

**Introduction to *Letters from England: By Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella***

**Edited by Carol Bolton**

When *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* was published in the summer of 1807, readers and reviewers were not sure what to make of it. It is still a puzzle to us now, due to its bi-vocal, multilayered construction. Though some of its original readers were fooled into thinking that it was written by a foreign visitor to their shores, a common response among the intrigued literati was that it was ‘pretty evidently the work of some experienced *English* bookmaker’.<sup>1</sup> Within six months of its publication this ‘bookmaker’ was revealed as the poet, reviewer and translator, Robert Southey.<sup>2</sup> The pretence of a Spanish author, communicating his first impressions of English manners and customs in epistolary form to his family at home, was important to Southey for several reasons. In the spring of 1805, when he had begun writing the book, he declared his plan to be:

My Spaniard, D. Manuel Alvares Espriella, is a young man, of good family, travelling solely for instruction. he is come to England with a M<sup>r</sup> J. a London merchant, with whom he had become acquainted in Spain, & in whose family he is domesticated in London. He arrives early in May & travels immediately to town, where he remains for a few weeks, & then takes certain journeys into the country – winters in London, & returns late in the spring thro the West of England to Falmouth. He brings some knowledge of the language with him, is indefatigably industrious, & has an eye for every thing around him, & is fortunate in having intelligent friends to assist his enquiries. in short as able a man as I can make him, with high notions of family, & a rooted belief in the Catholic faith, even in its absurdities, – which weakness is not inconsistent with his general talents, if you conceive that his fathers *solar* (family

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Jeffrey, ‘Don Manuel Espriella’s *Letters from England*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (January 1808), 370-390, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Espriella seems generally known. I can only console myself by proving that the world *had no reason* for knowing it because it only knows me as a poet & Espriella is not in the same stile as Madoc Thalaba or Joan of Arc. It cannot be helped, & it is no matter’ (Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford and Ian Packer (gen. eds), *Collected Letters of Robert Southey, Parts 1–4: 1791-1815 (Romantic Circles, 2014)*, Carol Bolton and Tim Fulford (eds), *Part 3: 1804–1809*, Letter 1401. Hereafter *CLRS*.)

seat) is in a remote province, & not in a town, – & that he is affectionately attached to his Confessor.<sup>3</sup>

Southey chose this back story for his narrator, because he wanted to create the detached view of an outsider from which to critique his own society. His innocent *ingénu* comes from a sheltered, parochial background, and brings with him a strong, unquestioning, religious faith. This allows Southey to present naïve impressions that amuse and entertain (as Byron would do in *Don Juan*) but also to fulfil the role of ‘truth-teller’ for a sophisticated, elite audience.

Espriella’s travels across England in this role are extensive. Arriving in Falmouth, he traverses the West Country to London. With his English host he makes a tour of the Midlands and the North West, and embarks on a walking trip in the Lake District with another companion, before returning to London via Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. His journey concludes in Cornwall again for the voyage home. En route, Espriella comments on every aspect of English society, from fashions and manners to political and religious beliefs. His tour of England takes advantage of the historical realities of Southey’s own day, because it could only have credibly occurred while there was a peaceful cessation in the Napoleonic Wars. Southey’s travelogue gives Espriella access to a country that had been besieged by war for ten years, after Britain and revolutionary France had opened hostilities following the execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793. The war would continue against Napoleon Bonaparte, as First Consul and then Emperor of France until 1815. Before and after the short-lived Peace of Amiens (April 1802-September 1803) it was impossible for tourists to pass through the borders of Europe. So to give the most up-to-date account of England, Southey made use of this brief opportunity to write his contemporary travel account. This meant that as well as commenting on established aspects of English culture, he could present his views on current national events, and the most recent social and political developments. Ostensibly then, *Letters from England* is an account of the places, customs and habits of the English population of 1802-1803, written by a Spanish observer recounting his two-year tour of the country. But investigating its compositional process, through Southey’s correspondence and his Commonplace Books during the years of its construction, reveals the wide range of influences and sources he drew on.

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<sup>3</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1051. Southey first mentions the composition of *Letters from England* in correspondence written during Autumn 1804.

## Composition

Having rejected ideas of a career in the clergy, medicine and the law to establish himself as a professional writer, Southey was dependent on his creative powers to furnish his 'ways and means' (as he referred to his living expenses). A clear motivation for writing *Letters from England* therefore, was financial.<sup>4</sup> Southey wanted to write a bestseller, saying to his friend John Rickman, in October 1804:

I have a plan for making a saleable book in the shape of translated Letters from a Spaniard in England meaning thereby to transmute certain of my opinions & some of my knowledge into chairs tables &c. hoping I should have said, for this is the philosophers stone in the pursuit of which some damned thing or other has always baffled me.<sup>5</sup>

Producing a popular, 'saleable book' was imperative for the security and comfort of his growing family, as many of the letters he wrote during 1804 and 1805 demonstrate. By December 1804, this economic necessity had become more pressing:

Our house is not sold – the bargain is broken off & we remain possessors as long as may suit us. however the place does not suit me, & I mean to make another attempt at settling by writing an anonymous book purporting to be the letters of a Spaniard from England – & so putting in all I know & think which I can do *in character*: two octavo volumes I could get ready by the end of autumn, for this thing has long been thought of, & the Devil would be in it if such a book so seasoned as it would be with all wholesome stimulants, did not sell fast enough to answer my purpose<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See W. A. Speck, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (New Haven and London, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 983.

<sup>6</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1005. Other letters continue in this vein: 'The book will be very amusing, and may very possibly pass awhile for a translation. It will certainly excite attention and curiosity, and I calculate upon greater profits than anything has ever yet brought me' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1089).

The very real requirement for ‘settling’ in a home at the age of 30, after living in various locations, underpinned Southey’s art. The house he mentions, Greta Hall in Keswick, would become his home for the rest of his life, but at this stage the instability created by his landlord’s proposed sale of the property is evident. Southey had doubts that his epic poem, *Madoc*, due to be published in 1805, would sell well enough to fund a home elsewhere. His other recent and proposed publications – a new edition of previously published poems, the translation of a metrical romance, a narrative poem set in India, and a substantial history of Portugal – were also limited in their general appeal and unlikely to attract a wide readership.<sup>7</sup> In *Letters from England*, however, Southey could combine novelty and interest with a storehouse of information (containing ‘all I know and think’) on his native country, allowing the book to be written quickly. Its gestation period, from mention of his plans in October 1804, to its publication in July 1807, was short compared to the time given to writing epic poems and histories.<sup>8</sup> The delays that did arise were because of friends’ slow compliance with his requests for material, or by hold-ups at the printers, rather than his own lack of progress, and the enjoyment he felt in writing the book is evident in his correspondence on this subject.

Much of the information provided in *Letters from England* was collected from Southey’s own experiences and memories, but it also contains the accounts of friends and relatives who he canvassed for material on specific aspects of English life. So the book has stitched into it the voices and texts of others, including, for instance, the journal of an intrepid aunt of his close friend Charles Danvers, the English traveller, Celia Fiennes.<sup>9</sup> It has been possible to construct a list of contributors through Southey’s correspondence. For instance, Danvers was regularly solicited to find essential information.<sup>10</sup> Southey’s brother, Thomas, a

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<sup>7</sup> *Amadis of Gaul* (1804); *Metrical Tales and Other Poems* (1805); *The Curse of Kehama* (1810); Southey’s ‘History of Portugal’ was never published.

<sup>8</sup> It was probably completed by the end of July or the beginning of August 1807, based on the fact that Southey wrote to John May on 12 August 1807 saying ‘by this time you will have received Espriella’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1352).

<sup>9</sup> ‘This book of your Aunts is certainly a very curious one. D Manuel has been indebted to it more than once, & the translator of that valuable work is of the opinion that this M.S. ought to be printed, as a great store house for county historians & family history’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1051).

<sup>10</sup> ‘I shall be glad of Whitfields Memoirs – & also of his Letters if the copy you speak of be in good & cleanly condition, there being I think some danger of its displaying the unktion of female fingers. Have you any friend at Bath who can buy me a book there? – for I remember years ago in Hazards Catalogue, where it is likely to remain still – the Pilgrims Progress from

sailor who was engaged abroad in military campaigns for much of the writing period, contributed information on the navy.<sup>11</sup> Southey's fellow writer, Richard Duppa, wrote on London life and art, and specifically on Westminster Abbey.<sup>12</sup> Rickman, who held the position of Secretary to the Speaker of the House of Commons, supplied material on politics and parliamentary elections, as well as details of the journey from Salisbury to London.<sup>13</sup> Southey's school friend and patron, Charles William Watkins Wynn was applied to for information about the capital.<sup>14</sup> Southey's youngest brother, Henry Herbert Southey, who

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Quakerism to Christianity by a M<sup>r</sup> Bugg, – a name of such remarkable beauty as not easily to be forgotten. Now a few shillings may well be ventured upon this Essence of Bugg, – for I have to review Clarksons book, & also to write one of Espriellas letters upon the Quakers, & if this book be any way correspondent to its title it would repay its own cost' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1242).

<sup>11</sup> 'I want you grievously to tell Espriella stories about the navy, & give him a good idea of the present state, which of course I cannot venture to do except very slightly & very cautiously, fully aware of my own incompetence. Some of your own stories you will recognize. the book will be very amusing, & promises more profit than any of my former works' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1130).

<sup>12</sup> 'Your letters are in tune to a miracle. I like them exceedingly & do not see that they stand in any need of transcription, except in compassion to the Printer, for it must be confessed your handwriting is the very perfection of unintelligibility. The first must come in about 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> in the series. the other a little farther on. I wish you also to show him the Exhibition for 1802 [...] Your travelled Englishman will be a fit person to show him the Exhibition – & you may say what is to be said about Somerset House. With architecture & the arts it would be very foolish for me to meddle when you are at hand' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1137).

<sup>13</sup> 'And can you send me one or two of the choicer Election reports, – Aylesbury – Ivelchester – & Nottingham. – for I am at intervals getting together as ways & means extraordinary for the year, all ~~xxxx~~ I know & much of what I speculate about this country of ours, in the form of Travels by Don Manuel Alvares Espriella – translated. This is a secret to every body in London except to you & Duppa, – he is to furnish certain letters, – & you shall see the whole & mend & make at your pleasure. It is likely to be a good book, & not a bad adventure. These said reports will furnish good matter for the chapter upon Elections' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1049).

<sup>14</sup> 'In the first of the inclosed Letters there are three blanks which you can probably fill up for me – the number of theatres in London in Elizabeths time, the number of persons which the Pitt at Drury Lane holds, & the number of tiers of boxes there [...] Bedford has sent me three sheets about the Abbey instead of ~~extracts~~ three sentences – I wanted a more sure description of Sir Cloudeslys monument & of Mr Thynnes than my own memory would supply to insert in a Letter which Duppa has written; for whatever relates to architecture & the arts he supplies me with. – Such another importation as the present will compleat the first volume – I shall begin the second with a journey to this part of England by way of Oxford, Birmingham & Liverpool' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1198).

had recently qualified as a physician, contributed material on medicine for the book.<sup>15</sup> Harry also undertook specific fact-finding ‘commissions’.<sup>16</sup> One of Southey’s favourite female acquaintances, Mary Barker, was another helping hand, whom he consulted on a range of topics including the Millenarian prophet Joanna Southcott, cookery, music, and Welsh ‘fairies’.<sup>17</sup> Southey’s life-long friend, Grosvenor Charles Bedford, was constantly reminded to supply information. In return Southey sent Bedford his impressions of the sacred texts he was reading for his book (such as popular editions of the Bible and the revelations of Emmanuel Swedenborg) for his comments. Even more interestingly, Southey consulted Bedford on the tone of his travelogue, in his concern to maintain the authenticity of his fiction yet inject light-hearted humour into it. He wanted this book to be extremely different from the public perception of him as ‘a very grave sort of person’.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> ‘The Spaniard goes on well. Have you time to write for him a sketch of the system of medical education? & of the Brunonian theory? it matters not how briefly’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1131).

<sup>16</sup> ‘And now Sir I have a commission which I must beg you to execute next Sunday, & that is to go to the New Jerusalem {i.e. Swedenborgian} Chapel, it is near S<sup>t</sup> James’s Square, & that is all the direction I can give you, – but you will look well asking your way to it, & no doubt do it with a very grave face. I want an account of the service & of the ceremonies – the ornaments – dress of M<sup>r</sup> Proud the Priest &c – it is for D Manuel, & he cannot have it too soon, – for I am spurring on Richard Taylor, & have nearly done the whole’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1260).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Can you bring with you the Welshmans book about the fairies? – I am going to make a book for the lucre of gain in which you can help me – Letters from England by a Spaniard – which I mean to pass off as a translation – so mind you keep the secret – for my name is not to appear. In this all that I know of England is to appear, & such a collection of stories & odd things it will be, as will very likely be a profitable – certainly a very amusing & curious book Now you have some odd things which will help me – some Welsh anecdotes, – also about Joanna Southcote – the county Rovers &c all which we will talk over when we meet. I want to give a compleat picture of the actual state of England such as it would appear to a foreigner, indefatigable in looking about him, who had keen eyes of his own, & intelligent friends to aid his curiosity’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1027).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Don Manuel. How could you not understand it was a secret? do you not remember how covertly I enquired of you the text in Fields Bible? & was not my very phrase that they were to be shown to you under the seal of silence? – The use of secresy is to create curiosity, – & *perhaps* to pass thro the reviews under cover. Rickman particularly commends the foreign cast of remarks thro the whole of the journey. thus do Doctors differ. I make blunders sometimes, but am cautious of overdoing it. Do you make more, & if they do not suit my conception of the Spaniards character they can be omitted or modified. On many subjects you will know necessarily more than I can do, & I shall expect some whole letters & many interpolations from you. You see the plan admits of every thing. I get bravely on with it, & feel no doubt of producing a book which will be thought very amusing now, & very valuable

Creating a new text from a ‘patchwork’ of elements was a particular method of Southey’s, and as in his epic poems and histories we can see him harvesting material from a range of sources.<sup>19</sup> This process is particularly evident in his use of commonplace books, which demonstrate how unrelated texts are given new significance in being merged together through his imaginative engagement with them.<sup>20</sup> In drawing on the opinions and knowledge of his contemporaries, the collaborative nature of Southey’s working methods exemplify other Romantic-period social and literary networks that were established through the practice of ‘bookmaking’. The close friendships, networks of influence, and working relationships of authors of the period – such as between Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, or the coterie of writers around Leigh Hunt (John Keats, Percy Shelley, William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb), and the Joseph Johnson circle (including William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays) – challenge assumptions of Romantic writers as solitary and reclusive.<sup>21</sup> Southey drew on the established, social networks of his own associates to replicate the other collaborative working relationships that he fostered over his lifetime, such as with his friends Robert Lovell, Bedford and Coleridge, and even his brother Thomas, who he assisted in writing a *Chronological History of the West Indies* (1827). Creating composite texts that employ the knowledge and expertise of others was also a common feature of travel narratives, with authors referring to previous accounts of places visited as corroborative evidence or to increase the stature of their own representations. Such methods can be seen in Thomas Pennant’s *A Tour in Scotland* (1769) which draws on Joseph Banks’ description of Staffa to add topographical authenticity to his account. The exuberant tone of Banks’ description of ‘a scene of magnificence’, which with its naturally occurring basalt pillars and arches

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hereafter when I & the author of the Butler shall be considered as antients. – Have you ever been to Margate? I want much to have a journey into Kent for him. – As for the queerities let them stay – it is only they who know me pretty nearly, know what a queer fish I am. The world conceives me to be a very grave sort of person. Besides I have not the least intention of keeping the thing concealed, after the purpose of secrecy has been answered’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1129).

<sup>19</sup> This was Francis Jeffrey’s term for Southey’s methods of construction in his review of *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). See ‘Francis Jeffrey, unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1802’, Lionel Madden (ed.), *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston, 1792), pp. 68-90, p. 83. Ourania Chatsiou also discusses Southey’s processes of compilation in ‘Paratext and Poetics in British Romantic-period Literature’, (Unpublished thesis: University of Swansea, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>21</sup> See Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds) *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (2006).

diminishes ‘the cathedrals or the palaces built by men!’, conveys the region’s distinctive features through a combination of detailed measurements and sublime effects.<sup>22</sup> In his own travel narrative therefore, drawing on the expertise of others to make a new work as the sum of its parts was a natural method for Southey. His collaborative work gives the lie to the long-held impression that he was a remote Romantic writer living in exile from the world around him in the Lake District, creating his unique visions in isolation. Southey was integrally connected to a network of friends, acquaintances and colleagues, and he kept up these associations through his correspondence with them, using the very method that inspired the book’s epistolary form.

However, despite the synergistic, intertextual nature of *Letters from England*, it is primarily a repository for Southey’s own, often inflammatory, opinions on society and politics. This personal investment in the book was not as obvious to his first readers, who were asked to accept it at face value as the work of its eponymous author. Southey was keen to maintain his anonymity in order to intrigue readers and potentially increase the book’s profits, but also to hide his identity from reviewers who might be hostile to his work. Southey suspected, for instance, that Francis Jeffrey’s exposure of him as a radical member of ‘a sect of poets’ who were ‘*dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism’ in the *Edinburgh Review* (1802), had damaged sales of his work and adversely affected his writing career.<sup>23</sup> He believed that Jeffrey would take the opportunity to harm him again (and limit the possible profits from his book) if he knew of his authorship.<sup>24</sup> In order to promote positive responses to his publication, therefore, Southey warned close friends against attributing it to him, because ‘the use of secrecy is to create curiosity, – & *perhaps* to pass thro the reviews under cover’.<sup>25</sup> To protect his secret Rickman was used as a go-between, forwarding the proofs Southey sent him to the printer, Richard Taylor, who was chosen because he could be

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1772), I, pp. 300-301.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Francis Jeffrey, unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1802’, ed. Madden, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Neither will Espriella be so long. my only motive is a wish that it may {pass} as a translation with those reviewers who criticise my books with no other object than to injure me’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1081).

<sup>25</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1129.



trusted to be discreet and complete the work quickly.<sup>26</sup> The book's pseudonym also enabled Southey to detach himself from what could be considered a 'popular' work. While he delighted in his invention and was proud of its reception,<sup>27</sup> *Letters from England* was clearly a very different publishing experiment from his serious aspirations to be a renowned poet and historiographer.<sup>28</sup>

## Form

A notable influence on Southey's work was the travel narrative as a form, and particularly accounts of domestic tours, at a time when Britain had been at war for many years and the 'Grand Tour' of Europe had been circumscribed. Alison Mary Stenton has argued (based on studies by Esther Moir and Edward Cox) that greater consideration should be given to the importance of the English travelogue during the Romantic period.<sup>29</sup> Stenton's assessment of the evidence estimates 'that just over two hundred home travels were published between 1750 and 1810, a figure which indicates a four-fold increase on those published between 1700 and 1750'.<sup>30</sup> Southey responds to this interest in domestic travel accounts and new

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<sup>26</sup> 'Don Manuel is in the press, in Richard Taylors hands; a good printer whom I could trust with the secret, knowing him, & his character. I saw two proofs, & shall have the others franked by Rickman' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1179).

<sup>27</sup> Southey took pleasure from the fact that even visitors to Keswick did not guess his authorship: 'The Smiths arrived yesterday from Scotland. They are gone to Buttermere to day, & were to pass the evening here, but I suspect they are weather bound. Tom is with them. Don Manuel is their travelling companion, & I find they are acquainted with the author. – It would amuse you to hear the Imperial Colonel descant upon the bigotry of this said author, & admire his wonderful observation. nothing, he says, escapes him' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1357).

<sup>28</sup> He spent little time on this work subsequently, hardly revising the text in later editions. Plans to publish further volumes, though mentioned in his correspondence until 1816, were never fulfilled.

<sup>29</sup> Alison Mary Stenton, 'Late Eighteenth-Century Home Tours and Travel Narratives: Genre, Culture and Space', (Unpublished thesis: King's College, University of London, 2003), p. 16. This is addressed more recently in collections such as Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan (eds), *Travel Writing 1700-1830: An Anthology* (Oxford, 2005, repr. 2008) which includes a section on 'Travels in the British Isles' and demonstrates how 'literate Britons' global consciousness – fostered by reading travel books – shaped their perception of their home island', p. xxv.

<sup>30</sup> Stenton, 'Late Eighteenth-Century Home Tours and Travel Narratives: Genre, Culture and Space', p. 16. This reflects a general interest in all kinds of travel: domestic and global. For instance, William St Clair demonstrates the importance of travel narratives in the period, and

books for English ‘tourists’ (a word coined during this period) in *Letters from England*, by explicitly drawing on fashionable works of the Romantic period such as *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1801–1818).<sup>31</sup> Britton and Brayley’s lavishly produced guides fuelled tourism by describing popular sites of interest all over the country and Southey’s work also anticipates this trend in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when ordinary classes of people such as his Spanish visitor, joined the elite travellers of the eighteenth-century.<sup>32</sup> In its dissected descriptions of provinces and towns, Southey’s book is influenced by other progenitors of this form, from Daniel Defoe’s *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6), also ‘divided into circuits or journies’, to William Gilpin’s more recent *Observations* on various parts of England (1782-1809).<sup>33</sup> Southey draws on an eighteenth-century trend for establishing distinct regions within the recently formed entity of Great Britain (after the 1707 Acts of Union). Domestic travellers increasingly defined the unique characteristics within their country, identified through geographical features or county boundaries, and given a specific flavour through the occupations and customs of their inhabitants. In this way travel within the English regions became popular, as did the accounts generated by travellers, with Southey’s contemporary, John Byng, commenting that ‘tour writing is the very rage of the times’.<sup>34</sup> Some travels, like Byng’s, were circulated among family members and friends, while others attracted a wider readership through print. Byng

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the rise in publication figures as demand for them increased, in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 232-234.

<sup>31</sup> ‘I am sadly in want of topographical history, – & when I come to London with my work taylor like, shall probably find those Beauties of England useful; in such parts of the manumatter-of-factory, which must have place for verisimilitude-sake, but which must be as brief as may be for every reason’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1049).

<sup>32</sup> Other recent publications were Cuthbert Cruttwell’s *Tour through Great Britain* (1801) and Alexander Campbell’s *A Journey from Edinburgh through parts of North Britain* (1802).

<sup>33</sup> A section of Gilpin’s guides were: *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (1782); *Remarks on Forest Scenery, and other Woodland Views (Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty), Illustrated by the Scenes of New Forest in Hampshire* (1791); *Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; to which are Added a few Remarks on the Picturesque Beauties of the Isle of Wight* (1798).

<sup>34</sup> John Byng, ‘Ride into the West 1782’, quoted in Stenton, ‘Late Eighteenth-Century Home Tours and Travel Narratives’, p. 13.

reports that his travels through all parts of Britain had made him an unlikely ‘man of mode’, and such cache was desirable for Southey in his own work.<sup>35</sup>

Within ten years of Southey’s publication, with national borders re-opening at the end of the Napoleonic wars, travel would become as ‘invitingly open to the sober citizen and his worthy family, as Margate or Brighton, [and] it could not but follow that the press should groan with many a Tour – much travel – and sundry masses of Letters that never paid postage’.<sup>36</sup> The sardonic reviewer of these writings identifies the vogue for such travels and the chief form of reporting them – which would remain fashionable into the nineteenth century – that of the letter. In choosing this form himself, Southey was influenced by the eighteenth-century trend for faux travel accounts. Ostensibly written by foreign visitors to Britain they were often penned by much more familiar authors. A selection of these works that were in circulation during the eighteenth-century are: Giovanni Paolo Marana, *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (first published in Paris in 1684); Baron de Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes* (1721); John Shebbeare, *Letters on the English Nation* (1755); Horace Walpole, ‘A Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, to his friend Lien Chi at Peking’ (1757); Thomas Percy, *Hau Kiou Chooan, or, The Pleasing History* (1761); Oliver Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World* (1762); Elizabeth Hamilton, *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). These firsthand experiences of cross-cultural contact were particularly attractive to English readers, who could see their own country anew from a strange perspective, and Southey was influenced by them in his own faux travel narrative (as discussed in the section on ‘Narrator’ below) to provide an updated commentary on England.

The epistolary form of these travel narratives was still very popular in the Romantic period and was chosen by Mary Wollstonecraft for her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). This work became a standard of the form and was much admired by contemporary readers, including Southey.<sup>37</sup> Whether based

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<sup>35</sup> Byng, ‘Ride into the West 1782’, quoted in Stenton, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Jorgenson’s Travels’, *Edinburgh Review*, 28, 55, (August, 1817), 371-390, 371.

<sup>37</sup> In Southey’s poem ‘To A. S. Cottle’, written after reading Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, he imagines her looking at Norwegian scenes with ‘the eye of Fancy’, perceiving her as one:

Who among women left no equal mind  
When from this world she pass’d: and I could weep,  
To think that *She* is to the grave gone down!

on a fictional or real journey, the flexibility of the epistolary travel narrative allowed the incorporation of a traveller's own personal, social and political reflections within an account of places visited, so adapting private encounters for public consumption. In this way, through letters written as reportage, the 'actual experience of a journey is reconstructed, and therefore fictionalised, in the moment of being told', as Barbara Korte observes.<sup>38</sup> While letters claimed to have unique access to the personal, subjective thoughts of their writer (during a literary period that particularly valued the insights afforded by introspection and interiority) the published epistle meant a complex negotiation between these private and public spheres. As Mary Favret states:

Throughout the eighteenth century, the letter's ability to define and confine personal experience had already been subject to a centripetal force which carried the private into the public realm, offering the individual's most intimate self for mass consumption.<sup>39</sup>

The ensuing popularity of the epistolary form as a result of this 'force' is clear in many writings of the eighteenth-century, such as Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748). The epistle as a literary form was therefore a natural choice for Southey. It was one which he had tried and tested in various ways, and he knew its private and public dimensions made it attractive to readers.

In *Letters from England* and other faux travel narratives however, it is the author's responses to society, rather than his confessional disclosures, which make the personal particularly political. Southey's companionable, informal style of writing allows us certain insights into his thoughts and beliefs, but the invention of his narrator keeps us from identifying them as his own, and the public nature of the text (intended for transmission to as many readers as possible) modifies our perceptions to believe it could be an authentic, even objective, account of English society. This combination of unique insight and generalised

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The poem was published in Amos Cottle, *Icelandic Poetry, or the Edda of Saemund, Translated into English Verse* (Bristol, 1797), pp. [xxxix]–xlii, with these lines appearing on page xxxvi.

<sup>38</sup> Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Exploration*, trans. Catherine Matthias (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 12.

observations is still an intriguing element of the work for modern readers. It was a technique that Southey borrowed from travel narratives and used in his long poems on alien, oriental cultures, such as *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810). In these works the evidence of cultural outsiders is used to provide ‘customs and manners’ sections that define people and places to create ‘types’. In *Letters from England* Southey also uses examples of specific instances – such as details of life in the provincial towns of Exeter, Dorchester and Blandford – to make general assertions about the ‘customs and manners’ of this oddly foreign country, now seen through ‘Spanish spectacles’.<sup>40</sup>

### Narrator

As in other Romantic-period writings that choose an atypical, inexperienced observer to comment on society, the innocent wisdom of Southey’s narrator is told ‘slant’.<sup>41</sup> This enables a novel perspective that questions the social structures and values which Southey’s contemporaries took for granted. So his Spaniard interrogates the religious beliefs, social attitudes and moral certainties of the English people he comes into contact with. Presenting the English as a race of strangers gives the same novelty to Southey’s account as the childish vision or impoverished perspective of marginalised figures in *Lyrical Ballads*. An observer of society who does not conform to establishment views of how it works and what its priorities should be can provide unique insights. In Espriella’s detailed account, seen through new eyes, we gain a novel, often humorous perspective on aspects of English life that are usually taken for granted. The advice Southey gave to a native of Spain intending to publish a similar travelogue of his country, usefully reveals his own writing methods:

do not be deterred from entering occasionally into the minutest details because they may be trivial to you, & to your contemporary countrymen; these things will be novelties to us, & they will be history hereafter, even in Spain itself. We in England love that life & reality which fulness of costume gives to representation of every kind, whether in painting or poetry, historical narrative, or the drama. The more of this life-

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<sup>40</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1051.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Dickinson ‘Tell All The Truth But Tell It Slant’, l. 1.

painting that you give us, the more willing will the reader be to follow you in your views & feelings.<sup>42</sup>

The detail of the ‘life-painting’ was Southey’s ambition in *Letters from England*. It would be coloured of course by his own views and his narrator’s unique insights, but universal enough to be realistic and recognisable to his contemporaries.<sup>43</sup> With an historian’s perspective, he believed the book would have an abiding legacy of interest for future generations, and it is often as a work of social history that it is valued today.

The book’s comprehensive view of English society, presented through the guise of a Spanish author, allowed Southey to promote his own ideas obliquely through his invented persona. It also created occasions for him to make acerbic comments on the Spaniard’s observations, in his dual role as the text’s translator. *Letters from England* gave Southey the creative space and opportunity to express his ideas in an unfettered medium. This was a refreshing change from the constriction he felt in other public channels, such as articles written for the *Annual Review* (1802-1809) where he complained of his copy being modified or censored by the editors. Southey’s voice was often too strident for the tastes of the *Annual*, as well as the *Quarterly Review*, where he was employed as a reviewer from 1809 to 1839. But in his pseudonymous travel account his views on British society could be given greater license through the invention of a young foreign narrator with characteristics of the mock *ingénu*. As in the narrative voice of Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World*, whose Chinese traveller visits England yet is ‘entirely a stranger to their manners and customs’, Southey employs the innocence and naivety of an inexperienced traveller to comment on a more sophisticated, but less wise, society.<sup>44</sup> Another work that Southey admired, which uses a similar narrative voice, is Voltaire’s, *Candide, ou l’Optimisme* (1759). In *Candide* the protagonist’s innocence of the world and its systems means he becomes an easy victim for

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<sup>42</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1978.

<sup>43</sup> A letter written by Southey to his friend, Peter Elmsley, also delineates his intent in *Letters from England*: ‘I am putting as many of the odd things that I have seen or heard as can be published without touching upon any personalities, and as many of my own speculations as can be let loose without exciting suspicion as to the quarter from which they come. My object is to make as compleat a picture of the existing state of society in England, in as lively colours as I can – to the life I should have said – for some of the colours must necessarily be dark ones’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1081).

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World, or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher*, 2 vols (London, 1800), I, p. 1.

more knowledgeable, cosmopolitan rogues. The implication of travel for Voltaire – and also for the *philosophe* Louis De Jaucourt in his entry on the ‘Voyage’ in the *Encyclopedie* – is that it has educational benefits. Southey shared this belief, and like Voltaire demonstrated that the knowledge his traveller gains from his cultural encounters is essential for the development of *weltanschauung*; in fact to become a ‘citizen of the world’ with all the relativist implications that Goldsmith’s term implies. In this way travel accounts borrow from the *bildungsroman*, where a movement through time and space enables the central character, in this case the traveller, to gain greater knowledge and appreciation of the society being traversed, with the resolution of the journey seeing this improved consciousness communicated to the reader. Espriella’s journey ends with considerably more comprehension of his host culture, but he has also learnt, like *Candide*, that it is best to ‘cultivate’ his own (Spanish) ‘garden’ and returns home to do so. And, as in Voltaire’s philosophical travel narrative, there is no doubt that Southey’s readers have also received an education from his visitor’s experiences on their shores. That is because both Goldsmith’s work and Southey’s can teach us to look at society again through a similar ‘opposition between fashionable commodities and unfashionable morality’, as James Watt points out.<sup>45</sup>

The device of using a ‘foreign’ explorer of one’s home culture to create a contemporary social satire was popularised by many writers, from Marana and Montesquieu onwards. As an early reviewer of Hamilton's *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* observed:

There is no better vehicle for local satire than that of presenting remarks on the manners, laws, and customs of a nation, through the supposed medium of a foreigner, whose different views of things, as tinctured by the particular ideas and associations to which his mind has been habituated, often afford an excellent scope for raillery; and the mistakes into which such an observer is naturally betrayed, enliven the picture, and furnish the happiest opportunity for the display of humour and fancy.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> James Watt, ‘Goldsmith’s Cosmopolitanism’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 30, 1 (Winter 2006), 56-75, 62.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Miss Hamilton’s *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*’, *Critical Review*, 17 (July 1796), 241-249, 241.

Southey's account employs the same formula of 'satire' and 'raillery' to convey his strong convictions to readers. Like Lien Chi Altangi in *The Citizen of the World*, and indeed in Goldsmith's fictionalisation of his own travels in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), cultural relativism is used to induce a changed perspective in the traveller, but also to identify faults in the host society. Satire has to have a specific, clearly identified, social target, and Lien Chi's attack is made on the commercial instincts of the English people, which in their most extreme form culminate in territorial expansion and aggression. In Canada, he claims, the native occupants once had:

all the necessaries of life, and they found ample luxury in the enjoyment. In this manner they might have continued to live to eternity, had not the English been informed, that those countries produced furs in great abundance. From that moment the country became an object of desire [... as] furs were found indispensably necessary for the happiness of the state; and the king was consequently petitioned to grant, not only the country of Canada, but all the savages belonging to it, to the subjects of England, in order to have the people supplied with proper quantities of this necessary commodity.<sup>47</sup>

The outrageous equation of a luxury item such as 'furs' to the welfare of a nation (designated here as the 'happiness of the state') signals the scornful tone of satire, alerting readers to see that the opposite meaning is intended. In *Letters from England*, Southey also has English materialism in his sights. He uses satire to deride a society that values the commodities it produces over the human souls that supply them. The enterprising spirit of the English (which they are seen to prize so highly) means they always seek the most recent inventions, including the 'hunting razor, with which you may shave yourself while riding at full gallop' (*LE*, 134).<sup>48</sup> Such silliness in a nation addicted to innovation does not cloak the more sinister fault in its people who are 'made wanton by prosperity' (*LE*, 134). Despite the half-century between the appearance of *The Citizen of the World* and *Letters from England*, the same issues are at stake. Southey shows that the sentiment of Goldsmith's generation, 'Where wealth and freedom reign contentment fails, / And honour sinks where commerce long

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<sup>47</sup> Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, I, pp. 58-59.

<sup>48</sup> All references to the text are from this edition, denoted as *LE*, with the page numbers in parentheses after each quotation.



prevails', is still relevant to his own.<sup>49</sup> In this way Southey updates eighteenth-century concerns to show that human compassion – in his view an important requisite for society to function successfully – is still being eroded by the consumerist impulses of the wealthy. He also shows an alignment with other Romantics of his generation, sharing Wordsworth's view that by 'getting and spending, we lay waste our powers'.<sup>50</sup> It is not difficult to see what attracted Southey to the satires of the eighteenth-century, and as a writer who often looked back to earlier precedent he reinvigorates these tactics and targets for the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The satirical tradition that Southey draws on can also be traced back to Montesquieu and Goldsmith in his choice of the epistolary form. But while *Lettres Persanes* employs several narrators, some having divergent views, we can see a difference in Goldsmith's use of fewer and less distinct voices, only incorporating letters from a family friend and Lien Chi's son. By the time Southey wrote *Letters from England*, he had narrowed the narrative focus even further for satirical purposes. While the frame narrative is important to each of these works, whether the traveller is Persian, Chinese or Spanish, in Southey's case once the conceit has been set up he gives all his energy to the concentrated opinions of one character. By employing a single narrator (because the minimal interpolations of the translator cannot justify the significance of such a label) and incorporating the very similar views of his companions, 'J' and 'D' (who as the anonymising initials serve to remind us are not fully individuated characters) the vigorous views of his Spaniard take centre stage. In this way there is less opportunity for separate opinions that could undermine the main narrative. While humour is used against his Spanish character, Southey could not afford to have his most sacred beliefs held up for satirical scrutiny.

A further difference in Southey's text to earlier ones, especially Montesquieu's, is that it is less philosophical in tone and content. Southey followed more closely Goldsmith's precedent to entertain through detailed descriptions of society, and his account is even more focused on the trivialities of daily life. Perversely, however, the more precisely described these narratives became the less plausible they seemed to the reading public, and Goldsmith had readers who were suspicious of his Chinese narrator. By the time Espriella appeared on the scene, this form of fiction and its trope of a foreign observer was more widely known and

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<sup>49</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Traveller', ll. 91-92.

<sup>50</sup> William Wordsworth, 'The World Is Too Much With Us', l. 2.

suspected. But what is important in Southey's work, as in all satirical accounts of English society, is not that we believe in the fiction of his foreign visitor, but that we believe the 'Spanish' values and morality that are being offered to us are more worthy than our own social ethics. Early reviewers missed the point in demanding authenticity, because Southey aimed to show genuine emotions – like the right responses of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) to vignettes of suffering humanity – rather than to provide a credible story. We believe the honest utterances of Southey's fictional 'other', who exclaims at inequality and derides false values, in the same way that we believe Goldsmith's Chinese visitor 'is desirous of understanding the human heart'.<sup>51</sup> Both writers wished to reveal the soul existing beneath the veneer of society, even when it is dressed in the most up-to-date, dissembling, fashionable 'new clothes'.

The popularity of travel writing in the period after James Cook and Joseph Banks had visited and reported on the South Pacific – and all the 'visits' Southey made in his own reading of travel narratives to the Orient and America for his epic poems – are behind his account of a newcomer viewing society from the outside. The extensive footnotes in his narrative poems, garnered from numerous travel accounts, are testimony to the influence of reported encounters by outsiders, who publish their opinions of alien people and places for their metropolitan readers. Southey's 'othering' of his own nation intends to make it as strange a world for his readers as that found in the first footfalls of explorers stepping onto a new continent. Despite the unsettling position of a newcomer in an unfamiliar place, the outsider's perspective has power, as Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates. A desire to 'conquer' the land, or assimilate it through literary methods, if not political ones, by imposing an individualistic (often imperialist) ideology on the landscape can be condensed in its most extreme form to the trope of 'monarch of all I survey'.<sup>52</sup> The idea of collating information and reporting 'home' on what is found, does not allow the observed subjects a voice (although modern interventions in 'subaltern studies' are keen to counteract this view) and demonstrates a contrived authorial perspective to convey the values and opinions of the narrative voice. Southey had absorbed a great deal from his reading and writing on exploration and colonial ventures, and one technique he learnt was how to present a dominant, first-person view of another race or nation. This allows him to construct an opinion

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<sup>51</sup> Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, I, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 2001), p. 201.

of the English that is difficult to refute when presented as the voice of a traveller to another land reporting his authoritative impressions to a readership at ‘home’.

Southey had good reasons for choosing a Spanish national to hide behind. He knew the country well after making two extended trips to Spain and Portugal (in 1795-1796 and 1800-1801). He was a life-long Hispanophile, translating Spanish and Portuguese literature, promoting it in Britain, and even intending to relocate there for several years. Southey’s account of his first trip to the Iberian Peninsula was published as *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797). Its engaging, anecdotal tone, and detailed descriptions of the places visited and customs of the people, would be a model for *Letters from England*. The same spirit of inquiry and acute observations he brought to Spain are applied to England, where Southey transposes the cultural positions of spectator and object of scrutiny by translating one culture to another. The voice of a Spaniard was one that Southey felt he could most appropriately imitate, and as a citizen of Europe, ‘Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella’ is, in terms of civility, on a level with the society he is visiting. Yet there was still enough cultural difference to make the gap between his expectations and his observations interesting.

This difference between the two European nations is made more distinct by what Marilyn Butler terms ‘the Cult of the South’, which she claims became prominent in the 1820s and affected representations of Italy, Greece and Spain in English literature.<sup>53</sup> According to Diego Saglia however, this was not a new phenomenon. It was a return to ‘late eighteenth-century approaches to Southern European cultures [...] through images which often blended hostility, suspicion or a desire to incorporate cultural authority with the short-lived enthusiasm of the later war period’.<sup>54</sup> Spain before 1800 was perceived as ‘a place where provocative issues could be represented and examined’, allowing texts like Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) and Southey’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* to ‘narrate the Spanish nation by means of stereotypes, often betraying a superannuated imagery of Spain’.<sup>55</sup> Lewis’s work particularly, invents a menacing religious

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<sup>53</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford, 1981), p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain*, p. 41.

‘bearer of Iberian difference’ to construct a negative cultural stereotype.<sup>56</sup> Within this indeterminate imaginative region of ‘the South’, Spain could be figured as nearer the Mediterranean ‘other’ which northern Europe defined itself against (through representations of uncivilised communal engagement in barbarous acts such as bull-fighting or the *auto-da-fé*) or become closer kindred through shared national loyalties, once Spain had been drawn into the war against France. There is a backward-looking nature to many Spanish representations in English texts, which can be seen clearly in Southey’s work. For instance, his poem ‘The Spanish Armada’ (1798) reprises an age in which England was threatened by ‘fools’ sent out by a ‘Spanish Despot’.<sup>57</sup> He focuses on the knightly codes of Castilian chivalry, employed to repel invaders in the *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808) – a translation of three Spanish manuscript sources on the life of Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar that included the additional ‘Ballads of the Cid’<sup>58</sup> – and invokes imaginary national values to oppose the cultural taint of the ‘Moorish conquest’.<sup>59</sup>

Another influential spectre of Iberian imagery was the anti-Spanish propagandist ‘black legend’ which haunts the pages of Southey’s *History of Brazil* (1810–1819). Tim Fulford demonstrates that as ‘war or near-war with Spain became a recurrent feature in eighteenth-century politics’ it spread to a global field where ‘the riches of Spanish America [were] the subject of envious fantasies’.<sup>60</sup> Attacks on Spain’s South American possessions were justified by ‘a venerable and self-serving British myth, that the Spanish and Portuguese were uniquely rapacious imperialists, in contrast to the mild, commercial British’, who

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<sup>56</sup> Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Southey, ‘The Spanish Armada’ (1798), in Lynda Pratt (ed.), *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, 5 vols (London, 2004), V, pp. 223-225, ll. 25, 42.

<sup>58</sup> ‘It will not be very long before I shall have it in my power to send you the first fruits of many years hard labour. I am going to press with the *Chronicle of the Cid*, a book of which the history is briefly this. In describing the state of society in the Spanish peninsula at time when Portugal first became an independent state I had many years ago written an abstract of the Cid’s life, as exhibiting in a connected and highly curious narrative the manners of the age; for this, however, short as it was the after growth of my papers convinced me that there would be no room. I then thought of enlarging it and printing it separately; but in setting about this the original documents appeared to be every way so interesting that I finally resolved upon setting seriously to work, and giving a *Chronicle of the Cid* at length and more fully than it has ever yet been done even in his own country’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1353).

<sup>59</sup> Southey, *Chronicle of the Cid, from the Spanish* (London, 1808), p. xxxvii.

<sup>60</sup> Tim Fulford, ‘British Romantics and Native Americans: the Araucanians of Chile’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 47 (Summer 2008), 225-252, 227.

‘stereotyped the Spanish and Portuguese as superstitious and cruel’ in order to further their own colonial aims.<sup>61</sup> Despite the promulgation of such textual representations, it is also true to say that as a writer Southey gave literary licence to Spain as a site of interest. Through his connections with the ‘Holland House circle’, his enthusiasm for Iberian literature and its themes in his own work, was aided and abetted. Henry Richard Vassal Fox, third Lord Holland, and his wife Elizabeth, had established a circle for the study of Hispanic literature in London, as well as having investment in the region through their political and economic aims. Initial interest on their part came through extensive travels in Iberia, and during the war years of 1808 and 1809, Holland toured the peninsula again (with Elizabeth), as an ‘unofficial envoy’ advocating British military support for the defeated Spanish armies.<sup>62</sup> As a renowned writer on Hispanic subjects and a translator of its literature, Southey was invited, in early 1805, to use Holland’s extensive library of books and manuscripts relating to Spain, Portugal and their colonies, and carried out research there for his Brazilian history.<sup>63</sup> In 1806 he was sent a copy of Holland’s *Some Account of the Life and Writings of Lope Felix de Vega Carpio* (a work that he later reviewed in a new edition of 1817).<sup>64</sup>

By the time *Letters from England* was published therefore, in 1807, Southey was seen as a reputable source on Iberian matters. In a political twist of fate, Napoleon’s use of Spain as a platform to invade Portugal in the autumn of 1807, and the outbreak of the Peninsular War in 1808 (continuing until 1814) meant that Spain was no longer an ally of France or an enemy of Britain. ‘Espriella’, as Southey referred to him, was now an acceptable foreign visitor to present to his readers, and the impertinence of his detailed observations were more likely to be forgiven.<sup>65</sup> In fact Southey’s book was in the vanguard of British early nineteenth-century interest in Spain that would continue throughout the Romantic period. As Saglia demonstrates:

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<sup>61</sup> Fulford, ‘British Romantics and Native Americans’, 228.

<sup>62</sup> Linda Kelly, *Holland House: A History of London’s Most Celebrated Salon* (London and New York, 2013), p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Ld Holland, has thro my Uncle, offered me the use of his library, which would be highly useful – if I were were near enough to find it so’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1063).

<sup>64</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1129.

<sup>65</sup> As Southey said to his brother Tom, in a letter dated 22 May 1806, ‘its tone is not unlike that of my Letters from Spain & Portugal, but it will be better done as I am better acquainted with that of which I write & am also ten good years older’ (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1186).

the anxiety with which Regency Britain followed the events in the Peninsula triggered both the usual demand for war bulletins and chronicles and a remarkable output of novels, poems, and travel narratives evoking the Spanish landscape, people, culture, and history for an eager reading public'.<sup>66</sup>

Southey had unknowingly tapped into an important literary market-place. While Walpole and Goldsmith had wittingly identified the eighteenth-century craze for Chinoiserie in their own time, now Southey found himself leading the way in a mania for Spanish subjects among British readers. He would consolidate this interest in the *Chronicle of the Cid*, and also his epic poem, *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814), which 'narrates the story of the eighth-century Islamic invasion of Spain as a historical analogue to the French invasion of 1808'.<sup>67</sup>

Though representations of Spain in English literature would be kindled by support for a martial ally and sympathy for the country as a victim of French aggression, some of the themes that came to dominate the war-time literature are evident much earlier, and can be seen in Southey's version of Spanish culture. According to Saglia, Spain was:

highly susceptible to being feminized because of a stereotypical discourse that represented it through the decadent culture of the Bourbon court; the *cortejo*, or the social convention of the *cavalier servente*; the myth of seventeenth-century decadence which had brought Spain's era of virile, external expansion to an end; and through sedimented images of Oriental opulence and fabulous American riches. The nationalist ideology woven around Spain by British writers combined this gendered imagery with the *topos* of the family as the basic social unit grounding the national community, and as the necessary thoroughway to shape society by means of language and fiction.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Diego Saglia, "O My Mother Spain!": The Peninsular War, Family Matters, and the Practice of Romantic Nation-Writing', *ELH* 65.2 (1998), 363-393, 363.

<sup>67</sup> Saglia, "O My Mother Spain!", 370.

<sup>68</sup> Saglia, "O My Mother Spain!", 365.

In *Letters from England*, we can see these influences at work. Though we learn little information about Espriella's origins, his home life, the 'basic social unit' of an unspecified agrarian community, is invoked in opposition to industrial England. In this way Southey displaces Spanish modernity and its national characteristics in favour of an idealised cultural 'other' that can be used to criticise his own society. As in his narrative poems set all over the globe, Southey creates a romantic version of certain conservative values to set against modern trends and behaviour. Though Spain is indistinctly drawn in this book, because Southey's focus is his own country, its nebulous shape, a locus for contradictory positive values, sees it hovering as a ghostly entity in the urban landscape that is negotiated by Espriella. Southey does not present a realistic version of Spain, but his invented version is invested with more power by employing a far older literary model of contrarities, which Raymond Williams identifies as one of the major forms through which crises in society are explored.<sup>69</sup> The longstanding dichotomy between country and city, or pastoral and urban values, is now inhabited by Spain and England. But what is rustic and bucolic to the poet Southey, is misplaced in a social commentary where such images imply retrograde resistance to technological advancement. This backwardness replicates 'sedimented images' of a nation that has lost its reputation for greatness and imperial conquest. As Espriella states:

They speak of our weakness with a contemptuous pride, which sometimes excites a Spaniard's shame, but more frequently his indignation; but in their sober and settled judgment they avow that it is the interest of England to see us strengthened rather than humiliated, and that their wishes accord with their true policy. (*LE*, 347)

Spain's 'weakness' requires the assistance of England if it is to be 'strengthened'. The implication of England as a muscular, energetic, forward-thinking industrial country in contrast to Spain's degraded, helpless state is an idea repeated elsewhere in the book. Despite the value accorded to the domestic centre at the heart of Espriella's rural sanctuary, the two nations inhabit distinctively different positions in a progressive hierarchy. As Elizabeth Smith Rousselle points out, by the time *Letters from England* was written, the early modern 'defamation of Spanish character and customs [through the use of] the Spanish Inquisition

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<sup>69</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1975), p. 289.

stereotype was replaced by the indolent Spaniard stereotype of the eighteenth century'.<sup>70</sup> While 'indolent' resistance to social change and industrial progress may be used to indicate primitivist virtues for Southey in lamenting the loss of soul within his own society, such national distinctions intended to create a traditional, pastoral counter-culture for English readers, simply reinforces the idea of Spain as atavistic and retrogressive.

In using a Spanish narrator, Southey has the opportunity to exploit Espriella's fervent Catholicism for the purposes of entertainment and to identify the gross errors in his faith. The role of Catholicism in *Letters from England* is discussed more fully in a later section, but at this point it is worth examining Southey's use of a 'truth-teller' from a religion he reviled. A precedent for this can be seen in Shebbeare's *Letters on the English Nation*, which purports to be the translation of an Italian traveller's observations on England. Shebbeare's intention was to correct national prejudice by exposing it to his 'nation' of readers. Despite using the 'letters of this papist', which are shown to be unstable because they have no 'foundation of truth', he smuggles, through subterfuge, his version of the 'truth' to readers.<sup>71</sup> Even while disclaiming the 'facts' that are asserted, it is still the case that readers measure themselves against what is said. Shebbeare uses a very different speaker from himself, distancing himself through religious distinctions to make wise observations based on his view that 'a true state of any kingdom is not to be expected from the natives' and 'to know one country well, it is necessary to have long resided in some other'.<sup>72</sup> The English are unable to judge their own government and religious institutions correctly because they have been brought up within its systems, which is why an alien recorder and arbiter is required, even one as distinctly different as a Catholic commentator. Shebbeare's account is derisive and exaggerated in order to purvey his brand of satire and comedy and it walks a fine line between entertaining and alienating its readers, as does Southey's. But its outrageous tone conveys successfully the inequality and absurdity of English society.

However Shebbeare's account has been criticised for not successfully portraying a convincing Catholic character and the same can be said of *Letters from England*. It is possible that in choosing such representatives of an 'alien' religion the powers of imagination were

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<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Smith Rousselle, *Gender and Modernity in Spanish Literature, 1789-1920* (New York, 2014), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> [John Shebbeare] *Letters on the English Nation: by Batista Angeloni, A Jesuit, Who Resided Many Years in London*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1756), I, p. iii.

<sup>72</sup> [Shebbeare] *Letters on the English Nation*, I, p. lv.



stretched too far. In Southey's text we learn little about Espriella's inner thoughts, reflections or motivations. The Romantic aesthetic, with its focus on the primacy of emotions and subjective revelations – found in Wordsworth's confessional poetic account of his self-development and internal growth in *The Prelude* – is not Southey's intention here. The fact that Espriella is not a fully rounded character may be seen as a failure by modern readers (and a clear indication to Southey's contemporaries that it was the work of an English author) but his ambition was less to create a compelling fictional psyche than to promote his own, often highly contentious views of English society and its progress. So no direct reference is made to Espriella's Spanish home and family until the fourteenth letter, approximately one fifth of the way through the book. As a result of such limitations we enjoy the fiction but never completely believe in it. Southey himself states that 'in reading this book you will easily distinguish what is written for Espriella from what is written *thro* him'.<sup>73</sup> This is because we see him speaking unreservedly on those aspects of English society and politics that he disliked. These repeated themes come out clearly in his work and particularly where he laments a stable, English past, when even if the hierarchies were rigidly enforced those inhabiting the higher echelons had a stronger social conscience. Southey asks why a Spaniard – an alien from a country dominated by 'superstitious' Roman Catholic beliefs and antiquated feudal structures – can identify the problems in modern English society when his own countrymen cannot. In particular, as we will see, the outsider's sensibility to the suffering of the labouring classes is used by Southey to lever a more concerned response from their own compatriots.

### **Englishness**

According to Krishan Kumar, the 'cultural nation' is defined from the point of view of its people rather than its governing institutions.<sup>74</sup> This idea is central to the English novel, which adopts a social landscape with the freedom to be subversive as well as celebratory in describing English attributes. The liminality of *Letters from England*, with its mixture of factual reportage and fictional frame-narrative, inhabits some of the character of a novel if we define this as a creative work set in a 'real' context. In assessing what Southey says about the

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<sup>73</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1342.

<sup>74</sup> Krishnan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 21-24.

English – which is a core element of his book – we can see him establishing the idea of a cultural nation that while it does not supplant the political nation, emerges from and transcends it. The cultural nation presents readers with an ‘inherited national character’ that, according to Patrick Parrinder, conforms to a ‘conservative definition of Englishness’.<sup>75</sup> In tracing a ‘line of conservative theory stressing the ancientness of the English establishment’, as exemplified by Edmund Burke, Parrinder suggests that this view is often ‘defensive, xenophobic and backward-looking’.<sup>76</sup> Southey shows his own increasing conservatism in trying to construct a national character that chooses some established definitions of Englishness to promote and refutes those that he finds less attractive. In blending his own political stance, by championing some values and criticising others that do not easily divide down party lines, we can see a familiar, distinctively Southeyan mixture of conservatism and radicalism emerging. This was because Southey’s growing conservative sympathies did not sit easily with its tradition of deference to the nobility, and as a rising middle-class professional he was making a bid for his own class and its values. So he adopts a conservative stance when it suits him, but eschews embracing all aspects of it. Similarly in his affection for the feudal past, it is often the rural small gentry as a class that he values and bemoans the loss of through the manufacturing system. In 1805 and 1806 Southey could still be considered a threat to the establishment and it was his lack of conformity to conventional conservative views all his life (and his role in the anti-Catholic debate of the 1820s) that saw him being labelled as an ‘ultra-Tory’. Unable to fit Southey into one camp or another, nineteenth-century and modern critics have always sought to hang labels on him which are often wide of the mark, but if one takes into account his sensitivity to the values and concerns of the rising middle class, we can make sense of his politics.

So while the subject of Southey’s work is England in the early nineteenth century, he took the Burkean long view in his conception of English character. An important source that he brings into his work, and which helps us understand his construction of Englishness, is Celia Fiennes’ 1702 memoir of her travels, *Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary*. Southey had unique and privileged access to this manuscript through his

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<sup>75</sup> Patrick Parrinder, ‘Character, Identity and Nationality in the English Novel’, in *Landscape and Englishness*, eds Robert Burden and Stephen Kohl (New York, 2006), pp. 89-102, p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Parrinder, ‘Character, Identity and Nationality in the English Novel’, p. 94.

friend, and her nephew, Charles Danvers, before its 1888 publication.<sup>77</sup> Southey admired and valued Fiennes' account of England a hundred years earlier and he also had an eye on posterity in revealing an essential 'English' spirit and character to his own readers. In Fiennes account, as Elizabeth Bohls and Ian Duncan argue, we find a 'patriotic justification for domestic tourism' through her 'interest in the "productions and manufactures of each place"'. This preempts Defoe's 'distinctively modern genre of "economic tourism" in which he 'highlights trade and industry as the foundations of an imperial greatness located in Britain's future rather than its past'.<sup>78</sup> These early eighteenth-century accounts instigate a radical commitment to progress and reform that would become the staple elements of modern domestic travel. When Fiennes undertook her journeys on horseback, England was largely unenclosed. Despite having only a few primitive roads to aid her progress, she advocates travel to her readers because it can form 'an Idea of England, add much to its Glory and Esteem in our minds and cure the evil Itch of overvaluing fforeign parts'.<sup>79</sup> Southey's text also adopts the optimistic tone of domestic travel writing by setting out to view the progress England has made, but any attempts at triumphalism are hampered by the ecological concerns he has about the landscape (the effects of enclosure on the Dorset hills and the industrial scars on the rural landscape of the Midlands) and the cost of such advancements to human welfare (the descriptions of poverty and moral decline in the manufacturing cities). A century after Fiennes' travels agrarian capitalism and the industrial revolution had transformed the countryside and urban centres such as Birmingham and Manchester. As a result, Southey is unable to fulfill the progressive agenda that defined earlier English travel writing, because the 'Glory and Esteem' he feels is for his country's past and his anti-industrialist stance in the present creates a tension which fractures his representation of modern England.

A problem Southey had in representing the city was one that he shared with other writers of his generation, as well as those in the Victorian period such as Matthew Arnold and

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<sup>77</sup> Southey commented in a letter to Danvers dated 18 April 1805: 'Will you laugh if I say that your Aunts travels would be useful to me? pray bring them – they will furnish a curious account of English manners a century ago, which any Spaniard may collect in the real way – from a MS.S. in the family of one of his friends' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1061).

<sup>78</sup> Bohls and Duncan (eds), *Travel Writing 1700-1830*, p. 96.

<sup>79</sup> Celia Fiennes, *Through England on a Side-Saddle in the Time of William and Mary: Being the Diary of Celia Fiennes*, ed. Emily W. Griffiths (London, 1888), p. x.

Gerard Manley Hopkins. As John Lucas states ‘the cities of the nineteenth century’ were ‘entirely new experiences [that] required an entirely new language’. This was:

the language of the streets, of industry, of machinery, and it was therefore of little use to poets, burdened as they were with that language of authority whose appeal lay precisely in its being distanced from the forces of anarchy – in a word, from the city.<sup>80</sup>

Southey’s instincts are poetic ones, formed through long habits of reading and writing in the pastoral tradition. Wordsworth too found cityscapes challenging material, preferring to celebrate London’s ‘smokeless’ atmosphere in an early morning scene of pre-industrial harmony that brings the fields and river as strongly into focus as the urban markers of ‘towers, domes, theatres’.<sup>81</sup> His close contact with the city in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, is conveyed through alienating dissociations that present London at an experiential, mind-blowing level of sensation and effect to demonstrate its impact on human lives; a representation that Williams sees as ‘one of the major early records of new ways of seeing the city’.<sup>82</sup> In response to the problem of how to describe the city positively through a traveller’s eyes after a long apprenticeship in pastoral writing techniques, Southey uncovers the historical England valued by foreign visitors. The modern decline in living standards due to urban development and industrial progress can be resisted through history. And in doing so Southey employs the trope of country versus city again, figuring these oppositions as past versus present. A rural, georgic past is invoked through the large country houses and sites of historical interest that Espriella explores, imposing a historical topography on the modern landscape. Nevertheless this landscape is not only one of aristocratic heritage. Southey also celebrates the townscapes of inns, houses and chapels that denote the lives and occupations of the lower classes, and the public and civic buildings of guildhalls and cathedrals that present the national grandeur of church and state (even if Espriella feels that this historical infrastructure is being neglected through the commercial priorities of its citizens). Whereas Defoe had rejected William Camden’s antiquarian view of the English landscape in favour of

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<sup>80</sup> John Lucas, *England and Englishness: Ideas of Nationhood in English Poetry, 1688-1900* (London, 1990), p. 201.

<sup>81</sup> Wordsworth, ‘Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802’, ll. 6-8.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 149.

modernity, Southey embraces the layered structures of history as a way of celebrating Englishness and rejecting the dangerous new spirit of materialism that threatens its cultural heritage. In this way, and as part of his construction of national character, Southey attempts to connect his countrymen to their forbears, and enable them to appreciate the shaping effects of earlier periods on their modern consciousness.

Southey's brand of nationalism can be understood through Ernest Renan's proposition that:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.<sup>83</sup>

Southey sees the nation as a safe repository of long-established consensual conventions which seek to preserve the 'heritage' of the past and transmit its 'soul' for posterity. In contrast the present is uncertain and the future is in flux, unless this 'spiritual principle' is conveyed through the English national character for subsequent generations. His desire to promote his version of Englishness was strong and explains his lifelong involvement in journalism and an adamant resolve to express his controversial socio-political views through public outlets. He firmly believed, despite accusations of apostasy, that though his:

views & hopes are certainly altered [...] the heart & soul of my ~~xxx~~ wishes continues the same. It is the world that has changed – not I. I look the same way in the afternoon that I did in the morning – but sunset & sunrise make a different scene.<sup>84</sup>

In *Letters from England*, written at a stage in his life when Southey had rejected his youthful enthusiasm for the radical agendas of Thomas Paine and William Godwin, Southey believed

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<sup>83</sup> Ernest Renan 'What is a nation?' in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London, 1990; repr. 2003), pp. 8-22, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1153.

that while his politics had changed, his essential core values had not. This only makes sense if we take the view, as he did, that he always had England's best interests at heart. In his twenties, buoyed on the optimism of revolutionary language and philosophy, he believed that a lower middle class franchise would achieve the kind of government he wanted. This was one that was in touch with the people, and was educated and uncorrupted (unlike the aristocracy) and could inject new energy into an autocratic, oligarchical state. Now, because his intentions for his own country are still of the highest, altruistic order, he sees himself as a self-appointed guardian of England's heritage, ensuring the nation's 'soul' endures. Such a belief would see him embracing the role of Poet Laureate in 1813 and continuing his career in an entirely Southeyan blend of patriotic principle by celebrating the monarchy through the Laureate poems and asserting national pride in his *Life of Nelson* (1813), yet generating the heated oppositional rhetoric of anti-Catholic debates in his *Book of the Church* (1824) and *Vindiciae Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (1826).

In Southey's account therefore, the forces of history are employed to transmit to present and future readers an enduring sense of national pride. And this is established as much through examples of quirky, distinctive behaviour, as by the more obvious and admirable traits of their ethics and moral principles. Like David Hume therefore, Southey also perceives England as 'a wonderful mixture of manners and characters in the same nation', and one in which:

the great liberty and independency, which every man enjoys, allows him to display the manners peculiar to him. Hence the ENGLISH, of any people in the universe, have the least of a national character, unless this very singularity may pass for such.<sup>85</sup>

This 'singularity', or in its more extreme form, eccentricity, became 'one of the buzzwords for the English character' in eighteenth century novels.<sup>86</sup> It is evident in Southey's work too, where familiar stereotypes of the English, such as their love of fox-hunting and beef-eating are set against their 'spirit of contradiction', which Espriella claims 'is the character of the nation': they complain about taxes in wartime and lack of event in peace; they love their

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<sup>85</sup> David Hume, 'Of National Characters' in *Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1994; repr. 2003), pp. 78-93, pp. 85-86.

<sup>86</sup> Parrinder, 'Character, Identity and Nationality in the English Novel', p. 95.

royal family and ‘caricature them in the most open and insolent manner’; while celebrating the freedom of the press they punish publishers or booksellers of ‘obnoxious’ works (*LE*, 132). Southey enjoys the unorthodox behaviour of the English and represents it through the eyes of his Spaniard for the purposes of entertainment. But in constructing the English character as a ‘compound of contrarities’ (*LE*, 132) he has a more serious purpose in trying to explain to his countrymen how ideas transmitted through history can define them as a nation.

Even while advocating travel as an education in cosmopolitanism, Southey’s tours of Spain and Portugal renewed his respect for his own country in contrast to what he identified there ‘as the religious despotism of Roman Catholicism’, and so ‘laid the foundations for his later conservatism’.<sup>87</sup> During the period of his second visit particularly, in 1800, he could say, no doubt partly tongue in cheek: ‘you know how any foreign country makes an Englishman proud – & will easily conceive that I am all Anglicanized already’.<sup>88</sup> During the early 1800s Southey can be seen to be pre-empting the views of Walter Bagehot in his own construction of national character, as ‘an inherited, residual phenomenon that is threatened by the processes of globalization’.<sup>89</sup> But for Southey the English people themselves are a threat to the transmission of core, established values, and his response is to become part of the national myth-making process of Englishness that would continue during the Victorian period. In *Letters from England* we see Southey representing the nascent middle class, who are asserting themselves as the true repository of national spirit and seeking the social and cultural authority they could not find in Burke’s long view of history or in eighteenth-century political theorists. The bourgeois values he expresses are ones he believed he shared with others of his rank and status, and through which he expected to find a similar, sympathetic readership.

### **Economics**

On Espriella’s journey from Falmouth to his residence in London the reader gains a sense of continual progress and motion on the English roads, which becomes a metaphor for the

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<sup>87</sup> Carol Bolton, *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* (London, 2007), p. 167.

<sup>88</sup> *CLRS, Part 2: 1798–1803*, Pratt and Packer (eds), Letter 520.

<sup>89</sup> Parrinder, ‘Character, Identity and Nationality in the English Novel’, p. 95.

energy and industry of the country. The speed of travel in stage coaches and chaises is a symptom of English ‘busyness’, which equates to the business of making money. Unlike the curious, restless English, Espriella explains that the Spanish rarely travel abroad, with the implication that they are content with what they have. The English ‘bustle’ through towns and villages at a speed that prevents them admiring the countryside, and what Espriella does see of rural England, which is ‘much injured by inclosures’ (*LE*, 87), compares poorly with Spain. This country ‘seems to be the paradise of sheep and cattle [while] Valencia [is that] of the human race’ (*LE*, 90). The livelihoods of the English, and the goods they produce and consume, are more highly prized than their citizens. Such representations of England emerge from a Romantic anti-economic stance that Southey was keen to promote. The soulless materialism of Goldsmith’s age is still rampant in the early nineteenth-century, driving industry, hardening hearts against the poor, and impoverishing English culture and heritage.

The most obvious example of these problems in society is London, as the commercial heart of the country, which is described as an alienating metropolis. Extending six miles from one end to the other, it is ‘an endless labyrinth of streets’ (*LE*, 102), as Thomas De Quincey would also note in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821).<sup>90</sup> The capital, which is inhabited by nearly a twelfth of the island’s population, suffers from a lack of community, so that ‘they who live at one end know little or nothing of the other’ (*LE*, 102). Southey creates a distinction between pre-industrial life in rural communities, where to ‘know’ someone implies important ties of friendship and kinship, to the isolation of the metropolis. As Wordsworth also demonstrates in the *Prelude*, in London being ‘unknown’ among a swarm of people who pass ‘face after face’ has a destabilising, uncanny effect.<sup>91</sup> The ‘blind Beggar’ on the streets, who would receive charity from a community in which he is ‘known’, has to wear a ‘Label’ that explains ‘The story of the Man, and who he was’.<sup>92</sup> In this, the largest, continually expanding capital, in Europe,<sup>93</sup> Espriella is fascinated by the range of consumer goods on sale and the grandeur of the buildings, but horrified by the dehumanising consequences of its magnitude. His artless parochialism is employed to good purpose in conveying spectacles of great wealth and severe poverty, to present London as a city of

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<sup>90</sup> De Quincey refers to ‘the mighty labyrinths of London’ in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford, 2013), p. 34.

<sup>91</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VII, l. 173.

<sup>92</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VII, ll. 612-618.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Between 1700 and 1820 [the population] rose to a million and a quarter’ (Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 146).



contrasts. Such ambiguity in describing the city is also seen in William Cowper's view of it as 'So rich, so throng'd, so drain'd, and so supplied', growing rapidly and 'still/ Increasing' like 'Babylon of old'.<sup>94</sup> Cowper's response is a common one in the late eighteenth-century, with its combination of pride in the city's wealth and opulence, and misgivings about its 'enlarged' proportions. Invoking 'Babylon' emphasises this equivocal message, in choosing to compare London with one of the most powerful commercial centres of the ancient world, which gained a reputation for evil and immorality in direct proportion to its decline in greatness.

The ambivalence in such attitudes to London was due to the reputation it had as one of the most prosperous cities in Europe, but also one in which there were visible social problems, such as an expanding working-class population and a high level of mendacity. As Williams shows, concern over London's sprawling boundaries led to legislative curbs, such as a bill of 1709 to prevent new houses being built to 'restrain the growth of London and in particular to prevent the poor settling there'.<sup>95</sup> Increasingly, 'poor people and vagrants [...] were the explicit objects of exclusion from the developing city'.<sup>96</sup> Another early nineteenth-century visitor to London, Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, who comments on the large scale of the population, seems unaware of the textual irony of discussing beggars and bankers on the same page.<sup>97</sup> As well as using expressive illustrations of the city's poverty to draw attention to these inequities, Southey uses narrative techniques to shock his readers and exploit the gap between their self-satisfied assumptions and harsh reality. Espriella arrives in England with the preconception that he is visiting a wealthy nation, but discovers that though its repute makes it 'the envy of all the rest of Europe; yet in no other country is there so much poverty' (*LE*, 168). This deliberate ploy to embarrass British readers is developed through Southey's favourite trope of comparing the state to a diseased body. Wealth does not flow 'equally and healthfully through the whole system; it sprouts into wens and tumours, and collects in aneurisms which starve and palsy the extremities' (*LE*, 215). The affluent members of society are unnatural growths that swell and prosper by diverting the current of wealth into their own coffers, without allowing it to circulate and nourish the entire social organism. As Philip

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<sup>94</sup> William Cowper, *The Task*, Book I, ll. 720-722.

<sup>95</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 145.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 145.

<sup>97</sup> Abū Ṭālib Khān, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa, and Europe, During the Years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802 and 1803*, trans. Charles Stewart, 3 vols, 2nd edn (London, 1814), 1, p. 289.

Connell shows, Southey appropriates metaphors of disease to create a social pathology – that was influenced by Thomas Beddoes’ *Hygeia* (1802-1803) and the medical treatises of George Cheyne<sup>98</sup> – in equating sickness in the population as a result of excess, to the practises of the body politic.<sup>99</sup> The idea of a ‘wen’, or diseased growth, has specific significance, as it was often used by commentators to describe the enlarging city of London.<sup>100</sup>

Espriella, in contrast to his English hosts, is presented as a romantic wandering soul, who can see through the lustre of progress and opulence around him to observe the mean-spirited, cultural impoverishment below the surface, and what he ‘most abominates’ (apart from Protestant ‘heresy’) is the ‘spirit of trading which has poisoned every thing’.<sup>101</sup> In the same way that Southey and his contemporaries commented positively on ‘savage’ societies to teach Europeans the virtues of primitivism, this contact narrative fulfils a similar purpose. In *Madoc*, for instance, the accounts of Native American communities, Aztec social customs and Druid traditions from Welsh medieval manuscripts combine to show readers the simplicity of man in his natural state. However, *Letters from England* complicates the familiar perspective of the metropolitan visitor reporting on alien cultures, by choosing a more retrograde observer (in Southey’s view) to mortify this progressive nation. Through the lens of his Spaniard, Southey shows how the ‘poison’ of commerce has affected the relationship between rich and poor, which was previously reinforced through the structures of a universal church. A national system of poor laws has replaced beneficence and largesse and it is policed with cold-hearted detachment and suspicion. In contrast Espriella evinces ‘correct’ beliefs in his emotive responses to the poor that are closer to an ancient spirit of Englishness (mythical though that may be) than those of Southey’s countrymen. It is also true, however, that Southey’s concern was not just with the rich, but was driven by his fear of violence erupting among those left to ‘starve and palsy’ at the ‘extremities’ of the English social body. Protecting the poor has the added advantage of preserving social stability.

The false values inculcated by the ‘spirit of trading’ are blamed on the economic theorists of the day, who Southey and his fellow Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, believed were advocating self-interest as a virtue. Though it was Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on*

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<sup>98</sup> Such as *The English Malady* (1733).

<sup>99</sup> Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford, 2001), p. 248.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>101</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1051.

*the Principle of Population* (1798) – and particularly the extended second edition of this work (1803) – which drew their ire, the precedents for his arguments can be identified in earlier works of economic philosophy. For instance the seventeenth-century political economist, Bernard Mandeville had identified human greed with commercial energy, arguing that if people existed in happiness and harmony they lost their drive to prosper.<sup>102</sup> Selfish vices rather than communal virtues were what made nations rich. In equating immorality with industry, Mandeville was perceived as deeply cynical, with self-interest, greed and desire for luxury being presented as necessary fuel with which to stoke the national economy. Little better in the eyes of the Romantics who opposed this ‘dismal science’ was Adam Smith’s view in *The Wealth of Nations* that self-interest could be virtuous if it was for the general good and that a *laissez faire* economic environment would allow self-motivated individuals to flourish and benefit the state through their financial activities.<sup>103</sup> Malthus was not very different from other social theorists of the period in agreeing with Smith’s ideas. But such economic principles of ‘self-love’, as Coleridge termed it,<sup>104</sup> were at odds with the beliefs of himself and Southey, who advocated aspheterist ideals in their hot youth and a more moderate version of social responsibility in the 1800s.

Initial interest in Malthus’s work by Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth, was due to its criticism of Godwin’s perfectibilist theories for society. His ideas espoused in an *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793) had attracted them all in the 1790s, but by now they were rejecting what they saw as his ‘theory of rational benevolence’ and his ‘atheistical radicalism’.<sup>105</sup> But in distancing themselves from such ideas, these poets had not turned away from their interest in social improvement and their concern for the poverty and destitution they saw around them that were also pertinent topics of Malthus’s *Essay*. In his analysis of Wordsworth’s ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ (1800), Connell demonstrates the poet’s belief in ‘the moral interdependence of human society’, at a time when this perspective was being eroded by Mandeville, Smith and Malthus.<sup>106</sup> As Wordsworth shows, the benefits of charity extend further than relieving the suffering of the

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<sup>102</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1714).

<sup>103</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).

<sup>104</sup> See for instance, David P. Haney, *The Challenge of Coleridge: Ethics and Interpretation in Romanticism and Modern Philosophy* (Pennsylvania University, 2008).

<sup>105</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, pp. 17, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p 20.

Cumberland beggar, because they have a positive, moral effect on the community that supports him. Unlike Wordsworth's anonymised London beggar in *The Prelude*, where the effects of social munificence are not seen or measured, the treatment of a beggar identified as a communal responsibility by the title of 'Cumberland', is a moral marker of its probity and care. In this way Wordsworth demonstrates 'polemical insistence upon the social utility of pauperism',<sup>107</sup> a view that Southey shared and which he espouses through Espriella's belief that in religious societies, a beggar 'receives a blessing with his pittance, but the poor man here is made to feel his poverty as a reproach [so that] there is neither charity in him that gives, nor gratitude in him that takes' (*LE*, 166).

However, while Wordsworth's poem does not identify the duty of Christian morality in aiding the poor – though he would do so in other poems such as the *The White Doe of Rylstone* (composed 1807-8) where he idealises the Catholic abbey and the local noble families who uphold its culture – this is Espriella's Catholic twist on human 'interdependence'. Advocating the religious infrastructure of his own country in supporting the poor, where acts of charity are a branch of 'good works', Espriella sighs for what has been lost in English society. Southey invokes a Catholic, feudal model of English history as a more virtuous version of society, without any self-conscious realisation of the irony in promoting such a rigid, antiquated structure. In this way he shares similar views to the radical William Cobbett who also perceived 'the monasteries as a standard for social institutions [and adopted] the image of the working of a communal society as a welcome alternative to the claims of individualism'.<sup>108</sup> Southey can of course hide behind the views of his young Spaniard, who observes:

With us charity is a religious duty, with the English it is an affair of law. We support the poor by alms; in England a tax is levied to keep them from starving, and, enormous as this tax is, it is scarcely sufficient for the purpose. This evil began immediately upon the dissolution of the monasteries. (*LE*, 166)

Though this is a plausible statement for a Catholic narrator to make, it is one that Southey would repeat elsewhere – such as in *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and*

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<sup>107</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p. 21.

<sup>108</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London, 1958; repr. 1967), p. 37. See also Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 2005).

*Prospects of Society* (1829) – to demonstrate the difference between a religious conscience and legislative solutions to social problems. As Williams states of the poetry of the period, which is also true of Southey’s account, ‘there is an idealisation of feudal and immediately post-feudal values: of an order based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations of an avowedly total kind’.<sup>109</sup> In evoking an ideal vision of communal symbiosis, the reader is asked to consider whether humanity, charity and true faith are not worthier goals for individuals than the deadening materialism that abandons the poor to state welfare. The poor laws and the workhouse are not seen as adequate responses to poverty when compared to the assistance that individual conscience should provide. This was also the argument of Frederick Morton Eden’s *The State of the Poor* (1797) which opposed organised charity and advocated moral virtue in assisting the poor, based on a survey of workhouses throughout England. His belief that aid provided by the state weakened ‘the principles of natural affection’ which should bind society together,<sup>110</sup> was a view shared by Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge, inspiring them to write their ‘English Eclogues’ and *Lyrical Ballads* in the 1790s.

In fact Malthus also objected to the potential loss of independence caused by the poor laws, and criticised the manufactories that employed many of the poorest members of society. But such details are used against him in Southey’s contemptuous article on the 1803 *Essay* for the *Annual Review*. Malthus is accused of wanting to ‘abolish the poor rates, and starve the poor into celibacy’.<sup>111</sup> As Connell points out, Southey had much in common with the agrarian bias of Malthus’s essay even while objecting to the idea of ‘self-love as the governing principle of society’.<sup>112</sup> But in his attack on Malthusian economics, against which his views on poverty in *Letters from England* were also being framed, Southey believed that Malthus was writing ‘advice to the poor for the rich to read’ and adopt’.<sup>113</sup> The danger of such writing – and Southey always had in mind the fear of social unrest and mob uprisings – was that it would ‘become the political bible of the rich, the selfish, and the sensual’ and do away with social responsibility.<sup>114</sup> The core of Malthus’s argument was that population increases tended to exceed the expansion of their food supply, but that as man was subject to

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<sup>109</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 35.

<sup>110</sup> Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor* (London, 1797), p. ccci.

<sup>111</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, *Annual Review for 1803*, 2 (1804), 292-301, 300.

<sup>112</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p. 30.

<sup>113</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, 301.

<sup>114</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, 298.

‘natural laws’, such as famine, war and disease, these checks would control population growth. Southey did not agree with Malthus’s basic premise that ‘misery and great vice’ must always afflict humanity to some degree.<sup>115</sup> In fact he believed that the political philosopher ‘triumphantly destroys all arguments for all amelioration of the state of the human race’.<sup>116</sup> Southey also put words in Malthus’s mouth based on his advocacy of ‘moral restraint’ or abstinence from procreation as a man-made solution to over-population, by stating that his ‘remedy is, that the poor should not be encouraged to breed’.<sup>117</sup> The tone of his review shows how morally reprehensible he found Malthus’s economic realism and he referred to him even more strongly, in private, as a ‘son of a bitch’.<sup>118</sup>

To some extent however, Southey deliberately misunderstands the role of economic philosophy (and Malthus’s part in it) as an experiential science that works from past events to anticipate future trends. For Southey, Malthus’s predictions display an irresponsible detachment from their consequences in the treatment of the poor, which interpreted at the most extreme level seem to advocate punitive measures. This emotional response to Malthus’s work was not his alone. During the period Southey was reviewing the *Essay*, he was in correspondence with Coleridge about how to respond to its ideas. When he grew tired of waiting for his friend to ‘put his Samson gripe upon that wretched Philistine’, he incorporated notes that had been made by Coleridge in the margins of a copy of Malthus’s work into his review.<sup>119</sup> The controversy over Malthus was not a brief one, showing how invested in the topic Southey was. He fed the fire by reviewing positively an attack on Malthus by Thomas Jarrold in the *Annual Review for 1806*<sup>120</sup> and beginning a review of William Hazlitt’s counter-argument to Malthus’s *Essay*, which in the end Harry Southey completed.<sup>121</sup> Though Southey was happy to sensationalise and even misrepresent Malthus’s views, there is a case to be made, as Hazlitt did in his *Reply to the Essay on Population*

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<sup>115</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, 301.

<sup>116</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, 293.

<sup>117</sup> Southey, ‘Malthus’s *Essay on Population*’, 301.

<sup>118</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 881.

<sup>119</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 879.

<sup>120</sup> Southey ‘Dr Jarrold’s Dissertation On Man’, *Annual Review for 1806*, 5 (1807), 607–615.

<sup>121</sup> Henry Southey, ‘Reply To Malthus On Population’, *Annual Review for 1807*, 6 (1808), 351–356. The review began with the transcription from Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577) which Southey provided for Henry (see *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1405).

(1807) that the statistics he used covered repressive ideology that encouraged ‘the narrow prejudices and hard-heartedness of mankind’.<sup>122</sup>

In Southey’s view it was human institutions that needed to take responsibility for the degradation of the working classes, and to mitigate the effects of ‘natural laws’ (such as famine and disease) in lowering the population. It was the duty of politicians to improve the lives of the working poor, and he had valid concerns about how the unfeeling abstractions of Malthus’s statistical science might be interpreted by the government to abdicate responsibility. As he said in a letter to Rickman while reviewing the *Essay*:

if a country be overstocked before it be half peopled ~~xxxxxx~~ in proportion to its power of production, the fault lies in a bad system of society, not in the system of Nature. M<sup>r</sup> Malthus therefore is cast in his action against God Almighty.<sup>123</sup>

In *Letters from England* Southey refers to the debate over population and uses Espriella’s overt religiosity to make a sardonic attack on Malthus. He portrays economists as secular transgressors who abrogate God's laws by questioning the very ‘constitution of nature’, in which:

the law which says 'Increase and Multiply', was given without sufficient consideration; in short that He who made the world does not know how to manage it properly, and therefore there are serious thoughts of requesting the English parliament to take the business out of his hands. (*LE*, 383)

Though Southey’s point is satirical, he recognises the serious consequences of political economy on the ‘English parliament’ which had already, as a result of William Pitt’s Poor Law Bill of 1796, turned workers into paupers dependent on state charity. In debates about economic philosophy, as Gertrude Himmelfarb shows, a ‘chasm’ had opened between ‘a moral and an amoral society’, between those with ‘communal and spiritual’ values and those

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<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’*, p. 50.

<sup>123</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 894.

with ‘no higher aspiration than the gratification of economic appetites’.<sup>124</sup> The latter are homogenised as the selfish ‘rich’ in *Letters from England*, and are responsible for the growth in manufacturing, the enclosure acts, and the migration of rural communities to the cities. The commercial spirit extends throughout society, so that the ‘literature, arts, religion, government are alike tainted, it is a *lues* [meaning plague or syphilis] which has got into the system of the country, and is rotting flesh and bone’ (*LE*, 323). By adopting a foreign narrator, Southey can evince graphic, physical disgust, without seeming disloyal or alarmist in the way an English commentator would.

Espriella goes on to test the validity of commonplace beliefs that the English are proud to promote. In regarding the prized concept of English liberty, Espriella explodes this myth by declaring ‘there is no liberty in England for the poor’ (*LE*, 166). Because paupers are tied to their parish by the duties calculated for their welfare, they cannot leave their birth-place without being continually moved on, or forcibly returned, to prevent them becoming a financial burden elsewhere. The cost of the poor laws, described by Espriella as the ‘disgrace of the statutes’, was also worrying (*LE*, 166). Writing to his Spanish family of the workhouse, he says ‘I cannot express to you the feeling of hopelessness and dread with which all the decent poor look on to this wretched termination of a life of labour’ (*LE*, 167). The same vignettes of poverty that populate Southey’s ‘English Eclogues’ (1799) appear in *Letters from England*.<sup>125</sup> Damp cellars and unheated houses show the weakest members of society suffering together in winter, with ‘the old cowering over a few embers – the children shivering in rags, pale and livid’ (*LE*, 168). But the bald statement, that ‘of the children of the poor, hardly one third are reared’ is used to inject statistical evidence and anecdotal realism into an account that otherwise could be discounted as overly sentimental (*LE*, 168). The combination of Espriella’s direct observations, with Southey’s own knowledge of such matters – being privy to a report on the state of the poor compiled by Rickman and Thomas Poole – allows him to indulge in trenchant critique without risking criticism. Learning that ‘one in eight throughout Great Britain receives permanent parish pay’, from the ‘Abstract of

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<sup>124</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London and Boston, 1984), p. 23.

<sup>125</sup> In ‘The Witch’ for instance an old woman is described as ‘Old, poor and sick! A miserable lot,/ And death will be a blessing’ (Pratt, ed., *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, V, pp. 321-326, ll. 111-112).



Returns Relative to the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor' sent by his friends,<sup>126</sup> Southey could be confident in expressing his views (though in fact in *Letters from England* he modifies this figure, saying that 'a tenth part of the whole population of England receive regular parish pay' (*LE*, ??)). Though these figures are now recognised as faulty in their calculations, giving a falsely inflated view of the problem, as David M. Craig states,<sup>127</sup> they fuelled Southey's outrage and his (pre-Shelleyan) conviction that literature had the power to legislate for a new world.<sup>128</sup> The device of a fictional author allowed Southey to make public interjections into a social debate that would have attracted critics during the fractious and divided political sphere of William Pitt's ministry. In 1798, for instance, Southey had seen his fellow radical, Gilbert Wakefield, arrested for sedition for publishing similar inflammatory rhetoric on the political status quo. Though Southey escaped this punishment, he was far from being isolated in the Lake District from the social problems of Britain, and he spent much of his life publicising them and targeting those he felt were responsible for them.

One of the specific social problems that Southey (and Coleridge) consistently addressed was the manufacturing industry, which was so important to Britain's economy. For Espriella, who makes a causal connection between the 'sickness' of consumerism and the state of the poor, it was also, unusually, on his schedule in touring the northwest of England. Readers suspecting Southey's agenda to publicise the plight of the labouring classes might think that his descriptions are exaggerated. But any overstatement can be laid at the door of his narrator, who has his own reasons for highlighting the detrimental effects of industrialisation. According to Southey, Espriella is 'such a man [who] when he feels the present degradation of his own country, looks with some pleasure to the symptoms of decline in this'.<sup>129</sup> Writing in character, any accusations of excessive language or imagery can be attributed to Spanish pique. Armed with this motive for his narrator's criticisms, Southey takes him to visit one of 'the great cotton manufactories' in Manchester, where the children of the poor are shown to be at the mercy of the machines they feed. The cotton mill owner's self-satisfied complacency (in taking the burden of the children's care from the parish onto

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<sup>126</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 951.

<sup>127</sup> David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain 1780–1840* (London, 2007), p. 68.

<sup>128</sup> 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World', Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford, 2009), pp. 674–701, p. 701.

<sup>129</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1051.

himself) is at odds with the humane concern of his Spanish visitor, who is overpowered simply by observing the scene. In response Espriella concludes that if ‘this [manufacturing] system is the boast of England, – long may she continue to boast it before Spain shall rival her!’ (*LE*, 216)

Belief in the benefits to society of child labour seems implausible in the twenty-first century. But in 1818 when Coleridge wrote in support of Sir Robert Peel’s Bill to limit the time children could work in manufactories to eleven hours a day, he had to refute the argument of industrialists that ‘children were happier in factories’. Their further objection to the bill, based on ‘the impropriety of legislative interference with free labour’, Coleridge found inimical, and he defined the term ‘free labour’ as ‘soul murder and infanticide on the part of the rich’.<sup>130</sup> In the end, after a House of Commons committee also found that ‘children were happier in factories’, the bill was rejected. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that ten years before Coleridge’s involvement in this debate, Southey feared the government would turn a blind eye to the treatment of the poor and determine economic and social policy based on a free market. The particular legacy of Malthus’s pamphlet was how it operated on the public imagination and divided citizens into categories that were ‘moral and amoral’.<sup>131</sup> By teaching the poor that they could be worse off than they already were, and providing the government with what Southey considered to be immoral justifications to withdraw from legislative solutions to poverty, these were just the consequences he had anticipated.

However, it is true to say that in their counter-economic arguments the Romantics were out of step with modernity in applying old models of a moral economy to the new situation of the industrialised towns. In the same way that they struggled to forge a language that made sense of the city, they also floundered in finding a socio-political system that catered for the changes in society. Southey’s opposition to commercialism and industrialisation was at odds with what many considered progress, revealing his backward inclination towards an idealised view of a pastoral existence or ‘golden age’ in English history. These views were imbued with his reading of eighteenth-century poets, such as Goldsmith and Cowper, and as a result they were seen as increasingly reactionary in their responses to industrial change by Victorian commentators such as Thomas Babington Macaulay. Southey’s anti-capitalism runs through all his writing to criticise those who use

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<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Pamela Edwards, *The Statesman's Science: History, Nature, and Law in the Political Thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, 2004), p. 166.

<sup>131</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, p. 130.

labour at the lowest cost for the highest profit, but ignore the great human expense in the process, as in his anti-slavery poetry of the 1790s.<sup>132</sup> As Williams demonstrates in discussing eighteenth-century capitalism in *The Country and the City*, it is a system that cares nothing for the humans within it, except in the roles they inhabit as producer, consumer or worker, thereby making those who could not work, such as the old and sick, vagrants and children, ‘an unwanted burden’.<sup>133</sup> The Romantics wanted to put the human back into economics, because like Samuel Johnson they believed that a ‘decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilisation [and that the] condition of the lower orders, the poor especially, was the true mark of national discrimination’.<sup>134</sup> In Espriella’s words ‘the peasantry are, and ought to be, the strength of every country; and woe to that country where the peasantry and the poor are the same’ (*LE*, 169). In this way Southey clings to some of his radical, anti-establishment views under cover of Espriella to shame his English readers into greater virtue and benevolence; the only way he perceived society could become more egalitarian.

## Religion

Southey’s adoption of a Spanish persona in *Letters from England* meant he could poke fun at the idiosyncrasies of that culture and society as well as the English. He also had a more serious message to convey, based on his observations of Roman Catholicism on the Iberian Peninsula. As an outright, increasingly vocal opponent of Catholic emancipation, Southey used Espriella’s ‘popish’ beliefs and practices to expose their fallaciousness. It is worth examining his opinions in his personal correspondence at the time of writing his travelogue, for how they contributed to his opposition to Catholicism, as well as his growing conservatism in valorising and seeking to reinvigorate the Anglican Church. The letters Southey wrote to the politician, Wynn, show how he defined his objections to Catholicism against his friend’s more liberal views on the subject. By the end of the eighteenth-century, after the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1791, toleration had been extended to Catholic schools and worship, and disabilities against entering the legal profession, the armed forces

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<sup>132</sup> See ‘Poems on the Slave Trade’ (1797), in Pratt, ed., *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, V, pp. 48-54.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 82.

<sup>134</sup> James Boswell (ed.), *The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.*, 4 vols (London 1823), II, pp. 132-133.

and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge had been removed. However Catholics were still excluded from voting, or entering Parliament, and holding positions of state or civic office. Southey had strong doubts about the wisdom of allowing Catholics greater rights or indeed a full emancipation, despite such plans having been proposed by William Pitt in the Act of Union with Ireland of 1801. George III refused to sanction Pitt's scheme because he believed that giving Catholics greater political freedom would violate the Coronation Oath made on his accession. Southey therefore, who had been an anti-monarchist in his youth, found himself on the king's side in this debate, as he informed Duppa:

Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that on the Catholic Question I am as stiffly against them as his Majesty himself. Of all my friends Coleridge is perhaps the only one who thinks with me upon this subject; but I am clear in my own mind.<sup>135</sup>

Wynn, who served as Under Secretary of State in the Home Office for the 'Ministry of All the Talents', lost his position in March 1807 when the government was broken up because the King would not accede to its plan to emancipate Catholics from the existing penalties and restrictions placed upon them. In 1805, while Southey was writing *Letters from England* he was communicating on this topic with Wynn in full knowledge that they stood on different sides of the Catholic debate. Southey felt that his time in Spain gave him some insight to the topic, saying of Catholicism:

if the old laws of prevention be suffered to sleep – it will gain ground, perhaps to a dangerous extent. You do not know what the zeal is, and what the power of an army of priests – having no interest whatever but that of their order.<sup>136</sup>

So while, as we have already seen, Southey was attracted to an historical, feudal idea of the pre-Reformation Church for reasons of social cohesion and the strong sense of shared identity and belief it constructed, he also loathed the control the Catholic Church had over the Spanish

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<sup>135</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter1299.

<sup>136</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter1055.

people. He feared the potential for similar interference in state matters in England if Catholics had a stronger political presence there. His travels in Spain and Portugal taught him to realise that however self-effacing the Anglican Church seemed to be in comparison to the supremacist position held by Roman Catholicism there, it was a better alternative to state religion. While admiring spectacles of religious processions that included representatives of the royalty, nobility and soldiery, he believed that such pomp imposed excessive taxation on the people and exposed the oppressive structures of power in these countries (however enthusiastically they were supported by the people). For instance in a long letter written from Portugal in 1800, he describes one of these processions and its ‘wonderfully fine’ conclusion:

the Knights of the various order, the Patriarchal Church, dressed most superbly, the nobles & the Ugly Prince, all following the Wafer. I never saw ought finer than this – nor indeed to be compared with it. the crowd closed behind – the music – the blaze of the dresses – the long street thronged – flooded with people. Had this been well managed it would have been one of the finest imaginable sights, but they moved so irregularly & with such gaps that it was a long procession broken into a number of little pieces. it ought also to be seen with Catholic eyes, not with the eyes of a philosopher. I hate ~~xxxx~~ this idolatry as much as I despise it, for I know the bloody & brutalizing spirit of popery.<sup>137</sup>

Southey’s admiration of the procession is evidenced by short listing phrases broken up by punctuation, to pile on the effects of finery and magnificence. But while he is dazzled by the spectacle one moment, he shows his deliberate disengagement from the scene in the next. The absorptive pull of such sights of ritual and reverence is seductive and has to be seen with the rational ‘eyes of a philosopher’, so that he is not drawn into the enthusiasm of those who observe it with ‘Catholic eyes’. The spirit of unity that the procession demonstrates, of a combined church and state, is undermined by his suspicion of its structures of power and tyranny, and the hold of its ‘brutalizing spirit’ over the people. Southey’s position on Mediterranean Catholicism was therefore oddly contradictory. He admired the national

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<sup>137</sup> *CLRS, Part 2: 1798–1803*, Pratt and Packer (eds), Letter 531.

loyalty it inspired, based on its historical longevity and assimilation into the social fabric, but not its 'bloody' tradition, grounded in false belief, error and fanaticism, as he perceived it.

*In Letters from England* it suits Southey, through Espriella's religious convictions, to show the English people the spiritual poverty of their lives since the 'schism with Rome'. Visiting a church in Dorchester, Espriella finds that divine 'office is performed in a desk immediately under the pulpit, not at the altar: there were no lights burning, nor any church vessels nor ornaments to be seen', and a smell of 'damp' instead of 'frankincense' (*LE*, 93). The act of worship is hierarchical in its organization, with wealthy members of the congregation sitting or kneeling on cushions and the poor standing throughout the service. In this way divisions of wealth are evident even under God's levelling eye. It is money that the English revere and so worship of secular, materialistic idols has replaced the sacred aspects of their lives. While their comfortable homes are carefully ornamented and plushly decorated, their religious services lack embellishment or beauty. From the plain vestments of the clergy, to the bare interiors of their churches, and the 'bald' unceremonious liturgy, 'nothing can be conceived more cold and unimpassioned and uninteresting than all the forms of this false church' (*LE*, 143). In the same way that Espriella's retrogressive views on industry and economics are used as an alternative source of value for readers, his Catholic faith also functions like this. In arguing that the space allotted to God has been taken by Mammon, Southey wants to show that the absence of passion and sacred purpose in people's lives does not fulfil them. A foreign, Catholic commentator therefore seems to have a better understanding of their need for strong religious convictions and spiritual passion. The duality afforded by the text's narrative construction affords Southey free licence to utter Espriellan historical and religious fantasies, which where necessary can be reigned in by his English, Protestant translator. The glimpse of these momentary 'truths' have power, and not just in shining light on the mercenary, materialist 'spirit of the age', but in issuing a rallying cry to the Anglican Church to put its house in order and inject more colour and soul into its doctrine and practices. By comparing his church to a more dominant, passionate faith that is attractive to its worshippers, Southey shows that it needs to compete for souls against the enthusiasm of popular religions like Catholicism and Methodism.

In publications that came after *Letters from England*, such as the *Book of the Church*, the *Colloquies*, and his articles for the *Quarterly Review*, Southey 'castigates global

Catholicism’, as Stuart Andrews demonstrates.<sup>138</sup> As the campaign for Catholic emancipation gathered momentum in England, Southey was drawn into controversial debates against ‘papist’ antagonists, such as Charles Butler and John Milner, to become an apologist for the Anglican Church. But nevertheless, the contradictory nature of his approach to Catholicism is also evident in these later works. The mixed messages he conveys in the guise of a Spanish narrator, therefore, cannot be put down simply to speaking in character. A further example of Southey’s ambiguity can be seen in his 1812 article on ‘The Poor’ for the *Quarterly Review*, where he states that ‘never was there a good work so wickedly effected as the Reformation in England. It is at once our chief blessing and our foulest reproach’.<sup>139</sup> As Kevin Gilmartin demonstrates, Southey’s views on the pre-Reformation Church, written only five years after *Letters from England*, ‘test the limits of loyalist nostalgia’ in regretting ‘the wholesale suppression of the monastic orders in Britain [and] wondering whether it would have been possible “to reform the regular clergy, instead of abolishing them altogether”’.<sup>140</sup> Southey was romantically inclined to an idealised view of England’s past religious structures that he saw as uniting all sections of society in faith and allegiance to its doctrines, but he also believed that the vestiges of Catholicism existing in the present needed to be regulated and contained because of the danger they posed to the state and the Anglican Church. One way in which to make sense of such ambivalence is to separate Southey the historian from his role as a commentator on modern society. As his epic poems show, the textual practice of interpolating extended footnotes from extensive commonplace books on aspects of the past that fascinated or inspired him often undermined the surface message of these works. The heterogeneous, even divergent views contained in his poetry, are also evident in the paradoxical nature of his socio-political prose. In the *Colloquies* for instance, the heteroglossic vision of society it produces in presenting a dialogue with the forces of history is more creative than clear-sighted. In this later work, which also has a Catholic guide in the form of Thomas More, the double vision we see in the character of Espriella takes corporeal form as two distinct personae. Possibly by this stage Southey was not able to contain such duality within one narratorial figure and needed to work out by explicit debate the implicit

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<sup>138</sup> Stuart Andrews, *Robert Southey: History, Politics, Religion* (New York, 2011), p. x.

<sup>139</sup> Southey ‘Inquiry Into The Poor Laws &c.’, in *Quarterly Review*, 8 (December 1812), 319-356, 329.

<sup>140</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge 2007), p. 236.

exchange of ideas within *Letters from England*; even if, as Macaulay pointed out, both speakers in the *Colloquies* are ‘a duplicate of the author’.<sup>141</sup> The influence of the past is never far from Southey’s elbow in writing his poetry or his prose works. In fact, it could be argued that Southey’s contribution to Romantic aesthetics is in presenting idealised ‘tribal’ histories to his readers that promote community identity and his own imaginative, distinctive version of the English national character. Marlon B. Ross’s claim that the Romantics help teach the English to universalise the experience of ‘I’ by ‘celebrating the universal validity of parochial values’ is seen here in Southey’s promulgation of a national ‘history’ that will be disseminated to readers at home and abroad.<sup>142</sup>

Bolstering up the Church of England was part of Southey’s strategy to strengthen national values and reinforce the social cement between his countrymen, as well as providing ‘protection against the intolerance of Romish bigotry, or Calvinistic fanaticism’.<sup>143</sup> As his conservatism developed he advocated reform of the Church and a coordinated system of national education that would fortify its position. He and Coleridge were united in these ambitions, partly in response to the perceived threat from Catholics and the proliferation of dissenting sects, and partly to ameliorate the condition of the poor through schooling. Increasing social stability through counterrevolutionary agency, as Gilmartin demonstrates, meant protecting the national church by combating faction within it and enemies without.<sup>144</sup> However, both men were reluctant to engage in activities that might disrupt what they saw as a delicately balanced social status quo, and so ‘avoided the kind of institutional supplementation associated with Evangelical moral reform and sought instead to return [...] to more essential constitutional methods’ in revitalising the Anglican Church.<sup>145</sup> Southey was increasingly opposed to radical reforms of society or the parliamentary system, instead perceiving that education and religious instruction were better tools for improving society.

In order to imagine a better church in the future, both the Lake poets sought to explain how it had been mismanaged in the past, producing historical, indeed revisionist accounts of

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<sup>141</sup> In the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1830. Quoted in Tom Duggett, ‘Southey’s *Colloquies* and Romantic History’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 44, 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2013), n.p.

<sup>142</sup> Marlon B. Ross, ‘Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity’, in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, 1988), pp. 26-51, p. 31.

<sup>143</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1313.

<sup>144</sup> Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution*, p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution*, p. 212.



its development, in Southey's *Book of the Church* and Coleridge's *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829). It is not accidental that these works appeared at a crucial period of fervent debate over Catholic rights, in events leading up to the passing of the Emancipation Act in 1829. As Andrews states, despite the fact that in his 'preface to *Vindiciae*, Southey claims that the *Book of the Church* was "strictly an historical work" and not intended as part of the Emancipation debate' he shared 'the view of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* of March, 1808, that the Catholic question "should be decided on historical evidence only"'.<sup>146</sup> Southey's long view of history informs his thinking on Catholicism, and it is divisive precisely because the fervour this religion inspired in its faithful down the long passage of time could be seen as fanaticism by a 'right thinking' modern Protestant observer. Like Wordsworth, Southey believed that the Anglican Church had inherited what was good in Catholicism, only to become corrupt. They employed their reforming values to modify and rehabilitate it and instigate a revival of the social dutifulness of Anglicanism in England, with the Church 'confirmed as the embodiment of national identity – Englishness made visible and corporate'.<sup>147</sup> This is particularly evident in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* of 1825 (first published as *Ecclesiastical Sketches* in 1822), which include individual poems on the Anglican rites of service, as well as giving an historical overview of the Church's progression in titles such as 'From the Restoration to the Present Times' and 'Charles the Second'. In this way Wordsworth's poetic negotiation of the Church's history and doctrine reflects 'similar views' (according to his own statement on the subject) as those presented in Southey's *Book of the Church*.<sup>148</sup> However such emphatic commitment on Wordsworth's part can be seen even earlier in his panegyric to church and state in Book 6 of *The Excursion*, 'The Church-Yard Among the Mountains' (1814), which acts as a manifesto for the united opinions of the Lake poets:

Hail to the Crown by Freedom shaped – to gird  
 An English Sovereign's brow! And to the Throne  
 Whereon he sits! Whose deep Foundations lie  
 In veneration and the People's love;

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<sup>146</sup> Stuart Andrews, 'Southey, St Dominic and Battering the Walls of Babylon', *Wordsworth Circle*, (Winter 2011) 42. 1, n.p.

<sup>147</sup> Andrews, *Robert Southey*, p. 195.

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *Robert Southey*, p. 196.

Whose steps are equity, whose seat is law.  
Hail to the State of England! And conjoin  
With this a salutation as devout,  
Made to the spiritual Fabric of her Church;  
(ll. 1-8).

Wordsworth's poetic affirmation of the Church, whose outposts are preserved even among the rural isolation of 'the Mountains', shows how English national values are fortified by its 'spiritual Fabric'. The monarch at the head of the Church is confirmed by 'Foundations' laid in 'Freedom' and 'veneration' to create a further revisionist history in poetic form that complements Coleridge's and Southey's pre-Emancipation discourses.

Despite accusations against Southey of apostasy in other social or political affairs, it is the case that in his opposition to Catholics being granted full admittance to England's political system, he was most constant. Another threat to the state that he perceived was from the burgeoning dissenting sects that he describes in *Letters from England*, despite considering them to be of lesser concern than the Catholics, in a letter of 1805:

The Protestant Dissenters will die away. destroy the test act & you kill them. they affect to appeal wholly to reason & bewilder themselves in the miserable snares of materialism – besides this creed is not reasonable – it is a vile mangle-mangle which a Catholic may well laugh at. But Catholicism, having survived the first flood of reformation – will stand – perhaps till the end of all things.<sup>149</sup>

Nevertheless the working class origins of the sects that Southey delineates, and the enthusiastic congregations that followed them, were a worrying trend. In his travelogue even a foreigner can detect that Methodist 'meeting-houses fill by draining the churches' (*LE*, 294) demonstrating Southey's anxiety that the Anglican Church was losing power and influence to this popular sect. Fifteen years later, he was much more aware of its influence, in the *Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (1820) where he shows the social impact it

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<sup>149</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1055.

has had. The poor, who Southey saw as neglected by state-assisted forms of charity, are benefitting from pre-Reformation standards of care:

It was among those classes of society whose moral and religious education had been blindly and culpably neglected, that Methodism produced an immediate beneficial effect; and, in cases of brutal depravity and habitual vice, it often produced a thorough reformation, which could not have been brought about by any less powerful agency than that of religious zeal.<sup>150</sup>

However such ‘zeal’ is misplaced if it replaces the national religion, which needs to compete with sects that are so attractive to the lower ‘classes of society’.

The spurious reason Espriella gives for making a study of English sects is that he has been charged by his family and his ‘confessor’ to observe and report back on this aspect of English religion. The strong core of his Catholic belief, and the certainties he utters, allow for unflattering observations on the ways in which other religious groups function, and particularly on the influence of modern populist ‘messiahs’ such as Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott. We know, from Southey’s correspondence, and the topics in some of his previous writings, of the horrified fascination he had for ‘religious zeal’ in any form. In poems, such as that on the life of the French saint *Joan of Arc* (1796), and *Thalaba the Destroyer* – in which the central character has a mission to uproot a Muslim fanatical sect – as well as *Madoc*, with its Aztec rituals of superstition, he was exploring the boundaries of religious mania. Southey had experienced a lesser form of such enthusiasm himself. In his youth, in frustration at the doctrinal hegemony of the Church of England, he had flirted for a while with various religions, such as Unitarianism, Socinianism and Quakerism. He knew their attractions therefore and why they found converts. Now however, he perceived that social stability was imperilled by the existence of so many irreconcilable groups, who secured their positions through dissent from church and state. In jokey fashion Espriella lists 43 minor and major sects – in which, as the ‘translator’ observes, ‘the popish author seems to have aimed at something like wit by arranging them in rhymes’ (*LE*, 181) – to demonstrate the proliferation of so many faiths divided from each other by doctrinal differences. He blames

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<sup>150</sup> Southey, *The Life of Wesley; and the Rise and Progress of Methodism*, 2 vols (London, 1820), II, p. 528.

their existence on the Protestant ‘schism’, after which ‘heresies sprung up like weeds in a neglected field’ (*LE*, 182). Even more worrying is the fact that several of this ‘hydra brood’ (*LE*, 182) are led by charismatic prophets, who encourage their zealous congregations in what Espriella considers to be insane beliefs and behaviour. The Messianic leaders of their sects, such as Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott, are extensive subjects for examination, due to Southey’s interest in the hysteria they inspired. Such uncontrolled and popular manifestations of religious passion contrast even more palpably with the cool rationalism that Espriella observes in the Anglican Church, showing readers why such nonconformist ardour, in contrast, is so attractive.

Southey’s strong interest in the subject of prophetic belief and the zeal it inspired meant that he ‘viewed religious enthusiasm as a quintessential part of the spirit of the age, a social phenomenon with political ramifications, capable of fomenting revolutionary fervour’.<sup>151</sup> Southey’s inclusion of a comprehensive overview of the sects existing in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century may be seen as digressive, but in fact, as he stated in a letter of January 1807, in *Letters from England* ‘the most compleat part will be the view of the different religious sects in the country – in which I think no former historian of heresies has equalled me’.<sup>152</sup> Southey was correct in identifying the uniqueness of his social history. He made visible a landscape of largely working-class dissent that had not been considered worth noticing on this scale before. He approached the topic with an historian’s commitment to research it thoroughly, buying and borrowing many texts and pamphlets on the subject. As Fulford points out, ‘he had an extensive collection of Southcott’s publications, owned the very rare Testimony of Bryan, and was familiar with the Brotherite writings of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed’.<sup>153</sup> It is clear from Southey’s letters (as the editorial footnotes to this work indicate) that he also knew some of the figures associated with these religious groups, including William Bryan (one of the ‘Avignon prophets’), his associate William Sharp, and other followers such as James Crease and Samuel Whitchurch. He was in correspondence with William Owen Pughe, who became a follower of Joanna Southcott. He also visited chapels and attended services of figures such as William Huntington S. S. (meaning ‘Sinner Saved’), whose congregation looked ‘as if they were already so near the

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<sup>151</sup> Tim Fulford (ed.), *Robert Southey and Millenarianism: Documents Concerning the Prophetic Movements of the Romantic Era* (Romantic Circles, 2012), para 2.

<sup>152</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1267.

<sup>153</sup> Fulford (ed.), *Robert Southey and Millenarianism*, para 23.

fire & brimstone that it had coloured their complexions'.<sup>154</sup> The political consequence of such groups, is for E. P. Thompson, one of the ways in which the working class was born, through a new kind of consciousness and self-activity. Thompson shows how religion created cohesive communities among the working classes, and particularly the Methodists, who 'injected into the chapels its own values of mutual aid, neighbourliness and solidarity'.<sup>155</sup> In this way 'as an unestablished (although undemocratic) Church, there was a sense in which working people could make it their own; and the more closely knit the community in which Methodism took root (the mining, fishing or weaving village) the more this was so'.<sup>156</sup> Moreover Himmelfarb believes that 'the Methodist ethos was eminently democratic', as the 'poor were not only objects of solicitude; they were the sect's main constituency'.<sup>157</sup>

The idea of groups of working class people banding together caused apprehension for many, including Southey. It led to the parliamentary acts of 1799 and 1800, 'to prevent Unlawful Combinations of Workmen', so prohibiting trade unions or groups of labourers meeting for the purposes of collective bargaining. However, as Iain McCalman asserts in his study of the social underworld, 'it was notoriously easy to procure licences for both dissenting ministers and their chapels' in which the working classes could congregate.<sup>158</sup> In 'plebeian Methodism', its critics saw a 'tendency to nurture socially disruptive beliefs' and a leaning towards antinomianism that was 'associated with an extreme and heretical fringe'.<sup>159</sup> And 'Millenarianism [the belief in Christ's coming, or an apocalypse on earth] became a feature of the urban, artisan culture that produced the political societies that the government feared would bring about revolution'.<sup>160</sup> According to John Mee, anxiety about 'popular prophecy was heightened by contemporary theories of the psychopathology of enthusiasm [...] which was presented as a contagious disease capable of rapidly infecting the lower orders'. He goes on to show how in an anonymous pamphlet, entitled *A Word of Admonition to the Right Hon. William Pitt* (1795), its author, who was 'using a metaphor of infection, urged the government to take action against "the poisonous prophetic that is infused and

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<sup>154</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1151.

<sup>155</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn (London, 1991), p. 431

<sup>156</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 417.

<sup>157</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 128-129.

<sup>159</sup> McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 58.

<sup>160</sup> Fulford (ed.), *Robert Southey and Millenarianism*, para 7.

making rapid progress through the great body of society”<sup>161</sup>. In the same way that Southey identifies threats to society through powerful images of disease, this author, in order to show the dire effects of prophecy uses as strong rhetoric as those who make apocalyptic predictions. The facetious tone with which Espriella recounts Brothers’ prophecies does not negate their disruptive effect:

He threatened London with an earthquake because of its unbelief, and at length named the day when the city should be destroyed. Many persons left town to avoid this threatened calamity; the day passed by, he claimed the merit of having prevailed in prayer and obtained a respite, and fixed another. (*LE*, 367)

One way in which Southey counteracts the fanatical beliefs of the Brotherites, the Swedenborgians and the Southcottians, to name but a few, is through satire and expressions of incredulity. Espriella concludes that the English are not just ‘the unbelieving people’ he had thought they were, they ‘are in reality miserably prone to superstition’ (*LE*, 365). In such comments we can clearly see Southey’s intent in using a Catholic narrator. The accusations of many English visitors to Mediterranean regions, and the inclusion of Catholic ritual and ‘superstition’ in novels like Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Italian* (1797), or Lewis’s *The Monk*, are being inverted here to show Protestant dissenters as having irrational, backward beliefs that are even further damned through the eyes of a ‘papist’ observer. While several of the bemused reviewers of *Letters from England* (see ‘Reception’) note the inconsistencies of a Spanish visitor knowing so much about the histories of the English sects, they also show concern at the extent of them. This was Southey’s intention, to warn the people of England about another pressing peril to their political, social and religious establishment.

### ‘Lakers’

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<sup>161</sup> Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford, 1994; repr. 2002), p. 49.

In *Letters from England*, Espriella comes closest to revealing the identity of his Romantic creator in his visit to the Lake District. Engaging in a walking tour of the region with an English companion, the two ‘bipedalists’ – to use Rebecca Solnit’s term that implies the cultural significance of walking as an activity – begin in Kendal, aiming for Windermere and Ambleside. A day’s visit is made southwest to Coniston, before going north to Brotherswater, Ullswater and Penrith and then heading west back into the Lakes to Keswick. A whole letter describes Derwentwater, Derwent Isle (or ‘Vicar’s Island’ as it was then known), the waterfall of Lodore and their ascent up Skiddaw. The walkers take in Borrowdale on their way south to Wastwater, returning ‘to Keswick by way of Ennerdale and Crummock Lakes’ (*LE*, 240). At the end of the tour they leave the Lake District via Lake Bassenthwaite, heading north to Carlisle. This is a comprehensive exploration of what modern readers would recognize as the most significant tourist spots in the Lake District. However the identification of this region as an attractive place to visit and walk in was a fairly recent one, with interest in it growing during the 1780s. At the time that Southey was living in Keswick (from 1803 onwards) and writing *Letters from England*, it was becoming a popular visitor attraction.

As the ‘Lake Poets’ were framing their responses to the landscape around them, Espriella brings the novelty of fresh eyes to what was for Southey a familiar sight. At this point in the narrative of *Letters from England* readers are explicitly reminded of its purpose to convey the experiences of a traveller on the ground, despite its textual hybridity as a ‘genre that straddles categories and disciplines’ to include fact and fiction, geography and history, philosophy and political commentary.<sup>162</sup> In travel writing, according to Michael Kowaleski, ‘a crucial element [...] remains the author’s “visitor” status. He or she remains, as the reader’s surrogate, a cultural outsider who moves into, through, and finally beyond the places and events encountered’.<sup>163</sup> This definition helps us to make sense of what Southey intended in his work. Even if we dispense with the fiction that his narrator is Spanish, or a traveller, it is still the case that Southey positions himself as an outsider in the role of a visitor or observer of people and places, much as in his accounts of foreign cultures. His descriptions of the Lake District are slyly observed by hiding his own familiarity and demanding a new vision through Spanish eyes. The motive Espriella gives for visiting the Lake District is to

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<sup>162</sup> Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Michigan, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Michael Kowaleski (ed.), *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel* (Athens, Ga., 1992), p. 7.

satisfy his curiosity about the English taste for summer migrations to picturesque locations. In this way he is an intentional tourist of tourism, and prepares to make a study of the region, its inhabitants and its visitors during the summer period of his tour. Southey's ethnographical interests come to the fore in observing trends in behaviour, such as the current fashion of 'Lakers', as he refers in his correspondence to visitors from other parts of the country, who come to visit the region.

Espriella's account of his Lake District perambulation includes multiple perspectives: the novelty of a traveller's first responses to the landscape, descriptions of its geographical and historical details, Southey's authorial interpolations about his Lake District domicile, and the use of technical vocabulary to describe its picturesque scenery. In adopting the latter, Espriella consciously explores 'a new science for which a new language has been formed' (*LE*, 185). Like other 'Lakers' he employs guide book strategies and their aesthetic principles to see this region through a prescribed method. In previous centuries the Lake District had been seen as hostile and uninviting, but visitors were now attracted to the region to apply their theories of the picturesque and the sublime to its wild terrain. So, in Kendal, before embarking on their trip, Espriella and his fellow walker send for 'A Guide to the Lakes' (*LE*, 226), which Jack Simmons suggests was Thomas West's popular *Guide to the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (1778). By 1802, when Espriella had 'arrived' in England, West's guide – first published in 1784 with a preface justifying leisure travel in general and domestic tourism in particular – was in its eighth edition. In his account of the Lake District it is clear to see Southey engaging with West's work, as well as Thomas Gray's *Journal of his Tour in the Lake District* (written in 1769 and published posthumously in 1775).

West was one of the first writers to present the north of England as an environment worth inspecting and even painting, and to do so he incorporated parts of Gray's account into his *Guide*. West's account led the way for similar books by Gilpin and Wordsworth.<sup>164</sup> In this way there are literary precedents for Espriella's own descriptions of the Lake District because 'one of the comforts of travelling in England [is that] wherever you go, printed information is to be found, concerning everything which deserves a stranger's notice' (*LE*, 226) Like the English tourists who benefit from this facility, Espriella accepts these authoritative sources on

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<sup>164</sup> Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly To Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, On several Parts of England, Particularly The Mountains, And Lakes Of Cumberland, and Westmoreland* (1786); Wordsworth, *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* (1810).



what is significant and notable in the Lake District, but we also see Southey challenging these accounts in his descriptions of the terrain. Having already lived in Keswick for several years when he published *Letters from England*, and having made many walking trips in the locality, Southey adopted the authority of a guide with his own personal ‘Lakers’, giving comprehensive advice on the route they should travel and the objects they should see. In this way, Southey, like those peddlers of tourism, West and Gray, promotes the idea of the Lake District as a uniquely sublime area, where a guide is necessary to appreciate it fully. The danger of going into it unprepared is that it might appear as a bare, empty wilderness instead of an important canvas for the picturesque. Espriella’s appreciation of the Lake District is therefore coloured by his reading of guide books, as Southey incorporates the language of the picturesque into his descriptions of the Lakes. So, Derwentwater has a pleasing setting in which ‘the mirror is in perfect proportion to its frame’ (*LE*, 233), a common analogy in guidebook diction. Espriella reports that though Skiddaw ‘seems’ to rise immediately from its shore at a certain point, in reality, depending on your point of view, the town of Keswick intervenes. The idea of seeing things from a certain place or perspective is important, highlighting West’s promotion of precise locations from which to view the significant features he identifies, such as Ambleside, which is ‘one of the regular stations’ on tours of the Lake District (*LE*, 228). Espriella says of the upper end of Windermere, ‘a stronger contrast cannot well be imagined than that of a shore thus ornamented, and the wild mountains beyond; yet wooded hills and crags rising one above the other, harmonized the whole into one accordant and lovely scene’ (*LE*, 228).’ The idea of looking for ‘contrast’ and ‘harmony’ is a painterly one that organises natural features in a picturesque way, much as an artist constructs a landscape scene. Espriella’s descriptions adhere to an ethos of framing or controlling natural elements which might otherwise be perceived as indistinct, rough or unattractive. This is so that the ‘trick of surprise’, as he refers to it, ‘is not offensive’ (*LE*, 229). Systematising the landscape to eliminate ‘surprises’ or shocks is one way in which the wilder parts of the Lake District became domesticated as a tame, describable, even idealised scenery that is now a recognised part of England’s tourist trail.

Southey contributes to this domestication in challenging the descriptions in West’s account. Espriella states, in navigating the Borrowdale valley, we had ‘consulted tourists and topographers in London, that we might not overpass any thing worthy of notice, and our Guide to the Lakes was with us’ (*LE*, 236). The travellers are prepared for a sublime experience:

They told us of tracts of horrible barrenness, of terrific precipices, rocks rioting upon rocks, and mountains tost together in chaotic confusion; of stone avalanches rendering the ways impassable, the fear of some travellers who had shrunk back from this dreadful entrance into Borrodale, and the heroism of others who had dared to penetrate into these impenetrable regions: (*LE*, 236)

The walkers anticipate a scene of animated, hostile nature, conveyed through hyperbolic language that heightens the sense of awe and fear (an essential formula for the sublime) in its vertiginous elements of ‘terrific precipices’ and antagonistic forces that render it ‘impassable’ and ‘impenetrable’. Southey uses the sublime aesthetic in his description, recognising its popularity in eighteenth-century travel guides which were influenced by Edmund Burke’s theories of the astonishment, awe and reverence that viewers experience when faced with such ‘dreadful’ scenes.<sup>165</sup> Burke also explains how a ‘delightful horror’ is created when the sublime is observed ‘at certain distances, and with certain modifications’.<sup>166</sup> Southey’s readers can experience the scene through the medium of writing – which as Ian Ousby points out, imitates Gray’s account of passing through the ‘Jaws of Borrowdale’<sup>167</sup> – to gain a thrill of ‘delight’, without expending the physical effort and ‘heroism’ required to negotiate the danger themselves. In the next moment however, with deliberate bathos, Southey explodes the sublime effects he has carefully built up, to expose it as a literary effect which the writers of guide books depend on to sell their publications. Espriella states, after the short division of a single dash to draw attention to the disruption in tone, that ‘into these regions, however, we found no difficulty in walking along a good road, which coaches of the light English make travel every summer’s day’ (*LE*, 236). In writing his own ‘guide book’ to the lakes therefore, Southey challenges the authority of these precedents in the way that Wordsworth would in his *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), in which he intended to provide ‘a model of the manner in which topographical descriptions ought to be executed, in order to their being either useful or

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<sup>165</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1767).

<sup>166</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 5th edn (London, 1767), pp. 257, 60.

<sup>167</sup> Ian Ousby, *The Englishman’s England: Taste, Travel and the Rise of Tourism* (London, 1990; repr. 2002), pp. 112-113.

intelligible'.<sup>168</sup> As John R. Nabholz demonstrates, in this way Wordsworth 'hope[d] that his work might serve in some way as a corrective to previous studies of local scenery'.<sup>169</sup> The impulse to provide such correctives is because the Lake poets' believed that their local knowledge of the region was more authentic than that provided by existing guide books. But they also had a specific kind of reader and visitor in mind. For instance Wordsworth states that:

In preparing this Manual, it was the Author's principal wish to furnish a Guide or Companion for the *Minds* of Persons of taste, and feeling for Landscape, who might be inclined to explore the District of the Lakes with that degree of attention to which its beauty may fairly lay claim.<sup>170</sup>

The appeal to people who use their 'Minds' and have 'taste and feeling', to encourage the right kind of tourist, led to accusations of elitism and protectionism which are even more evident in Wordsworth's later objection to the extension of the railway from Kendal to Windermere (and the implied consequences of a greater influx of tourists). His feelings on this initiative are made plain in his poem on the subject that was published in the *Morning Post* on 16 October 1844, with its inquisitorial accusation, 'Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?'<sup>171</sup>

The influences of tourism on the Lake District were evident even in the early nineteenth-century and Southey humorously sends up the attractions that have come into vogue since being advocated in the guide books. A popular event in the tourist's schedule was to experience the effect of hearing a cannon being fired across one of the Lake District's great expanses of water. The nearest lake to Southey's home, Derwentwater, was the most common choice for this amusement. Espriella and his companion also pay to hear 'the sound rolling round from hill to hill' at the high price of 'four shilling', instead of selecting the 'inferior one which would have cost only two shillings and sixpence' (*LE*, 234). The decision

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<sup>168</sup> Quoted in Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, ed. Ernest de Sélincourt (London, 2004), p. xi.

<sup>169</sup> John R. Nabholz, 'Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes and the Picturesque Tradition', *Modern Philology*, (May 1964), 61 (4) 228–297, ??

<sup>170</sup> Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, ed. de Sélincourt, p. 27.

<sup>171</sup> Wordsworth, 'Is Then No Nook Of English Ground Secure', ll. 1-2.

to get more ‘bang for their buck’ deliciously complements Espriella’s London commentary on the ridiculousness of purchasing expensive luxuries, so that here:

when one buys an echo, who would be content, for the sake of  
saving eighteen pence, to put up with the second best, instead  
of ordering at once the super-extra-double-superfine?

(*LE*, 234)

The account humorously conveys the effects of the tourist ‘industry’ on the region, an apposite term for the opportunity visitors are given to ‘buy’ experiences.

A further way in which Southey engages with the guide books of West, Gray, and Gilpin is in challenging their pre-eminence in the field by taking Espriella to a part of the Lakes he knew himself, which was off the beaten track. The premise for this is again an aesthetic one. In viewing an art exhibition, Espriella notes that:

There were several views of one [lake] called Waswater, which is so little visited that our book of directions is silent concerning it. It seemed to us however to be of so striking a character, and so different from all which we have yet seen, that we consulted with our host concerning the distance and the best mode of getting there, and have accordingly planned a route which is to include it, and which we shall commence tomorrow.

(*LE*, 235)

Espriella’s ‘host’ is someone Southey knew well, John Fisher, a Keswick barber, who earned money on the side by renting a room to travellers, a facility used on occasion by Southey’s own visitors when his house was full of ‘Lakers’. The significance of this passage is that a local ‘guide’ to the region offers a different route through its landscape, and an alternative perspective from the conventional eighteenth-century coach tour. In this way Southey provides a supplement to West’s ‘book of directions’, which is ‘silent’ on the subject of Wastwater, in showing how to access it on foot as part of Espriella’s circumlocution of the Lakes. The knowledge of the ‘host’ opposes that of published metropolitan authorities on the subject and this local insight is valued by the walkers who are well paid for their exertions. Their walk affords them a unique view of the three peaks of Scafell, Scafell Pike and Lingmell together, and a clear sight of their ‘jagged and grotesque rocks’ (*LE*, 239). They see

the ‘wonderful mixture of colouring’ of the Wastwater Scree (LE, 240), and discover remnants of Norse mythology in St Mary’s Churchyard, Gosforth. In this way Southey provides a corrective to West’s work, updating information that is missing from its eight editions. He is also, more importantly, providing an alternative, Romantic tour of the lakes, which should be made on foot to gain the full effects of the sublime, picturesque and historical elements within it.

Southey and his fellow Lake poets are advocating a new leisure activity, that of pedestrianism. As Solnit shows – based on the precedent of critical works such as Robin Jarvis’s *Romantic Poetry and Pedestrian Travel* (1998) – ‘while many travelled on foot out of necessity before [the Romantic period] few did so for pleasure’.<sup>172</sup> The idea of walking as solitary musing (advocated by the peripatetic philosopher Rousseau) or companionable converse (Wordsworth, his sister, and Coleridge in Somerset) or for the physical and social benefits of the effort (Southey’s frequent tours up Scafell with family and friends), was one that developed in the Romantic period. Walking on the public road, as Peter Spratley demonstrates, could also afford ‘an opportunity for chance meetings with others [...] who are also, significantly, travelling on foot’.<sup>173</sup> The significance comes from the fact that these ‘others’ are often walkers because they are itinerant, allowing these ‘meetings’ to report the unusual insights of discharged soldiers, leech-gatherers, or an old man who is ‘going many miles to take/ A last leave of my son’.<sup>174</sup> This engagement with the common man ‘instigates [the] communal and social sympathy’ that inspired *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>175</sup> The activity of pedestrianism could also provide a unique, subjective perspective that is integrally linked to the Romantic aesthetic itself. As Anne D. Wallace states, ‘pedestrian action produces intimacy with nature’, and in the example of Wordsworth particularly, ‘walking does not merely provide the raw materials of writing, but is physically linked with the process of composition’.<sup>176</sup> Recounting the story of a walk taken for pleasure also sets Romantic writers

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<sup>172</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London, 2001; repr. 2014), p. 84

<sup>173</sup> Peter Spratley, ‘Wordsworth’s Walking Aesthetic’, in *Grasmere 2010: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference*, ed. Richard Gravil (Penrith, 2010), pp. 30-40, p. 33.

<sup>174</sup> Wordsworth, ‘Old Man Travelling’, ll. 17-18.

<sup>175</sup> Spratley, ‘Wordsworth’s Walking Aesthetic’, p. 33.

<sup>176</sup> Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 7, 128. Wallace adds that ‘Wordsworth composed ‘Tintern Abbey’ on a four day walk to Bristol with Dorothy’ and ‘habitually walked while composing’, pp. 128-9.

apart from previous generations. Coleridge's solitary walking tour of 1802, in which he completed a hundred-mile circuit of the Lake District (referred to as his 'circumcursion') in nine days, is recounted in his notebooks. As Richard Holmes states, Coleridge contributes to 'a new kind of Romantic tourism, abandoning the coach and the high-road for the hill, the flask and the knapsack'.<sup>177</sup> Simon Bainbridge also makes the point that in his 1802 tour, Coleridge coined the word 'mountaineering' as the practice of climbing for pleasure.<sup>178</sup> Coleridge's exultation in walking the hills is conveyed in his notebook description, where 'every man [is] his own path maker – skip & jump – where rushes grew, a man may go'.<sup>179</sup> The physical delight of 'skipping' through the landscape is conveyed through the jumping effect of one idea to the next, demonstrating the integral relationship between the occupation of walking and its representation on the page. Such exhilaration is also conveyed in John Keats' plans for a walking tour in 1818, when he says 'I will clamber through clouds and exist', as if the act of walking underpins, and makes real, his very existence.<sup>180</sup>

The enthusiasm for walking that the Romantic poets demonstrate in their writing reflects a 'general wave of pedestrian touring that began in the late eighteenth century' as Wallace states, also quoting Morris Marples's view that 'from about 1800 onwards, it became worthwhile to publish guidebooks expressly intended for pedestrians'.<sup>181</sup> In *Letters from England*, Southey, like his fellow poets, was leading the way in popularising this activity that he enjoyed so much himself. By prioritising the subjective, experiential voice of the walker, the Romantic writers have become identified with this emblematic region, and the literary aesthetics it inspired have endured in England's cultural heritage. As Julia S. Carlson argues, even by the early Victorian period guide books were demonstrating the shaping of the Lake District by 'the literary personalities of the preceding era' as much as by the 'geographical and socio-linguistic forces over time'. For instance, *Black's Picturesque Guide to the English Lakes* (1841) includes references to 'Southey, Hemans, Radcliffe, Coleridge, Jewsbury and Wordsworth, through whose writing – and often because of it – tourists are asked to

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<sup>177</sup> Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London, 1989), p. 328.

<sup>178</sup> Simon Bainbridge, 'The Power of Hills: Romantic Mountaineering', in *Grasmere 2010: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference*, ed. Richard Gravil (Penrith, 2010), pp. 7-29, p. 7.

<sup>179</sup> Quoted in Rachel Hewitt, *Map Of A Nation: A Biography Of The Ordnance Survey* (London, 2011), p. 209.

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Bainbridge, 'The Power of Hills: Romantic Mountaineering', p. 10.

<sup>181</sup> Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture*, p. 167.

apprehend features of the topography'.<sup>182</sup> In this way these writers of the Romantic period have contributed to transforming the landscape that Espriella saw in the early nineteenth century.

## Reception

Southey was right in his judgement that his other works, such as his American founding epic, *Madoc*, would be outsold by *Letters from England*. Unlike the former, which sold poorly, less than 6 months after publication the latter had just 30 per cent of its copies left and a second edition was being planned.<sup>183</sup> By Christmas 1807 the remaining stock had been halved again.<sup>184</sup> Southey attributed the book's popularity to the mystery surrounding its authorship which he had intended to create speculation. He requested his friends to assist its sales by keeping his authorship secret and by asking them to promote the book wherever possible. A letter written in December 1807 reveals that 'D Manuel has a friend in the Courier & in the Morning Post. This is Stuarts doing'.<sup>185</sup> Daniel Stuart was the editor of the *Courier* and had been the owner of the *Morning Post* until 1803, where he still retained an interest. Extracts from Southey's book on Birmingham and Manchester, and at least one advertisement for it, were published in the *Courier*, and Stuart and Southey who shared the same opinions on the state of Britain's manufacturing towns planned to publicise their concerns further.<sup>186</sup> In February 1808, Southey wrote to Coleridge saying:

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<sup>182</sup> Julia S. Carlson, 'Topographical Measures: Wordsworth's and Crosthwaite's Lines on the Lake District', *Romanticism* (2010), 16. 1, 72-93, 89.

<sup>183</sup> 'Espriella sells – about 300 are left of the thousand' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1387 (dated 1 December 1807)).

<sup>184</sup> '150 copies of Espriella remain, & they go to press again immediately' (*CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1402).

<sup>185</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1389.

<sup>186</sup> In *The Courier* of 20 November 1807, probably at Coleridge's instigation, appeared an extract from *Letters from England*, Letter 38, concerning the exploitation of the poor in the new commercial and manufacturing towns. On 17 November an extract from Letter 36 criticising Birmingham had been published. An advertisement for the book appeared on 1 December. The references in the *Morning Post* have not been traced.

Espriella has sold rapidly, for which I have to thank Stuart; the edition is probably by this time exhausted, and, I verily believe, half the sale must be attributed to the puffs in the Courier. The sale of a second edition would right me in Longman's books. Puff me, Coleridge! if you love me, puff me! Puff a couple of hundreds into my pocket!<sup>187</sup>

The connection between writing and his financial situation was never far from Southey's mind. While he was actively marketing the book, before the news of his authorship had broken, reviews of *Letters from England* began to appear. The *Edinburgh Review* was one of the first periodicals to acknowledge the book (in January 1808) just as Southey had realised that as 'Espriella is so generally ascribed to me' it could affect its sales (which did indeed fall) as well as the tone of its reviews.<sup>188</sup> Jeffrey, his adversary at the *Edinburgh* who wrote the review, recognised the polemical purpose of its author and that a foreign pseudonym protected a native writer, even if he did not suspect Southey at this stage. In his review Jeffrey blasts the weak 'powers of reasoning' that are so overlaid with sentiment, observing that whenever the narrator:

approaches any great manufacturing town, instead of any expression of admiration at the wonderful exertions of ingenuity and industry which are there displayed, we are sure to be presented with a highly coloured and most lamentable picture of misery and vice into which a great portion of the inhabitants are plunged.<sup>189</sup>

Jeffrey's liberal views contrast with Southey's social agenda, and where a Spaniard might be forgiven for such anti-industrialism, a British observer with these views is castigated for being retrogressive. Southey is especially at fault for his inability to suggest solutions to the problems he perceives.

Jeffrey criticises the tendency of the author to include minute details of everyday life that are often uninteresting to readers. The review is extensive, containing long excerpts from

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<sup>187</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1427.

<sup>188</sup> *CLRS, Part 3: 1804–1809*, Bolton and Fulford (eds), Letter 1412.

<sup>189</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 372.



the book that gave it a large amount of publicity. Jeffrey finds Southey's book admirable in some aspects, particularly identifying the 'well executed' descriptions of the Lake District as meritorious and in fact 'by far the best part of the book'.<sup>190</sup> Jeffrey also enjoys the descriptions of the metropolis and regrets the lack of further passages that reveal the 'opulence and splendour of the shops' and the capital's 'immense riches'.<sup>191</sup> Ironically, therefore, he values the exact parts of Espriella's narrative that were intended as critiques of excessive consumerism and the valorisation of wealth by its citizens. Jeffrey's Whig tendencies come out in support of Southey's stance on martial law and the 'miserable state' of the military,<sup>192</sup> and despite attacking Espriella's criticisms of the manufacturing system he quotes extensively on the deleterious state of the poor in Manchester. The tonal aspects of the book are a common complaint, as the author can be 'affected', 'conceited' and 'dogmatical', alternating between 'querulous' comments and a humour that is often 'vulgar'.<sup>193</sup> Jeffrey quotes extensively on sectarianism, but this material leads him to conclude that 'No one, we conceive, who reads the book, can for a moment suppose it to be the work of a foreigner'.<sup>194</sup>

A more positive response to *Letters from England* appeared in the *Monthly Review* in April of 1808, when it was commonly known that it was not written by a Spaniard. The reviewer professes not to have been taken in by the pseudonym and clearly identifies its writer's agenda to 'instruct' rather than flatter the 'national vanity'.<sup>195</sup> In this respect the book can be considered successful, even if the fiction is poorly kept up. In the review Southey is identified by name as the author, as is Duppa, erroneously, for his contributions to the text.<sup>196</sup> As well as quoting extensively in the same areas as Jeffrey, drawing attention to the poor and supporting Espriella's views on manufactories, the reviewer's main interest is in the passages on sectarianism. The 'religious madness' of the English sees him despairing at their credulity.<sup>197</sup>

The *British Critic* also identifies Southey and Duppa as the authors and takes on the duty of identifying the gap between what a Spaniard new to England could know and the

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<sup>190</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 372.

<sup>191</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 374

<sup>192</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 376.

<sup>193</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 373, 374, 389.

<sup>194</sup> Jeffrey, 'Don Manuel Espriella's *Letters from England*', 390.

<sup>195</sup> Christopher Lake Moody, 'Espriella's *Letters from England*', *Monthly Review* (April 1808), 380-386, 380.

<sup>196</sup> Moody, 'Espriella's *Letters from England*', 380.

<sup>197</sup> Moody, 'Espriella's *Letters from England*', 386,

greater (English) experience of its author.<sup>198</sup> This periodical, set up in 1793 by the Church of England under the auspices of the Pitt administration, and with two clergymen as editors, demonstrates its conservative principles. It accuses Don Manuel of intending ‘to inflame vulgar prejudices’ against Pitt’s administration and because an account of Gilbert Wakefield’s history is included, the reviewer assumes that the authors are ‘democrats and jacobins’ who wish to create ‘a spirit of discontent among the lower orders of the people’.<sup>199</sup> The review compares the opinions in *Letters from England* to similar views in one of Wakefield’s ‘seditious pamphlets’ (on the subject of manufacturing) to emphasise the radical nature of Southey’s book.<sup>200</sup> According to the reviewer, the authors are ‘grossly misrepresenting the nature and operation of our poor laws’.<sup>201</sup> In doing so he makes a distinction between the ‘us’ of the English and ‘they’ of the writers (i.e. Southey and Duppa), to emphasise the unpatriotic nature of their criticisms. The review also highlights the difference between the deserving, respectable poor who are well treated and the ‘vicious poor [who] are indeed miserable’, implying that this is a proper state of affairs.<sup>202</sup> It accuses the authors of making ‘the lower orders discontented with the station in which Providence has placed them’ and with the existing laws ‘for the protection of property’, as well as intending to ‘misrepresent the constitution of the British legislature’.<sup>203</sup> The tone of the review is angry and indignant in defending the state and the church, but admits that if the book ‘were purged of the dross with which it is mixed [it] would be excellent’.<sup>204</sup> It identifies the errors in the authors’ assertions and charges the authors with too much detailed information on religious sects.<sup>205</sup>

Southey’s attempts to get into character got him into trouble with reviewers, who perceived his fiction not as creative licence, but as ‘forgery’. For this reason the *Critical Review* has a brief entry stating that the book should not be given any credibility. Until the ‘supposition’ of whether it is a forgery or not can be proved, the periodical refuses to give

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<sup>198</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, *British Critic*, 31, 168-178. Duppa refuted his authorship in this same edition of the *British Critic*, 460.

<sup>199</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 168, 170.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 170.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 170.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 171.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 173.

<sup>204</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 176.

<sup>205</sup> ‘Letters of Don Manuel Alvarez’, 176.

*Letters from England* ‘a full and candid review’.<sup>206</sup> The reviewer highlights the tricky nature and slippery status of such texts, which he perceives as neglecting to observe the compact between author and reader to ‘tell the truth’. Such attempts at discovering veracity have led even critics in the twenty-first century to designate that for ‘texts to count as travel writing’ they require ‘an ethical dimension to their claims to have made the journeys they recount’.<sup>207</sup> This throws up the difficulties in categorising Southey’s book, where the author is an invention and the journeys he records did not take place (or at least not in the way they are depicted). According to this definition Southey’s book is a hoax, as the *Critical Review* makes plain. In this way the interesting and problematical nature of *Letters from England* is highlighted and its generic diversity and unique status, in its own time and the modern period is evident.

In contrast the *Gentleman’s Magazine* sees the book as an ‘admirable lesson for English writers’.<sup>208</sup> The narrator is referred to as ‘Noble-minded Espriella!’ for ‘rousing the world to a sense of honour and patriotism’.<sup>209</sup> The reviewer appreciates the ‘good humour’ of ‘the Don’ but also shares his sentiments on the more serious subject of the poor.<sup>210</sup> The article approves of Southey’s work immensely, taking its fiction at face value in the same good-humoured way that the book’s material is offered. As an entertaining outsider’s view of the English, it recommends that Southey’s work could ‘be read with advantage by all ranks of people’.<sup>211</sup> Another favourable account, surprisingly, appears in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* of 1810. Renowned for lampooning Southey, Coleridge and Charles Lamb as Jacobin poets in 1798, the reviewer states that since the publication of:

a second edition of these Letters, which are now, we believe, the avowed production of Mr. Southey [...] they will not detract from his increasing name. They abound in humour [...] in curious anecdotes, acute observations, and many apposite reflections, affording very salutary practical

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<sup>206</sup> ‘Letters from England’, *The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature*, 3rd series, 13 (1808), 282-283, 283.

<sup>207</sup> Tim Youngs, citing Peter Hulme, ‘Introduction: Defining the Terms’ in *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, ed. Tim Youngs (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 1-15, p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> ‘Letters from England’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 78 (1808), 1169-1174, 1170.

<sup>209</sup> ‘Letters from England’, 1170

<sup>210</sup> ‘Letters from England’, 1171, 1172.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Letters from England’, 1174.

suggestions for the political and moral melioration of society'.<sup>212</sup>

The book is recommended as 'a work well worthy of being perused' and a source of 'amusement', 'entertainment and 'instruction', though some of the 'historical and political anecdotes are destitute of any foundation in truth'.<sup>213</sup> The reviewer includes substantial extracts from the book and weighs the evidence given in its observations to approve the judgements or find fault in what is expressed, in a detailed way. The author considers that the 'account of the artifices and zeal of the Papists to propagate their superstition is drawn up with great truth and fidelity'.<sup>214</sup> However, it states that the book includes 'a most ludicrous enumeration of sects'.<sup>215</sup> The descriptions of 'Oxford, Blenheim, and the Lakes' have 'never before been sketched with a more faithful pencil', but In discussing 'the manufacturing towns, the writer, always in character, takes the dark side of the picture to exhibit'.<sup>216</sup> The reviewer agrees that Southey's comments are 'deserving of attention' but it chooses to concentrate on the 'immoral effects of large manufactories' rather than the conditions of the workers.<sup>217</sup>

In these reviews by the major periodicals of the day, it is possible to see what contemporary readers thought of Southey's book, even if we can assume that these responses are made by an educated elite and that there are divisions of political sensibility among them. There are aspects that were admired by these first readers which have enduring interest in our own day. For instance the evocative Lake landscapes and the reformist social commentaries (even if they can be considered excessive or sentimental) are established components that were deemed worthy of comment by nineteenth-century readers and fascinate us now. The detailed minutiae of English life, customs, habits and attitudes that most reviewers objected to, are an intriguing source of social history for twenty-first century readers. The disbelief of contemporary reviewers at the proliferation of sects shows that Southey's survey of their scale and effect was a surprising new element of his work, as he predicted. The reviews divide down party lines over Espriella's responses to the manufacturing industry and

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<sup>212</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 34, 135-138, 274-289, 289.

<sup>213</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', 274.

<sup>214</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', 280.

<sup>215</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', 283.

<sup>216</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', 283.

<sup>217</sup> 'Espriella's Letters from England', 283

treatment of the poor, as might be expected. But the fact that liberals and conservatives alike found elements to praise or criticise in the book, underlines its contradictory nature and the difficulty of accurately identifying Southey's political position at this time.

Despite the domestic subject-matter of Southey's book, it sold quite well abroad. There were several American editions of the work that were published in Southey's lifetime (1807, 1808 and 1836).<sup>218</sup> A French edition appeared in 1817 and a German one in 1818.<sup>219</sup> Interest in the text waned after Southey's death, though extracts and quotations from it have been included in publications from the nineteenth century onwards. Espriella has been quoted in parliamentary debates on the use of flogging in military discipline,<sup>220</sup> and the Lake District extracts – particularly the renowned description of the sky reflected in Lake Derwent to create the effect of being 'suspended between two firmaments' (*LE*, 234) – have been included in encyclopaedias.<sup>221</sup> Southey's book, collected and constructed from all kinds of disparate sources, has therefore suffered from a similar fate by being dissected to serve as evidence in other works. This is because as a work of social history it has had an enduring reputation and validity, and by this means Southey's ideas in his prose work have been proliferated and preserved in ways that his poetry has not. However it is as a work of literary merit and complexity that this edition intends to present Southey's text and argues for it to be read, as well as for the repository of cultural observations and social attitudes it contains.

Southey's work seems farsighted to readers now. His warnings about the effects of industrialisation on human life, his criticism of the increasing division between rich and poor, the political corruption and social injustices he identifies, have been since the book was written, and continue to be, aspects of English life that cause anxiety. Some of Espriella's dire warnings have come to pass and some of the improvements he suggests have been adopted. The scorn he poured on the electoral system was shared by fellow radicals, such as Henry Hunt, who ten years later was also advocating the secret ballot in reformist agendas. As a result of such pointed political content, despite Southey's reactionary credentials, Hazlitt

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<sup>218</sup> Jack Simmons (ed.) *Letters from England*, (London, 1951), p. xiv.

<sup>219</sup> *L'Angleterre et les Anglais, ou Petit Portrait d'une Grande Famille: Copié et Retouché par Deux Témoins Oculaires*, trans. Joseph-Antoine de Gourbillon and T. W. Dickinson (Paris, 1817); *England und die Engländer. Von Robert Southey, Esq.*, trans. Johann Adam Bergk [from the preceding French translation] (Leipzig, 1818).

<sup>220</sup> 'Flogging in the Army', *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, 88, (1846), 374-363, 393-394.

<sup>221</sup> See for example *The London Encyclopaedia*, 8, 275.

recognised that ‘he is decidedly *revolutionary*. He may have given up the reform of the state: but depend on it, he has some other *hobby* of the same kind’.<sup>222</sup> For Hazlitt, Southey was an unpredictable writer in support of the establishment, who was liable to break out into effusions of ‘independence and liberality’.<sup>223</sup> While Southey could be Britain’s greatest advocate abroad, in this domestic work he shrewdly observes the faults in his countrymen. His reputation as a truth-teller, however offensive that may be to his readers, is well served by his decidedly outspoken alter ego, Espriella. In later years, Southey’s contradictory political opinions meant he was often vilified alike by aristocratic Tories and reformist Whigs. His belief that England’s commercial spirit had created an iniquitous manufacturing system, would also divide later generations of politicians and writers. Thomas Babington Macaulay found Southey’s account of Britain’s feudal past revisionist, his anti-industrialism backward, and his response to the forces of progress short-sighted. But Southey’s warnings would be taken up by Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin in their own resistance to the narrow-minded impulses that materialism and industrialisation projected on Victorian culture. And Southey pre-empted Elizabeth Gaskell’s descriptions of the Mancunian poor, in demonstrating the impact on them of urban industrialisation and *laissez faire* politics, by at least forty years. Southey’s identification of the ingenuity of ‘coiners’ and forgers who use their highly developed abilities to make money, albeit fraudulently, sees him lamenting their merciless executions, because the English bank is considered the ‘Holy of Holies’ (*LE*, 153). Southey suggests that these ‘gifted’ transgressors should be sent to New South Wales instead where they could be an asset to that community. Espriella’s grim observation that ‘it is a part of the English system to colonize with criminals’ (*LE*, 153) reproduces Southey’s cherished and well-publicised agenda in his journalism to disseminate British citizens and their language and culture to all parts of the world, a plan that became concretised through Victorian imperialist policy.

For readers now therefore, Southey’s ‘Spanish spectacles’ seem prescient in the problematic picture of English progress they present, and in exploring these consequences for modern society. The plurality of the work, due to its composite nature and its mixture of fact and fiction, as well as the dual focus that conjoins Espriella and Southey, often makes *Letters from England* an anxious, unstable text. Nevertheless Southey’s intention was to provide

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<sup>222</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age; or, Contemporary Portraits*, 2nd edn (London, 1825), p. 176

<sup>223</sup> Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 180.

uncomfortable, de-familiarising reading for his countrymen that would unsettle complacent beliefs in their cultural superiority at the same time as providing an alternative locus of inherited national value that he believed was a more worthy model. As well as its anecdotal humour and richly drawn images of early nineteenth-century England, this destabilising view is Southey's chief innovation and contribution to Romanticism.

### **This Edition**

After Southey's first publication of *Letters from England* in 1807,<sup>224</sup> there were two further life-time editions of his work (the second edition of 1808 and the third edition of 1814).<sup>225</sup> The text used here is from the first edition, with Southey's original footnotes – claimed to be inserted by the fictional Espriella and an English translator (see 'Preface by the Translator') – presented as endnotes to the text. Added to these endnotes are the newly transcribed annotations made by Southey on his own interleaved first-edition copy of the work, held at the Brotherton Library in Leeds.<sup>226</sup> The editorial endnotes explain topical references, literary and cultural allusions and include translations of foreign language material. They also contain references to Southey's correspondence in the first four parts of the recent online edition of the *Collected Letters of Robert Southey* (2009-13).<sup>227</sup> This facilitates greater understanding of *Letters from England*, and the influence of Southey's friends and correspondents on its composition. It also allows the accurate identification of printed sources he drew on to produce it. A strong sense of the book's origins, the resources used and Southey's own views on English habits and manners are perceptible from reading *Letters from England* in conjunction with his personal correspondence. My editorial work on *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey: Part Three, 1804-1809*, provided access to all the extant letters he wrote during the book's composition. Earlier and later parts of the *Collected Letters* were also an invaluable asset for understanding its pre-publication and reception history. This information is incorporated in the notes, including quotations from previously unpublished manuscript letters.

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<sup>224</sup> *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, 3 vols (London, 1807).

<sup>225</sup> *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, 3 vols (London, 1808); *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, 3 vols (London, 1814).

<sup>226</sup> Catalogued with the accession number: Brotherton Collection 19C Southey.

<sup>227</sup> See note 2.

This edition contains two appendices. The first is a description of the only manuscript of the book that is known to exist (held in Chetham's Library, Manchester), which delineates the differences between it and the first edition.<sup>228</sup> The close resemblance of the manuscript to the text included here, as well as its great length, has precluded publishing it within this edition. The second appendix is a copy of the notes collected for this project – and from an aborted plan to publish further volumes of *Letters from England* – which were gathered from Southey's commonplace books and published by his son-in-law, John Wood Warter.<sup>229</sup> In this publication the variants from the two later editions of *Letters from England* are not recorded, because they are generally of a minor nature, having only occasional differences in spelling or punctuation. Any major changes between the editions are identified in the editorial notes.

The fact that *Letters from England* has been frequently cited and anthologised demonstrates the need for a modern scholarly edition of the text. This edition therefore revises and extends the edition produced by Jack Simmons and published by The Cresset Press in 1951. Since Simmons' publication, over sixty years ago, the field of Romantic Studies has changed immensely. This edition presents a new critical appraisal of the book, based on recent Southey research, as well as drawing on current methodologies that re-historicise literary works within their social and political context to appreciate their cultural relevance. It enables a full understanding of its socio-historical context, authorial intentions, and the relationship between this text and other works by Southey and his contemporaries. This edition therefore intends to assist in the current trend for reappraising Southey's eminence as a literary figure by facilitating understanding of the wide range of his literary output, and the limitations of categorising him as poet, historian or journalist, because, although he was proficient in all these fields, we now know that he was also an amusing prose writer. The last fifteen years of Romantic criticism have seen a renewed interest in the work of Southey, with the publication of a series of important texts related to his life and writings.<sup>230</sup> Southey's centrality to Romantic-period literature and its textual and cultural

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<sup>228</sup> Catalogued with the accession number: MUN Collection, Mun.A.4.2.

<sup>229</sup> Southey's *Common-Place Book*, ed. John Wood Warter, 4 series (London, 1849-50), pp. 352-426.

<sup>230</sup> The five-volume edition of *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810* (Pickering and Chatto, 2004) is a seminal text for scholars and students of the Romantic period. In 2012 a further four-volume edition of *Robert Southey's Later Poetical Works, 1811-1838* was published by Pickering and Chatto. The first-ever scholarly edition of Southey's collected



practices is now recognised, but this edition adds an extra dimension in showing how the established perceptions of genre and form within which he and his contemporaries worked were challenged in a debate over form and function that makes this one of his most innovative works.

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