leads his reader into a sensually realized natural scene, completely imagined but nonetheless effective in its engaging observation. Keats offers his scene for the reader's sensual consumption, no matter how distanced the poet or the reader may be from the natural

¹²⁶ Duncan Wu "Keats and the Cockney School" in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 97.

¹²⁷ Mizukoshi, *Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure*, 7.

¹²⁸ OED

landscape. Much like earlier Romantic poets, Keats is able fully to imagine and realize a natural scene without direct natural stimulation, simply through a wealth of peripatetic experience.

Keats's devotion to the countryside is very real and rooted in a deep appreciation of and participation in the natural scene. Though critics argue that for Keats's mentor, Leigh Hunt, pastoralism is linked with his attempts at cultural authority and authentification, Keats's poetry goes beyond poetic legitimation and is more in tune with Hunt's definition of an ideal poet: "A sensitiveness to the beauties of the external world, to the unsophisticated impulses of our nature, and above all, imagination, or the power to see, with verisimilitude, what others do not,—these are the properties of poetry." ¹²⁹ Critics such as Marjorie Levinson question the maturity of Keats's poetry, failing to see that his adherence to these ideas of Hunt's, his "unsophisticated impulses of our nature," is ultimately what validates Keats cultural and peripatetic aspirations. For who is the peripatetic if not a wanderer open to the impulses of not only human nature, but also the greater natural world, finding natural truth to celebrate in song? In his poem "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats communicates a melancholy passion inspired and sung by the Nightingale, creating vivid imagery to conjure a natural scene that reflects his emotion and communicates the pure intensity of the natural experience:

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. ("Nightingale," 45-50)

¹²⁹ Leigh Hunt, "Preface" to Foliage (London, C.H. Reynell, 1818), 13.

As he creates this scene out of his blindness, Keats celebrates the peripatetic ideal, in which experience is in itself the goal. Indeed, through his elaborate, opulent images such as "pastoral eglantine," not merely a wild flower but an entire canon of poetry, Keats underlines the importance of interaction with nature. The reader must be as engaged in the landscape as Keats is himself, recognizing the poetry of the flowers and the "murmurous" song of "flies on summer eves." As he explores and we vividly experience this scene, Keats demonstrates Walter Pater's observations on experience:

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us,—for that moment only. Nor the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. 130

Indeed, much of "Ode to a Nightingale" may be interpreted as an elucidation of the momentary passion inspired by a song "of summer in full-throated ease" ("Nightingale," 10). His passion, like the violets, is "fast fading," but his peripatetic experience both precedes and succeeds this momentary vision, allowing him access to a greater, eternal, natural truth.

Though he enjoyed the intense interiority of the peripatetic experience, as when he climbs and composes upon Ben Nevis, ¹³¹ Keats's evolved peripatetic ideal was social, emphasizing a connection not only with the landscape, but also a connection among wanderers and between the poet and his reader. As he connects with the landscape in "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats forms a relationship with the nightingale:

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, But being too happy in thine happiness,— That thou, light winged Dryad of the trees,

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¹³⁰ Pater, "Conclusion," 60.

¹³¹ Keats to Tom Keats, Findlay, August 3,6, 1818, 137.

In some melodious plot Of beechen green, and shadows numberless, Singest of summer in full-throated ease. ("Nightingale," 5-10)

He directly, though imaginatively, enters into the experience of the nightingale, inviting the reader to join the poet as he imagines a habitat "of beechen green, and shadows numberless," a life of perfect and beautiful "ease." Indeed, the emphatic diction highlights the moment when Keats addresses his subject personally, "that thou," and enters into conversation with the nightingale's song, which is evocative of both the mythological, in "dryad," and natural, in "trees." Keats is creating a landscape in which all elements converge, through the end rhyme of "trees" and "ease," into a pleasurable facility of poetic creation, shared by poet, reader, and nightingale alike. Duncan Wu, expanding upon the work of Susan Wolfson, writes, "this is a 'poetics of cooperation,' which predicates its art on the reciprocal activity of an imagining, desiring reader, and which ideally embodies an ethic of openness and generosity toward both reader and subject." ¹³² Clearly, Keats uses poetry for the communication of natural truths and of the passions enclosed by a "thick wall of personality." As his avid letter-writing shows, sociability was critically important to Keats as an outlet and an escape from a consuming interiority. As Mizukoshi records, "In the late 1810s, members of Hunt's circle luxuriated in such variety of leisured pursuits as poetry readings, musical performances, convivial conversations, country walks and tea-drinking." With the peripatetic experience forming a key part of his interaction with other people, as well as with poetry, Keats was dedicated to art not simply as a mimetic representation of the natural scene, but also as an

¹³² Wu, "Keats and the Cockney School," 88.

¹³³ Pater, "Conclusion," 60.

¹³⁴ Mizukoshi, Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure, 8.

inhabited landscape, imagined and peopled by a wandering poet searching for company in the song of a nightingale.

A occupant of central London during his time at Guy's Hospital, ¹³⁵ Keats spent much of his creative life in the suburb of Hampstead, which reinforced the peripatetic mediation of city and country life. As cities such as Islington and Hampstead developed into 'suburbs,' or, more realistically, into strange amalgamations of middle-class luxury and the rural poor, ¹³⁶ the relative rurality of their setting was celebrated and reified. Keats was attacked, as a member of the Cockney school, for participating in a cheapening of natural experience through this celebration of a domesticated nature. Famously, <u>Blackwood's</u> magazine criticized Leigh Hunt, the so-called Homer of the Cockney school, saying,

He is the ideal of a cockney poet. He raves perpetually about 'green fields', 'jaunty streams' and 'o'er leafiness' exactly as a Cheapside shop-keeper does about the beauties of his box on the Camberwell Road... He has never seen a mountain higher than Highgate Hill, nor reclined by any stream more pastoral than the Serpentine river...His books are indeed not known in the Country; his fame as a poet (and I might say, as a politician too) is entirely confined to the young attorneys and embryo barristers about town. In the opinion of these competent judges, London is the world and Hunt is Homer. ¹³⁸

In their many attacks on Hunt and Keats, <u>Blackwood's</u> magazine recognizes that middle-class poets experience nature not in grandiose (and expensive) scenes but instead celebrate simple nature: "Tasting of Flora and the country green,/ Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!" ("Nightingale," 14-15). In "Ode to a

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Alan Richardson, "Keats and Romantic Science: Writing the Body" *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 230.

136 Mizukoshi, *Keats*, *Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure*, 60.

¹³⁷ As magazines controlled by predominately conservative literary critics, both <u>Blackwood's</u> and <u>The Edinburgh Review</u> were famously antagonistic to what was perceived as the middle-class usurpation of a classical, higher artistic form, poetry.

¹³⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, "The 'cockney' and the nation, 1780-1988" in *Metropolis-London* (London: Routledge, 1989), 283.

Nightingale," Keats does not stray across the Alps, because he could not afford to; rather, he traces a domestic nature that can be as easily encapsulated in "a draught of vintage" ("Nightingale," 11) as in a city's suburb. Though Hampstead was countryside for the hardened city-goer, it was still a complex and mediated experience of the British landscape. As Raymond Williams clarifies, "A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation." By Keats's time Hampstead was no longer a (primarily) working or productive country; instead, it was a center of consumption. As Elizabeth McKellar writes,

Their [Hampstead, Highgate, and Islington] purposes as urban playground was greatly enhanced from the late seventeenth century onwards by the development of a range of commercial entertainments catering for all sectors of society, in which pleasure grounds spas, inns, and tea assembly rooms all vied for the custom of pleasure-seeking city dwellers. ¹⁴⁰

Hampstead was largely celebrated and attacked for its associations with the middleclass and the bourgeoisie, a class clearly associated with urban ideas of consumption without production. Ridiculed for not being gentlemen poets, free to walk and create among the mysterious magnificence of the wider world and free from pecuniary worries, the Cockneys were associated with a consumption that took financial interests away from country magnates and into urban centers.

Keats's evolving peripatetic ideal is based upon observation, a deeper perception that connects the urban poet to a geographically distant rural (or

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 120.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth McKellar, "Peripheral Visions: alternative aspects and rural presences in mid-eighteenth-century London," *The Metropolis and its Image: constructing Identities for London, c. 1750-1950* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 30.

urban/suburban) landscape. Distinguishing himself from earlier, peripatetic Romantics, Keats defines his poetic reality in fluid terms:

As to the poetical character itself, (I mean that sort which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet [...] A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse and poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. 141

Quite clearly, Keats is describing the role of the objective observer; this observer can enter into the minuteness of other life, using the mimetic capabilities of his poetry.

Observation may not typically be linked to poetic creation—it seems too cold, calculating, and removed. But as Keats shows his reader, the poet is, indeed, "unpoetical" and capable of "filling some other Body." His extremely mimetic poetics can be seen as devotion to what Robert Gittings calls an "objective exactness," as he shows in his "Ode to a Nightingale,"

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk[.] ("Nightingale," 1-4)

Writing in a medical register, Keats attempts definitively to describe and encapsulate the experience of his melancholy. Keats's evocation of soporific drugs and the draining or disappearing of fluids parallels the slow sinking "Lethe-wards" of the poet and the gradual rhythm of the lines, which are slowed by commas. Keats carefully

¹⁴¹ Keats to Richard Woodhouse, October 27 1818, 147-148.

¹⁴² Richardson, "Keats and Romantic Science," 234.

chooses his imagery and descriptions, searching for a means to describe the "dull," "drowsy" numbness of his emotional state. The lyricism of the abab rhyme emphasizes the dream-like state of the wanderer, underlining the metapoetic moment of the poet listening to the music of the nightingale. The self-referentiality of the poem arrests the readers' attention, calling it to the clarity of the poet's description of an inherently indistinct emotional state. Ultimately, the medical register serves to emphasize the distance of the entranced poet, which is similar to his experience of the nightingale's song as a drug induced state, where all experience is veiled and obscured in melancholy. In order to fully illuminate his experience for his reader, Keats turns to his medical training, but more fundamentally to his observational tendencies, to intimately describe and realize the imagined scene and song.

As his progressive background in natural science informed his perception, after studying to become a surgeon, so it shapes his poetics, emphasizing Keats's role as a distanced and disinterested observer. Nicholas Roe has demonstrated that Keats's medical background links him with the community of radical dissent, but it also links him with a progressive curiosity, a tradition of searching and critical observation. As Alan Richardson demonstrates, Keats's poetry is intricately connected with his background at Guy's Hospital:

It was this fluid and dynamic conception of matter that led Priestley to reject the traditional dichotomy of matter and spirit. Keats's poetry is analogously dynamic, describing a world of change in terms that draw subtly but revealingly on his education in chemistry. 143

Indulging a radical curiosity in chemistry and as a surgeon, Keats could not help but express the same ideas and use similar, chemical language to describe his

¹⁴³ Richardson, "Keats and Romantic Science," 238.

observations, as when he cries, "O for a beaker of the warm South" ("Nightingale," 15). Raymond Williams chooses another medically educated poet, George Crabbe, who also demonstrates the close relationship between observation and poetic creation:

The independence Crabbe announced, as the uncommitted observer who will tell the truth against the lies of the pastoral conventions, is in the end, the independence of priest or doctor: of those who care for soul and body, within the consequences of a social system.¹⁴⁴

This "independence" is crucial to the act of poetic creation in many ways, but for Keats as for Crabbe, it was a manifestation of the primacy of observation in poetics: the interaction of the interpretive mind with the flood of sensual experience.

The exploration of the relationship between the senses and the mind is the work of the artist as well as the work of the peripatetic. Despite the early relationship between his observation and the natural sciences, Keats abruptly renounced his surgical career in 1816¹⁴⁵ and began to use observation imaginatively, believing that,

The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning [...] However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a shadow of reality to come. 146

After abandoning medicine, Keats could fully dedicate himself to the artist's mixture of observation, imagination, and fancy—that indulgence of "a Life of Sensations!" Stimulating his imagination without "consequitive reasoning," Keats seeks a rich (poetical) intellect, which perceives objects through preconceived structures and therefore distances itself from the object through the artistic process. Because he

¹⁴⁵ Robert Gittings, *John Keats*, (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1968), 98.

¹⁴⁶ Keats to Benjamin Bailey, Dorking, November 22 1817, 69.

¹⁴⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 94.

recognizes the role of "the impression of the individual in his isolation" in interpreting the object or the landscape, Keats must return to himself at the end of "Ode to a Nightingale" and cannot become fully subsumed by natural experience. Rather he questions the Nightingale and her proxy, Fancy,

Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! Adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? ("Nightingale," 73-80)

Returning to Lethe's dreamy forgetfulness, Keats finishes his ode to a (never-seen) creature by questioning the reality of every fully imagined "fast fading violet" ("Nightingale," 47). Though he writes of the passing of the Nightingale's song as it drifts away, the lines also double as the flight of the poet as he distances himself from his imagined landscape.

The intensity of Keats's observation, as provoked by the absent nightingale, is the work of the artist or the modern peripatetic who searches for a beautiful, but necessarily distanced interpretation of the natural landscape. In an urban reality, the peripatetic poet observes,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies[.] ("Nightingale," 23-26)

Obviously drawing on his experiences at Guy's Hospital and his extensive experience as a surgeon's dresser, ¹⁴⁸ Keats articulates the horrors of 'modern' hospitals while

¹⁴⁷ Pater, "Conclusion," 60.

¹⁴⁸ Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent, 164.

expressing concisely the salient details of a doctor's first observation and examination of his patient, diagnosing "palsy" and consumption. As he runs away into his poetic, natural experience on the "viewless wings of Poesy" ("Nightingale," 33), Keats is escaping his reality for that which William Hazlitt, in a January 1818 lecture at the Surrey Institute, "On Poetry in General," calls the visionary power of poetry: "The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and the undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions." 149 This poetic vision is necessarily distanced from its object, as it has been imbued with "fanciful pretensions." But what Hazlitt fails to see is that while Keats is "In such an ecstasy!" ("Nightingale," 58) of poetic creation, it is not simply visionary, but also an intensely observed and interpreted natural scene. Further distancing the peripatetic poet from his landscape, the intensity of the artistic experience removes Keats from intimate natural experience. As T.S. Eliot describes poetry it deeply resonates with this distanced peripatetic poetry, "it is not the 'greatness,' the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts."150

Demonstrating his allegiance to observational experience, Keats presages the opulent observation associated with aestheticism, which was dedicated to the illumination of experience and grounded in a distancing urbanism affecting all elements of artistry and perception. As Walter Pater writes, poetry is clearly, fundamentally intertwined with observation: "The service of philosophy, of

¹⁴⁹ quoted in Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent, 183.

¹⁵⁰ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Waste Land*, ed. Michael North (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 118.

speculative culture, towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation."¹⁵¹ Demanding an engaged reader, Pater simultaneously insists on the critical observation of the artist, which is necessary to engage and "rouse" the reader. Keats, using nature as a catalyst to force his readers' reaction and participation, similarly focuses on the importance of observation to the artist:

If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. However it may be with me as I cannot help looking into new countries with 'O for a Muse of fire to ascend!'—If Endymion serves me as a Pioneer perhaps I ought to be content.¹⁵²

The pioneer Keats roams the country searching for poetry by way of peripatetic observation, searching for the startling, provocative "Muse of fire." Poetry must, necessarily, be as natural as budding leaves because Keats's poetry is a transcription of direct sensual experience of the natural world coupled with the workings of the interpretive mind. Natural experience informs his observation, which allows him access to "the viewless wings of Poesy,/Though the dull brain perplexes and retards" ("Nightingale," 33-34). The brain slows the work of the observer because the interpretive mind mediates sensual experience through the web of the self and through preconceived interpretive structures. Thus, the observer is left with an impression, as Dennis Donoghue explains,

Impression is Pater's word for that event which is neither objective nor subjective but compounded of both considerations. An impression is an impression of something, but it is well on the way to becoming independent of its source, a trace without memory. ¹⁵³

The distance of an impression, as it becomes "independent of its source" is the distance of the urban observer who is subjectively interpreting the natural experience

¹⁵¹ Pater, "Conclusion," 60.

¹⁵² Keats to John Taylor, Hampstead, February 27, 1818, 66.

through specific observational structures. Thus, Keats wishes for wine to dull his senses, "That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,/ And with thee fade away into the forest dim" ("Nightingale," 19-20). Keats has already interpreted the nightingale's song and desires a mediated nature, not simply the objective reality of the nightingale's song, but also the subjective joining together of poet and nightingale so that the poet may create and eventually fade along with the observed source of his song.

The image of the nightingale is never evoked and the poet quickly distances himself from the nightingale's song in his urge to fade away, which separates the poet's impression from any direct sensual experience or observed source. As T.S. Eliot writes, "The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation served to bring together." Keats uses the culturally loaded Nightingale to encapsulate a natural experience that has already faded and from which the poet is removed. By distancing himself from the natural experience, Keats demonstrates Pater's theory:

That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways. 155

Emphasizing the distance between the object and the observer, which parallels the distance between the poet and the unseen nightingale, Pater develops a theory of consciousness in which observation is preeminent, mediating sensual experience by

¹⁵⁴ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 118.

¹⁵⁵ Pater, "Conclusion," 59.

the grouping and associating of the interpretive mind. Thus, Keats must recognize the ethereality of the poet's experience of the Nightingale's song and the uncertainty that plagues him as to the veracity of his experience: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?" ("Nightingale," 79). When natural experience is mediated by the interpretive mind, the role of the individual in creating his own observed reality becomes central to his interpretation of nature. As Keats writes,

Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own innards his own airy citadel—the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean—full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury—But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions—It is however quite the contrary—Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all [for at] last greet each other at the Journeys end. 156

The web of self that Keats here describes is eminently subjective, but it still allows for communal experience and engagement in an objective vision of nature. Presaging the web and spider imagery of Pater, Keats emphasizes similar ideas of the paucity of sensual experience in the formulation of self. It is not "the points of leaves and twigs" that create the intricate "tapestry" of self, but the circuitous path of the mind between objects that creates a complex, cohesive identity. More specifically, the poet is not limited by the constraints of the natural world or the provocation of sensual experience, but may go beyond and explore the web of his own mind, a "space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury."

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¹⁵⁶ Keats to J.H. Reynolds, February 19 1818, 62-63.

The peripatetic tradition is rooted in ancient Greek philosophy—Aristotle and his students walking, interpreting, questioning—so it is unsurprising that Keats would rely heavily on evocations of ancient idylls, or that Greek and Roman imagery figured so intimately into both the Cockneys' and the aesthetes' attempts at cultural legitimation. The use of this cultural lens to interpret and portray the natural experience adds yet another impediment to free and direct discourse with the landscape. With a growing empire and burgeoning internal dissent, English literature returned to valorizations of its own landscape and ancient cultural history, as well as to evocations of the Greek and Roman empires in order to legitimate rapid expansion and cultural superiority. Even more than seventy years later, Pater turned to the Greeks and Romans as his material for criticism in accordance with this accepted tradition. As Dennis Donoghue writes, "[O]ne way of describing Pater's work is that he set out to create a personal style by paying a special kind of attention to ancient Greece and Rome[.]"157 Canonical British literary figures such as Wordsworth and Pater used the Greeks and Romans to develop and legitimate their personal style; Keats, and to a varying degree the whole Cockney school, adapted similar poetic styles.

Suffering underneath the Romantic poet's feeling of vocational vulnerability, Keats was forced to defend his self and his poetry: "The slurs upon the Cockney lack of education, 'vulgarity,' 'effeminacy,' 'immorality,' and social class, are key moves in the Tory campaign to discredit the new school's bid for cultural authority." Much of the condescending criticism of Keats described him as young, uneducated,

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¹⁵⁷ Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 126.

lower-class, and effeminate. Until as late as the 1980s popular critical opinion of Keats retained this decidedly narrow interpretation of his influence and cultural importance. ¹⁵⁹ In his own time, Keats was seen as a protégé of the great (and successful) Leigh Hunt. 160 As such it is unsurprising that, though he never questions his vocational identity, 161 his poetry is permeated with allusions and evocations of a greater literary history, a more widely conceived temporal vision that celebrates the idyllic natural experience. Throughout his poetry he evokes "Bacchus and his pards," ("Nightingale," 32) and "blushful Hippocrene" ("Nightingale," 16), the cherished fountain of the Muses on Mount Helicon and the source of a poet's inspiration 162 to lend weight and cultural credibility to his "viewless wings of Poesy" ("Nightingale," 33). An interesting deviation in "Ode to a Nightingale" is Keats's introduction of a biblical allusion to "the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, She stood in tears amid the alien corn" ("Nightingale," 66-67). Again embracing a greater literary tradition, Keats emphasizes his similarity to Ruth, stuck in an "alien," distant reality evoked by the stimulus of the Nightingale's song, but interpreted through a removed, cultural lens. Against attempts to categorize him as a middle-class usurper, he claims the legitimacy of poetry inspired by the Muses and a greater cultural tradition evocative of the idealized pastoral of "verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" ("Nightingale," 40). Indeed, Keats's nature is so aestheticized that even the "glooms" are green and verdant, evoking a temporal, distanced, idealized vision of the natural landscape, including Keats in the greater canon of idealized pastoral British literature.

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¹⁵⁹ Mizukoshi, Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure, 6.

¹⁶⁰ John Kandl, "The Politics of Keats's Early Poetry: 'Delight' with 'liberty'," in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁶¹ Keats to Tom Keats, June 25-27 1818, 97.

¹⁶² OED

Though it might be more simple to privilege Keats's similarities with the aesthetes, this argument ignores the reality that Keats was not a completely alienated urban observer, but retained peripatetic ties to a more intimate and rooted natural experience. He may claim that "Glory and loveliness have passed away" and lament "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" ("Nightingale," 23) of the urban environment, but he still turns to conquering the wilds of Scotland on foot in order to stimulate his creativity with the lush materials of peripatetic inspiration. Indeed, though he may doubt the veracity of his experience with the Nightingale, he never doubts that power of the bird's song, declaring, "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" ("Nightingale," 61). Indeed he always shows a dedication to the power of immediate natural experience, and to the song of the birds: "The Thrushes and Blackbirds have been singing me into an idea that it was Spring, and almost that Leaves were on the trees[.]",164

 ¹⁶³ Keats, "To Leigh Hunt, Esq." *John Keats*, 1.
 ¹⁶⁴ John Keats to George and Tom Keats, Hampstead, February 21 1818, 65.

Conclusion

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

—T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*

In this troubling and violent natural image, T.S. Eliot presents a radical and destructive image of the city and the forces creative of *The Wasteland*. In this representation of the city, with its "rubbish" and "dry stone," Eliot perpetuates the antagonistic relationship between urbanism and poetic inspiration that runs throughout literary history and especially the poetry of Wordsworth and Keats. Yet the nature that Wordsworth and Keats idealize is not "a heap of broken images," but a finely interwoven web of active perception and perpetual sensual stimulus. And this web of perception is in turn founded upon the peripatetic experience, which weaves together a complex natural landscape with an internalized self and greater cultural and literary traditions. As Eric Leed describes the experience of walking, he writes,

The mind of the traveler is not separate from the body of the traveler...The mental effects of passage—the development of observational skills, the concentration on forms and relations, the sense of distance between an observing self and a world of objects perceived first in their materiality, their

externalities and surfaces, the subjectivity of the observer—are inseparable from the physical conditions of movement through space. ¹⁶⁵

As Leed shows, this heightened perception, this objective gaze, are a result of movement, more particularly, self-motivated movement through the landscape. And through this increased perception, the wanderer reconnects with the landscape, which has become distant from the modern individual who lacks intimate natural experience. For Wordsworth and Keats, peripatetic poetry resolves the individual's distance or independence from the landscape, transforming the self-conscious observer into a participant in the natural scene.

Nearly a hundred years after the death of John Keats, not only was T.S. Eliot still acquainted with his work, but he also found it emblematic of his definition of "tradition." As Eliot talks about Keats's manipulation of the nightingale, he reveals the importance of Keats's more *contextualized* vision of nature, especially in an increasingly urban environment. Though firmly rooted in his intimate peripatetic experience of nature, Keats's nature has been incorporated into a greater poetic tradition and even his peripatetic observations reflect this intellectually expanded vision of nature:

What astonishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the store, the moss—the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance of intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Keats to Tom Keats, June 25-27 1818, 97.

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¹⁶⁵ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1997), 33. ¹⁶⁶ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," in *The Waste Land*, ed. Micheal North (New York:

W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 118.

The intellectual tone that pervades Keats's landscape is a direct result of the interpretive structures that formed his natural experience. Informed by travel literature and first generation Romantics, Keats's nature was "well imagined before one sees [it]" because the vistas of nature fit so neatly into his pre-conceived landscape. Notably, in his great peripatetic excursion, Keats chose to follow the well-worn paths of the Scottish countryside, following in the footsteps of peripatetic poets such as Wordsworth. In his pedestrianism as well as his poetry, Keats chose to illuminate an idealized landscape that had become an almost perfunctory experience of the masses, but retained an epistemological significance for Keats and other wanderers

As a poet concerned with talking to people in their own language, bringing poetry to an enlarged and less privileged audience, Wordsworth created a rural, naturalized poetry that is, like Keats's verse, still relevant in the greater poetic tradition. By creating a more universally accessible poetry, Wordsworth created a more universally accessible natural landscape, which provoked the poetic perception of both the wanderer and his audience. The natural experience, for Wordsworth, was not only didactic (illuminating a natural order), but also inspirational. As Raymond Williams writes of Wordsworth's poetry,

Two principles of Nature can then be seen simultaneously. There is nature as a principle of order, of which the ordering mind is part, and which human activity, by regulating principles, may then rearrange and control. But there is also nature as a principle of creation, of which the creative mind is part, and from which we may learn the truths of our own sympathetic nature. 168

The key term in this passage is William's definition of nature as "sympathetic;" indeed, in Wordsworth's poetry true sympathetic experience is the goal—between the

¹⁶⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 127.

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wanderer and the natural landscape, the poet and the people, and the individual with a greater universal experience.

To wander in the landscape, losing oneself in peripatetic reverie, is a relatively universal experience, claimed not only by Romantic artists, but also by Greek philosophers and any people who allow themselves a free and direct discourse with nature. To privilege walking as a poetic discourse is simply to understand that the importance of the movement is equal to the importance of the goal. As Robin Jarvis shows, walking becomes a part of many greater national and cultural narratives: "if [this] patriotic rationale for walking strains credibility, it nevertheless demonstrates one way in which a mundane physical activity can be put to work within apparently remote and more culturally privileged discourses:" Though this cultural embrace and idealization of the peripatetic is not unique to the Romantic era, it is a crucial moment in the development of the wanderer as his countryside became complicated as increasing land enclosure, industrialization, and urbanization changed the roads, the landscape, the people, and the poet.

Poetry, with its economy of language, is often seen as a spontaneous natural inspiration, a gift of Helicon's springs or soft, whispering breezes, but the peripatetic poet takes an active role in the inspirational natural scene. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe saw the "primevale phase" of individuals as the same as that of nations, in which, in conjunction with a primitive spirit, a creative, enlightened spirit

gazes at the great phenomena of the world, perceives what occurs there, and gives utterance to what exists with profound awareness as if it came into being before his very eyes. Therefore, in the earliest stage we have the

¹⁶⁹ Jarvis, Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel, 4.

¹⁷⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe "Stages of Man's Mind" in *Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. John Gearey (New York: Suhrkamp Publishers, 1986), 203.

contemplation and the philosophy of nature, the defining and the poetry of nature—all in one.

According to the German Romantic Goethe, philosophy and poetry are intricately connected to the contemplation of nature, both internal and external. Because poetry and nature are the same language, or articulations of the same ideals of form and Beauty, the peripatetic is the natural translator of complex natural experience.

Bringing Beauty to his reader and to his created landscape, the Romantic peripatetic bows to the power of natural inspiration and creation, as William Gilpin writes,

The vistas of art are tame, and formal. They consist of streets; or of trees planted nicely in rows; or of some other species of regularity. Nature's vistas are of a different case. She forms them sometimes of mountains, sometimes of rocks, and sometimes of woods. But all her works even of this formal kind, are the works of a master. If, the idea of regularity be impressed on the *general form*, the *parts* are broken with a thousand varieties.¹⁷¹

The thousand varieties of nature in her particulars provoke the senses, demanding the increased perception of a peripatetic participant in the language of nature and poetry. Keats and Wordsworth channeled their sensual perception through peripatetic consumption of nature, thus forming and informing their particular Romantic styles. Evolving through generations, the peripatetic ideal directs not only poetic styles, but also the relationship of the individual to the landscape and the harmonious natural breeze, which stirs creative inspiration.

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¹⁷¹ William Gilpin, *Observations on the river Wye 1782* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991), 73.

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