

ROMANTIC WRITING AND PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL

Also by Robin Jarvis

WORDSWORTH, MILTON AND THE THEORY OF POETIC
RELATIONS

REVIEWING ROMANTICISM (*with Philip W. Martin*)

Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel

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For William

You cannot travel on the Path before you have become the Path itself.

Gautama Buddha

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book had its origin many years ago in a somewhat romantic desire to engineer a fusion of my academic and personal interests. A growing fascination with how many of William Wordsworth's early poems were grounded in the experience of walking, or featured pedestrian speakers or characters, gave the first clear sign of how this might be achieved. From there, I began to research thoroughly the phenomenon of the cult of pedestrian touring which appeared in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, before returning, with an altered perspective, to Wordsworth and to other major figures in Romantic literature. The issues that now preoccupied me with these writers were diverse, but my pursuit of them had behind it the pressure of a more general question: if, as I was to find Leslie Stephen saying in 1902 ('In Praise of Walking'), the 'literary movement at the end of the eighteenth century was... due in great part, if not mainly, to the renewed practice of walking', why was this striking fact of literary history so little recognised, and why did it not shape the teaching of Romanticism in universities here and abroad? My reasoned reply to this question, and, more importantly, my own effort of redress, lie in the chapters that follow; here I shall merely gesture at a history of academic collusion with the social and intellectual prejudice with which walking, and the mentalities and aesthetic practices it nourishes, have until quite recently been treated. That 'pedestrian' passes unnoticed as a term of depreciation is no accident. The revaluation of Romantic writing I attempt in this book involves challenging a critical tradition which construes its highest achievements as those in which the body is laid asleep, and insight accrues to the motionless 'living soul'; instead, the creativity of Romantic verbal art is repeatedly referred to the conditions, qualities and rhythms of a body in motion, a travelling self making excited passage over the land, or through the streets, discovering locomotive and representational freedoms that were unavailable to previous generations.

Since I started thinking on this topic, others have belatedly initiated the scholarly debate. In particular, Jeffrey Robinson's *The Walk* (1989), Roger Gilbert's *Walks in the World*, and Anne

D. Wallace's *Walking, Literature, and English Culture* (1993) have given me much to think about, as well as remitting the isolation of research in a seemingly unvisited area. I hope that these authors, should they read the present book, will consider that I have contributed something to the project they have placed on such a sure footing. I regret that Celeste Langan's *Romantic Vagrancy* (1995) arrived too late for me to be able to address its provocative thesis. For all their substantial contribution to critical enquiry, one questionable feature of these books, taken together, in their bearing on the Romantic period, is the exclusive effect of their preoccupation with the work of William Wordsworth. In a long view, Wordsworth was undeniably the most influential writer of his age with respect to the subsequent literature and philosophy of walking, but our understanding of the cultural history of Romanticism is not helped by an over-concentration on his monumental pedestrian *oeuvre*, and the present book is structured with this in mind.

I am grateful to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the West of England (UWE) for the half-year's leave in 1994 which finally allowed me to make substantial progress on this book, and to the staff of the St Matthias Library for their efficiency and courtesy. Geoff Channon has been unfailingly supportive during my time at UWE. Kate Fullbrook has taken an enthusiastic interest in this undertaking from the start, and provided an inspiring example of how intellectual life can be sustained under the weight of more mundane professional demands. I have benefited from many conversations with Bill Greenslade whilst perambulating the pubs of north Bristol. Nicholas Roe and John Goodridge have been generous with their knowledge, and I have received valuable suggestions along the way from Nora Crook, Peter Kitson, Jim Lewis, Philip Martin, Jeanne Moskal and Katherine Turner, among others. I drew much-needed encouragement in my research from the trust placed in the project by Charmian Hearne at Macmillan. Sincere thanks to Tony Pinkney for more than twenty years of friendship and intellectual companionship. To my wife, Carol, who has walked with me among the world's highest mountains, I am grateful for being with me always on the lowlier path of daily life. I am conscious of many blessings as I enter my fortieth year, and my dedication expresses the greatest of these.

R.J.
Bristol