

THE URBAN PICTURESQUE IN ENGLISH POETRY:
FROM GAY TO WORDSWORTH

By

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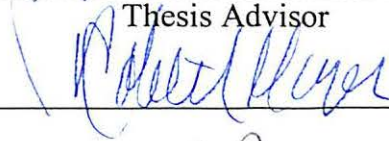
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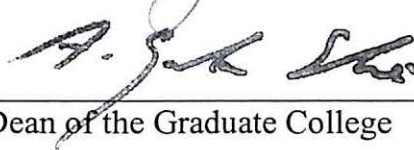
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

John Gay provides one of the most vivid representations of London in his poem *Trivia*. In a semi-satirical look at the “art of walking” the streets of London, Gay creates a very conflicting portrayal of the city. Although he refers to London as “Happy Augusta! law-defended town” (145), he also depicts its corruption: “here dives the skulking thief with practis’d slight” (59). Over one hundred years later, William Wordsworth is similarly struggling to define his relationship to the city. Like Gay, he depicts opposing images of London. In “Upon Westminster Bridge,” Wordsworth writes: “This City now doth, like a garment, wear / The beauty of the morning” (4-5), yet he describes the city in *The Prelude* as “a phantasma / Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!” (7.688). These poets have been categorized as either nature poets who paint a very corrupt city, or as urban poets who only portray the benefits of industry and commerce. Typically, Augustans such as Gay and Johnson have been viewed as urban poets who praise the ever-changing city while the early Romantics have gained the reputation as purely nature poets who abhor the city.

This thesis will focus on three eighteenth-century poets, John Gay, Samuel Johnson, and William Cowper, along with William Wordsworth from the early Romantic period. All of these poets struggle with the relationship of the country to the city and

commonality that exposes and explores the ways in which these poets use what William Gilpin later refers to as the “picturesque” to depict the city long before it became a popular form for defining the country. Thus, the literary term “picturesque” used to explain the ways in which poets depicted the country in the late eighteenth-century, actually existed in the early eighteenth century beginning with Gay to describe the urban landscape. In addition, the conflicting images that provided a tone of ambivalence in the writings of later eighteenth-century poets, actually existed earlier through poets such as Gay and Johnson who portrayed urban landscapes. Malcolm Andrews refers to the contrasting images that characterize the picturesque as “controlled pattern[s] of contrasts” or the “order in variety” (*Search for the Picturesque* 23). It is only through the poet’s ability to group these images, by attempting to categorize or create a pattern that, at first, appears oppositional that they can discuss the city/country antithesis. By writing about these contrasting images, the poets attempt to control a very diverse subject (i.e., the city).

I shall analyze poems reflecting each writer’s views of the city and the country and the underlying values that can be deduced from these views. The images of the city change from the more realistic in the Augustan period to the monstrous in the Romantic. However, despite these apparent changes, the poets continue to express an ambiguity when writing of London. While they revere nature, they simultaneously display its chaos, and while they portray the chaos of the city, they also reveal its inspiration for the poet. These conflicting images typify the depictions of the picturesque urban landscape.

Interpretations of the city have changed with time. According to Michael Gassenmeier, the negative portrayal of the city started “after London’s support for the

parliamentary opposition in the Civil War became manifest” (305). At this time, Cowley, in his poem *The Civil War* (1643), refers to London as the “seed bed of rebellion.” Even earlier, in John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (1642), although this poem marked unchartered ground as it replaced Augustan Rome with an English landscape, “the city is a place of horror in which an unscrupulous commercial class victimizes its citizens with ever new ‘imaginary wants’” (Gassenmeier 305). This negative urban image continued to flourish after the Plague and Great Fire, but the descriptions of the city changed after the Glorious Revolution when James II, “who had enslaved the city and deprived her of her charter, fled to St. Germain, when the Tories and their concept of divine right disintegrated as a political force, and their powerful poet-laureate John Dryden had to quit the arena” (Gassenmeier 306). London, then, became thought of as a major political and economic empire.

Poets after Dryden did not adopt his optimism, however. Instead, they seem caught between wanting to praise London for its economic opportunities and wanting to scold it for its crime, avarice, and moral degradation. London suddenly appears as a threat to the innocence of the country and to the morals of society. As the city experiences rapid change, poets grapple with words to express their feelings for their relationship to this new metropolis. Not knowing whether to embrace it or rebuke it, poets of the eighteenth and even early nineteenth-century find themselves doing both, thus creating an ambivalent tone to their poetry. Their ambivalence expresses the changing values attached to both city and country.

In order to define the city, it is important to understand its antithesis: the country or nature. The concept of nature as the essence of the countryside became popular

through poets such as Thomson and Cowper who rejected the artificiality of the formal pastoral from the previous century (Bunce 40). Later, in the early nineteenth-century, the image of nature includes Wordsworth's wilder landscapes set in the Lake District. For the Poets of Sensibility, nature incorporated man-made gardens, such as Cowper's greenhouse, but progressed to reflect a more sublime landscape in the early Romantics. According to Donna Landry, it was during the Game Act of 1671 and its repeal in 1831 that 'countryside' "ceased to refer to a specific side – east or west, north or south – of a piece of country, or a river valley, or a range of hills, and became 'the countryside,' an imaginary, generalized space" (1). This "generalized space" eventually developed into a literary representation of the countryside landscape. Therefore, the 'country' held different meanings for each individual poet, representing nature, man-made gardens (both in the city and country), and, as with Cowper and Wordsworth, an imaginary inner landscape. The city, on the other hand, represented commercial opportunity, human industry, pollution, disease, and avarice.

While the country rapidly evolved, the city experienced even more change in the eighteenth-century. Roy Porter explains that "London dominated the nation like no other capital" (131).¹ Due to a mass of migrants from other countries and even from the English countryside itself, the city continued to grow at alarming rates. Commenting on the influx of country residents, agrarian writer Arthur Young, in 1771, notes:

they enter into service in the country for little else but to
raise money enough to go to London, which was no easy
matter when a stage coach was four or five days creeping

¹ "London continued to swell, rising, in round figures, from 200,000 in 1600 to 400,000 in 1650, 575,000 by the end of the century, 675,000 in 1750 and 900,000 by 1801, when the first census provides a definite figure" (Porter 131).

an hundred miles; and the fare and the expenses ran high.

But now! a country fellow one hundred miles from London jumps on a coach-box in the morning and for eight or ten shillings gets to town by night, which makes a material difference; [they] quit their clean healthy fields for a region of dirt, stink and noise (Porter 133).

Many rural laborers lamented and even resented this sudden exodus to the city. Young acknowledges the improvements in travel that made the abandonment of the country much easier. Communication between London and the surrounding countryside improved as coastal shipping between London and provincial ports became more common, and as road carriers appeared along with stagecoaches (Porter 135).²

Thus, a rapidly changing country landscape coupled with a run-away city caused the poets of the eighteenth-century not only to look back to what seemed to be a more pleasing past, but also to create an ideal refuge - an Eden that only existed in literature, painting, and even the parks of wealthy people. Because the natural countryside no longer existed due to enclosures, the poets had to create their own descriptions/definitions of a natural landscape contrasted with the urban environment. Just as Brown, Repton, and Loudon attempted to regain the natural look of the countryside by duplicating the natural landscape in the English garden, the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets attempted this same duplication in their writings. However, the product of the poets' quest to recapture a lost landscape is a man-made endeavor, an artificial form of naturalness that becomes something fabricated instead of real. As the image of the countryside changed due to physical elements such as enclosures, migration of urban

² Porter contends that "by 1681 London was linked to 88 towns, and by 1705 to 180" (135).

gentry, etc., the created Eden-like image of the country flourished as well; poets continue to refer to an idealized rural setting that serves as an escape from their urban surroundings. Likewise, by the middle of the eighteenth-century, when land enclosures reach their peak, poetic narrators, in their depictions of the city, appear more distant, as in Cowper's narrator who seems omnipresent as he views both the city and country from a global standpoint. Although Wordsworth's narrator also remains apart from the crowd on his showman's platform (*The Prelude* Book 7), he views the city that affects him personally, a city that has grown monstrous, a parade of images that has become artificial. Unlike Gay, Johnson, and Cowper, Wordsworth acknowledges in his poetry that everything in the urban environment influences his perspective.

Without a clear sense of the difference between natural and artificial, they had no means by which to define the city. The following account argues that poets are in the process of trying to define differences even though in their attempts, they use conventional means by which to address what they consider artificial. For example, by creating an inner landscape of an ideal country setting, writers such as Cowper and Wordsworth use artificial means to achieve a stylized landscape.

In order to create and arrange natural objects, landscape designers took much of their inspiration from pictures. Thus, the picturesque, although it strives to create the look of the original landscape, includes the man-made means by which to accomplish this goal. Robinson explains that landscape compositions were a combination of two natures, God's and man's (103). In addition, designers believed that as long as the artifice was not obvious, it was acceptable for concealment of unacceptable elements. The urban picturesque differs, in this respect, from the rural picturesque. In Cowper's depiction of

the city, he shows us that “so fair/ May yet be foul; so witty, yet not wise” (*The Task* 1.27-28). Eighteenth-century poets who used the picturesque to depict the city did not conceal the less desirable qualities; if anything, they made them more obvious. Gay does not allow “the paths of fair Pell-Mell” (*Trivia* 2.257), where the pavements are safe for the London resident, to become an artifice to hide the more dangerous areas where the “skulking thief with practis’d slight / And unfelt fingers make thy pocket light” (3.59-60). In an attempt not to be artificial, urban poets of the eighteenth century displayed the city as brash and unforgiving. At times, however, their attempts to reveal an actual urban landscape cause them to exaggerate the negative qualities of the city. Cowper, for example, claims that merchants “build factories with blood, conducting trade / At the sword’s point” (*The Task* 4. 681-82).

Scholarly work has typically identified the picturesque as that which defines rural landscapes of the late eighteenth-century, and very little has been written concerning how the picturesque applies to the urban landscape. When scholars discuss the picturesque in terms of the city, their discussions center around Victorian London and the work of Dickens. Malcolm Andrews, in his article “The Metropolitan Picturesque,” places the picturesque in an “unfamiliar context” and thereby tests the limits of “the conventional association of the Picturesque” (282). Andrews contends that, beginning in the nineteenth-century, the objects of the picturesque were no longer the isolated rural inhabitants that created a sense of the sublime in nature, but they included the working classes who were subject to poverty: “in the London Rookeries the street vagrants and communities of the poor become indistinguishable from the criminal underworld to which every citizen was immediately prey” (“Metropolitan Picturesque” 287). However,

this marriage of the picturesque with the working classes, the urban inhabitants, did not originate in the nineteenth-century. Instead, I argue that it developed as early as Gay's walk through London in *Trivia* as he portrays the baker, chimney-sweeper, butcher, along with the whore and rake. Andrews further contends that in the eighteenth-century, the picturesque was "founded largely on the aesthetics of poverty, neglect and decay" (288), which created what he calls a "detached spectator" (288). Consequently, by the middle of the nineteenth-century, writers such as Dickens and Ruskin restructured the picturesque in order to appeal to a more sympathetic spectator. The following discussions define the picturesque narrator as a type of spectator, as a detached guide, but his detachment is not influenced by the poverty of the landscape but by his inability to join the crowds. The narrator's role as onlooker of the picturesque allows him to remain an objective guide, to view the city from a distance, yet speak to the reader at the same time. Furthermore, Andrews claims that the "metropolitan Picturesque had somehow to absorb, adapt or reconstruct the older relish for the antique, the ruined and the obsolescent, subjects which, in a rural context, seemed unaccountably glamourised by the depredations of time" (290). Conversely, the urban picturesque did not exactly follow the depictions/characteristics of the rural picturesque. Andrews compares the two as if they are identical when each actually has very distinct qualities. The poets who address the urban picturesque are not as concerned about reflecting and glamorizing the dilapidated, antique, buildings, but possess a desire to move away from the pastoral past, to portray the actual city landscape with both its pleasing and disturbing features. Therefore, like Andrews, I intend to examine the picturesque in a non-traditional context. However, unlike Andrews who focuses on the Victorians, such as Dickens and Ruskin, as

the originators of the urban picturesque, I contend that Gay introduced the urban picturesque landscape in the early eighteenth-century.

Although the term “picturesque” was not introduced until the late eighteenth-century when William Gilpin published journals of his tours around Britain, the characteristics of the picturesque originated in the early eighteenth-century in literary depictions of urban landscapes. Gay exposes qualities of this new movement as it relates to the city in *Trivia*. Johnson continues this same realistic portrayal exposing the irregularities of the city landscape, while Cowper unites both the city and the country through the picturesque. Then, just as Loudon creates the “gardenesque” philosophy of landscape design as he narrows his focus to specific objects in the landscape, Wordsworth adopts the same approach to the city. Gilpin feels that the picturesque should survey nature: “It throws its glance around in the broadest style. It comprehends an extensive tract at each sweep. It examines parts, but never descends to particles” (Bermingham 120). Likewise, the urban picturesque surveys the city revealing the contrasting images found throughout. Because the urban picturesque poets seek to portray the actual city ~~that they witness~~, they expose both the positive and negative aspects of London, thereby creating an ambivalent tone to their poetry. Finally, the urban picturesque contains a detached narrator who remains an observer of his surroundings but never a participant.

This thesis examines how each poet addresses the city within his poetry, how their descriptions of its disagreeable aspects actually create the opposite affect for the reader, revealing, instead, the city’s allure to the poet. It also examines the poetic characters

portrayed in the city and discusses their usefulness to an understanding of the poet's perception of the urban landscape.

The urban picturesque poem originated with Gay's *Trivia* and then resurfaced in Johnson's "London" in 1732. Both Gay and Johnson create an urban landscape by portraying the specific characteristics of the city, its sights, sounds, smells – pleasing and horrific at the same time. While Gay and Johnson provide mainly urban depictions, Cowper presents both the picturesque urban landscape along with the rural landscape. Through *The Task*, Cowper continues in the tradition of Gay and Johnson by displaying a detached narrator who portrays a city built on conflicting images, and, at the same time, exposes the country as it relates to the city. Although the term "picturesque" does not become popular until Cowper's time, I argue that this mode of interpreting and recording the city has been in effect since the early eighteenth-century. Through Cowper, we understand how the poet struggles to define his relationship to both urban and rural landscapes, and how he must voice through his poetry his connection to each one. Furthermore, Cowper introduces the inner landscape of the poet that remains in opposition to the actual landscape. The urban picturesque mode continues into the early nineteenth-century through the work of Wordsworth as he depicts a city that contains a mixture of conflicting elements "a Parliament of Monsters" and "the quick dance / Of colours, lights, and forms" in *The Prelude* (Book Seven). Wordsworth, however, moves in a new direction as he focuses on specific objects and named places in the landscape as opposed to general localities. Just as the rural landscape becomes more artificial through landscape design and literature, the urban landscape also grows more monstrous and more exaggerated beginning with Wordsworth's urban writings. Wordsworth continues

in the tradition of the previous three poets by relating the detached narrator to the picturesque, and characterizing the picturesque as that which contains inconsistent images. He further defines the urban picturesque, however, by portraying the interrelated qualities of the inner landscape of the poet's mind to the actual urban landscape that the poet witnesses. Thus, the urban picturesque begins in 1717 with Gay's poem *Trivia* and continues, eventually codified, through Wordsworth's depictions in the nineteenth century. Poets and novelists after Wordsworth, such as Dickens and Eliot, continue to address the city in the same picturesque terms, revealing a city that both excites and terrifies them.

CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF THE URBAN PICTURESQUE: GAY'S *TRIVIA* AND JOHNSON'S "LONDON"

Introduction

Although both Gay and Johnson imitate classical models, they move beyond their predecessors by defining a new way to approach the city, to write about a subject that is still fresh, varied, and, at times, incomprehensible. Gay uses the model of Virgil's *Georgics*, not to write about a harmonious eighteenth-century countryside, but to write, instead, about a larger-than-life city. Likewise, Johnson addresses the same city through an imitation of Juvenal, fitting it to reflect the eighteenth-century city in which he lived. The ensuing discussion will consider why each poet feels compelled to address the city, how they use the picturesque mode to reflect the city, and how their narrators function as onlookers and detached guides. Both Gay and Johnson, although in different ways, encourage their readers to engage in the city, not to abandon it for an ideal countryside that has never really existed. Gay encourages his reader to participate in the city, to remain actively involved in everything the city offers, from commercial, educational, and even recreational opportunities. Johnson encourages his reader not to look for an escape from the city but to accept its raw, uncontrollable features as a different form of

naturalness. Even with the multitude of negative elements in the city, these poets request that their eighteenth-century reader find value in what the city offers.

Gay's *Trivia*

Through neoclassical modes, mixing Georgic with satire, John Gay provides skills necessary to survive urban life in his poem *Trivia* (1717). Although Gay warns of the dangers of the city, he also conveys its vibrancy and the wealth of opportunity it affords. Stephen Copley and Ian Haywood note that critics have found it difficult to define “the tone of Gay’s verse, in particular . . . trying to decide whether it is satirical or celebratory in its depiction of society” (65). Since Gay both praises the city and reveals its dangers, to categorize the poem as either satirical or celebratory is ultimately impossible. Instead, Gay’s main goal involves the depiction of the city as good and bad. As Tom Woodman explains, “if the poem shows the dirt and danger of London, it is also full of the attractive liveliness and variety of its sights and sounds” (85). Just as the landscape painters and architects of the eighteenth-century portray the picturesque by representing the rolling hills and jagged rocks, so Gay uses the same technique to describe the city. Similarly, just as eighteenth-century poets substituted classical sites for landscapes in and around London (i.e., the Thames took the place of the Roman Tiber) Gay substituted the Georgic rural landscape for the urban landscape of London. While Gay could have written a more pastoral view of the city, he chose instead to express a picturesque view of an actual landscape with attractive and raw features. At the same time, however, the literary picturesque is also artificial. Just as landscape designers used nature only as a reference point and then manipulated its elements to fit an overall composition, urban writers,

starting with Gay, selectively present the city to their readers. Thus, a reader of Gay's *Trivia* approaches the city through the eyes of his narrator, as the narrator points out only what he wants the reader to witness. Gay's urban landscape consists of a detached narrator, a diverse subject, and contrasting images, all characteristics of the urban picturesque.

Gay's narrator selects elements of the urban picturesque that allows for opposing images such as Gay's condemnation and praise of industry. The narrator of the picturesque is an educator, a guide, who moves throughout the poem describing and detailing the complexities of his subject, refusing to shade over imperfections or flaws. In addition, by looking closely at Gay's own life, we understand that the literary narrator of the urban picturesque does not necessarily represent the poet himself.

Through *Trivia*, Gay portrays the walker in conflict with his surroundings yet excited by its activity. Vinton Dearing explains that although the walker experiences disharmony with the jostling crowds, the severe weather, and the riotous celebrations, "the positive sense of the city also emerges steadily, though its dangers are great" (547). Because the walker is much more of an observer than a participant in the streets, he belongs neither to the city nor to the country. The youthful walker does not specifically mention having an occupation, yet he gives money to the lame and blind (2.453). He walks around a city that neither fully rejects nor embraces him. While he has witnessed riots (395), he has not participated in them, and while he has watched "bustling crouds," he has never really been a part of them. Instead, he walks alone with his imaginary reader "through the long Strand" conversing (2.479). The walker is no more a part of this

city than his reader, but because he has been there before and knows the way, he writes with a voice of authority.

Gay admires the sense of constant activity along with the opportunity offered in the city. Gay highly regards the industrious citizen who actively participates in the city – such as the black youth who yells “clean your shoes” (1.24). He enjoys the sounds of industry as he hears “treble voices ring” as they “sell the bounteous product of the spring” (2.427-28), and admonishes even those who are not working, but are actively involved. He notices the “ladies gaily dress’d” (1.145) who obviously have a place to go, a destination. Likewise, he enjoys witnessing the football war near Covent Garden and seeing the “prentice” leave his shop to join the game (*Trivia* 2.349). Along with the activity of the city, he admires the opportunities and the variety that it provides. Not only can one participate in the city, but all learning is also available as “volumes on shelter’d stalls expanded lye” (2.551). Gay portrays limitless books waiting on protected shelves as if they are sacred. Overall, Gay admires those who actively live their lives, who do not merely observe their surroundings but participate in them. From the hard working industrialist, to the socialite, to the young man who stops to enjoy a moment of fun, all seize opportunities. Each of these opportunities is uniquely offered through the city and cannot be provided elsewhere. What Gay admires most is the opportunity available for the city dweller.

Gay views everyone in the city as either part of a crowd or as belonging to his or her occupation (he never uses names to refer to individuals in the city). He begins by stating that he will warn his reader how to avoid the “jostling crowds” (3) and then continues to refer to the “gaping crowd” (2.221), the “throng” (2.353), “crouds heap’d on

crowds” (3.27), the “rude throng” (3.87), and, finally, “bustling crowds” (3. 395). Gay wants to belong to the crowd, to be the prentice who joins the football war, but he, instead, remains an onlooker due to his occupation as guide. The only time he identifies a character is when he digresses into a mythological story about the goddess Cloacina and the birth of her son.

Because the walker observes the town, rather than participating in it, he remains alienated from that which he most admires (everyone has a specific role or job to perform except, apparently, the poet). Although the walker also has a specific responsibility, as a guide to those who are new to the city, his role keeps him from being an active member of the crowds that comprise the city. Gay values the crowds because they are not stagnant; their mobility gives them importance. In the urban picturesque mode, poets remain outside of their subjects in order to provide a more objective account of the city and its inhabitants. Out of necessity, Gay’s narrator must retain a sense of mobility, a constant movement in order to reflect the overall urban portrayal.

Much that Gay finds redeeming in the city includes its byproduct - industry.

Trivia portrays people actively involved in a trade, in a city alive and prolific.

Throughout his letters to Swift, Gay comments on the importance of keeping busy and remaining productive. In a letter dated November 16, 1732 he writes: “I have not been idle while I was in the country; and I know your wishes in general, and in particular, that industry may always find its account” (*Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*). Therefore, the sounds of industry are pleasing to Gay as he hears the “shops open, coaches roll, carts shake the ground / And all the streets with passing cries resound” (2.25-26). Later, in Book II, he proclaims “Hark, how the streets with treble voices ring / To sell the

bounteous product of the spring” (2.430). Gay praises the multitude of products that can be found in London such as veal, cheese, fruits, old books, and old suits (2.543-50).³ Even industry is not portrayed as purely beneficial, however. Though the boot black boy is saved when Cloacina places a brush in his hands, and as “industry awakes her busie sons” (2.21), Gay still describes the negative aspects of a city bustling with merchants. He warns the walker to stay away from the perfumer, the baker, the chimney-sweeper, the dust-man, the chandler, and the butcher because they might soil his clothes or harm his eyes (2.25-44). Although “the voice of industry is always near” (2.100), the reader is never sure whether this voice is a positive element of the city or a negative influence. The contrasting depictions of human industry expose elements of the urban picturesque.

Trivia is laden with paradoxical images that create this ambiguous sense of the city, one that contains “jostling crowds” (3) yet “spacious streets” (6), inclement weather “when suffocating mists obscure the morn” (125) or pleasant weather when “the ladies gayly dress’d, the Mall adorn / With various dyes, and paint the sunny morn” (146). While Gay warns his reader of the shady characters that inhabit the city, he also represents trustworthy individuals such as the sworn porter, grave tradesman, and watchman who guard the city. Even as the walker finds danger in the narrow streets where “no rang’d posts defend the rugged way” (2.228), he also finds solace in alleys where “wheels ne’er shake the ground” (2.273). These inconsistent images expose the good and bad of London and typify the picturesque.

³ “Compared with previous generations the English were said to be buying more than ever before, compared with other nations they were said to own more than anyone else, compared with both a greater proportion of English society was said to be involved in buying an unprecedented range of household goods” (McKendrick 25).

In order to reveal an actual landscape, as opposed to a pastoral landscape, writers tried to expose all images of the city and their efforts to do so lead to an inconsistency. Inconsistent images are, therefore, a character of the picturesque. The picturesque never accepts certainty, and because nothing remains completely untouched or pure in the picturesque mode, it relies on the contradictory descriptions to provide its own accuracy. In essence, “the picturesque tries to find a way to incorporate doubt into compositional activity . . . As a corrective it concentrates on moments between vigorous acquisition and fertile dissolution” (Robinson 150). The picturesque never wants its reader to view a landscape as one-dimensional, but, just as Gay shows us in *Trivia*, the landscape is multi-dimensional and must be examined with an inquisitive, and even doubtful, eye. The extremes of “acquisition” and “dissolution” characterize the picturesque, not only for rural landscapes (Robinson’s main emphasis) but for urban landscapes as well.

Gay struggles with his need to describe the city in concrete terms when nothing remains constant. For example, the narrator describes a city alley as a refuge from the “noisy roads” (2.271) – a place where he can actually look people in the eye, study their faces, and determine their business without even speaking to them. People have separate identities; each walker has a “different face” (2.275) in these “close abodes” (272), and even though the characters, such as the broker and “lavish rake” (2.277, 283), are not reputable, he finds solace in this part of the city. However, in Book Three, he cautions the reader to avoid the alley at night: “Yet ne’er to those dark paths by night retire / Mind only safety, and contemn the mire” (129-30). Gay has discovered a city that must be approached cautiously because it operates on a complex set of rules. For example, the

alley is only favorable during the day but must be avoided at night. Gay finds both danger and solace in the city, creating, once again, contrasting depictions.

The walker is regularly in danger from other people, the weather, coaches, various festivals, plagues, and fires. As the walker pauses to listen to the ballad of Cloacina, “new dangers round him throng” (219) and he must continually move to avoid calamity. The danger increases as the poem progresses. In the beginning, the walker need only worry about the weather, making sure he has appropriate shoes and outerwear to battle the rain and cold. Later, he must concern himself with avoiding those merchants who might dirty his clothes, finding the most convenient and safest places to walk, and dodging raucous celebrations in the streets. By Book Three, the walker has greater concerns since he must maneuver through the city at night. As “crouds heap’d on crouds appear” (27), the walker must beware of pickpockets, whores, and rakes. Even ballad singers who should provide a pleasant break from the hectic pace of the city, are referred to as “sirens” because they tempt the walker to stop and listen, making him more susceptible to pickpockets. Likewise, the walker explains that the crutch carrying man may evoke compassion from people during the day, but turns into a thief at night as he uses his crutch to “wound / Thy bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground” (3.136-37). Other dangers include losing one’s companion in the throng of people, for the city threatens to separate rather than unify in this latter book. The exciting, active, and industrious crowds of Book One have become dangerous by Book Three: “When from high spouts the dashing torrents fall / Ever be watchful to maintain the wall / For should’st thou quit thy ground, the rushing throng / Will with impetuous fury drive along” (205-8). This last book depicts the final degradation of the city as it ends with

“the spiry flames” that “lift aloft their heads” (3.358), and just like Naples’ fate, the “fiery flood” splits apart Earth’s womb (i.e., nature) and the towers of the city fall at the same time. Gay concludes his poem with an exaggerated cause/effect relationship where the fire from the city creates the complete destruction of London and its countryside.

Only a few years before Gay wrote *Trivia*, Joseph Addison summarized his countrymen’s views of industry and commerce. In *The Spectator*, Addison writes: “there are not more useful Members in a Common-wealth than Merchants. They knot Mankind together in a mutual Intercourse of good Offices, distribute the Gifts of Nature, find Work for the Poor, add Wealth to the Rich, and Magnificence to the Great” (May 19,1711). In *Trivia*, Gay carries Addison’s statement further by acknowledging the benefit of merchants but also exposing what industry does to the city as “shops open, coaches roll, carts shake the ground” (323) and how the eighteenth-century city both tempts and repels the walker. Although writers such as Gay and Addison respected industrious men who worked hard, they were, at the same time, leery of where aspirations for success would lead. During this time, the fear of social disorder was heightened (Crawford 57), and this is reflected in *Trivia* as Gay laments that “gaudy pride corrupts the lavish age / And the streets flame with glaring equipage” (113-14). The narrator praises the porter who “bends beneath his load” (2.49) but condemns the broker who “laughs at honesty” (1.117-18).

Gay’s use of vivid, overly dramatic, language to describe negative elements of the city causes the reader to question his sincerity. Within dangerous elements, Gay finds stimulating qualities. The poet beckons his reader to walk through the city, to embrace all that it offers gain inspiration from its variety and excitement from its dangerous

elements, and yet also to beware of its pitfalls. In this way, Gay becomes an educator, the walker's guide. Early in the poem, he establishes this role as he hopes to "build a glorious name / To tread in paths to ancient bards unknown / And bind my temples with a Civic crown" (1.18-20). Interestingly enough, the narrator's form of instruction leaves the reader unclear whether certain elements of the city are actually dangerous since the language used to illustrate a dangerous element of the city is frequently vivid, expressive, and compelling. For example, when the walker happens across the football war, he seems trapped yet excited to be a part of the game: "The gath'ring globe augments with ev'ry round / But whither shall I run? The throng draws nigh / The ball now skims the street, now soars on high" (2.352-54). In this description, the encroaching crowds seem far from threatening; instead, they entice the walker, quench his curiosity, and provide him with even more knowledge of the city and its vitality. Likewise, while warning the walker of the dangers of the prostitute, Gay uses seductive language to link her to the city, for just as the city's "cheeks grow warm with rural red" (2.266), her "hollow cheeks with artful blushes glow" (2.272). Gay asks his readers to be "careful observers, studious of the town" (2.285). He requires that they not shun the town entirely, but embrace it cautiously: "Let constant vigilance thy footsteps guide / And wary circumspection guard thy side / Then shalt thou walk unharm'd the dang'rous night" (3.110-13). As Dianne Dugaw notes, Gay warns the reader of correct apparel, provides instruction on appropriate behavior, and gives advice on directions and safety (112). Gay requests that his readers be careful observers not only of the various elements that comprise the city but also of the ways in which the poet describes the city.

Cynthia Wall contends that the limitless quality of the city creates in Gay a need to feel in control of his surroundings: “Gay’s poem reads confidently, optimistically, the need for negotiation or containment not urgently ideological but practical, sensible” (133). Gay enjoys the variety of the city (both its good and bad features) but his descriptions of the city serve as an attempt to contain the out-of-control elements that comprise the city. As Wall points out, the poem does not present ideological ways in which to control the city, but focuses on practical ways in which the city can be enjoyed despite its limitless quality. The extravagance of this run-away city surfaces not only in its growing population and in its crowded streets, but also in its abundance of luxury. He warns the reader that practicality is the only way to maneuver around the city: “Let beaus their canes with amber tipt produce / Be theirs for empty show, but thine for use” (1.68-69). The emphasis on practical ways to maneuver around the city provides Gay with a way to control his subject.

As educator, Gay reveals a moral theme as well, by denouncing those who seek luxury and ease over industry. Consequently, Cowper portrays the sofa as a symbol of dangerous ease in *The Task*, and Gay introduces those who ride in coaches as practitioners of a lifestyle of luxury and idleness. As an antithesis to these individuals, he presents the walker who is keenly aware of his urban surroundings even though he is consequently more susceptible to the dangers of the city. Gay even characterizes him as more compassionate than those who seek the luxury of the coach:

Proud coaches pass, regardless of the moan
Of infant orphans, and the widow’s groan;

While Charity still moves the walker's mind,

His lib'ral purse relieves the lame and blind. (2.451-54)

Those riding in coaches may not hear or even notice the needy orphans and widows, or, conversely, they may see the need but refuse to stop. Because the walker remains close to the people, he is more aware of and connected to everything that is going on in the city. The poet suggests, inadvertently, that the walker may not have as much to give but gives anyway unlike those who ride in coaches and ignore the needs of others. Gay comments on a changing society that has become much more mobile, which, in turn, means more distanced, and Gay values the walker because he has found a way to remain attached to the city through his role as guide/educator.

According to Copley and Haywood, the walker is “apparently qualified as a moral commentator purely by virtue of the fact that he is walking . . . This gives him a particular perspective on society, on its economy and on the luxury and waste which characterize it” (73). Gay establishes the walker as a generous individual, a qualified commentator, and one who is not beset by the physical ailments inflicted on those who ride in coaches. However, the narrator does not want his reader to think that the walker has never suffered. At the end of the poem, he describes the fatigue of walking the city streets and the “toils, the perils of the wintry town” (394) and describes witnessing “riots” while braving large crowds. Through this comparison of the rider and the walker, Gay clearly reveals that it is much more admirable to suffer from the fatigue of exercise than it is to suffer from diseases that result from inactivity.

Much of Gay's discussion of coaches is a reflection of his age as more and more people relied on coaches for transportation. According to Porter, mail coaches left every

evening after first loading up passengers and “by 1700 there were three deliveries a week from and into London” (135). Gay addresses this new way of travel with a voice of pessimism; instead of progress, he depicts the new mode of transportation as a sign of laziness: “May the proud chariot never be my fate” (2.587). Therefore, Gay’s poem becomes morally didactic in that it teaches its reader an important lesson: hard work provides contentment, while luxury leads to avarice.

Trivia beckons the reader to retain the intimacy with the city through the act of walking since the expansion of city limits will soon make walking undesirable and impractical. Due to London’s rapid growth rate, it has become impossible for the eighteenth-century citizen to see all of its attractions on foot. Much of the poet’s frustration lies in the fact that another form of transportation such as coaches is quickly becoming a necessity rather than a luxury. Defoe comments on London’s rapid growth in *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* when he asks in 1724: “Whither will this monstrous city then extend? And where must a circumvallation or communication line of it be placed” (288)? Frustrated, yet astounded, by the way in which the city seems to spread out in all directions “as the convenience of the people directs” (286), Defoe finds this sense of haphazard expansion disturbing. By questioning how people will maneuver through such a city and how they will communicate to each other through such distance, Defoe echoes, although more overtly, what Gay is also saying in *Trivia*. While Gay excitedly embraces this new commercial city, he realizes that the intimacy of its close quarters, the ability to identify specific areas by their smells and sounds, will soon be lost.

Ironically enough, in his own life, Gay was not known for walking around the town. In a letter dated May 4, 1732, Swift writes:

You pretend to preach up riding and walking to the Duchess, yet, from my knowledge of you after twenty years, you always joined a violent desire of perpetually shifting places and company, with a rooted laziness, and an utter impatience of fatigue. A coach and six horses is the utmost exercise you can bear, and this only when you can fill it with such company as is best suited to your taste. (*Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*)

Gay never meant to fool his friends by trying to pretend that he was actually the walker in *Trivia*. Pope, Swift, and other contemporaries knew Gay too well to be deceived through such pretense. Instead, Gay plays the citizen who rides in “gilded chariots” and “loll[s] at ease” (69). In fact, one of Gay’s original aims was to write a satire and “his first target was himself” (Burgess 54). Throughout his letters to Swift, Gay refers to a desire to exercise more frequently but is constantly plagued with an illness that prevents him from doing so.⁴ Gay admires and even wants to become *Trivia*’s walker but can only attempt this through his writing. Once again, the dichotomy of observer/participant and the inconsistency of the narrator mirror the conflicting images throughout the poem, reflecting a feature of the picturesque mode.

By 1730, it appears that Gay has secluded himself so much that he needs the stimulation of the city. Alexander Pope writes in a letter dated October 23, 1730: “I also wish you were not so totally immers’d in the country; I hope your return to Town will be a prevalent remedy against the evil of too much recollection” (142). Pope alludes to the chaos that Gay describes in *Trivia* as something positive, as a diversion from the danger

⁴ In a letter to Swift on May 16, 1732, Gay writes: “As for myself, I am often troubled with the colic.”

of too much solitude in the country. Pope refers to Gay as not just being engaged in the country at this time in his life, but being totally immersed in it. He views Gay's return to London as a remedy as if from a disease – too much solitude allows for dangerous recollection (i.e., introspection which can create discontentment). Pope's statement assumes that isolation from the city creates its own evils. Although London's growth rate is not experiencing the alarming rate that it faces later in the eighteenth-century, and although the industrial revolution has not officially arrived at this time, Gay felt called to address a rapidly evolving city rather than a stagnant countryside.

John Johnston contends that ultimately in *Trivia* “we are left with an extended joke, some incomparably vivid descriptions of city scenes, some rather routine social criticism, and, on our part, a puzzled sense of inconsequentiality” (52). However, what is consequential for a study of the eighteenth-century city is *Trivia*'s portrayal of a new *Georgic*, one that portrays the urban picturesque: “With a realism that is unparalleled in his time except by Swift, Gay describes the wretched condition of the pavements, rough cobblestones with the gutter in the middle of the street” (Irving 153). Gay exposes both the benefits of urban commerce without forgetting the reality of urban crime. Instead of Virgil's Rome as the antithesis to the countryside, Gay presents London as containing elements of splendor and squalor, order and disorder, chaos and peace. Long before Gilpin developed the picturesque style of portraying the country, Gay used this technique to describe the city.

According to Patricia Spacks, while *The Shepherd's Week* expressed Gay's ambiguous feelings “about the country life he had abandoned” (41), *Trivia* conveys this same ambiguity in respect to the city life that he had chosen. *Trivia* depicts the realism of

the city and *The Shepherd's Week* depicts the realism of the country, but, as Spacks contends, Gay was not fully comfortable in either world. Spacks argues that Gay has “found a mask that does not entirely obscure his own features: uncomfortable in the total guise of sophisticate, unwilling to commit himself completely to the unfashionable posture of a lover of the country, he adapts many voices to his own use” (40). Much of his feeling of alienation stems from the extreme changes taking place in the rural and urban environments. As the countryside continues to face enclosures, appearing more artificial, the city appears even more remote as the growth rate continues to climb. However, by the time he published *Trivia*, Gay was more firmly committed to London life and now “a member of the best literary society” - the Scriblerus Club (Spacks 41).⁵

While the walker moves about the city as guide and educator, he retains an objectivity while never completely praising or rebuking any one aspect. Gay's landscape includes the dangerous inhabitants of the city along with the sworn porter; he refuses to ignore the bad when portraying the good. *Trivia's* walker carefully and selectively introduces his reader to the London streets, and at the same time, quietly suggests that this new, enlarging, city will no longer welcome intimacy. The narrator's advice to his walking companion is critical because it provides a way for him (the reader) to retain intimacy with the city by walking.

⁵ The Club must have started shortly after Gay's return from the country in November, 1713. According to William Irving, “it was to be ridicule of pedantry then, that would focus the discussions and writing of the group, whether the pedantic dunces applied their efforts to poetry, learning, natural philosophy, medicine, or the law” (96).

Johnson's "London"

While Gay overtly examines the positive and negative elements of the city, Johnson provides a one-sided view of the city. Throughout his poem, Johnson maintains a variety of objectives – he rebukes the political leaders of his day, comments on a society that has lost all morality, and grapples with trying to depict a city that seems alien yet familiar to him. Johnson's narrator, Thales, like Gay's unnamed narrator, remains detached from the city - he is a guide for the reader. For Johnson, London is a repetitive motif (as it mirrors Juvenal's Rome); it is not suitable for the innocent; it can be dangerous, yet it is more natural than the artificial countryside. Johnson portrays the city in picturesque terms as he provides a narrator who retains a sense of detachment. In addition, through his descriptions of the city and his brief depiction of the country, he juxtaposes the urban landscape with its raw features to the rural landscape with its pastoral features. In doing so, he clearly defines the urban picturesque as that which encourages variety and contrast.

Johnson provides a more modern interpretation as London replaces Juvenal's Rome. Adopting Juvenal's theme of the decay of Roman morals under the emperors Nero and Domitian, Johnson comments on the decline of English virtue under the influence of Robert Walpole and George II,⁶ blaming these political leaders for much of the city's downfall. The poet contends that Heaven is punishing the citizens of London for Walpole's crimes:

⁶ "The depredations of the Spanish guarda costas, Walpole's alliance with Cardinal Fleury, the Catholic prime minister of France, Walpole's attempts to impose an excise, and the mushrooming popularity of Italianite masquerades are all viewed as symptoms of this corruption" (Venturo 66).

Behold our fame, our wealth, our lives your own,

To such, a groaning nation's spoils are giv'n,

When publick crimes inflame the wrath of heav'n. (64-66)

The speaker sarcastically condemns the “heroes” whose thirst for power and gold have overthrown virtue and who have claimed the lives of their subjects and inflicted the wrath of Heaven. Johnson portrays a public who has distorted values – when the “wretched vagrant’s” (190) home burns down, people either neglect or insult him but when Orgilio’s palace burns, “gaudy vassals” (202) come to restore his treasures and he receives so much that he actually hopes for another fire.⁷ By imitating Juvenal’s Third Satire, Johnson is also making the statement that the vice and corruption evident in London mirror an earlier time in Rome – that this larger-than-life city overflowing with decadence and dishonesty is nothing new. By associating London with Rome, known for its decadence and corruption, Johnson is charging London with extreme immorality.

In “London,” Thales feels rejected by that which makes up the city: the “rabble” (14) that rages, the “relentless ruffians” (15), the “fell attorney” (16), the “falling houses” (17), and the “female atheist” (18). Johnson paints a portrait of the poet standing by the Thames next to his friend as they think back to better days before “masquerades debauch’d, excise oppress’d / Or English honour grew a standing jest” (29-30). Johnson defines in these lines what created this corruption, providing an overall thesis before he describes vice more particularly. At one time, London was the “guard of commerce, and the dread of Spain” (28). Now, falsehood and deception have debased the city, while taxes have further depressed the economy; London has damaged England’s overall

⁷ “Orgilio, whose name means ‘proud’ in French, almost certainly represents Walpole, master of princely Houghton Hall” (Venturo 74).

reputation and honor. Johnson depicts a world that has been turned upside down, one in which lies are seen as truth and vice parades as virtue: “All Crimes are safe, but hated Poverty” (159). Much of the speaker’s distress arises from the dangers prevalent within London. In the streets, Thales is subjected to the “fiery fop” and the “frolick Drunkard” and even at home is not safe from the burglar or from the murderer who invades the hour of rest. Johnson creates Thales as the innocent, injured, voice juxtaposed to the adulterated city. Thales does not seem fit for London society as he asks his friend “what hope remains for me?” (67). Johnson portrays him as one incapable of vice who, because he does not know how to deceive, provides the antithesis to the villains of the city: while others use “softer smiles” and “subtler art” (75) to “sap the principles, or taint the heart” (76), Thales’ “rustic tongue / Ne’er knew to puzzle right, or varnish wrong” (80). In the character of Thales is the innocence of the educated savage who, if he remains in the city, will be destroyed. Unlike Gay’s walker who remains in the city, yet detached (as an observer), Thales actually abandons the city.

In actuality, Thales is as unbelievable as his refuge. While he claims to be incapable of evil acts or intentions, this same idealistic purity mirrors the place where he intends to flee. Thales entertains thoughts of a perfect world as he idealizes the “fair banks of Severn or of Trent” (211):

There ev’ry bush with nature’s music rings
There ev’ry breeze bears health upon its wings
On all thy hours security shall smile,
And bless thine evening walk and morning toil. (220-23)

Thales views nature as providing a continual source of inspiration, a place where health abounds instead of fatigue, and a place secure from any evil. The country contains, according to Thales, quiet evening walks proceeded by productive morning work in the fields. The narrator also views nature as a retreat from the corrupt city, referring to it as a “happier place” (43), a “peaceful vale” (46), and a “secret cell” (49). These descriptions of nature do not reflect a real but, instead, an imaginary place. Johnson reveals the duplicity of his narrator to this idealized retreat. The poet understands that this fantastical escape is only in the mind of Thales, and that a perfect land, like a perfect person, does not exist.

During his Scottish tour, Johnson writes to Hester Thrale on September 21, 1773, and, in a sarcastic tone, reveals that he is quite aware of the illusions that his contemporaries entertain about nature:

You are perhaps imagining that I am withdrawn from the gay and the busy world into regions of peace and pastoral felicity, and am enjoying the reliques of the golden age; that I am surveying Nature’s magnificence from a mountain, or remarking her minuter beauties on the flowery bank of a winding rivulet, that I am invigorating myself in the sunshine, or delighting my imagination with being hidden from the invasion of human evils and human passions. (*Letters* 326)

Johnson clearly identifies the country/city antithesis, the stereotypical depictions of the rural and urban landscapes that have continued into the eighteenth-century. He identifies the misconception of the city as being full of frivolous, yet non-stop, activity, and as bringing out the worst in people, as it tempts them to follow their passions. As the

antithesis to this urban world, Johnson displays the notion of the country as one that is free from strife, as that which has been portrayed in the pastoral mode of literature and represents a golden age that never really existed. Unlike Gay who expresses an actual nostalgic longing for Virgil's literary golden age, Johnson recognizes the falsehood of such reflection. He satirizes the idea that the imagination can only be ignited in this idealistic setting. Johnson proceeds to shatter these illusions:

The use of traveling is to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are. Here are mountains which I should once have climbed, but to climb steeps is now very laborious, and to descend them dangerous, and I am now content with knowing that by scrambling up a rock, I shall only see other rocks, and a wider circuit of barren desolation. (*Letters* 326)

In this paragraph, Johnson clarifies his true feelings not only about the city and the country, but also about his perspectives on writing. He feels that reality is what ignites the imagination and instead of concentrating on an imaginative, unreal, landscape, he believes in focusing on the landscape as it currently exists. Johnson reveals a very different depiction of the countryside than what is perceived in the pastoral literature of his day. Just as the city is dangerous, Johnson portrays the country in a similar light. Climbing mountains is laborious instead of invigorating and descending steep cliffs is often dangerous. He does not hold any imaginative conceptions of ideal pastoral landscapes – he knows that when he climbs to look over a rock, he will not see a magnificent, breath-taking view, but a barren, desolate, landscape. It is this exact mind set that he also maintained when writing “London.” Although he writes of the country in

such negative terms in this letter, he is not saying that he does not like the country, nor that he fails to gain inspiration from the rural landscape. Similarly, although “London” contains mainly stark, negative, images of the city, Johnson does not want to flee to the country for an escape from its effects. Instead, Johnson conveys to his reader that both the city and the country can be inspirational and dangerous at the same time. Although Johnson wrote this letter thirty-five years after writing the poem “London,” it bears comparison with his poem on the city. Johnson never nostalgically believes in a “blissful age” that can be magically recalled (25), any more than he believes in an idealistic countryside, “a pleasing bank where verdant osiers play” (45). Instead, in “London” Johnson exposes frustration with and fear of a city that appears to have lost control, and grown immense. He exposes the picturesque landscape as he “regulate[s] imagination by reality” (*Letters* 79).

Thales’ idea of the country is really a man-made, as opposed to a natural, landscape. Before Thales describes this idealistic setting, he begins by encouraging his reader to find an “elegant retreat” (212) that a man of distinction has deserted. Thales explains that everything in this retreat can be formed to fit the ideal – the walks can be pruned, the flowers enhanced, the streams directed so that they complement the landscape, and the arbors designed to appear natural but remain useful. It is only when man has formed the landscape to accompany his needs that nature responds with the gifts of music, health, and security. Therefore, we understand that Thales’ idea of a “happier place” (43) is really a country estate, not a “pleasing bank where verdant osiers play” (45). Thales’ retreat is preferable to the city because it can be controlled and made to appear perfect. Thales has no control over the city, but he relishes the idea of creating his

perfect world in this adjustable countryside. The poet, however, understands that what Thales really values is not a natural landscape but an artificial man-made location, outside of the city, that is even more artificial than the urban landscape. Although much of the city is man-made, the poet, unlike his narrator, values its uncontrollable features: the city cannot be designed to fit an individual's needs. It is raw, brash, loud, and, in this way, natural. Johnson's depictions of the city are not as ordered, calculated, or carefully conceived as Gay's. Although he selectively chooses what to present to the reader, his descriptions are more random, reflecting the chaotic, unpredictable city.

Although the poet denounces the city with its vice and corruption, the reader, nevertheless, finds him at the end of the poem still a part of the city. Andrew Varney comments on the poet's final decision by explaining that:

Thales can solve the problem of London by putting hundreds of miles between himself and the enemy within. But of course Thales is enacting a fantasy which it is denied to the poet to realize for himself: when Thales glides off on his wherry the poet will remain on the strand at Greenwich, with no choice but to turn back and face the enemy within the squalid metropolis he both inhabits and imagines. (214)

The reader remains uncertain whether the poet wants to leave the city, but his decision to remain on the shore hints at his final resolution. As if to fulfill a moral obligation and record the injustice of the city, he remains fixed on the shore. For the poet to leave with Thales would, in turn, silence the voice of rage, thereby silencing the poet's voice. Therefore, Johnson sends Thales, representative of the poet's undefiled self, far away from the corruption of the city. Yet, of necessity he allows the expressive self (that of the

poet) to remain. Geoffrey Finch defines these two selves as the young idealist who views the city as a horrifying place and the potentially talented writer who views the city as the only place to succeed and further his work (359). Thus, we are left with the talented writer on the shore watching his other self, the idealist, depart by boat to go where “ev’ry bush with nature’s music rings / . . . ev’ry breeze bears health upon its wings” (220-21). Finch concludes that when we “consider the rhetorical excess of the poem, the way it seems to protest too much, and the limp quality of the country haven to which Thales is going to retire, the cause of virtue seems peculiarly unconvincing” (357). Thus, according to Finch, the very dramatic language to describe the city juxtaposed with the dull language that depicts the country raises questions concerning the sincerity of the portrayal of the city in “London..” The fact that Johnson refuses to abandon the city, reveals his dependency upon it and fondness for it. Johnson moralizes over the urban disorder so prevalent in the city, the decadence, and the “subversion of intellectual standards” (Johnston 54), yet, at the same time he accepts the challenge of the city by allowing his narrator to remain on the shore.

Unlike Thales who elects to pursue a dream-world in Wales, Johnson exposes the poet who knows that Thales will never find contentment in such a world. There are actually two narrators in “London” – the narrator who begins the poem and is the poet standing beside Thales on the shore and Thales himself who takes over the poem after the fourth stanza. The poet remains objectively distant, as he describes himself as if watching two individuals going their separate ways. As the poem opens, the poet offers Thales as a sacrifice to Scotland as they both wait for the wherry. He willingly gives to “St. David one true Briton more” (8). As if there are few left to sacrifice, the poet

presents one of the best from his country who must leave because he is too pure to withstand the vice of London. Thales symbolizes those who have given up on the city – those who retain a one-sided view of London as a place of corruption, those who feel they have lost something through living in the city, and those who feel that a more ideal world exists elsewhere. If Thales is a misfit for the city, what is the poet? The poet regrets losing his friend but praises Thales' ability to isolate himself. When the poet claims that Thales is going to “breathe in distant fields a purer air” (6), he is only repeating what Thales himself believes, not what he, as poet, actually believes. The poet understands what Thales does not, that a purer air does not exist and that total isolation is neither healthy nor practical.

Johnson's depictions of a superficial, crime-ridden, city conflict with what he has expressed in his other writings. For example, Johnson claims that the “man who is tired of London is tired of life” (Byrd 132). Furthermore, in *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, Johnson is quoted as saying “Whoever has once experienced the full flow of London talk, when he retires to country friendships and rural sports, must either be content to turn baby again and play with the rattle, or he will pine away like a great fish in a little pond and die for want of his usual food” (Hill 324). Johnson declares that solitude “is dangerous to reason, without being favourable to virtue . . . Remember . . . that the solitary mortal is certainly luxurious, probably superstitious, and possibly mad: the man stagnates for want of employment, grows morbid, and is extinguished like a candle in the foul air” (Hill 297). Clearly, Johnson valued the city's ability to provide intellectual stimulation along with its wide variety of cultural attractions. As an explanation for this inconsistency, Prem Nath reveals two very distinct points of time in Johnson's life; speaking

figuratively he claims that Johnson uses two pairs of spectacles for looking at London. The first pair he wears, earlier in his career, while writing the poem "London" as he displays its "falling houses" (17), "gaudy vassals" (202), and its extreme poverty. Johnson wore the other pair of spectacles while writing the *Lives of the Poets*: "With the change in his literary and social status, his visual focus had also undergone certain alterations" (Nath 22). In the *Life of Pope*, Johnson reveals his great concern for truth yet defends his right to change his mind. He says in *Lives*, that "to think differently at different times of poetical merit may be easily allowed. . . Who is there that has not found reason for changing his mind about questions of greater importance" (Nath 223)? Finally, Percy Boynton blames the discrepancy on Johnson's different stages of life. Since "London" was written only a year after Johnson's arrival in the city, "when he had been more or less overwhelmed with the grim discovery that 'slow rises worth by poverty depressed'" (186), Boynton claims that it is not surprising that as "fortune became kindlier Johnson developed into as fulsome a flatterer of London as any mistress could have wished" (187).

Johnson felt differently about the city during different stages of his life; however, he also clearly understood that this new emerging, ever-changing, city must be portrayed with all of its vice and corruption. Thus, although "London" is an imitation of Juvenal, although it comments on the court of George II, it becomes, most importantly for Johnson, a portrait of an actual city that contains both positive and negative elements. The city, for Johnson, is more natural than the country; it cannot be contained, manipulated, or controlled. Johnson's city requires the knowledgeable walker of Gay's *Trivia*, the individual who understands where to go and what to avoid. The city does not

accept those who try to conform it to fit their needs, who become, like Thales, fearful of its harsh offerings. Unlike the pastoral depictions of the countryside in the early eighteenth-century, Johnson continues in the picturesque tradition of Gay by offering a new approach to an evolving urban landscape.

This unified image of the city, established by Gay and Johnson, fades as we approach the latter part of the eighteenth-century. Poets such as Cowper and Wordsworth expose additional elements that affect the picturesque urban landscape, such as the inner landscape of the poet's mind. In this way, the picturesque becomes more than just a description of both the pure and raw qualities of the city, and evolves into a discussion of how the poet's inner landscape influences his view of the outer urban landscape. Cowper and Wordsworth expose a more complex characteristic of the urban picturesque as they not only reveal the influences of an inner landscape, but they compare it to the rural picturesque landscape as well.

CHAPTER III

COWPER'S VARIED LANDSCAPES

The use of the urban picturesque to portray London continues into the latter part of the eighteenth-century, especially in the works of William Cowper. In *The Task*, Cowper continues in the tradition of Gay and Johnson, yet provides the reader with a more personalized voice. Like Gay's walker and Johnson's Thales, Cowper's narrator is an educator and observer of the city. Cowper exposes two different types of landscapes: the inner, or conventional, and the actual. After introducing the inner landscape, he defines the difference between the two landscapes, and then proceeds to walk his reader through what he considers to be an actual landscape. An analysis of this process will clarify his use of the urban picturesque. Cowper defines the artificial through examples found in *The Task*, a poem which also helps explain what Cowper finds so attractive about the city.

Throughout *The Task*, Cowper takes his reader on a rural walk and while doing so introduces the urban landscape. How Cowper views the rural scenes furnishes a basis for how he views the urban scenes. Much like Gay, Cowper's narrator walks his reader through a generalized, unspecified landscape. By informing us where to look on the journey, when to stop, and even how fast to walk, Cowper manipulates our focus to view the rural landscape as if we were viewing a painting. Typical of the picturesque, the poet directs the eye of the reader. To begin, Cowper appeals to his reader through experiences

of nature that they both have shared – of pausing during a walk and dwelling upon a scene: “How oft upon yon eminence our pace / has slacken’d to a pause, and we have born / The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew” (1.154-56). Cowper reminds us of a walk that he once took by taking us to the elms “that screen the herdsman’s solitary hut” (168), to the vale, to the tall spire, and to the groves, heaths, and remote villages. But these scenes are only generalities, remaining in the mind of the poet who works to make them familiar to his reader: “Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily view’d / Please daily, and whose novelty survives / Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years” (1.177-79). Cowper describes an idealized, general, landscape to his reader and acknowledges that both he and his reader maintain the same conventional inner landscapes that must remain beautiful since the mind returns to them daily. The inner landscape, therefore, portrays an ideal countryside as industry and nature work harmoniously together: “Thence with what pleasure have we just discern’d / The distant plough slow moving, and beside / His lab’ring team, that swerv’d not from the track / The sturdy swain diminish’d to a boy” (1.159-62). In Book Four, he refers to these landscapes as “waking dreams” (4.287): “I am conscious, and confess / Fearless, a soul that does not always think / Me oft has fancy, ludicrous and wild/ Sooth’d with a waking dream of houses, tow’rs / Trees, churches, and strange visages, express’d / In the red cinders, while with poring eye / I gaz’d, myself creating what I saw” (4.284-90). Cowper clarifies that these generalized landscapes are not dreams, but derive from a conscious poet who views an actual landscape that turns into conventional forms as the mind embellishes the scene. Cowper recognizes the impact that the poet can have on a scene, the ability to transform an outer landscape into an inner landscape, and admits to creating

what he views in that landscape. As he states later in Book Five, in this way the poet “calls the delightful scen’ry all his own / His are the mountains, and the vallies his / And the resplendent rivers. His t’ enjoy / With a propriety that none can feel” (741-44).

While Cowper views the actual rural landscape as belonging to God, and the urban landscape as one shared by men, his generalized landscape is unique because it belongs solely to the individual.

After introducing his reader to the inner landscape, and before taking his reader on a walk through an actual landscape, Cowper clarifies the difference between the two. He accomplishes this clarification by recounting a scene that occurred in the past: “Once went I forth; and found, till then unknown / A cottage, whither oft we since repair” (1.220-21). As he deviates from his inner landscape, he also exposes an imaginary landscape that becomes juxtaposed with the actual. Just as Johnson during his tour of Scotland displays his knowledge of the difference between an actual and imaginative landscape, so too does Cowper who begins by describing an ideal setting composed of a cottage:

‘Tis perch’d upon the green-hill top, but close
Environ’d with a ring of branching elms
‘That overhang the thatch, itself unseen
Peeps at the vale below; so thick beset
With foliage of such dark redundant growth,
I call’d the low-roof’d lodge the *peasant’s nest*.
And, hidden as it is, and far remote
From such unpleasing sounds as haunt the ear

In village or in town, the bay of curs
Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,
And infants clam'rous whether pleas'd or pain'd,
Oft have I wish'd the peaceful covert mine.
Here, I have said, at least I should possess
The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge
The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure. (1.222-236)

Cowper, at first, displays an ideal cottage set on a hill with a view of the vale yet surrounded by elms and foliage for privacy. Though it is really a lodge, Cowper renames it "the peasant's nest" which reflects how idealized he has made the scene. Not only is the cottage secluded and hidden, but it is also sound-proof. Because it blocks out the unpleasant noises of the town, Cowper considers it an ideal refuge for the poet who can allow his imagination to flow without interruption; the refuge also allows him to refocus his poetic efforts after returning from the city. Interestingly enough, Cowper's "unpleasant sounds" consist of people working; they are sounds of industry and productivity. Even though his overall theme centers around the dangers of luxury, he finds the activity of the town disturbing.

Cowper recognizes, however, that the ideal rural landscape is only imaginary, and, thus, only exists in the mind of the poet:

Vain thought! The dweller in that still retreat
Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.
Its elevated scite forbids the wretch
To drink sweet waters of the crystal well;

He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,
And, heavy-laden, brings his bev'rage home,
Far-fetch'd and little worth; nor seldom waits,
Dependant on the baker's punctual call,
To hear his creaking panniers at the door,
Angry and sad, and his last crust consum'd.
So farewell envy of the *peasant's nest!*
If solitude make scant the means of life,
Society for me! (1.237-49)

After describing this poetic refuge, he announces the worthlessness of his vain perspective. In his retraction, Cowper chides himself for turning a lodge into a “peasant’s nest,” and never allows the actual cottage to represent more than a humble home for a peasant. This example of fictionalizing an actual element in the landscape differs from the poet’s tendency to create a generalized, inner, landscape (the waking dreams mentioned in Book Four). Landscapes of the mind are unique because they never require comparisons with real objects, nor do they base their value on past experiences. Cowper explains that, in reality, the peacefulness of such a retreat is paid for with a high price, the dweller “dearly obtains the refuge.” Instead of drinking from a pure well, the peasant must gather water from a ditch and carry it up the hill to his home. Cowper, in fact, now refers to the main character (the poet) as a wretch. In reality, the beautiful vale means a long walk to obtain both water and food. Cowper exposes his knowledge of the inner and outer landscapes and recognizes the function of each. Therefore, Cowper really depicts two very different landscapes: the inner landscape of the mind and the rural picturesque

landscape that portrays a more believable setting. Cowper does not want us to confuse retirement with rural isolation. Just as he never intends his reader to associate the country with idleness, he does not intend to profess that retirement means complete abandonment from the city. A retreat, for Cowper, signifies a place to escape for a short period of time, never an eternity. According to Robinson, “the escape to the countryside from the court or the metropolis is not made with a cart loaded with all earthly belongings; it is not desertion” (42). Cowper’s literal and imaginary departures to rural retreats provide him with inspiration in his urban setting.

Again, in Book Four, Cowper defines the two landscapes in an identical way. He begins by pretending to lament being unable to write during the Renaissance, what he refers to as the golden times, when “nymphs were Dianas” when “swains had hearts / That felt their virtues” and when the innocent “found shelter in the groves” (517-19). Cowper begins his retraction regarding the cottage by calling it a “vain thought” and he initiates this rebuttal by exclaiming “vain wish.” Those days, Cowper claims, never existed; they were “airy dreams / Sat for the picture; and the poet’s hand / Imparting substance to an empty shade / Impos’d a gay delirium for a truth” (4.525-28). Cowper acknowledges that the “happier days” were only created, manufactured subjects of poetry and painting but not actual representations. These descriptions, both visual and written, were stylized, fabricated interpretations of the artist/poet. We must assume, then, that Cowper feels he is offering through *The Task* an accurate depiction of the times in which he lived, that he is neither embellishing nor creating something that never existed when it refers to an actual landscape. In essence, instead of superficiality, Cowper wants to portray truth. Cowper views a former age of poetry where the landscape remains only on

the canvass and in the poem, but in his own writings he attempts to create a more realistic landscape that takes inspiration from the scenes around him.

Cowper takes his reader on a walk through a picturesque landscape, similar to Gay's walk around London. He begins the actual walk with his reader immediately after defining the difference between the imaginary and the real: "Not distant far, a length of colonnade / Invites us" (1.252-53). The poet uses this colonnade for an object lesson to show the wisdom of his forefathers and the stubborn self-confidence of the people today. After passing the colonnade, we descend "a sudden steep" and pass a gulf: "our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft / Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil" (1.273) who, according to Cowper, has disfigured the earth. In his description of nature and the countryside, the poet does not only note the beautiful elements, but the more practical aspects also, such as walking into mole piles. Then, Cowper directs us to an alcove and although he calls it a "grand retreat," he also mentions the rural carvers who have defaced it, "leaving an obscure, rude name / In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss" (1.282-83). Cowper's tendency to reveal both the pleasant and the unpleasant aspects of the countryside coincide with the picturesque mode of description, for as Uvedale Price states: "A temple or palace of Grecian architecture in its perfect entire state, and with its surface and color smooth and even, either in painting or reality is beautiful; in ruin it is picturesque" (Andrews *Search for the Picturesque* 58). Through an understanding of Cowper's different definitions of landscape (both the inner and the outer), the reader is able to understand how to interpret Cowper's perception of the city.

An examination of the ways in which Cowper treats the rural landscape provides insight into his treatment of the urban landscape. While Cowper's walk through the

countryside mirrors Gay's walk through London, Cowper's discussion of the city comes closer to Johnson's moralistic condemnation of a society that has grown too self-assured. As in his depiction of the cottage, Cowper establishes two contrasting descriptions of the city. He begins by providing the reader with an outline: "Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaim'd / The fairest capital of all the world / By riot and incontinence the worst" (1.697-99). The poet stands away from the city, objectively viewing its features, and decides to describe it both in terms of its taste embodied in the art displayed within the city and by its negative qualities, represented by riot and incontinence. By using the urban picturesque, Cowper presents both sides of the city, just as he has provided us with various qualities of the country. Cowper relays these contrasting images to his reader in a very matter-of-fact way as if to say that London cannot be defined without acknowledging each facet of its character. The narrator condemns London for its lack of restraint but praises it for the role that it plays in the cultural arts and for the reputation that it maintains as a wealthy city. These characteristics reveal the parts that comprise the urban landscape. Clearly, the urban landscape is not imaginative, but real. While the countryside contains for Cowper health, virtue, and solitude, the city provides the fertile soil for the arts, philosophy, science, and mathematics. The city is where one finds all areas of knowledge as "she [London] calculates, computes, and scans / All distance, motion, magnitude" (1.716-17). Not only invention, but a different form of industry than is found in the country exists in London. Cowper explains that in the country individuals display human industry through tending a garden, reading, or writing: "Delightful industry enjoy'd at home" (3.355-56). He refers to the hard working rural couple, in Book Four, as "poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat" (374) and clearly distinguishes

from the poor who work hard and yet feel content because of their efforts and those who “whimper forth / Their long complaints” (4.429-30) due to laziness. When he refers to the industry offered by the city, he exposes a world of opportunity, unlike anything offered in the country. Cowper asks: “where has commerce such a mart / So rich, so throng’d, so drain’d, and so supplied” (1.719-20). He praises the city for what it offers, provides, and creates, but, at the same time, by emphasizing its expansion “enlarg’d and still / Increasing” (721-22), he compares it to a modern Babylon. Refusing to provide a narrow view of the city, Cowper conflates the good with the bad, arguing that while London is fair, it is also foul, while witty, it is not always wise. With all of the city’s abilities (for Cowper refers to it in human terms) her values are distorted. Like Johnson, Cowper blames the justice system for its inconsistencies (i.e., denouncing death on petty robbers and indulging life “to speculators of the public gold” [1.735]). Cowper’s city consists of inconsistencies, exposing a subject that must be described paradoxically.

Cowper’s discussion of the evils of society takes a moral turn as he blames the city’s demise on its rejection of Godly principles: “she has presum’d t’ annul / And abrogate, as roundly as she may / The total ordinance and will of God” (1.741-43). Society, Cowper contends, has turned away from God, rejected holy ordinances, and created customs of its own. For this reason, he claims that “God made the country, and man made the town” (1.749). At this point, Cowper returns to an inner landscape, and by recalling the existence of both the inner and actual rural landscapes, in Book One, readers can understand the digression here. Once again, Cowper creates an inner landscape much like his former description of the rural cottage. Instead of exposing both the positive and negative features of the city and the country, he categorizes them as being all good

(country) or all bad (city). Because God made the country, health and virtue abide there; the pensive wanderer is its inhabitant; the birds provide the only necessary music; and the moon provides the only necessary light. The city, by contrast, was made by man, and its inhabitants are those who ride in chariots and sedans – the idle who “taste no scenes / But such as art contrives” (1.756-57). The inhabitants of the city will only experience artificial beauty, not the real thing (i.e., nature). In order to provide a more persuasive account of exactly how the urban society has turned away from holy ordinances (God), the inner landscape serves as a convenient form within which to present elements as either black or white. Earlier, in his description of the cottage, Cowper describes his ideal retreat in order to show the extreme difference between a corrupt city and the tranquil country, and this perfect portrait of the cottage remains ideal due to its unchangeable quality existing in the mind of the poet. Likewise, in order to reveal how morally corrupt society has become, he sets up a comparison between the city and a rural paradise. Eventually, Cowper moves back into an actual landscape and explains that even the country is not completely pure. Like a plague, the poet claims that the city contaminates the country --“your songs confound / Our more harmonious notes” (1.766-67) and, later, in Book Four, Cowper exclaims that the “town has ting’d the country; and the stain / Appears a spot upon a vestal’s robe” (553-54). The city has infected the country with “the manners and the modes / It knew not once” (4.693-94). Once again, the infection refers to the moral degradation that Cowper blames on the city.

What makes understanding Cowper’s true perception of the city so complex in this first book is the poem’s conflation of terms, as he refers to London as being both opulent, earlier in Book One, and mutilated at the end of the book. When we understand

that Cowper is moving in and out of two very different landscapes however, complexities diminish and become clearer. Since Cowper is discussing an inner landscape, he refers to the city and country in concrete terms, and he focuses solely on the declining morality. In actuality, he does not refer to the city as literally collapsing, but he refers to the degradation of the morals of society within the city as turning so far from God as to eventually destroy itself. His country/city comparison and its link to God creates a return to an inner landscape of an ideal country, but this time he includes the corrupt city. Just as he never really believed in the perfect “peasant’s nest,” he is never fully convinced of the pensive wanderer’s ideal home amidst the groves. Instead, once again, Cowper paints an idealistic picture for his reader, an inner landscape in which virtue thrives in the country and folly thrives in the city in order to condemn what he believes to be the city’s separation from God. In this case, he is using conventional means by which to describe the city in order to make a point concerning the city’s rejection of Godly principles. These black and white depictions of a god-forsaken city in Book Four do not contain the vivid mix of positive and negative elements used to portray the actual city.

Although Cowper found much of city life disconcerting, he clearly makes a distinction between a “retreat” and a “permanent home.” The city and the country played separate roles for Cowper in his personal life. While describing his summer house, what he called his *boudoir* (no bigger than a sedan chair), to his friend Joseph Hill on June 25, 1785, Cowper says “It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion . . . a poet’s retreat is sacred” (King 142). Although Cowper appears to favor the country over the city, we find, through a close analysis, that the ideal country is not a real place for him. In many ways, “the poet’s retreat” remains only in the mind of the poet, an inner

landscape that remains sacred because it is untouched. In a letter to Lady Hesketh on November 26, 1786, Cowper comments on his definition of a cottage:

You must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bed chambers of convenient dimensions. (*Correspondence of William Cowper* 108)

Cowper values the urban picturesque, however, because of its reflection of the actual landscape. Cowper's descriptions in Book One of ideal inner landscapes represent the "retreats," while his depictions of both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the country and the city expose the existing landscape that he actually experiences. He never refers to his summer house as a permanent dwelling, but as a place where he spends only a few months out of the year - to compose poetry and gain inspiration, but not suitable for daily living. If he needs the country to compose, he certainly needs the city to publish. Like Johnson and Gay, Cowper needs the city to further his profession, to gain inspiration from other writers and to make a profit from his writings.

Because Cowper experienced the practical need for association with others in both his professional and personal lives, he acknowledges in Book Four that man should not be completely isolated, that he matures only when he is a part of society: "Man in society is like a flow'r / Blown in its native bed: 'tis there alone / His faculties, expanded in full bloom / Shine out" (659-64). Just as the poet discovers that he cannot completely forsake the conveniences that attend the city, he learns he cannot forsake the company of other people. Cowper reveals that man needs other men, yet when men become too enclosed, without any privacy (as flowers in crowded vases), they become a "loathsome

body” (4.674). Cowper wants to find a balance between the rural setting where he can get away from the crowds to re-establish correct values, and the urban environment where he can pursue his work, gain inspiration, and use his talents to help himself and others. Cowper’s world feels unbalanced as he views a city where men are compressed, where “the common rights of man” (4.680) have been forgotten and where “foppery atones” (689), as he views a country where total isolation seems the only option. Given these choices, he proclaims, concerning the country: “My visit still, but never mine abode” (1.251). Cowper uses paradoxical statements to grapple with this country/city antithesis. Even as vast and boundless as London seems, Cowper claims that it is still a “crowded coop” (3.834). The reader literally witnesses Cowper working through his own thoughts about the city and the country, trying to arrive at some conclusion regarding these opposing landscapes. In essence, he concludes that the city, like the country, contains both positive and negative features. The multi-dimensional urban picturesque landscape causes the poet to feel uncertain of his relationship to the city, for although he elects to make the urban landscape his permanent home, he understands that this means learning how to live within the “crowded coop.”

What Cowper admires most about the city is what Gay, and even Johnson, after writing “London,” admired – its varied, diverse, and anything but artificial inhabitants:

O thou, resort and mart of all the earth,
Chequer’d with all complexions of mankind,
And spotted with all crimes; in whom I see
Much that I love, and more that I admire,
And all that I abhor; thou freckled fair,

That pleases and yet shock'st me, I can laugh
And I can weep, can hope, and can despond,
Feel wrath and pity, when I think on thee! (3.835-42)

The ability of the city to house subjects that are not plain, but checkered, spotted, and freckled, causes the poet to address it as both a resort and a mart, for it provides both entertainment and commercial opportunity. In this verse paragraph, Cowper clearly exposes his very mixed views of London, for as much as he abhors it, he also admires it, and what pleases him also shocks him. All of his emotions come alive in the city – he is capable of both hating and loving it at the same time; his divided response makes the city fascinating to him. Just as Cowper presents picturesque descriptions of nature in which he reveals their pleasing and unpleasing aspects, (“The night was winter in his roughest mood / The morning sharp and clear” [6.57-58]), he provides a city that also holds disparate characteristics. In essence, Cowper celebrates the extreme diversity of the city, and he exposes this multiplicity that creates in its inhabitants a wide range of emotions.

Cowper also unveils his excitement for the city through his indirect depiction of the country in Book Three:

Cities then

Attract us, and neglected Nature pines
Abandon'd, as unworthy of our love.
But are not wholesome airs, though unperfum'd
By roses; and clear suns, though scarcely felt;
And groves, if unharmonious, yet secure
From clamour, and whose very silence charms;

To be preferr'd to smoke, to the eclipse
That Metropolitan volcanoes make,
Whose Stygian throats breathe darkness all day long;
And to the stir of commerce, driving slow,
And thund'ring loud, with his ten thousand wheels? (3.729-40)

The fact that Cowper makes a statement through the form of a question, explains that he is still struggling with the issue of whether attraction to the city is actually abandonment of nature. At this point, Cowper addresses nature as it really is, for each description he provides a qualification: wholesome air is not necessarily perfumed by roses and clear suns are hardly experienced in the country; nor are groves always harmonious but, often, lonely; they are, however, secure from the noise of the city. Like Johnson, Cowper qualifies each ideal depiction with its more realistic counterpart. Even as he finally provides what he considers a more believable representation of the country, he cannot resolve its relationship to the city. Ultimately, [even though he admits that country living has its shortcomings] he asks the reader why people are attracted to the city. In questioning his reader, he questions himself because the city holds the same attraction for Cowper.

Cowper attempts to persuade the reader that rural scenes are preferable to the polluted city, yet, according to Lucy Newlyn, “the excitement of the poetry tells us otherwise. Where the country is lifeless, flat, stylized, the city is full of movement and mystery” (“In the City Pent” 171). Before this passage, Cowper laments that nature “the universal prize” should “want admirers” (3.724, 726), that she should lose her influence due to the city’s great attraction. Yet, the language he uses to describe nature (i.e.,

“wholesome airs,” “clear suns,” “secure groves”) pales in comparison to “metropolitan volcanoes” with “stygian throats” and commerce that “thunder[s] loud.” Therefore, while Cowper, like Gay, claims one thing, the language he uses to create his argument accomplishes quite another. Creating metropolitan volcanoes out of chimneys and monsters from commerce, Cowper furthers his reader’s interest in cities, making it difficult for them to prefer the silence of the groves to the personified language of the city. As mentioned earlier, the city rather than the country is becoming more valuable financially to people because of the ability to produce and create a multitude of products there. The clamor, smoke, darkness, and thunder are all products of human industry, and they have appeal for what they ultimately represent (i.e., financial security, class position, commercial opportunity). Cowper struggles with, not only others but his own desire for what has become man-made, artificial, and unnatural.

Although Cowper has emphasized throughout *The Task* that virtue and true worth really derive from nature, by Book Six, he subtly and even more directly points his reader to nature’s creator. Unlike Wordsworth, who will later view nature as a being (as a god in itself), Cowper praises nature only because it has been created by God: “One spirit – His / Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows / Rules universal nature. Not a flow’r / But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain / Of his unrivall’d pencil” (6.238-42). Cowper ultimately places God as the great artist who remains unequaled, for even the powerful force of nature cannot compete in *The Task* with its creator.

Both Gay and Johnson deal with actual urban landscapes, specifically London and its inhabitants, and Cowper continues the urban picturesque mode but displays two very different landscapes while incorporating a more direct comparison of the city and the

country. Through an analysis of his two methods of landscape, the inner and the actual, we discover what he considers to be imaginary and what he believes to be real. By determining that the cottage and the poet's retreat are places in the inner landscape of the mind, we can conclude that the city is more valuable because it belongs to an actual landscape. The poet does not describe the city using pastoral depictions, akin to Virgil's *Georgics*. Instead, Cowper portrays London as shockingly real and thus picturesque. The stress is on its believability not its beauty. More than Gay and Johnson, Cowper struggles with the country/city antithesis, with definitions of what constitutes the artificial, and with his personal role as poet in an urban environment. Through his introduction of the inner landscape, Cowper paves the way for Wordsworth who depicts an inner landscape which more closely resembles an outer picturesque landscape.

CHAPTER IV

WORDSWORTH'S UNION OF URBAN AND RURAL LANDSCAPES

The urban picturesque did not end with Cowper but carried into the early Romantic period with William Wordsworth. Wordsworth is well known for his love of nature and his preference for the rural life, and is described by many critics as one who feels total isolation in the city. Critics such as Kristiaan Versluys contend that for Wordsworth “nature is an inspiring divine, and educative force while the city is its counterpart: dirty, noisy, busy, filled with sorrow and with suffering” (20). Arthur Weitzman believes that the Romantics utterly rejected the city: “In Wordsworth’s vision, London was topsy-turvy, oppressive, and irredeemable” (479). The danger in these extreme classifications is that they define Wordsworth too narrowly as a poet who deems the city uninspiring and unnecessary. On the contrary, Wordsworth desperately needed the city not only for financial gain, but for the inspiration that it provided. Even though Wordsworth’s anti-urban voice resonates more strongly than the poets discussed earlier, the reader continues to discover the same conflicting images characteristic of the picturesque as the poet works to define the relationship of the country and the city. Lawrence Kramer asserts that the city stripped Wordsworth of his creative powers: “Perplexed by too much hurly-burly, as he is in London, Wordsworth suffers an erosion of the sense of self as his imagination becomes impotent” (621). Yet his writing in Book Seven of *The Prelude* (1799) is anything but unimaginative as he describes Bartholomew

Fair “with chattering monkeys dangling from their poles / And children whirling in their roundabouts” (694-95), until the images become so intense, so magnificent in their impact on the poet’s mind, that he calls out in “blank confusion” (722) in order to halt the parade of images. Kramer feels that these images destroy the poet, until he is left with nothing concrete, only delirium, “a gratifying stupor” (621). Wordsworth is left, however, with something that not only inspires him as a poet, but excites his readers as well, and through elevated language he takes his reader to this dizzying spectacle. Wordsworth claims that because “the Spirit of Nature [is] upon [him] there [London],” (7.766) he understands the purpose and meaning of the urban images which work alongside nature to “quicken the slumbering mind” (7.759). James Heffernan provides a more balanced view as he compares Wordsworth’s London to “Jekyll and Hyde, by turns a Babylonian monster and a city of heavenly light” (427). Inwood also addresses Wordsworth’s self-contradiction by declaring that in London “he found a ‘monstrous anthill’ and a city as enthralling, in its way, as anything he could have imagined” (305).

Cowper’s exaggerated sense of the city with its metropolitan volcanoes continues through Wordsworth’s larger-than-life portrayal of London. The urban picturesque becomes both more exaggerated and more specific as Wordsworth identifies not only the London landscape but also the actual place within the city such as Bartholomew Fair or Westminster Bridge. Although Gay and Johnson have specific reasons to be in the city, Wordsworth has no well-defined purpose. Instead, like Cowper, he remains an idler who moves about the city but refuses to participate in its activity. While Cowper clearly distinguishes between inner and outer landscapes, Wordsworth unites the two, exposing their interrelated qualities. Of all the poets discussed so far, Wordsworth unites indirectly

both urban and rural landscapes, and this ability allows him to distinguish what he refers to in *The Prelude* as “the parts from the whole” (7.736).

Although the city affects Wordsworth personally, otherwise he would not have included it in his autobiographical work we see a distinct change from the way in which he writes of the city compared with the ways in which the former poets addressed the city. Instead of a walker, moralist, guide or commentator on the picturesque, Wordsworth becomes the director of a theatrical performance as the picturesque develops into a more embellished form. While writers during the time of Gay and Johnson viewed the country as chaotic and the city as orderly due to human industry and reason, Wordsworth takes the picturesque in a new direction. The actual urban landscape, with its raw qualities, described by Gay, Johnson, and Cowper, becomes even more imposing, more intense, through Wordsworth; he perceived nature as orderly yet mysterious, and this mystical element touched the supernatural. Since nature was for Wordsworth a sublime source of inspiration, his perceptions of urban life are affected by the spiritual way in which he views nature. If the countryside is Eden, the city is at the same time a type of hell that tempts and entices.

Unlike the other poets discussed thus far, Wordsworth enters London without a clear purpose. While Gay serves as a guide to the traveler, and Johnson functions as a moralist, Wordsworth claims that he returns to the city as an idler (7.72). In doing so he associates himself directly with certain elements and inhabitants of the city. Both Gay and Cowper could serve as guides only because they perceived the city as a place of order. Through their roles, they revealed this order (even if it was only perceived and created by the poet). Wordsworth found order in nature, not in the urban environment, so

the title of “idler” places himself with the “freaks of nature” (7.715) – he has no purpose to be there but to be entertained by the sights and sounds of “the mighty city” (7.723). Since he does not actively participate in the scene but remains content to function as the audience for an urban performance, he calls himself an idler rather than a visitant (7.68). Wordsworth begins Book Seven by explaining that he revisits London after leaving school, not knowing which “course of life” to pursue (7.58). He refers to his time in school as “sheltered” (7.53) and refers to his departure as a welcome change, to experience the “unfenced regions of society” (7.57). Thus, although Wordsworth displays a very disordered urban setting when he writes of London, this early reference to his anticipation of the unstructured elements of the city reveals that what may appear negative, is actually a positive aspect from the poet’s perspective. At this point in his life, he is already familiar with the city streets. He describes his initial visit to the city with images of motion as he “paced / Her endless streets, a transient visitant” (7.67-68). He refers to himself as moving through the streets, transient, as if without a real home, but he defines his second visit with images of permanence: “Now, fixed amid that concourse of mankind / Where Pleasure whirls about incessantly” (69-70). Instead of participating in the action of the city, Wordsworth observes his surroundings and refuses to allow contagious pleasure to entice him. Early in the book, he explains that he is free from “dangerous passions” (65); he professes a self-control that cannot be found in many of the inhabitants as they partake of what he denotes as a dangerous passion that leads to out-of-control pleasure. While everyone else has been seduced into joining the city’s chaotic motion, Wordsworth seems proud that he can resist such “foolishness and madness in parade” (544). On his second visit, he is no longer in awe of the town; he no

longer feels the need to explore its features; rather he allows the city's incessant movement to encompass him while he remains fixed, no longer experiencing the "shock / of the huge town's first presence" (66-67). Again during this second visit, Wordsworth's status as idler provides him with a house instead of a permanent "home." For example, instead of referring to himself as owning a home, he claims that the house owns him. In essence, during his first visit, although he felt the shock of the city, he also felt that his participation, as he walked the streets to create his own perspective of its features, allowed him to control his surroundings (i.e., own a home). During this second visit, however, he realizes that his role of idler causes him to lose control of even his own perspectives; he must allow the city to speak to him (the city this time owns him). He returns, therefore, a different man with a different outlook.

Similar to other urban picturesque poets, Wordsworth sets up a contrast between his idealized images of the city and the actual landscape in order to show the reader the difference between "bold imaginations" and what he refers to as a "living scene." Instead of comparing an urban to a rural landscape, however, Wordsworth compares the urban landscape that exists in his mind to the actual urban landscape that he perceives during his second visit. He explains that there was a time when he imagined London as a type of fairy-land with "fireworks magical / And gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes" (123-24), along with stately monuments such as the "Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's; the tombs / of Westminster; the Giants of Guildhall" (130-31). Wordsworth points out that even a living, or actual, scene can be heightened by wonder or "sublimed by awe" (153). In essence, he acknowledges that his imagination has affected the ways in which he views the actual scene, and that the everyday appearance (the most picturesque

perspective) is transformed into an inner landscape (the poet's imagination). Thus, because the inner landscape plays such an important role in shaping the "living" or outer landscape, the picturesque takes on a new form as both the inner and outer landscapes are combined. Wordsworth's urban scene does not contain Gay's everyday accounts of football wars or funerals, nor does it include Cowper's descriptions of specific men such as Bacon, Chatham, or Reynolds (*The Task* 1.699-704). Instead, Wordsworth's account of the actual landscape has become influenced by his inner landscape; therefore, his images combine both landscapes. For example, Wordsworth's descriptions of the inner landscape often echo his descriptions of the actual landscape: his descriptions of human industry later in Book Seven of *The Prelude* - "the quick dance / Of colours, lights, and forms" (154-55) - becomes reminiscent of earlier descriptions from his inner landscape, of the bold imaginations that included "gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes / Floating in dance" (124-25). Clearly, Wordsworth displays that his earlier imaginations of London and the image of ladies appearing to float as they dance, has transferred into a different, yet not altogether new form. The image of the tranquil dance represented in the inner landscape has now transformed into a more active dance that encompasses the entire city. In this way, Wordsworth demonstrates how the inner landscape influences the outer picturesque landscape. These images merge, and, ultimately, become indistinguishable, creating a different type of picturesque landscape – one in which the inner landscape directly influences how the poet perceives the outer landscape. This combined landscape remains picturesque since it retains the variety of images; however, by uniting the inner landscape, with its bold imaginings, to the outer landscape, the urban picturesque form becomes more exaggerated. Wordsworth's view of the city is so

exaggerated that because he expresses emotion more than concern for practicality of scenery, he cannot offer, nor does he intend to offer, an actual account of the urban landscape. Instead, Wordsworth offers a combined landscape that preserves its picturesque qualities.

When Wordsworth creates an inner landscape, it is similar to the inner landscapes created by Johnson and Cowper. However, while Johnson and Cowper display how the inner landscape and the actual outer landscape are two very different entities, Wordsworth shows us how they relate to one another. He refers to his inner landscape as the “bold imaginations” (142) directly linking these created landscapes to the imagination. Wordsworth even begins Book Seven by first defining his inner landscape of London which, he declares, was established before his initial visit. In doing so, he purposely moves into his inner landscape to recall an innocence that existed, an untouched image of London created solely by the imagination: “Would that I could now / Recall what then I pictured to myself”(106-7). He provides us with a glimpse of this imagined setting so that we can clearly see the difference between what he imagines and how the perception changes when he views the actual urban landscape: “Vauxhall and Ranelagh! I then had heard / Of your green groves, and wilderness of lamps / Dimming the stars, and fireworks magical / And gorgeous ladies, under splendid domes” (121-24). When he witnesses London for the first time, he explains that the bold imaginings, which created the fantastical view of the city, have now faded and left other imaginings in their place. Unlike Johnson and Cowper who expose the bold imaginings as being completely imaginary, Wordsworth demonstrates that the inner landscape functions by affecting the ways in which he views the outer landscape. Instead of showing the two landscapes as

separate, he exposes their interrelated qualities. Thus, the two landscapes are mutually dependent on one another.

Like Gay, Wordsworth will not participate in the scene, but he will observe the performance, and, in this way, control his reader's perspective. In a voice of command that shows his authoritative role, he calls the scene into view: "Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain" (149). As if directing a play, Wordsworth immediately reveals his role in the performance. He does not tell the reader he is walking down the streets of London, but through describing the "dance," he describes the sense of motion going on around him: "The comers and the goers face to face / Face after face; the string of dazzling wares / Shop after shop" (156-58). For Wordsworth, the city consists of "strangers, of all ages" (154) not specific individuals such as the chairman, the barber, and the perfumer from *Trivia*. The city comprises shapes rather than detailed outlines, indistinguishable voices with no audible meaning. Eventually, all objects lose their individuality and are "melted and reduced / To one identity, by differences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end" (7.726-28). As a result, Wordsworth feels alienated from the people in the city:

How oft, amid those overflowing streets,
Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, "The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery!" (7.726-29)

The poet frequently goes to the city and although he encounters crowds rather than individuals, the mystery of the faces creates even more interest for him. His choice of the word "mystery" implies that, at the same time that he experiences alienation, he also

encounters faces that are intriguing. Mystery, for Wordsworth, entails the unknown, that which is not yet known and that which will never be known. This element of the unknown both fascinates and frightens him. In this case, the mysterious faces excite him because they represent the “unfenced regions of society” (57) mentioned earlier in Book Seven. As an observer, he cannot tell the reader who, exactly he sees in the crowd, but he can relay his own excitement by relating that each face denotes its own sense of mystery. In “Tintern Abbey,” however, Wordsworth displays a more fearful side to that which is mysterious. He claims that his inner landscape, consisting of the “beauteous forms,” has lightened “the burthen of the mystery . . . the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world” (37-40). In this way, he portrays the mysterious as something that burdens him because it is unknown. While describing a rural landscape in “Tintern Abbey,” he concentrates on a broader meaning of the term “mystery,” as it relates to the sublime. His mind naturally focuses on the sublime aspects of nature when he is in a rural setting, causing him to be burdened by that which he cannot explain. Conversely, when he is in the city, as demonstrated in Book Seven of *The Prelude*, that which is mysterious is also intriguing since the poet does not associate the city or anything in the city with the sublime. In addition, Wordsworth clearly participates in all aspects of his rural landscape as he thinks back to his encounter with the Wye Valley, but he remains outside of the action in his urban setting and, therefore, does not become over-burdened by the unknown.

Because Wordsworth is not burdened by the unknown element of the city, he is enticed by the places, people, and objects that make up the city. Although the anonymity and busy-ness of the crowds initially oppress him, he cannot help but be aroused and

thrilled by their energy, similar to what he has retained from nature as part of his inner landscape. Instead of limiting himself to simple rural characters such as the Cumberland beggar, Wordsworth now writes of “Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs” (7.707) and the “silver collared Negro with his timbrel” (7.703). Through these unique characters, Wordsworth finds a different aspect of man’s character, a less humble, more animalistic nature. These urban characters remain in contrast to Wordsworth’s humble rural characters such as the leech gatherer (“Resolution and Independence”). Urban inhabitants are colorful, loud, constantly in motion, and anything but humble as they perform for the crowds and the poet himself.

The blind beggar depicted in Book Seven serves as the exception standing apart from the other urban characters. Just like Johnson’s Thales, Wordsworth’s blind beggar is another “type,” a universal symbol that serves a didactic purpose. While viewing the city streets, Wordsworth rarely focuses on individual objects or people, but he does notice the blind beggar who “with upright face / Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest / Wearing a written paper, to explain / His story, whence he came, and who he was” (639-42). Like Thales, Wordsworth’s beggar is almost too innocent for such a corrupt setting. Wordsworth does not recognize anyone – “The face of everyone that passes by me is a mystery” (628-29) – until he reaches the blind beggar, and through the beggar’s face the poet is warned as if from another world. In the midst of moving crowds and “overflowing streets” (626), Wordsworth introduces us to a contradictory image in the beggar. Like Wordsworth, the beggar is stationary, “unmoving” (647) and “steadfast” (648), while everything else becomes a moving backdrop: “That huge fermenting mass of human-kind / Serves as a solemn back-ground, or relief / To single forms and objects”

(621-23). Both Wordsworth and the beggar comprise the “single forms and objects” that remain in the forefront of the “huge fermenting mass.” The beggar actually pulls the poet out of the “moving pageant,” away from the mysterious faces, giving him a sense of familiarity. If the beggar had been moving with the mass, he would not have been noticeable. Unlike the nameless faces of the crowd, the beggar’s story is evident (written upon his chest). The beggar’s real handicap is not his blindness, but his inability to speak; he can only witness the crowds through listening to them, and somehow understands that to be heard requires a way to be noticed. Therefore, instead of moving, he remains stationary, and instead of talking, he remains silent. In essence, his actions provide the antithesis to the crowd’s meaningless motion, and in this way, the beggar captures the poet’s eye. This solitary figure is not one of the mysterious faces, for the poet, after reading his story, recognizes a man who knows where he has been and where he is going. In the same way, Wordsworth separates himself from the crowd by remaining stationary and relating his experiences through writing.

Wordsworth explains that “structures like these the excited spirit mainly / Builds for herself” (650-52). He makes a clear distinction between objects that cause the inner mind to create its own scene from the outer object (i.e., the blind beggar), and those that take little assistance from the mind but are already formed (653) such as “the peace that comes with night” (655) or “at late hours / Of winter evenings, when unwholesome rains / Are falling hard” (662-64). Even these things, he concedes, are “falsely cataloged” (669). Ultimately, Wordsworth concludes that: “things that are, are not / As the mind answers to them, or the heart / Is prompt, or slow, to feel” (669-71). In this way, Wordsworth teaches his reader that what actually exists is not reflected by the mind or by

the heart's response. There is a difference, he claims, between the object of the beggar standing on the street, and what the beggar becomes or symbolizes when the image is transferred to the poet's inner landscape. Because we cannot separate ourselves from the emotional reaction to the object or scene, and because we bring past experiences with us to face new experiences, every object, both urban and rural, "the excited spirit builds for itself" (652). With this stated, he then begins to question his own assumption by asking his reader how to interpret times when half the city breaks out "full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear?" (673). Wordsworth is really wondering how a diverse group of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and most importantly, different inner landscapes, can unite to form one common passion. He shows us, through this example, that as a whole, the creative power of collective men is useless, unproductive: "there, see / A work completed to our hands, that lays / If any spectacle on earth can do / The whole creative powers of men asleep" (678-82). While Gay and Cowper expose the gathering of men as healthy because of what can be produced through them, Wordsworth reveals that unified passions create chaos, as displayed through Bartholomew Fair.

Consistent with his own detachment from the urban scene, Wordsworth places his reader in Book Seven safely upon a showman's platform to observe the fair without actually having to participate in it. The reader views the scene through the poet's eyes. The description of the fair opens with the poet explaining that he will provide the "colour, motion, shape, sight, [and] sound" of the spectacle, yet the language used to describe this spectacle is less intense at the beginning of his depiction: "huge scrolls" (7.692), "children whirling" (695), and "chattering monkeys" (694). His descriptions intensify, however, as he later portrays the actions of the crowd: "grimacing, writhing, screaming"

(699). Similarly, those involved in this moving theater evolve as images are transformed to the inner mind from “buffoons” to “moveables of wonder” to “freaks of nature” and, finally, to “a Parliament of Monsters.” Everything intensifies until the poet must call out “Oh, blank confusion” (7.722). Although Wordsworth does not literally participate in the scene, he displays through these images how the mind participates as both inner and outer landscapes create their own scene within the mind of the poet. The intensification of images directly relates to the amalgamation of both landscapes and actually causes the poet confusion rather than clarification.

The amalgamation of the two landscapes (both inner and outer) achieves different results in the city than it does in the country. For example, when Wordsworth returns to the Wye Valley and writes about his encounter after leaving the scene, the inner landscape, or what he refers to as “the picture of the mind,” provides him with pleasure and a sense of future inspiration: “The picture of the mind revives again / While here I stand, not only with the sense / Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years” (“Tintern Abbey” 61-65). In the city, however, when past urban images created through the inner landscape combine with the images that he currently witnesses, they become more intense, larger-than-life, and therefore more disturbing.

Wordsworth points out, however, that this oppressive scene (witnessed at Bartholomew Fair) does not weary “him who looks / In steadiness, who hath among least things / An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole” (733-36). As the poet remains on the platform with his reader, he knows that being able to fit the parts into the whole requires, first of all, the ability to remain on the

platform, separated. It also requires the capacity to appreciate natural objects and to grasp an understanding of where this city with its material emphasis fits into the whole picture. Most importantly, Wordsworth understands that this scene in the city, and the city itself, is just a part, not the whole. While both the city and the country alone are parts, together they comprise the whole.

Wordsworth credits his ability to view the parts within the whole to his “early converse with the works of God (i.e., nature)” (7.741-42). He also credits the elements of nature for giving men the ability to understand these parts: “the everlasting streams and woods . . . exalt the roving Indian” (7.745-47); the grandeur of the desert sands inspire the Arab, and the ancient hills have “quicken[ed] the slumbering mind” (7.759). Thus Wordsworth proclaims that in the midst of what he finds transitory and trivial in the city, nature has never left him but enables him to experience the harmony of two very conflicting worlds. In other words, nature teaches him how to retain his identity despite the masses, and to understand the lesson of the blind beggar by acknowledging that the beggar’s story is unique to anyone else’s story. Wordsworth believes that the foundation he receives from nature enables him to see past the transitory objects of the city and understand how both urban and rural worlds create a whole unit. For this reason, he ends Book Seven by stating:

This did I feel, in London’s vast domain.
The Spirit of Nature was upon me there;
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life
Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused,
Through meager lines and colours, and the press

Of self-destroying, transitory things,

Composure, and ennobling Harmony. (765-71)

As a sudden revelation, Wordsworth discovers that although he cannot actually be in nature while in this urban setting, the spirit of nature or the inner landscape that he has depicted of nature remains with him. Wordsworth refers to nature as the “soul of Beauty” as he realizes that it continues to inspire him even when he is far from its presence. In essence, he sees and understands how the city fits into the overall picture. The key to understanding the relationship of the country and the city is to understand the parts, the Spirit of Nature (power, simplicity) and to be able to understand how the least relate to the greatest. Ultimately, to view harmony in the city requires an early union with nature, thus only will “attention spring” and “comprehensiveness and memory flow” (7.740-41). The city, therefore, combined with nature and the inner landscape of the mind can be a positive element, but the city, independent of the country, becomes a Parliament of Monsters.

This complex image of the city is evident in the poem “Upon Westminster Bridge” where Wordsworth describes the city as a garment that wears “the beauty of the morning; silent, bare / Open unto the fields, and to the sky / All bright and glittering in the smokeless air” (4-8). According to Newlyn, “it is the pleasure of finding these opposite worlds at all comparable which gives immediacy and significance to [Wordsworth’s] writing” (“Lamb” 179). Newlyn indicates that for Wordsworth, the smoke had always appeared polluting, and formerly represented the alienation of the city; yet, in “Upon Westminster Bridge,” he “celebrates a moment of vision in which the real world is transformed” (179). Wordsworth celebrates, however, more than a “moment of

vision” when he looks out at London. When he explains in the first line “Earth has not anything to show more fair,” it is the first time in his poetry that he has admitted the equality of the city to the country. Earth (i.e., nature) does not contain anything greater than what he finds in the city. In the first book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth uses the term “earth” in relation to nature (to his rural surroundings): “in what vale / Shall be my harbour? Underneath what grove / Shall I take up my home? And what clear stream / Shall with its murmur lull me into rest / The earth is all before me” (10-14). Throughout his writings, earth relates to nature or to the natural surroundings of the poet; similarly, Wordsworth employs the term “earth” in this urban poem, to link nature to the city. Instead of placing an urban object in nature, Wordsworth takes objects from nature such as the sun and recognizes them in an urban setting. Furthermore, he claims that the sun as it is rising over the city has never looked more beautiful, not even while he watches a sunrise over a “valley, rock, or hill” (10). What Wordsworth is describing is significant to an understanding of his views of the city in relation to the country. Not even in the country has he seen the sun look so beautiful, nor in his rural landscapes has he seen and felt such calm. By using the word “never” twice, he emphasizes the uniqueness of this urban experience to anything that he has witnessed or felt in his rural walks. Wordsworth finds a unifying whole in these opposed spaces.

Perhaps even more significantly, Wordsworth wrote this poem one month after he viewed the scene. On July 31, 1802, before marrying Mary Hutchinson, Wordsworth took a trip to France to see his daughter Caroline and crossed Westminster Bridge on coach. Burton Pike refers to Wordsworth’s account of London as a “*trompe l’oeil* reconstruction of a fleeting impression” (29). He contends that, since Wordsworth was

not actually looking at London while writing the poem, the poem amounts to an illusion of what the poet would like the city to depict, not what it actually represents: “It is as if the city seen in depopulated, death-like repose, has left the world of human activity where it belongs to become another object in the world of nature” (30). Conversely, although Wordsworth’s portrayal of the city is static rather than active, and although he may have embellished the scene during a lapse of a month, he is characteristically doing what he did in “Tintern Abbey” -- returning to a scene through the power of memory and creating an inner landscape from an outer one. Throughout his poetry, Wordsworth tends to reflect back upon scenes that give him comfort in his present state, the very tactic captured in the city scene surrounding Westminster Bridge. In the 1800 “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explains that the poet has “an ability of conjuring up in himself passions which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events” (325). The view from Westminster Bridge has been to Wordsworth what the rural scene comprised in “Tintern Abbey” “in which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened” (39-41). Therefore, Wordsworth uses both urban and rural scenes as inner landscapes to provide relief while “in lonely rooms” (“Tintern Abbey” 26). The poem “Upon Westminster Bridge” reveals Wordsworth’s reliance on the city as a source of inspiration. Even more importantly, the poem indicates that Wordsworth needs the city just as much as he needs the country (nature).

Wordsworth provides the finale to the picturesque depictions of urban London initiated by Gay in the early eighteenth-century. By moving the picturesque into new directions, he eventually bridges the gap between what was once a definitive line concerning urban and rural landscapes. Wordsworth’s picturesque portrayal of the urban

landscape contains a detached poet who observes rather than participates and who records the observations using elevated images that exaggerate the picturesque form. Like Gay, Johnson, and Cowper, Wordsworth confronts the inconsistent images that typify the urban picturesque. Additionally, through his discussions of the inner landscape, he reveals the influence that the landscape of the mind can have on his actual surroundings, concluding that the two landscapes are inseparable. Although Cowper introduced the inner landscape and compared it to the actual landscape, he never exposed their interrelated features. Wordsworth not only unites these two landscapes, but also shows the connection between both urban and rural settings, and their importance to the poet. Instead of rejecting one and relying solely on another, he finds, along with his contemporaries, that the urban landscape is just as influential to him and discovers that elements of nature reside even in urban surroundings – he defines this revelation as the ability “to see the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole” (*The Prelude* 7.735-36).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Through these four poets, the urban picturesque form was established and solidified to include characteristics that continue throughout the nineteenth-century. Gay's depiction of an industrious city with its constant activity, its opportunity and its danger, paved the way for Johnson's portrayal of a city that contains moral depravity, yet a raw naturalness. Johnson causes the reader to question his own sense of what is "real" and what is purely idealized, and Cowper continues this thought by introducing the workings of the inner mind and its ability to create idealized scenes that appear in opposition to the actual urban landscape. While Cowper separates both the landscape of the mind and the actual urban landscape, exposing the reality of one and the artificiality of the other, Wordsworth exposes their interrelatedness. Through all of their discussions of the city, they define the urban picturesque and reveal its specific characteristics: the urban picturesque contains a detached poet who serves as a guide to the reader, who must address the inconsistent images that make up the urban landscape.

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