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**PHILOSOPHICAL VAGABONDS:  
PEDESTRIANISM, POLITICS, AND IMPROVEMENT  
ON THE SCOTTISH TOUR<sup>1</sup>**

*Nigel Leask*

On 7th August, 1801, Mr Patrick Sterling, a magistrate in Dundee, signed off an affidavit stating that “Mr Bristed and Mr Cowan, two young gentlemen of America, now students of medicine at the University of Edinburgh, having been brought before me, this evening, as suspicious persons, or vagrants, who could give no good account of themselves” had satisfied him that they were in fact *bona fide* students by producing witnesses.<sup>2</sup> The two pedestrian travellers, disguised as American sailors, with little money and no identity papers, had been apprehended as “suspicious persons” in a tense political climate marked by French invasion threats and Irish insurrection. The Dundonian rumour mill cast them variously as “French spies,” “English deserters,” “Irish rebels,” or “wandering Jews” (I:169) and (in Bristed’s characteristically high-coloured account) “demanded the immediate execution of the two bloody-minded terrible spies, who were come with an intention to murder all the men, to ravish all the women, and eat up all the children in Dundee” (I: 90). The discovery of Bristed’s shorthand travel diary did little to dispel the popular alarm, given that the Justice Clerk considered that its cyphers “contained treason against the sacred person of our sovereign lord the king” (I:183).

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on the Marilyn Butler Lecture, delivered as a plenary at the British Association for Romantic Studies biennial international conference, “Romantic Improvements,” University of York, 27-30th July, 2017. My thanks to the conference organizers for the invitation to speak. It draws on research for the AHRC project, *Curious Travellers: Thomas Pennant and the Scottish and Welsh Tours, 1760-1830*, PI Mary-Ann Constantine, CI Nigel Leask: <http://curioustravellers.ac.uk/en/>.

<sup>2</sup> John Bristed, *Anthroplanomenos; or A Pedestrian Tour through Parts of the Highlands of Scotland, in 1801*, 2 vols (London: J. Wallis, 1803), I:2 (cited below by volume and page number in parentheses in the text). The affidavit is printed as an epigraph to the book as a whole.

In fact, the Dundee magistrate was deceived in being led to believe that the two prisoners were “young gentlemen of America.” Although John Bristed and his friend Andrew Cowan were indeed *bona fide* medical students at Edinburgh, Bristed (1778-1855) was an Englishman, son of the vicar of Sherbourne in Dorset, educated at Winchester, and matriculated at Edinburgh University in 1800, while Cowan was a Belfast man, who had studied at Columbia College in New York before arriving in Edinburgh, and therefore (unlike his companion) already possessed first-hand knowledge of America. Both were ambitious of pursuing literary careers: the year after their two-week August tour of Scotland, in 1802, Bristed launched an unsuccessful periodical entitled *The Adviser: or Moral and Literary Tribune*, and went on to publish other works, including a novel, *Edwin and Anna* (1805). Cowan's radically materialist *Anthropopaedeia; or a Treatise on General Education* was published in 1803, seeking “to establish pleasure, not pain, as the basis of all instruction.”<sup>3</sup>

Cowan's pretentious title might have been the cue for Bristed's decision to entitle his travel account *Anthroplanomenos; or A Pedestrian Tour through Part of the Highlands of Scotland*, published in 1803, when he had moved to London and was studying for the bar. Even by the standards of romantic period travel writing, *Anthroplanomenos* (or “wandering man” in made-up Greek) is a monster, taking 1,241 pages to narrate a tour that lasted only 15 days. Its only claim to being out of the ordinary was the fact that Bristed and Cowan had travelled entirely on foot, although they had never deviated from the well-beaten track of the Scottish *petit tour* which followed the 18th century military roads, tramping from Edinburgh to St Andrews, Dundee, Perth, Dunkeld, Blair Atholl, Killin, Loch Lomond, Glasgow, Lanark, and back to Edinburgh. It was a route frequented by scores of tourists during the romantic decades, albeit usually travelling on horseback or in a chaise, rather than on foot. A *pot-pourri* of prose and verse, including sentimental vignettes and Smolletian satire, the book's prolixity is largely due to a series of lengthy philosophical and political dissertations interspersed throughout the tour narrative proper.

Mauled in the *Annual* and *Monthly Reviews*, *Anthroplanomenos* seems subsequently to have sunk without trace, despite brief recent notices by Robin Jarvis and Carl Thompson.<sup>4</sup> The *Annual* accused Bristed of “book-making,” given that the first sixty pages of his introduction was a puff for

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<sup>3</sup> From the positive review in the *Critical Review*, 2.1 (June, 1804), 217-21, 217. Bristed would be eclipsed by the literary fame of his son, Charles Astor Bristed (1820-1874).

<sup>4</sup> Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 26; Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 137-147.

Cowan's *Treatise on General Education*, and that a 100-page dissertation on female education was largely plagiarised from "an essay in the first volume of the *Cabinet*," artfully disguised.<sup>5</sup> Even more damagingly, the *Monthly* complained of inaccurate local information, "low and disgusting incidents, oddly jumbled with fine-spun dissertations, or declamatory lectures, to which the title of a tour only serves as a travelling name."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in this essay I will argue that Bristed's *Anthroplanomenos* is worth a second look, and that the pedestrian tour that it narrates, somewhere between a student jape and a serious social experiment, casts an illuminating light both on the practice and representation of romantic travel, as well as the discourse on social improvement in early 19th century Scotland. Above all, it casts light on the politics of the pedestrian tour, virtually unstudied in the Scottish context.<sup>7</sup>

"But why travel as sailors? said a lady to whom I was recounting a part of our adventures." Such is the Shandeyan opening sentence of Bristed's book, and the answer is as follows:

Because, Madam, we conceived no other mode would afford so good an opportunity of surveying the beauties of the country, or give so great a facility of seeing and investigating the manners of the people unvarnished by courtesy and undisguised by interest (I:5).

The book's frontispiece [Fig. 1] admirably represents the weirdness of Bristed's disguise (he's the figure on the right), attired in the white striped pants and blue jacket of an American tar, as well as his "cat-skin hat and green medicated spectacles." Cowan, presented in the narrative as a taciturn, dour republican, looks here more like the conventional pedestrian tourist of the period, although Bristed notes that the artist had underestimated Cowan's scruffy appearance. In fact, by the end of the tour, "Cowan was literally a sans-culottes, for his trowsers were defalcated of their posterior department, and he had no drawers, and his miserable Russian-gray jacket did not reach lower than his middle, so that at every step which he took appeared an amazing exhibition...his face was pale, dreary, and woe-begone." In short, "two more wretched dismally-looking ragamuffins were never discharged from the hulks" (II:515)

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<sup>5</sup> *Annual Review [for 1803]*, 2 (London: Longman and Rees, 1804): 408-409.

<sup>6</sup> *Monthly Review*, 43 (April 1804): 358-67 (365); the copy in \*\*\*\* is attributed (in pen) to "Muir."

<sup>7</sup> Although I won't say much about William Wordsworth, the greatest poetical pedestrian of the romantic period, Bristed's "simulation of freedom" certainly partakes of the spirit of Celeste Langan's "romantic vagrancy," which she describes as "the framing issue of Romantic form and content," a meeting of "the transcendental surplus and the empirical deficit": Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14, 20.



**Fig. 1:** frontispiece from John Bristed, *Anthroplanomenos; or A Pedestrian Tour through Parts of the Highlands of Scotland, in 1801*, 2 vols (London: J. Wallis, 1803).

Image by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Rebecca Solnit writes in *Wanderlust* that “the history of walking is an unwritten, secret history whose fragments can be found in a thousand unemphatic passages in books, as well as in songs, streets, and almost everybody’s travels.”<sup>8</sup> If so, then the romantic pedestrian tour is something of an “open secret,” even if Solnit rightly identifies the counter-cultural connotations of walking that continue to this day. In *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, Robin Jarvis acknowledges that “there was an element of deliberate social nonconformism, of oppositionality, in the self-levelling expeditions of most early pedestrians.”<sup>9</sup> In a founding text of pedestrianism, Ramond de Carbonniere’s notes to his French translation of William Coxe’s *Travels in Switzerland*, cited by Wordsworth in the notes to his *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), the radical translator underlined the importance of jettisoning the trappings of class privilege for pedestrian “freedom”:

we travelled, or rather rambled on foot over the mountains, without following any road, accompanied by a native of the country... we lived like brothers with the shepherds whom we visited, without letting them suspect that curiosity alone brought us among them.<sup>10</sup>

A similar goal (as well as an acknowledgement of the need for disguise) was claimed by Coleridge’s fellow-traveller Joseph Hucks, in his *Pedestrian Tour through North Wales*:

I much doubt whether you would recognise us through our disguise; we carry our clothes, etc. in a wallet or knapsack.... all ideas of appearance and gentility, they are entirely out of the question—our object is to see, not to be seen.<sup>11</sup>

Like a walking panopticon, the bourgeois pedestrian’s goal is “to see, not to be seen.” But this cloak of social “invisibility” often assumed a more conspicuous form. A less politically motivated pedestrian, John Keats, walking through the Highlands in 1818, sported a fur cap, with plaid and knapsack, while his bespectacled friend Charles Brown wore a “white hat, tartan coat and trowsers, and Highland plaid.”<sup>12</sup> Like Bristed and Cowan, Keats recalled that the pair had been taken for “Spectacle venders, Razor sellers, Jewellers, travelling linen drapers, Spies, Excisemen, & many things else, I have no idea of” (*ibid.*, 211). That at least suggested that their disguise

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<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Granta, 2014), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jarvis, as in n. 4 above, 17, 27.

<sup>10</sup> William Coxe, *Travels in Switzerland, ... to which are added the notes and observations of Mr Ramond* [Louis-Francois Ramond de Carbonnières], new ed., 2 vols (Basel: Decker, 1802), I: i-ii. On Coxe and pedestrianism, see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 484.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Hucks, *A Pedestrian Tour through North Wales* (London: J. Debrett and J. Edwards, 1795), 4

<sup>12</sup> Carol Walker, *Walking North with Keats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 213.

had been effective: but more damaging was Brown's fear that their cover had been blown, when he overheard a labourer “sarcastically observe to his companion—there go a couple of gentlemen!—having nothing to do, they are finding out hard work for themselves!” (*ibid.*, 224).

Robin Jarvis has described pedestrian tourism as “a new form of masculine, middle-class self-fashioning.”<sup>13</sup> What’s different about Bristed and Cowan's tour is their conscious decision to ‘camp it up’ in a piece of conspicuous transnational role-play, rather than to dress down like most polite pedestrians. In this light, it’s ironic that Bristed attributes the practice of disguise to the Scottish poor, not the pedestrians: their sailor’s garb would “induce the people whom we met to treat us without any disguise of factitious and artificial civility, and show their native character, whatever it may be, in all its outlines and features” (I:ii). In order to neutralise the social deference (or is it resentment?) of the poor, they travel as discharged sailors, but add a national ingredient by posing as *American* sailors. This because, Bristed reveals, “their nation was a favourite with the Scottish; and that the Caledonians, as yet, so despise and dislike the English and the Irish.” “Had it been known that we were natives [of] either,” he added, “... we should never have gained the least information, but should have returned no wiser than we set out” (*ibid.*). Moreover, American disguise supported their radical agenda, offering Bristed and Cowan the opportunity (in the words of the *Monthly Review*) “of agitating the minds of the simple with golden dreams of transatlantic happiness,” and promoting republican manners.<sup>14</sup>

### **Improvement, Pedestrianism and the Scottish Tour**

Both as traveller and travel-writer, Bristed followed in the footsteps of a throng of visitors inspired by the naturalist and antiquarian Thomas Pennant’s two published Scottish Tours of 1769 and 1772, which as Frederik Jonsson has argued, “repackaged the business of strategic surveying into a form of polite entertainment.”<sup>15</sup> Bristed was however after different quarry: although he doesn’t mention Pennant explicitly, he boasted that he was himself “indifferent to antiquities or natural history,” and disavowed any desire for “everlasting fame” by “counting on our fingers the exact number of basaltic pillars on the Isle of Staffa” (I:8). He was equally uninterested in picturesque landscapes, an enthusiasm that absorbed most contemporary Scottish tourists in the wake of publications by Gilpin, Uvedale Price, and

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<sup>13</sup> Jarvis, 155

<sup>14</sup> *Monthly Review*, as in n. 6 above, 367.

<sup>15</sup> Frederik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 50. For current research on Pennant and the Scottish tour, see <http://curioustravellers.ac.uk/en/>.

Payne Knight. "We were neither artists nor connoisseurs, but ... two philosophical vagabonds, who wished to examine the condition of the great mass of the people" (II:178).

Instead, Bristed seems to have drawn his inspiration from the English radical John Thelwall's *The Peripatetic* (1793), a seminal text for radical pedestrianism. Thelwall's extraordinary narrative in prose and verse tells of a series of "eccentric excursions" on foot around Kent and the environs of London by the pseudonymous "Sylvanus Theophrastus" and his friends.<sup>16</sup> Bristed's self-description of himself and Cowan as "two philosophical vagabonds" echoes directly Thelwall's "little party of vagrant philosophers" (Thelwall, III:22). II: 22) for whom (Thelwall insisted) "information and improvement were to constitute the principle features of our expedition" (Thelwall, I:90). In turning away from the Pennantian travel account, *Anthroplanomenos* owes a major formal debt to what Judith Thompson describes as *The Peripatetic's* "generic miscegenation and eccentricity, its plurality of self-questioning voices."<sup>17</sup> Bristed's refusal of "uniform similarity" in his narrative, his copious quotation of poetry, and the book's massive digressions, all echo Thelwall's rejection of "the arbitrary and usual distinctions of book and chapter" and his professed design to "unit[e] the different advantages of the novel, the sentimental journal, and the miscellaneous collection of essays and poetic effusions" (Thelwall, I: iii, vi). Both texts confirm Jeffrey Robinson's perception that "the vulnerability of the walker might transform into the vulnerability of the writer to the mixing of genres."<sup>18</sup> Importantly, pedestrianism is a master trope for digression in Thelwall's text:

remember, that as I am only a foot traveller, the bye path to the right and to the left is always as open to me as the turnpike road; and that if ... 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 (Thelwall, I:105).

Thelwall's association of pedestrian tourism, generic experiment, and radical politics was a particularly potent mix, especially given his

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<sup>16</sup> John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic; or, Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society; in a series of Politico-Sentimental Journals, in Verse and Prose, of the Eccentric Excursions of Sylvanus Theophrastus; Supposed to be written by himself*, 3 vols, (Southwark: printed for the Author, 1793), I, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Thompson, "John Thelwall and the Enfranchisement of Literature," in *Romantic History and the Possibility of Genre: Re-forming Literature 1789-1837*, ed. Tillotama Rajan and Julia M. Wight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122-148 (144).

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey C. Robertson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989; repr Rochester, NY: Dalkey Archive Press, 2006), 5.

subsequent imprisonment, trial, and notoriety as “an acquitted felon.”<sup>19</sup> This might help explain why, despite the recorded popularity of pedestrian tourism in the decade or so after 1793, and the dozens of surviving manuscript journals of such tours, the titles of relatively few published works advertised themselves as “Pedestrian Tours.” George Dyer and Arthur Aikin, James Plumptre, John Leyden, Francis Jeffrey, James Hogg, John Stoddart, William and Dorothy Wordsworth (at least for part of their tour), Coleridge, Sarah Stoddart, and John Keats are among the better known romantic pedestrians in Scotland, but none of them would publish “a pedestrian tour.”<sup>20</sup> According to Arthur Mitchell’s extensive catalogue of Scottish travel narratives, *Anthroplanomenos* is actually the first published Scottish tour to advertise itself as such, albeit in Greek disguise, and in a subtitle, and only a small handful of others followed suit. Michael Freeman’s extensive database also reveals only four published Welsh pedestrian tours in the years 1793-1810.<sup>21</sup>

The most celebrated Scottish pedestrian tour to have appeared in print was John Stoddart’s *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland* (1801), which describes his picturesque excursions with the landscape painter John Claude Nattes in 1799-1800. But Stoddart’s handling of pedestrianism in this work of romantic revisionism lends support to the view that in 1801 the practice carried a strong whiff of vestigial radicalism. Perhaps to underline the completeness of his ideological conversion from the radical Godwinian politics that he had shared with other men in his London circle (including Hazlitt, Lamb, and Wordsworth), Stoddart dedicated *Remarks* to the Duchess of Gordon, *doyenne* of the Tory party, whose hospitality he had enjoyed during a nine day sojourn at her rustic retreat at Kinrara in Badenoch: he’d also visited the Wordsworths and

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<sup>19</sup> See Steve Poole, ed., *John Thelwall: Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 1-11.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Stoddart [Hazlitt]’s tour is the most remarkable pedestrian tour made by a woman in Scotland: see “Journal of a Trip to Scotland,” in William Hallam Bonner, ed., “The Journals of Sarah and William Hazlitt,” *University of Buffalo Studies*, 24, 3 (February 1959), 185-252, (216), and Betty Hagglund, *Tourists and Travellers: Women’s Non-Fictional Writing about Scotland, 1770-1830* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010), 126-141.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Mitchell, “List of Travels and Tours in Scotland, 1296-1900,” *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 35 (1900-1901), 431-638. My thanks to Michael Freeman for sharing his extensive database on the Welsh tour in a personal correspondence.

Coleridge on his way south in 1800, and would be instrumental in arranging for Coleridge's subsequent employment in Malta.<sup>22</sup>

Neither Stoddart's title nor his preface, however, contain any intimation that he and Nattes had undertaken a pedestrian tour, a fact which is first mentioned a hundred or so pages into the first volume.<sup>23</sup> Besides sensitizing the traveller to local scenery, the great advantage of pedestrian tourism, Stoddart proposed, was "a ready, and unconstrained intercourse with the people of the country," although no radical motives were offered for seeking such intercourse (Stoddart, I: 117). Citing the German traveller Carl Moritz's unhappy experience as a pedestrian tourist in England in 1782, Stoddart wrote that in this respect

Scotland has a great advantage over most parts of England, where, as it is presumed, that nothing but necessity can compel a man to walk, ... had he tried the same experiment in Scotland, he would have found the poor man ready to 'crack a wee' with him, to offer him a 'pickle o' snishen' or to do him any other little services, always accompanied with a respectful, yet manly, deference (*ibid.*).<sup>24</sup>

Given the dates, Stoddart's remarks here might well have encouraged Bristed and Cowan, even if (as we will see) they found the Scottish poor considerably less accomodating than he had done.

### **The 'Three Miles an Hour' Tour.**

Stoddart's paraphrase of Moritz, that in England "nothing but necessity can compel a man to walk," certainly supports Anne Wallace's thesis in *Walking, Literature and English Culture* about the rise of peripatetic travel.<sup>25</sup> Against Wallace, however, Robin Jarvis has proposed that pedestrian tourists "travelled in a way they did not have to, and in a way they could not be suspected (*maugre* the occasional inept disguises) of having to adapt from

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<sup>22</sup> As the increasingly reactionary leader writer of *The Times* after 1812, Stoddart publicly crossed swords with his brother-in-law William Hazlitt, who had married Sarah Stoddart in 1808, against her brother's will.

<sup>23</sup> John Stoddart, *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland during the years 1799 and 1800*, 2 vols (London: W. Miller, 1801), I: 116.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Karl Phillip Moritz, *Travels, chiefly on foot, through several parts of England, in 1782* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1795): "A traveller on foot in this country seems to be considered a sort of wild man, ... stared at, pitied, suspected, and shunned by everybody that meets him" (p. 122). On Moritz, see Jarvis, *Romantic Writing*, 9, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1994). 'Only as the transport revolution shifted travellers' attitude towards the process of travel and altered the socio-economic context of walking did people begin to think of walking as a desirable way to travel, practically or metaphorically'. (p. 18)

necessity.”<sup>26</sup> Their ideological choice to walk was perhaps a response (and a rebuke) to the moral panic elicited by the enormous war-time rise of vagrants on the nation’s roads and turnpikes, signalled by Pitt’s abortive bill for the reform of the Poor Law in 1796-7. Radical pedestrians believed that the state of the poor was an index to the state of the nation: and one notable pedestrian (William Wordsworth) controversially claimed in 1800 that the language of “humble and rustic life” was “a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language” than that spoken by educated city dwellers.<sup>27</sup> But whereas Thelwall’s peripatetic seeks out a gentle Socratic exchanges with the poor and indigent (“these fields, these hedge rows, and this simple turf, shall form my *Academos*”), Bristed more aggressively claimed that because “our chief object on this tramp was to obtain some insight into the manners of the people, we always *accosted* every one whom we encountered” (Thelwall, I:10; Bristed, II:124). The word “accost” here is reminiscent of George Canning’s antijacobin parody in his poem “The Friend of Humanity and the Knife Grinder”: “Tell me, Knife-grinder, how you came to grind knives? / Did some rich man tyrannically use you?”<sup>28</sup> It’s not the only passage where Bristed’s narrative feels like a satire on the radical pedestrians themselves as much as upon the people they meet on the road.

Sometimes Bristed and Cowan’s “inept” disguise led to them being detected as frauds, as in their arrest in Dundee mentioned above. More often, however, it succeeded (despite the fake American accents), maybe assisted by the fact that in the course of their tour they become increasingly dirty, dishevelled and down-at-heel. In Fife, they discover an abject, poverty-ridden country, its people oppressed by high rents, class exploitation, war time taxes, and forced recruitment. At Largo Bristed commented on the “filthy beastliness” of a girl who refuses to give them anything but the dirty water from washing potatoes, and he remarks with disgust on the “penury and misery of the inhabitants; such squalid, wretched, emaciated, rude, inhuman, dejected, lifeless, indolent, spiritless, sluggish beings we had never beheld” (I:86). This adjectival torrent leads him to a philanthropic digression on cleanliness, and a lengthy quotation from Count Rumford’s 1796 *Public Establishment for the Poor in Bavaria*. Earlier, in the same town, the “sailors” had facetiously informed the locals that “We left America *this morning*.—And how is meal sold there? [they inquire]—Very cheaply, and we are not burthened with heavy taxes” (I:53). But the customary response,

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<sup>26</sup> Jarvis, *Romantic Writing*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in John O. Hayden, ed., *Wordsworth: Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 282.

<sup>28</sup> George Canning, “Imitation. Sapphics. The Friend of Humanity and the Knife Grinder,” *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* (London: J. Knight, 1799), 10-11 (ll. 9-10).

Bristed reported, was “*You will no get ony thing here; we have nothing for you; not a single bawbie to spare; the war has ruined us all*” (I:54)

Robin Jarvis has noted that the Wordsworths regularly sought to “get their money’s worth of *story* out of the beggars they patronized.”<sup>29</sup> By travelling in disguise, Bristed and Cowan got their stories for free. But in a perverse role reversal, the “philosophical vagabonds” frequently ended up as the principal story-tellers, and consequently the *objects* (rather than the purveyors) of charity from the poor. Tramping through the Carse of Gowrie towards Perth, they meet a female beggar, with whom they exchange stories. She tells them that she is the widow of a thresher, whose ten children are all dead. She can earn only 3d a day by spinning—and because her house rent is 18 shillings a year more than she can pay, she will shortly be turned out by her landlord, “a huge rich gentleman, a mason in Perth” (I:240) Bristed’s representation of radical sympathy here is somewhat undermined by the fact that upon hearing their story the beggar herself takes pity on the down-at-heel “Americans,” and offers them charity, refusing to “take a shilling for two bawbies’ worth of milk . . . from two crippled sailors that are much worse off than I am” (I:242). Quoting from Young’s *Night Thoughts* and Burns’s poem “Man was made to Mourn,” Bristed compounds the irony by philosophizing on the likely fate of governments that permit their subjects to sink into penury:

*Something must be wrong*, when so many painted butterflies are seen to spread their gilded wings, and to flutter in indolence and sloth, through the whole of a useless and contemptible existence, and the that industrious bee is robbed of all the fruits of her unremitting toil and labour (I, 248).<sup>30</sup>

A similar encounter occurs later, in Glenfalloch, when they’re again offered charity by a beggar, the widow of a Glasgow weaver forced to beg from cottage door to door with her starving children, and on that occasion Bristed quotes Smollett’s “The Tears of Scotland”:

Mourn, helpless Caledonia, mourn...  
The helpless widow, doom’d to death,  
Forsaken wanders o’er the heath (II, 460),

Such “sentimental” exchanges are interspersed with more conflictual encounters with travellers on the road. The pedestrians are worsted in a

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<sup>29</sup> Robin Jarvis, “Wordsworth and the Use of Charity,” in Stephen Copley and John Whale, eds, *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts, 1780-1832* (London: Routledge 1992), 200-218 (p. 204).

<sup>30</sup> Bristed seems oblivious to the irony here: but for Wordsworth’s self-identification as a butterfly in a meditation on charity and vagrancy in the poem “Beggars,” see David Simpson, *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (London: Methuen, 1987), 175-177.

slagging match with a party of Gaelic drovers near Blair Atholl who hail them in

Erse, delivering in the true Irish twang, with a great variety of gesticulatory distortions. I shook my head, thereby intimating that I did not understand a single syllable of their gabble, and that all their rhetoric was lost upon me (II:149).

But the drovers speedily retort in English “*He is dumb, lame and an idiot.*” However, Bristed and Cowan (in their American disguise) were less likely to have offended Gaels than James Hogg, attired as a Borders shepherd in the era of sheep clearances, as he tramped through the Highlands the following year in search of an affordable sheep farm. Hogg made sure that he was equipped with “a good pocket travelling map,” so “I never asked the road of anybody,” for “fear of having to answer several impertinent questions for the favour conferred.”<sup>31</sup> In this sense Hogg's isolationism differentiates him completely from the political project of pedestrian tourism as articulated by Thelwall and others.

In the Vale of Leven, a visit to Smollett's memorial (“defaced by some barbarian”) elicits a Smolletian caricature of a dandified officer of Volunteers whom they encounter on the road, “holding a parasol in his hand to shade his dear face from the sun,” and giving off “whiffs of lavender-water and burgamot.” “As this hero appeared to be an egregious coxcomb, and moreover a little fellow, not stout enough to thrash us in case of any quarrel, we determined to have some banter with him.” In a repeat of the alarm they had caused at Dundee, the officer accordingly denounces them as “a couple of lying rascals”: “I ... know you to be spies and traitors, and will have ye hanged up at the next town” (II:493-495). In the end nothing comes of his threats, but this rather homophobic encounter reinforces Bristed's pacifist and antimilitarist message: a soldier is “a drone upon society, wasting the fruits of productive labour in the support of his carcass,” so he can “exercise in rank and file with other human animals that have been thus converted into *machines*” (II: 356)

As I've mentioned, American disguise provided a cover for promoting republican principles, as when the pedestrians inform an old lady in front of Hamilton Palace, that “the fashion of dukes and had passed away in France, and, therefore that Hamilton could claim no honour from any title in that country, whatever he might in Scotland and in England” (II:657) But shortly afterwards, a flirtatious encounter with a group of mill girls on the road to the town of Hamilton backfires when a discrepancy in their story (Bristed now claiming to be an American farmer rather than a sailor) leads to their plebeian cover being blown. Cowan is furious, as he has

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<sup>31</sup> James Hogg, *Highland Journeys* [Stirling-South Carolina Edition of James Hogg, 25], ed. H.B. de Groot (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 74.

brought his little round tub of a damsel to consent to pass as his wife at their next abode for the night; but that I had spoiled all, by my foolish rhodomantade about the American farmer (II:656).

After a hundred pages of feminist diatribe in the preceding volume (“let the defenders of male despotism, answer, if they can, the Rights of Woman, by M. Wollstonecraft”: I, 374), this incident seems particularly inappropriate.

### **No Room at the Inn**

As we've seen, the ideologues of pedestrian tourism dreamed of wandering off the beaten track to share the simple cottages of virtuous peasants high in the Alps, among the English Lakes or Snowdonia, or the remote glens of Highland Scotland. Things were quite different though on the “beaten track” of the Scottish *petit tour*, given that the construction of military (and later) turnpike roads had been accompanied by new inns to support the improved transport infrastructure. These were initially the “Kingshouses” built by the government to facilitate military travel, but later included more commodious inns for polite travellers, such as those at Blair Atholl, Inverary, Killin and Kenmore, established by the Dukes of Atholl and Argyll, and the Earl of Breadalbane respectively.<sup>32</sup> The location of inns relative to the tourist circuit determined both their comfort and price: in 1803, Dorothy Wordsworth noted that their bill for a night's accom-modation, dinner and breakfast at the inn at Taynuilt was only half what they had paid the previous day at Dalmally, because “Dalmally is in the main road of the tourists.”<sup>33</sup> In the unpublished journal of his pedestrian tour of 1802, the Welsh radical poet Iolo Morganwg fulminated about being ripped off in a filthy Birmingham inn, on account of the proximity to the Welsh tourist honey-pots: “it is now pretty well known that pedestrian travellers are seldom treated with tolerable respect or accomodated with any thing tolerable in Inns on the borders of Wales.... I was surely at the Fountain head of imposition.”<sup>34</sup> Budget travellers like Bristed and Cowan hiking the beaten track of the Scottish *petit*

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<sup>32</sup> See Martin Rackwitz, *Travels to Terra Incognita: the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides in Early Modern Travellers' Accounts c. 1600 to 1800* (Munster: Waxman, 2007), 194-5.

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803*, ed. J.C. Shairp (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), 152. The qualities of Scottish inns were widely debated by tourists: see for example the assessment of 34 Scottish hostleries in Elizabeth Diggle's “Journal of a Tour from London to the Highlands of Scotland, 19 April to 7th August 1788,” in Alastair J. Durie, ed., *Travels in Scotland, 1788-1881: A Selection from Contemporary Tourist Journals* (Suffolk: Boydell/Scottish History Society, 2012), 18-40.

<sup>34</sup> National Library of Wales, 13174A – notebook. Journey May-June 1802, 21v. Thanks to Mary-Ann Constantine for making her transcription available to me.

*tour* certainly couldn't expect anything better than the hardships described by Iolo, especially in the guise of penniless American sailors.

More than any other single factor, Bristed's narrative is structured around (mainly adverse) experiences in roadside inns and ale-houses. Their disguise may have facilitated free conversation with other travellers on the road, but it was a distinct disadvantage in seeking out food and shelter at the end of a long day's tramp. On the first night of their tour, when they arrived half-crippled and dirty at Kirk Largo, the innkeeper pretended that she had no room for them, in a pattern that repeats itself with monotonous predictability throughout the book. By flattering the woman the "sailors" are on the point of procuring beds for the night, but her husband thinks otherwise (I: 60). Quoting the Bible on the Christian duties of hospitality proves completely inefficacious, and the mercenary innkeeper only relents when they agree to pay an inflated price. At this, "poor Cowan, full of the high and indignant spirit of a republican" is infuriated, expostulating to Bristed: "this comes of your foolish whim of travelling as a sailor! Could you not for once have attempted to disguise yourself as a gentleman?" (I: 65) Later, Bristed is forced to relent: pleading for accommodation at an inn in Perth, they assure the polite innkeeper that "we were *gentlemen* from America, not *sailors*, but only adopted that garb for certain and particular reasons, which we would relate presently" (I:262)

Bristed describes how, in his conversation with the innkeeper "Mr Lindsee" at Kirk Largo,

we took an opportunity of pouring down his throat a very great abundance of matter, which he could not possibly understand, because we well knew that weak and ignorant people are always best pleased with what they cannot comprehend,

thus putting him his securely in his place (I:67). Despite all their talk of American democracy, they adopt a "self-important and authoritative tone" which made Lindsee "honour us with the appellation of *sir*, at every other word" (I:70) We might compare the class politics of this episode with Thelwall's account of Sylvanus's encounter with an old disbanded Scottish sailor early in *The Peripatetic*, when the latter is embarrassed by his assumption that his interlocutor is a tradesman rather than a gentleman. Sylvanus retorts that "I feared that the false estimate of my importance might prevent the freedom of conversation from which alone the human heart can be revealed" (Thelwall, I:44). Setting the sailor's mind at ease by assuring him that, although no tradesman, he does "have the honour of earning my own livelihood by my own industry," Sylvanus is able to engage in the "free" conversation that is the object of his pedestrian wanderings (*ibid.*). As Jon Mee notes of the passage, this egalitarian voucher "allows for at least provisional and imperfect comprehension between the speakers without

suggesting they need to be transparent or identical to each other.”<sup>35</sup> By contrast (and contradicting the whole spirit of pedestrianism) Bristed clearly has nothing to learn from uneducated commoners like Lindsee, or his blacksmith son. In fact, he resents “the continued repetition of the same insipid ignorance, all delivered in one unvaried style of monotonous and disgusting uniformity,” while he is trying to write his shorthand diary (I:79) The blacksmith's idiocy feeds into Bristed's depressing report that

by far the majority of mankind are born in situations hostile to every improvement in understanding and in virtue, stagger through life in absolute uncertainty about the most important truths; gain perhaps in the course of their earthly existence, one single idea, and that a wrong one; ... and perish, like the bursting of bubbles on the ocean, without notice or remembrance (I, 311).

Arriving at Dunkeld on 8th August, the pedestrians discover that the Highlands “are the seats of oppression, poverty, famine, anguish, and wild despair” (II:404) The information that “the Duke of Athol was endeavouring to lay waste and to depopulate Dunkeld in order to increase the extent of his pleasure grounds and park” leads to a lengthy quotation from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* and a plug for the “Society for Improving the Conditions of the Poor,” a goal of which is to counteract “the destructive tendencies of the English Poor Law” (II:101) Bristed is convinced that only direct government assistance can curb aristocratic monopolies and enable the poor to earn their own bread, as opposed to hiking up poor rates. After an unfortunate swim in the Tay in which Bristed cuts his foot, loses a shoe, and blots out half of his diary, they are shown round the Duke's policies by an obsequious English head gardener (II:115) They visit Ossian's Hall on the River Bran, perhaps the most celebrated picturesque site in Scotland, but are unimpressed by its “petty artifice” (II:119) Even the language of Bristed's clumsy attempt at landscape aesthetics here reflects a topography of oppression: “the country round was terrifically grand: far as the eye could range the prospect was bounded by an eternal chain of mountains, whose summits were buried in the clouds” (II:142). Everywhere they find “the recent marks of emigration, in the desertion of the huts and the lamentation of those that were left behind” (II:415)

The most flagrant personification of Ducal tyranny is “Mrs Pennycook,” keeper of an inn half way between Dunkeld and Blair Atholl, “whose flat, fat, bloated carcase, and brandy-drinking face, betokened all the malignity of supercilious ignorance”: to enhance his caricature, Bristed quotes a few devastating stanzas of Burns's song “Willie Wastel's Wife.” Pennycook is a former cook and lackey of the Duke (her inn sports the Atholl crest), typical

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<sup>35</sup> Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 194.

of a dependent class hostile to those whom it “is not in their *interest* to oblige,” while displaying “abject and pitiful servility to all those with whom they are immediately connected by their chains of bondage and of service” (II:141).

However, the hospitality of Macnaughton, keeper of the public house at Blair Atholl on the next stage of their tour, redeems the Highlands from seeming like a Scottish version of Godwin's novel *Things as they Are*. Macnaughton possesses all the exemplary virtues of a Highlander, although he has been radicalised by forced dispossession of his 25-acre farm, and “ground down by taxes and impositions of every kind,” to the point when he now contemplates emigration (II:156). Importantly, he also has “a thorough knowledge of Burns, the new edition of whose works, in four volumes octavo, by Currie of Liverpool, he possesses” and is “rapt in ecstasy by many of the strains of the bard of Coila” (II:154-155). Bristed, also a fervent admirer of Burns, is already on sacred ground (the poet had made an important visit to Blair Atholl in 1787 during his own Highland Tour), which provides the cue for a prolonged 150-page digression on Burns's poetry, on the Scottish peasantry, and on the superiority of Scottish national education. Purportedly based on Bristed's discussions with Macnaughton, in substance this in fact largely derives from Dr James Currie's introductory essay to his edition, “Observations on the Manners of the Scottish Peasantry.”<sup>36</sup> Currie's 1800 edition is commonly blamed for having diluted the radicalism of Burns's poetry, but his analysis of the pathology of poetic genius would have appealed to medical students like Bristed and Cowan. For all his personal faults, Bristed argues, Burns promises a welcome resurrection of British literature, an argument reinforced (incongruously enough) with approving reference to T.J. Mathias's anti-jacobin poem *The Pursuits of Literature*: “the interests of government and of literature are inseparably blended together; they must go hand in hand, or neither of them will prosper” (II, 198). As I've already observed, Bristed's radical principles are often built on shifting sands.

### Intergeneric Contradictions

In my final section, I will consider the contradiction between Bristed's often brutal caricature of plebeian Scots as impoverished (and inhospitable) lackeys of aristocracy, and his idealised portrait of national improvement in the Blair Atholl passage, largely dependent on Currie's ideological

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<sup>36</sup> On Currie's essay, see also my *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late 18th Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 276-92.

interpretation of Burns's pastoral poem "The Cotter's Saturday Night."<sup>37</sup> Here Bristed insists that "the Caledonian peasantry ... are more intelligent, and have their minds more enlightened, than are the understandings of men in the other countries of the globe" (II:268). Moreover, they "surpass their more ignorant neighbours, the English and the Irish, as much *in the purity of their morals* as they do in the extent of their knowledge," resembling the Swiss and the "people of New England": for which reason, "in Scotland, agriculture flourishes, manufactures thrive, commerce abounds, and wealth is continually pouring its golden tide into all her ports" (II:280).

This suggests an answer to the political conundrum that has teased Bristed throughout his pedestrian tour: how to improve the condition of the poor. England should imitate Scotland and establish a national system of parish schools, including institutions dedicated to the fine arts, to raise the lower classes "to the elevated height of mental exertion and of intellectual enjoyment" (II:263). His long digression concludes with the quotation of seven stanzas of Burns's poem "Humble Petition of Bruar Water to the Duke of Atholl," the deferential language of which contrasts sharply with Bristed's earlier denunciations of Atholl's despotism, as it suggests that even Dukes are susceptible of being lectured in the arts of improvement by their social inferiors. Bristed's subsequent account of their visits to John Anderson's Institution in Glasgow, and to David Dale's "little territory" at New Lanark mills, further reinforces the message of Scottish exemplarity.<sup>38</sup>

However, the "suffering traveller" narrative that dominates the final sections of *Anthroplanomenos* rapidly eclipses Bristed's enthusiasm for Burns, Currie, and Scottish improvement, in a vertiginous return to bathos. Judith Thompson has described Thelwall's *Peripatetic* as an "intergeneric conversation," in which sentimentalism and satire, verse and prose, rub up against each other, "like a magazine in which the articles argue, debate, and converse with one another."<sup>39</sup> It's tempting to characterise Bristed's attempt to emulate this style as "intergeneric *contradiction*," given the bathetic disconnection between picturesque and picaresque, squalor and improvement, dirt and deity. Describing their return to Edinburgh "in our present crippled and beggared state," Bristed again verges on self-caricature; as Carl Thompson perceptively indicates, it's a domesticated, de-exoticised

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<sup>37</sup> A poem, Bristed insists, which "every peasant in the kingdom should read and study" (II:208)

<sup>38</sup> By contrast, Bristed also devotes nearly a hundred page to criticizing "the fallen condition...and decaying state of [Edinburgh's] medical school," which may suggest why Bristed abandoned his medical career (II: 536-647 [647]).

<sup>39</sup> Judith Thompson, "Introduction," in John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2001), 40.

version of the heroic sufferings of James Bruce or Mungo Park struggling through the African desert.<sup>40</sup>

At Carnwath, the exhausted travellers swallow “a large wadding of solid opium” washed down with puddle water, which permits them to “crawl on ... at about a mile and a half an hour” (II:866) The opium brings on an insufferable thirst, but when Bristed collapses in a ditch, the selfish Cowan abandons him and plugs on to Edinburgh alone, belying Wordsworth’s praise of the good “heart” that subsists between two pedestrians “plodding slowly along the road, side by side,” compared to “two companions lolling in a post-chaise.”<sup>41</sup> The recumbent Bristed is kicked by a passerby, and “a large shaggy cur ... in order to show his utter contempt for me, lifted up his hinder leg and founted all over the middle of my body” (II:694) Despite being briefly reinvigorated by the sight of a beautiful sunrise (eliciting a spate of quotation from Shakespeare, Thomson and Milton), Bristed again collapses on a bridge near Edinburgh when he overhears a conversation among the local villagers:

Who is that poor miserable wretch?—said one.—A lame, crippled, half-starved sailor,—replied another,—who looks as if he would die before he crawled on another mile.—Whether he dies or not,—observed a third,—it does not signify, he will get nothing from us—But if he should die,—remarked a fourth,—we had better push him off into the river, and his body will float down the stream to some other place, where the people will fancy he has drowned, and may, perhaps, give him a Christian burial (II:699).

It’s hard to gauge a passage like this which solicits the reader’s sympathy in favour of the “philosophical vagabond,” while representing the Scottish poor in such an appalling light, unless we read it as perhaps a caricature (rather than an endorsement) of radical sensibility. Bristed’s “pedestrian peregrination” abruptly grinds to a halt (after more than twelve hundred pages) as he staggers home at 10 am on the 18th August, an event celebrated by the quotation of Burns’s execrable poem “Edina! Scotland’s darling seat” (II:703).

In its long review of *Anthroplanomenos*, the *Monthly Review* asked:

Why are *pedestrian* tours so much more frequent now than they have hitherto been? Is it from the love of singularity and whim, from a necessary regard for economy, or from a laudable persuasion that a

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<sup>40</sup> It is also in many ways reminiscent of Coleridge’s “wild journey” through the Highlands in the summer of 1803: see Carol Kyros Walker, *Breaking Away: Coleridge in Scotland* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 184, quoting his letter to Southey, September 10, 1803.

<sup>41</sup> Wordsworth, “Preface,” to *Descriptive Sketches*, in *Wordsworth: The Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), I: 10.

steady and correct view of a country, of men, and of manners, is most attainable by the humble peripatetic?<sup>42</sup>

The reviewer strongly suspects that Bristed's tour is inspired by the former, by "singularity and whim," rather than the real spirit of improvement.

In the light of his subsequent career, even this may have been a generous interpretation. In 1805, just a couple of years after the publication of *Anthroplanomenos*, Bristed the former radical praised "the permanency and beauty of the English Constitution" which had ensured national stability, compared to "recent events in a neighbouring empire."<sup>43</sup> The following year, he converted his undergraduate role-playing into reality by becoming a citizen of the United States, setting up a law practice in New York City, and in the 1820's taking Anglican orders in Rhode Island. Bristed would never have to rough it again, especially after his marriage in 1820 to the daughter of the American fur magnate John Jacob Astor. On 8th June 1810, John Murray wrote to Bristed inviting him to join William Gifford, Robert Southey, Walter Scott and other "eminent & respectable gentlemen" as a regular reviewer and American correspondent on his new Tory *Quarterly Review*, representing Bristed's final severance from the radical politics that had ostensibly inspired his pedestrian tour nine years earlier.<sup>44</sup> Although Bristed never seems to have contributed to the *Quarterly*, he vented his conservative Federalist politics in his *Resources of the United States* (1818), attacking "the philosophy of ... sans-culotte writers," and hailing the reactionary Lord Castlereagh as "the pacificator of Europe and the deliverer of England."<sup>45</sup>

Bristed's subsequent trajectory perhaps confirm those elements of *Anthroplanomenos* that (as I've hinted) sometimes read like antijacobin satire. After all, Andrew Cowan is often the radical "fall guy" in Bristed's narrative: little wonder that Cowan seems a lot less happy than Bristed with the idea of pedestrian disguise, as if aware that it was a complete betrayal of Rousseau's, Godwin's or Thelwall's liberal principles of social transparency.<sup>46</sup> At times Bristed's tone is reminiscent of Coleridge's "exculpatory" writing in *Biographia Literaria*, notably his facetious account of his youthful pantisocracy scheme, or the radical *Watchman* tour of the Midlands: and as Judith Thompson has suggested, *Biographia* is a book

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<sup>42</sup> *Monthly Review*, as in n. 6 above, 358.

<sup>43</sup> John Bristed, *The Society of Friends, or People Commonly called Quakers, Examined* (London; for J. Mawman and J. White, 1805), 29, 31.

<sup>44</sup> NLS MS.41908, John Murray Letter Book (Mar 1803-11 Sep 1823. 8 Jun 1810): Murray to John Bristed, James Eastburn, Esq., Merchant, New York. Thanks to Matt Sangster for this reference.

<sup>45</sup> John Bristed, *The Resources of the United States of America* (New York: James Eastburn, 1818), 494; reprinted Louisville, KY: Lost Cause Press, 1975.

<sup>46</sup> To date, I've been unable to find anything about Cowan's subsequent career.

whose “intergeneric” form owes something to Thelwall's *Peripatetic* and, perhaps even (if Coleridge will pardon the comparison), to *Anthroplanomenos*.<sup>47</sup> In 1817, a conservative Coleridge appealed to “respectable men” to “bear witness for me, how opposite even then my principles were to those of jacobinism or even of democracy.”<sup>48</sup> Recalling his days as a “philosophical vagabond,” John Bristed the American conservative must have hoped that his facetious, digressive, literary experiment with radical pedestrianism might be read in a similar light.

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<sup>47</sup> Judith Thompson, “Introduction,” as in n. 39 above, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask (London: Everyman, 1997), 103, 106.