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Walking with John Howard: Itineracy and Romantic Reform

Abstract:

This essay identifies a new source for the politicization of walking in the final decades of the eighteenth century, John Howard's *The State of the Prisons* (1777). Howard made a case for reforming prisons in Britain and across Europe based on evidence collected on his wide-ranging travels, during which he made a practice of stepping into spaces of incarceration where others – including jailors themselves – refused to tread. As we show, Howard was celebrated for the seemingly global reach of his humanitarian mission, but in the work of poets and biographers he also became an icon for the levelling potential of walking into spaces occupied by the legally, socially and economically disenfranchised. Howard's text, however, presents a tension between asserting common humanity with prisoners and exercising patrician benevolence. As we show in conclusion, this tension persists in early nineteenth-century literary representations of both prison reform and walking by Wordsworth and De Quincey, whose texts trouble the (by then established) assumption that walking constituted a politically radical act of social levelling.

Keywords: walking, prisons, reform, empiricism, poetry, politics

INTRODUCTION: STEPPING INTO PRISONS

Robert Southey's 'The Sailor who served in the Slave Trade', first published in Volume 2 of his 1799 *Poems*, begins with 'He stopped', as the poem's narrator (described as a 'Dissenting Minister' in a headnote) hears a groan coming from a hovel.¹ The minister 'hastens' to the hovel and, hearing a broken prayer, goes inside (Southey, *Poems*, 107). The sailor therein does not heed the narrator's 'entering footsteps', so intent is he on uttering his bitter groan (Southey, *Poems*, 108). This provokes the minister to ask what 'crime' caused the anguish of his prayer (Southey, *Poems*, 108). In this scene, Southey casts the sailor as a prisoner, confined in a miserable hovel by his guilt; the minister's footsteps are the mechanism through which his crime – and by extension the national 'crime' of the slave trade – is exposed to public view. In a revision of the poem, published in *Minor Poems of Robert Southey* in 1815, Southey adds specificity to the opening scene in the body of the poem: a 'Christian minister' 'Walk'd forth at eve amidst the fields / Near Bristol's ancient towers'.² Locating the action in Bristol sharpens the poem's indictment of the slave trade, Bristol being a major port of departure for slave ships. Southey's revisions also indicate more carefully the minister's movements: the minister is walking in the

fields, and this occasions his hearing the sailor's lament, entering the out-house, and learning his story. Reframing the poem in this way, Southey's combination of two acts – walking outside and stepping into the sailor's 'prison' – enable an argument for the moral degeneracy of the trade and its danger to Britain's soul.

Southey's poem exemplifies the Romantic-era association between walking and reform. As the poem implies, people who 'walk the fields' and step into spaces of suffering are the means by which moral corruption, inhumanity, and injustice are exposed to public attention, a first step toward redress, whether social or legal. In this essay, we argue that this idea – widely articulated across late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century reform literature – has its roots in the activities and publications of the famed prison reformer John Howard. To produce evidence of the need for reform, Howard made numerous circuits of Britain, and later Europe and the near East, inspecting and recording the conditions inside hundreds of jails and lazarettos. This fundamentally empiricist project required extensive travel and the willingness to enter places of confinement, despite the dangers of infection by gaol fever or plague.

By the 1770s and 1780s, Howard had become an iconic figure, celebrated in poetry, plays, essays and biographies for his reform-driven humanitarian mission. In works by William Hayley, William Cowper, Erasmus Darwin, John Thelwall, Elizabeth Inchbald, and William Bowles, among others, Howard appears as the saviour of inmates, especially debtors, who languish in dank, dark prisons, exposed to gaol fever, with no legal recourse and little hope. As we detail, literary works bind Howard's Christian piety and empiricist project of data collecting to the physical acts by which he carried them out, the combination of incessant journeying and a willingness to enter places where others feared to tread.

By the 1790s, however, through its association with Howard and reformers who followed the methods he pioneered, this empirically-driven mode of travel became associated not only with reform, but also with the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality. In particular, John Thelwall's 1792 biography of Howard casts his reform activity as a democratizing act, one that might level class hierarchies. Despite the cast of patrician benevolence Howard gave his mission, in Thelwall's work Howard's travels became a form of political and social radicalism. This association underwrites many Romantic representations of walking and stepping, from those of Southey's abolitionist poem to Thelwall's mixed-genre work *The Peripatetic* (1793), Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800), and De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821).

Critics have, of course, analyzed the connection between walking and radical politics in the Romantic era at length. Like Robin Jarvis, we locate the genesis of politicized walking in the second half of the eighteenth century, rather than, as Anne Wallace has argued, as a result of the nineteenth-century transport revolution.³ We develop Jarvis's 'anatomy of the pedestrian traveler', especially the 'radical walker' and 'philosophical walker' in the Baconian empiricist tradition, to identify Howard's travels as a source for these Romantic-era figures. Further, we argue that the association of walking and radical politics necessitated the erasure of Howard's patrician attitude toward those whose distresses he set out to relieve; the explicitly Christian motivations for his humanitarian mission; and the strong association between his travels and the aristocratic grand tour. As we show in conclusion, these aspects of Howard's reform activities proved troubling to authors in the first decades of the nineteenth century, especially those who experienced and reflected on the stark difference between themselves and those

whose steps were measures of their poverty, homelessness, and unrelieved suffering.

HOWARD'S METHOD: EMPIRICISM EMBODIED

Howard's fame in his time and ours depends to a large extent on his publication of *The State of the Prisons* (first edition 1777; hereafter *TSP*, and cited parenthetically) and his influence via this work, among other activities, on the practice and conception of prison reform. By his own account, as the Sheriff for the County of Bedford, Howard began visiting prisons in 1773. After deciding to 'visit most of the County-Gaols in England', Howard recounts that he 'travelled again into the counties [he] had been' to 'inspect' (*TSP*, 2). Afterwards, he repeated 'his visits and travel[ed] over the kingdom more than once' (*TSP*, 4). Re-visiting was thus central to his project: his 'first journeys' lead to 'facts and experience' while in his 'latter visits' he was armed with the 'strong arguments' grounded in the laws that he had helped pass (*TSP*, 5). In this way, the suffering and injustice he witnessed locally propelled him to make, by one count, over 1,441 individually dated visits to 224 different prisons in England and Wales over the next two decades – not counting subsequent visits to prisons across Europe and the Middle East, from Paris to Malta to Corfu, Venice to Mentz [Mainz] to Constantinople.⁴ Howard's project 'collected' facts (*TSP*, 4, 6): he (and the assistants and associates he likely employed) measured rooms and windows, counted steps and inmates, took thermometer readings, noted sanitary conditions, and recorded the health or sickness of inmates as well as their thoughts about their places of captivity. This data forms the bulk of *TSP* (1777, 2nd ed. 1780, 3rd ed. 1784) and *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe* (first published 1789), which was published in the year of his death.⁵ Both works open with summaries of the 'general distress' Howard

witnessed during his visits to sites of incarceration and follow with generalized suggestions for alleviating it based on professional recommendations and observations of best practices. However, the bulk of these works comprises hundreds of pages of narratives of prison visits attended by of engraved blueprints, plans, diagrams, tables, and charts. All this material reflects the evidentiary base of Howard's case for prison reform – a case Howard presented to the House of Commons in 1774, which bolstered the proposed legislation, 'An Act for the Relief of Prisoners' (14 Geo. III, c. 20); and, subsequently, 'An Act for preserving the Health of Prisoners in Gaol, and preventing the Gaol Distemper' (14 Geo. III, c. 59).

Apart from modern biographic inquiry into the composition of *TSP*, little sustained consideration has been given to its form and content (England, 203–15). This is presumably for at least two reasons: first, the work fits neatly within a Foucauldian interpretation of the history of power relations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain; and, second, even when we examine this work with other motives in mind, the temptation is to accept its status as a transparent, fact-based account of prison conditions.⁶ As Margot Finn has shown, the latter assumption has the benefit of opening fresh historical horizons, but it does so only by accepting Howard's own claim to have 'set down matter of fact without amplification' (*TSP*, 6).⁷ In what follows, we offer some examination of how *TSP* seeks to achieve a state of referentiality and indexicality with regard to prison conditions, and we consider how such efforts are shaped (and in some cases sidetracked) by *TSP*'s organization as a travel narrative.⁸ In doing this, our objective is to restore Howard's place in the cultural and political history of travel and walking. Moreover, as this perspective reveals, Howard's book forges connections between walking, empiricism, and a chimerical brand of reform

that swings between patrician and radical modes – connections inherited and reworked by Howard’s panegyrists and Romantic authors more generally.

A careful reader of *TSP* begins *in medias res* within a larger trajectory of reform efforts aimed at British prisons and their prisoners. Typical of an Enlightenment-era empiricist work, *TSP* emphasizes vision as the primary faculty for establishing truths. Across the work’s pages, looking, seeing, observing, beholding, perusal, and sight introduce the reader to the work’s aims and methods. As Howard indicates, in ‘looking into the prisons, I beheld scenes of calamity, which I daily grew more anxious to alleviate’ (*TSP*, 2). The eye moves from sight to sight leaving the body behind.⁹ Yet it quickly becomes clear that the objects of the reformer’s gaze – prisons and prisoners – have not and cannot be brought into view without significantly more effort than merely opening one’s eyes and turning one’s head. To accumulate the data, visual and otherwise, on which prison reform would be founded, Howard emphasizes, he had to move his person across geographic space and into places others were unwilling to go.

This movement begins naively and innocently enough as Howard (in his capacity of a Sheriff) recounts that he ‘rode into several neighbouring counties’ (*TSP*, 2) to find a precedent for abolishing jail fees in his own county. This movement spirals outward dramatically as the text describes the would-be reformer ‘travelling’, ‘journeying’, and ‘visiting’ prisons far and wide. Once set in motion, Howard’s body becomes an instrument sensible (and indeed vulnerable) to what prisons hold within them. In Solothurn, Switzerland his feet trace the ten yards between the water fountain in the street and the prison door (*TSP*, 104). In France, they traverse paved, open-air courts (*TSP*, 81); there they also serve to measure the despair of a dungeon. In the Royal Court of the Bicêtre Hospital in Paris,

Howard’s feet tally the ‘sixteen steps’ down which lie ‘eight dreadful dungeons . . . each about thirteen feet by nine’ (*TSP*, 91–2). In Lyons, they enumerate the ‘more than two hundred steps’ necessary to ascend to the main entrance of the state prison (*TSP*, 95). The greater the number of steps, the damper and darker the dungeon, and the more likely Howard is to find a prisoner laden with chains and suffering from gaol fever.

But it is not only the prisoners’ bodies that attest to prison conditions; the reformer’s body is also exposed to what he finds. In Horsham, Howard and the jail keeper walk in on a jail break in the process of being complete. They stop it, but, as Howard remarks of the would-be fugitives, ‘[o]ur lives were at their mercy: but (thank God) they did not attempt to murder us, and rush out’ (*TSP*, 42n1). Prisons are noisy. In England, women and men locked up together produce ‘such shrieks and outcries, as can be better conceived than described’ (*TSP*, 30). And English prisons stink, especially in contrast to their continental counterparts (*TSP*, 81–2). But perhaps the most imminent threat to the body of the fact collector comes in the invisible threat of ‘gaol-distemper’ (also commonly called jail-fever; what we now know to be typhus). As Howard intimates, the threat of this sickness was perceived to be so prevalent and so contagious at the time that it ‘terrifies most of us from looking into prisons’ (*TSP*, 3). Howard describes in detail the material precautions he took to avoid being infected. He ‘constantly’ changed his clothes and sniffed vinegar (*TSP*, 5). Even so, the air of the prisons he visited was so foul that jailers would make excuses to avoid going into felon wards (*TSP*, 13). Of his own person, Howard adds, ‘my cloaths were in my first journeys so offensive, that in a post-chaise I could not bear the windows drawn up: and was therefore obliged to travel on horseback’ (*TSP*, 13).¹⁰ The intangibility of a disembodied eye thus transforms into a gentleman’s heroic escape from what, for him, resembles

'*Hell in miniature!*' (13). The descriptions of these activities, encounters, and events perform a variety of rhetorical work. In surveying foreign prisons, they intentionally bring home the evidence of a wider world against which Britain might measure its own successes and failure. Yet they also unsettle the disembodiment inherent in vision-centered narratives: knowledge of prisons and prisoners not only demands the movement of a body with *all its* senses into and through such places, but it also necessitates the discomfort and risk of that body.

Given this, it would be easy enough to conclude that in *TSP*, we find yet another instance of Enlightenment vision embedded in the body, and thus reminded of its shortcomings and fragility as a means of knowing. However, we would rather underscore that Howard's counting and accounting—he stepped forth again and again in order to bring suffering into the public eye—bind empirical evidence and reform with the glue of sensibility. At Basle, Howard finds that felons are kept in solitary confinement in a clock tower. Access (and the delivery of food) to the most secure of these rooms is afforded by a trap door in a six-foot high ceiling. Howard inspects the room from inside and is told that the last inmate there had escaped by extracting a piece of timber with a spoon and using it to beat the trap door loose, timing his effort by when the clock rang out and obscured the sound of his actions. Lowering himself from the tower, the fugitive fell and broke most of his bones. He was deemed a lost cause by the surgeons, but miraculously he recovered. And, in a twist of poetic justice, he was pardoned for his crime and set free (*TSP*, 104–105). While Howard reserves commentary, a reader's feelings are engaged by the story of the escapee's seemingly divine punishment and discretion greasing the wheels of justice.

This anecdote of extra-legal forgiveness of the thwarted escapee illuminates a crux in

Howard's text. By placing Howard in the cell—entered by trapdoor from above—it puts the reformer on the same level as the suffering prisoners he investigates. Yet it reserves a place for judgement by the very act of narration, an act enabled by power, wealth, influence, privilege, and the views these forces open. Howard can leave the cell and choose to tell the story of the escapee in a way that implies the social justice of his recovery and pardon. Other instances of Howard's attitude of patrician benevolence toward the lower classes are less subtle. As his 'journeys' have revealed, 'our peasants' now lack the 'ruddy complexions' they used to have decades ago', a characteristic Howard blames airless prisons and their effect on 'the poor' (*TSP*, 15n1). Despite this clearly patrician attitude, in making general comments on the improvements necessary in English prisons, Howard sounds a note of Godwinian radicalism:

Why have some Prisons been suffered to become ruinous; so that many rooms in them are unsafe, and prisoners are crowded together in the few that remain? Why were not the walls of the yards repaired in time, that prisoners might with safety be allowed the proper use of them? Money, to the amount of thousands is not withheld when Shire-halls and Town-halls are wanted. These we often see grand and elegant Edifices.

Here, Howard critiques waste and extravagance of those in power at the expense of projects aimed at public good, but an echo of his elite point of view resonates in his additional remark, 'Why should [money] be spared when the morals and lives of multitudes are at stake; and when it is impossible the design of the Legislature should be answered without it?' (*TSP*, 74). As these examples suggest, Howard's empiricist project requires that he literally stoop to the level of the debtor and prisoner, both identified as predominantly lower class. But his position as a gentleman reformer and

philanthropist – and his ability to enact change through the data he collected – requires him to ascend the dais of authority and judgement.

HOWARD IN LITERATURE: CHRISTIAN SAVIOUR TO RADICAL DEMOCRAT _____

It was the combination of the breadth of his travels and his willingness to walk into spaces where others feared or refused to tread that captured the imagination of Howard's panegyrists and eulogists. For example, William Hayley's *Ode Inscribed to John Howard* (1780) represents Howard as 'led by [the] celestial guide' (4) of Philanthropy on his travels. As in the opening section of *TSP*, Howard's precise mode of transport is obscured. He appears in a suffering prisoner's cell instantly, almost magically, and in disembodied parts: addressing Howard, the poem's speaker describes how 'Thine eye his dumb complaint explores; / Thy voice his parting breath restores; / Thy cares his ghastly visage clear' (6). Howard's movements are not impeded by geographic or national borders, or even by the human body: 'No single tract of earth could bound / The active virtues of his mind!' because Howard is the 'New star of philanthropic zeal / Enlight'ning nations in [his] course!' (8). In Hayley's panegyric, Howard – like water, stars, and light itself – is a figure for an Enlightenment worldview, a physico-theology underwritten by Christian faith and propelled across space by a Baconian programme of knowledge acquisition.¹¹

To promote his global vision of Howard's philanthropy, Hayley emphasizes oceanic voyaging rather than land travel: 'To all the lands [. . .] / Eager he steer'd, with every sail unfurl'd / A friend to every clime! a Patriot of the World!' (14). By contrast, in William Lisle Bowles' elegy *The Grave of Howard* (published in 1790 after Howard had perished from the plague on the Crimean Peninsula), Howard's movements are more tangible, geographically specific, and, as such, serve to amplify the

personal dangers he faced in his travels. Of Howard's journey through Russia (a place affected by the plague and home to 'barbaric legions') the speaker comments, 'How awful did thy lonely track appear / O'er stormy misery's benighted sphere!'¹² Here, Howard becomes a traveler on foot, an idea reinforced when the speaker claims Howard's 'steps' 'through many a distant land' were guided by God, a God pleased that Howard's 'long and last abode should there be found, / Where many a Savage nation prowls around' because his grave will 'Speak of the man who trode the paths of woe' to instruct 'successive tribes' in virtue (Bowles, 7). As in Hayley's *Ode*, Bowles's hyperbole celebrates the transformative power of Howard's travels, but in place of abstract journeying Bowles foregrounds Howard's steps, his lonely trek of mercy that admonishes readers to 'not on Life's journey go / Heedless, or callous to the plaint of Woe' (Bowles, 12). By replacing Hayley's disembodied Enlightenment visionary with a solitary walker whose philanthropic mission puts him in bodily danger (and eventually kills him), Bowles projects a more human, imperiled version of the reformer. While neither poem places Howard on the same level as those whose misery he exposes, Bowles's representation returns Howard to his body through the act of walking, opening the door for a more democratic interpretation of his philanthropic travels.

As both Wallace and Jarvis note – and Bowles's poem reinforces – the social stigma associated with walking for much of the eighteenth century had shifted by the final decades, when pedestrianism took on the mantle of political radicalism. Jarvis argues the 1780s and 1790s saw the 'educated gentleman "levelling" himself with the poor in his mode of travel', an assessment that reflects commentary on Howard. For example, in a 1780 speech Edmund Burke contrasts Howard to a gentleman on the grand tour, arguing that Howard traveled 'to survey the mansions of

sorrow and pain; to take the gage and dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt; . . . and to compare and collate the distress of all men in all countries'. By enumerating Howard's empiricist methods ('survey', 'gage', 'compare', 'collate'), Burke set Howard apart from the aristocratic aesthete who travels for his own edification and pleasure; instead of collecting art and antiquities, Howard collects data about prison architecture and the mental condition of the prisoners – data only available to someone who enters the prison on foot. These methods bring Howard knowledge of all men in all countries, a radical levelling of economic and cultural hierarchies. For Jarvis, John Thelwall exemplifies this conjunction of empiricist projects and the radicalization of walking: Thelwall's 'politically driven [pedestrian] tour' of 1797, for example, 'provides for more patient and careful investigation than if he were traveling by coach' (34, 36). As Jarvis notes, Thelwall had explored both the levelling potential of walking and its roots in the Baconian tradition of empirical observation in his 1793 mixed-genre work *The Peripatetic*. However, the representation of walking in both tour and novel are first developed in Thelwall's biographical essay on Howard, published in *An Interesting Collection of Modern Lives* (1792).

Thelwall's biography amplifies the political implications of Bowles's representation of Howard as solitary walker. Thelwall opens the narrative with a poem celebrating Howard's peripatetic journeying: 'Long had he roamed abroad, from coast to coast / All Europe's glory and Britannia's boast' and 'With painful care and pious steps he trod / The path prescrib'd by virtue and his God'.¹³ Here, Thelwall deploys the established poetic tropes of globe-spanning travel and stepping into dungeons to signal Howard's empiricist project and its roots in religious piety. Throughout the biography, Thelwall heightens these associations by labeling Howard 'our traveller' and noting that

'he constantly entered every room, cell, and dungeon, with a memorandum-book in his hand, in which he noted particulars on the spot' (Thelwall, *Collection*, 14, 23). This mode of collecting information leads directly to change: as Thelwall describes, 'what gratified the Philanthropist most, was to find that many of the abuses and the horrors which he had by his former journies made known, were now, by the interference of those in power, considerably reformed' (Thelwall, *Collection*, 22). As evidence of this, Thelwall points to a declaration of the French monarch abolishing underground dungeons, which highlights how Howard's steps made inhumane conditions visible. Crucially, in Thelwall's narrative Howard wields empirical data as a weapon against both the petty tyranny of jailors and the government's abuse of its citizens, and his success lay in his active resistance to state power and class hierarchy. Howard refuses to 'fawn to greatness' because he 'placed himself on a level with all mankind, and treated all with the same degree of civility and attention' (Thelwall, *Collection*, 34). Howard's agenda, in Thelwall's view, was inherently democratizing because of the way he carried it out: as he moved around Britain, Europe and the globe, he continually stepped down to the level of the debtor, the criminal, the sick, the poor, elevating them through empiricist practices of making, recording and collating observations.

The politically radical, reformative power of movement, and specifically steps and walking, that Thelwall develops in his biography of Howard is the central and guiding trope of *The Peripatetic*, published the following year. As Judith Thomson has argued, Thelwall's novel aims to level Burkean distinctions of birth, rank and property, replacing them with distinctions of merit, character, and heart.¹⁴ This project is carried out through the eccentric wanderings of the narrator, who, bearing the surname of the ancient peripatetic philosopher Theophrastus, travels on foot through byways, fields, and

woods. In his journeying, 'the contemplation of natural phenomena' coupled with 'the searching rays of investigation' helps him banish doubt and dogma, leaving in their place 'universal benevolence' (Thelwall, *Peripatetic*, 109–10). Read in conjunction with the biography of Howard, the *Peripatetic* enacts two distinct transformations. By remaking Howard's travels into a kind of peripatetic wandering, Thelwall conflates Howard's purposeful, reform-driven investigation of prison conditions with an absent-minded, seemingly undirected form of walking out of doors. Further, with scenes that put the narrator – a self-designated 'man of letters' and philosopher – in conversation and close proximity with 'idle fellows' engaged in catching songbirds, an unemployed haymaker begging for charity, an old Scotch sailor eating his simple meal, and a slew of other laboring-class types, Thelwall's novel perpetuates the idea of walking as a levelling and politically radical act, not one driven by the religious fervor or patrician benevolence of the wealthy philanthropist.

PERSISTENCE OF PATRICIAN BENEVOLENCE

In the section above, we located two tensions that arose when Howard's travels were recast as democratizing in their empirically-oriented reform agenda by writers like Bowles, Burke and Thelwall. First, Howard encapsulated the tension between two types of traveler-observers, those seeking pleasure and those whose mission was the acquisition of knowledge. Second, as Howard's own texts indicate and the poems of his panegyrists amplify, reading his mission through the French revolutionary lens of universal brotherhood and fellowship of mankind conflicted with the patrician attitude he took toward the prisoners whose suffering he sought to alleviate. These tensions resurface in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century

representations both of prison reform and of walking, even in works that do not explicitly reference Howard or his philanthropic mission. For example, Wordsworth's 'The Convict' – published directly preceding 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' in the 1798 first edition of *Lyrical Ballads with a few other poems* but removed in 1800, never to be republished in any of Wordsworth's successive collections – begins with the narrator looking at the vista as he stands on the slope of a mountain.¹⁵ The narrator is clearly walking out of doors before he before he 'turned, to repair / To the cell where the convict is laid', stepping into the prison's 'thick-ribbed walls' and finally its dungeon (*LB* 1798, 197). Upon entering, the narrator invokes the empiricist mode of observation associated with Howard, describing the prisoner's physical condition – the 'steadfast dejection' of his eyes, the 'fetters that link him to death' – before turning to his mental condition (*LB* 1798, 198). Like Southey's guilt-ridden sailor, the prisoner is consumed by the memory of his crime and 'wishes the past to undo'; his condition is worsened because 'Mid tumult and uproar this man must repose; / In the comfortless vault of disease', a reference to the prevalence of gaol fever in British prisons (*LB* 1798, 198). Picking up on the sentimentality common to poems about Howard, when the prisoner 'half-raises his deep-sunken eye', the action 'unloosens a tear', which the narrator interprets as a question: the prisoner's sorrow 'asks of me why I am here' (*LB* 1798, 198). At this moment, the poem turns its critical eye on the narrator, who immediately claims (in quotation marks, implying he is speaking aloud to the prisoner) that he is 'no idle intruder' but rather a 'brother' who has come 'thy sorrows to share' (*LB* 1798, 198). Here, the narrator distances himself from the curious masses, levelling himself through his common humanity with the prisoner. The final stanza, however, reasserts the distance between them: the

narrator goes on to proclaim that 'My care, if the arm of the mighty were mine, / Would plant thee where yet thou might'st blossom again' (*LB* 1798, 198). While claiming powerlessness, the narrator enacts a form of patrician benevolence, imagining the prisoner as a drooping flower in his care. The historical reference here is likely to the reformatory potential of criminal transportation (the legal system would 'plant' the convict in Australia), and as such, the figure undoes the claim of brotherhood and replaces it with the 'arm of the mighty', its wealth and power, determining the convict's fate.

In *The State of the Prisons*, Howard comments explicitly on the 'idle intruders' who come to gaols for entertainment: the lunatics and idiots incarcerated alongside convicts 'serve for sport to idle visitants at assizes, and at other times of general resort' (*TSP*, 16). As in Wordsworth's poem, Howard's comment points to the difference between his empirically driven visits to prisons and those of the idle and curious public. As Nicholas Thomas notes, however, the line between 'licensed curiosity' of the scientific traveler engaged in empirical observation and the licentious curiosity of the pleasure seeker were difficult to disentangle in this period, leaving Howard and those following his footsteps open to criticism for precisely this kind of idle intrusion.¹⁶ Couple this with the stance of patrician benevolence that closes 'The Convict' and – even if this poem was intended, like 'The Thorn', as a critique of the narrator's ideological position – the narrator's suspect motives may have contributed to its being excised from the collection and from Wordsworth's self-manufactured canon. Despite its short life in print, 'The Convict' is illuminating for the discomfort it attests to – a discomfort stemming from the tensions between walking and immobility, empirical observation and the pleasures of spectacle, common humanity and class hierarchy.

These tensions resurface throughout Wordsworth and Coleridge's collection in various forms, perhaps most strikingly in the fourth of Wordsworth's 'Poems on the Naming of Places' in the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads, with other poems* (1800). This poem explicitly takes the lyric speaker and his friends to task for being lulled into a 'vacant mood' and 'feeding unthinking fancies' while strolling by the side of the lake.¹⁷ After a 40-line lead up that mimics the dalliance of the privileged who dawdle and pluck flowers while listening to the 'busy mirth' of reapers labouring in the nearby fields, the friends turn judge and jury on an 'idle' peasant angling by the lake (192–3). This man, they subsequently realize, has been 'worn down / By sickness, gaunt and lean, with sunken cheeks / And wasted limbs'; he is a man 'too weak to labour' (193). The self-reproach felt by the friends returns to the language of sensibility used by Bowles – the poem ends with the need to 'temper all our thoughts with charity' (194) – but it also raises an ethical problem of *assuming* that walking is an inherently politically radical or levelling activity. The middle-class pedestrians imagine themselves sharing in a form of universal benevolence and brotherhood with the laboring poor, only to find they have seriously misjudged the distance between their condition and the lived reality of working people.

This problem – the intrusion of patrician benevolence and judgment into a scene that should attest to the democratizing power of walking – is explored at much greater length in works that appear after *Lyrical Ballads*. We have space for a short discussion of only one, De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), which brings these questions to a head. The first part of *Confessions* is largely defined by the narrator's pedestrian travels, after he 'set off on foot' from Oxford to North Wales and later to London.¹⁸ As a consequence of his mode of travel, in London De Quincey's narrator 'naturally fell in more frequently with

those female peripatetics who are technically called Street-walkers' (*Confessions*, Part I, 304). He defends his intimacy with Ann, 'a young woman, and one of that unhappy class who subsist upon the wages of prostitution' (*Confessions*, Part I, 304), on the grounds of philosophy and walking: the philosopher, he argues, should stand 'in equal relation to high and low – to educated and uneducated, to the guilty and the innocent' and thus 'for many weeks I had walked at nights with this poor friendless girl' (*Confessions*, Part I, 304–5). Steps taken together of necessity erase differences of education and background; in walking, the opium eater and Ann occupy the liminal spaces between public and private property, spaces created by the excrescent entryways, stairs, and roofs of the city's architecture. Further, his intimacy with Ann brings De Quincey's famished avatar much needed mental and physical sustenance. Ann resuscitates him by 'running off into Oxford Street' to get a 'glass of port wine with spices' when he is about to faint (*Confessions*, Part I, 305). This act returns to De Quincey's narrator in the present moment of writing, when he describes how

a heart oppressed with gratitude, might have a like prerogative; might have power given to it from above to chase—to haunt—to way-lay—to overtake—to pursue thee into the central darkness of a London brothel, or (if it were possible) into the darkness of the grave—there to awaken thee with an authentic message of peace and forgiveness, and of final reconciliation!

(*Confessions*, Part I, 305–6)

Like Thelwall's claim to universal benevolence and Wordsworth's desire to plant the convict where he might blossom again, De Quincey imagines entering the dark brothel – or even transgressing the boundary between life and death – to reconcile with Ann. The 'authentic message of peace and forgiveness' he wants to convey signals the levelling potential of his

action, both past and imagined, of stepping into the spaces that morally taint and legally criminalize her (*Confessions*, Part I, 306).

While it revels in the democratizing power of walking and stepping into spaces of the downtrodden and ostracized, De Quincey's text also plays on the ethical tensions explored in Wordsworth's poems. When he would 'wander forth' to the markets where the 'poor resort of a Saturday night', the narrator practices a kind of empirical observation bordering on voyeurism: he goes out for the sake 'of witnessing, on as large a scale as possible, a spectacle', watching and listening, learning 'their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions'.¹⁹ This activity tips into idle intrusion, as he says 'whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without appearing to be intrusive, I joined their parties; and gave my opinion upon the matter in discussion' (*Confessions*, Part II, 360). His 'rambles' thus allow him access to the concerns and feelings of the working poor, into whose lives he quite literally intrudes his 'not always judicious' opinion (*Confessions*, Part II, 360). To take a second example, on yet another detour into the narrative present amidst a retrospective narration, the narrator revisits the lawyer's house he once shared with a 'neglected child', recalling the 'darkness – cold – silence – and desolation' of the place (*Confessions*, Part I, 305). This recollection generates a portrait of his fellow 'inmate' with whom he experienced 'real fleshly ills' of cold and hunger: 'she was neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners' (*Confessions*, Part I, 302, 304). Despite – or perhaps because of – her obvious differences from the Oxford-educated scholar of Greek, the narrator reflects that 'even in those years I needed not the embellishments of novel accessories to conciliate my affections: plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough for me, and I loved the child because she was my partner in wretchedness' (*Confessions*, Part I, 304). Sharing her

wretchedness provokes feelings of love, an effect of stepping into her prison – but as he notes at the beginning of this passage, his suffering lasted ‘for upwards of sixteen weeks’ until he meets ‘a gentleman of his late Majesty’s household’ who sends him a £10 note (*Confessions*, Part I, 306). Neither Ann nor the child have prospects of this kind. Further, directly following these scenes with a lengthy description of the narrator’s machinations to secure money based on his expectations prompts the reader to ask if the narrator’s feelings for the child or his message to Ann are more the effect of patrician charity than ‘authentic’ love.

With Wordsworth and De Quincey, we see writers working with and through the assumption that walking out of doors and stepping into the spaces occupied by the legally, socially, or economically disenfranchised was necessarily a democratizing or politically radical act. As these texts indicate, the legacy of Howard’s philanthropic project and the means by which he carried it out may have been recast by writers like Burke, Bowles and especially Thelwall, but the tensions we located in Howard’s own text continued to resurface in literary treatments of the politics of walking in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

NOTES _____

1. Robert Southey, *Poems, the Second Volume* (Bristol, 1799), 107–114. All further references provided in text.
2. Robert Southey, *Minor Poems of Robert Southey* (3 vols, London, 1815), i. 43–53, 45.
3. See Anne Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1994). For a critique of this argument, see Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Houndmills, 1997).
4. R. W. England, ‘Who Wrote John Howard’s Text? The State of the Prisons as a Dissenting Enterprise’. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 33. 2 (1993), 203–15.
5. The successive editions of *TSP* revised and expanded the content to reflect new information and to enhance its appeal to readers. This phenomenon is described in Paul Keen, “‘Uncommon Animals’”: Making Virtue of Necessity in the Age of Authors’, in *Bookish Histories: Books, Literature, and Commercial Modernity, 1700–1900*, ed. Ina Ferris and Paul Keen (Houndmills and London, 2009), 41–60. In Howard’s case, the changes across these editions benefitted from the attention of many hands, including Anna Barbauld’s brother, the physician John Aikin.
6. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1977). Margot Finn makes this first point about Howard’s place in the histories of discipline. Yet she also uses *TSP* as a repository of factual information about prison conditions at the turn of the nineteenth century. See her *Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge, 2008), 112, 118, and 155–8.
7. Our text will refer to *TSP*’s first-person narrator as ‘Howard’ for the sake of clarity, but we also seek to analyze this narrator as a construct beholden to the work’s larger rhetorical strategies.
8. In the transition from the work’s prefatory material and the evidence collected in specific prisons, Howard admits that the organization of the vast majority of the work mirrors his travels. ‘In my relation’, he explains, ‘I shall follow the order of my last journey’ (79). Despite omitting many (but not all) of the ‘trivial’ details that occupy eighteenth-century travel narratives (as satirized by Laurence Sterne in his *A Sentimental Journey* [1768]), the vast extent of *TSP* is in fact a document of his movements.
9. For useful accounts of the tension between sight and embodiment in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century life writing, see Veronica Kelly, ‘Locke’s Eyes, Swift’s Spectacles’, in *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Veronica Kelly and Dorothea Von Mucke (Stanford, 1994), 69–85; Peter De Bolla’s ‘The Charm’d Eye’ in the same collection; as well as Jeannine DeLombardo, “‘Eye-Witness to the Cruelty’”: Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 Narrative’, *American Literature*, 73.2 (2001), 245–75.
10. As Kevin Siena has recently shown, physiological distress served to mark boundaries between social

classes in early modern Britain, boundaries initially demarcated by the 1666 plague and its cultural afterlife. See *Rotten Bodies: Class and Contagion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 2019).

11. On physico-theology, see Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England, 1660–1740* (Ithaca, NY, 1994). The long-standing global colonial agenda of information gathering is neatly captured in the query lists supplied to merchants, ship captains and scientific travelers by the Royal Society in an effort to train travelers to collect pertinent facts and observations. See Vera Keller, *Knowledge and the Public Interest, 1575–1725* (Cambridge, 2015), 230–2.
12. William Lisle Bowles, *The Grave of Howard* (Salisbury, 1790), 5.
13. John Thelwall, 'Biographia Addenda No. II: John Howard F.R.S.', *An Interesting Collection of Modern Lives* (London, 1792), 9.
14. Judith Thompson, Introduction to *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit, 2001), 25.
15. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with a few other Poems*, (London, 1798), ed. Bruce Graver and Ronald Tetreault, 197–8, *Romantic Circles Electronic Edition*, 2001, < <http://ec2-52-90-79-236.compute-1.amazonaws.com/editions/LB/html/Lb98-1.html> > , accessed 30 Dec. 2019. All further references provided in text.
16. Nicholas Thomas, 'Licensed Curiosity: Cook's Pacific Voyages', *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London, 1994), 116–36.
17. William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with other poems* (London, 1800), ed. Bruce Graver and Ronald Tetreault, 190–194, *Romantic Circles Electronic Edition*, 2001, < <http://ec2-52-90-79-236.compute-1.amazonaws.com/editions/LB/html/Lb00-2.html> > , accessed 30 Dec. 2019. All further references provided in text.
18. [Thomas De Quincey], 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar, Part I' *London Magazine*, 4. 21 (September 1821), 293–314, 299. All further references provided in text.
19. [Thomas De Quincey], 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar, Part II' *London Magazine*, 4. 22 (October 1821), 354–379, 360. All further references provided in text.