

2015

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Robert Southey on Portugal: Travel Narrative and the Writing of History

Robert Southey was once referred to by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch as “one of the best known of the unread poets” (9) in a study that deliberately focused on what he considered Southey’s largely failed poetic quest: “Southey’s grand failures,” he explained, “are more interesting than his modest successes and far more illuminative of Romanticism and Romantic myth-making generally” (9). In an oblique way, my focus in this essay is likewise another of Southey’s grand failures-- his planned, but never finished, *History of Portugal*. This ambitious project, despite remaining mostly unwritten, occupied much of Southey’s time in the early years of his career. Only part one, *The History of Brazil*, was actually published (1819-23); however, his early hopes of attaining a strong literary reputation and financial reward rested on it, even more than on his poetry. Indeed, as we will see, starting early on in his writing life, Portugal was a subject he returned to repeatedly. Having been in the country twice for rather extended periods, Southey eventually became an acknowledged expert on Portugal and its culture: after returning home to Keswick from his second trip, he wrote that he had become “a Portuguese student among the mountains.” And Adolfo Cabral, who discovered and edited the manuscript of Southey’s unpublished journals of this trip, stressed that “for about forty years a vast part of his

literary activity was wholly or partly dedicated to Portugal or Portuguese subjects” (*Journals* xxi).¹

As Southey’s correspondence during the weeks preceding the departure for his second trip to Portugal underscores, the plan to write *The History of Portugal* and the hope for the success it would bring him were foremost on his mind. On February 9, 1800, waiting to find out whether his uncle, the Reverend Herbert Hill, English Chaplain in Lisbon, would receive him, he wrote to John May:

I would... employ my time there by seriously beginning the history of the country,--a work which I could complete in England, but for which the materials and the necessary topographical knowledge must be sought in Portugal.... Occasional excursions of a fortnight or three weeks would afford novelty enough, and make me well acquainted with the whole country. I know the language well enough to travel without embarrassment, and the subject of my studies would supply a constant interest of employment. Less than two quarto volumes could not comprise the work,--and I should think no less than three; for the great Indian episode would require one to itself.² The pecuniary profit of such a work might be estimated at not much less than a thousand pounds.... Here is a great plan; and the embryo skeletons of chapters on the religion, and manners, and the literature of the country are now floating before me. (*Cabral Journals* 63-64)

¹ For a thorough discussion of Portugal’s importance in Southey’s life and work see Cabral’s *Southey e Portugal, 1774-1801: Aspectos de uma Biografia Literária* and Cabral’s edition of Southey’s *Journals of a Residence in Portugal, 1800-1801 and a Visit to France, 1838*.

² Southey is referring to Vasco da Gama’s maritime voyage to India around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, one of the most salient episodes in the history of the Portuguese discoveries.

Another letter to John May, on February 18, 1800, reveals that even before being certain that Lisbon would be his destination, Southey was already busy planning the organizational principles of the work:

I have busied myself in idleness already in the History of Portugal, and the interest which I take in this employment will make me visit the fields of Ourique and the banks of [M]ondego and the grave of Inez. The Indian transactions are too much for an episode, and must be separately related. The manners and literature of the country should accompany the chronological order of events. (*Cabral Journals* 64)

Once his trip to Lisbon was settled, Southey wrote to inform those closest to him; again, he stressed his plans for the *History of Portugal*, insisting on the importance he attached to it. To Grosvenor Charles Bedford, Southey announced: “I am going to Lisbon—and with all speed....and I have a definite and important object in view [namely] to write the History of Portugal, a work on which I will bestow [much] labour, and which, if not miserably self-deceived, I can do as [well as] it ought to be done” (*Cabral Journals* 66). In a letter to his brother Thomas Southey he elaborated:

My intention is, when at Lisbon, to undertake the History of Portugal, a long, and arduous, and interesting, and important undertaking, which I think I can do as it ought to be done. The little connection which Portugal has had with general politics gives a wholeness and unity to the story; and no country in her rise ever displayed more splendid actions, or exhibited a more important lesson in her fall. It will be necessary to know well the country of which I write, and to be familiar with the situation of every town famous for a siege, and every field famous for a battle. I shall endeavour, also, to do what history

has never yet done, to introduce into the narrative the manners of the age and the people.
(Cabral *Journals* 67-68)

He reiterated his purpose of travelling to research the sites of important historical events and his intention to address the manners of the people in a letter of March 26 to William Taylor:
My intention is seriously to undertake the History of Portugal, and to qualify myself for the task by travelling over the whole of the little kingdom, and well understanding the site of every place whereof it may be my office to write. No country possesses a better series of chronicles. I shall visit the various convent libraries, and hunt out all the scarce documents. Twelve months well employed will suffice for the collection of materials; and if otherwise, I am not limited to time. One thing I shall especially attempt in writing history,--to weave the manners of the time, as far as possibly can be done, into the narrative, instead of crowding the volume with appendix chapters; rather, in this point, to resemble the old chroniclers than the modern historians. (Cabral *Journals* 68-69)

In his reply, Taylor encouraged his friend: “The History of Portugal is a neat subject.... The colonial system and all that constitutes the exterior policy of Great Britain is but a refinement of Portuguese undertaking” (qtd. in Cabral *Journals* 68-69 n. 4).³

To Coleridge, Southey wrote, on April 1: “My purposed employments you know. The History will be a great and serious work, and I shall labour at preparing the materials

³ Later, responding to Southey’s continued enthusiasm for Portugal, Portuguese culture, and Portuguese history, William Taylor sounded a very different note. In a letter of January 17, 1803, he wrote:

It would be an odd termination for you to select your home in the *patria* of the Inquisition, and to make choice of the despotism of Portugal for the form of your government.... But who else cares to know anything about the worthies of Portugal...? Your history may indeed serve to popularize them, and it is right to prepare the funeral oration for a nation so likely to be soon entombed” (qtd. in Cabral *Biografia Literária* 311 n.2).

assiduously. The various journies necessary in that pursuit will fill a journal, and grow into a saleable volume” (Cabral *Journals* 70). The problems with their relationship notwithstanding, Coleridge offered positive, hopeful words: “Of your History of Portugal I anticipate great Things—it is a noble Subject & of a certain Sale” (qtd. in Cabral *Journals* 70 n. 4).

These excerpts from Southey’s correspondence in early 1800, before his departure on a second trip to Portugal, reveal an enthusiasm wholly lacking at the time of his first visit in 1795 undertaken at the urging of his uncle. Then, the Reverend Hill had hoped to cool Southey’s revolutionary enthusiasm by taking him away from Coleridge’s influence, and to prevent him from marrying Edith Fricker.⁴ His first hope may have been partly fulfilled--critics tend to read Southey’s increasing conservatism as a direct result of his experiences in Portugal.⁵ The second, however, was not. Southey married Edith right before embarking for Portugal, and having to leave his new bride behind may have influenced his negative views of the country (Speck 63). His letters to her, later published as *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal*, represent Portugal as a dirty country, crippled by Catholic superstition and a corrupt justice system, where the people were “depraved beyond all [his] ideas of licentiousness” (Cabral *Biografia Literária* 407).⁶ The interest they appear to have held for his readers-- three editions

⁴ For a concise summary of this period of Southey’s life see Speck 60-63; Ley 4-6.

⁵ Carol Bolton writes of Southey “growing comfortably more reactionary” due in part to “his largely negative experiences of Portuguese society and religion” (8; see also 12). “This created the genesis of patriotic respect for his own countrymen,” she writes, “whom he felt contrasted so vividly with the Portuguese” (41). Christopher Smith also believes that after the trip to Portugal “another voice may be discerned, that of the disillusioned idealist, the man dedicated to the hearth and home” (161). On the other hand, Speck suggests that “witnessing Popery at first hand reinforced Southey’s radicalism” (63).

⁶ While his earlier impressions of Portugal were extremely negative, once he became better acquainted with the country, Southey moderated his disapproval. At the end of his first visit, he was already claiming: “I am eager to be again in England, but my heart will be very heavy when I look back upon Lisbon for the last time” (547). Moreover, as Cabral shows, Southey’s second visit to the country, documented in *Journals of a Residence in Portugal 1800-1801*, further

in 1797, 1799, and 1808 testify to the *Letters*' success among the British public—may rest in part on the contemporary vogue for travel narratives since traveling abroad was becoming increasingly popular.⁷ But even though Southey specifically addresses his audience as travelers or travelers-to-be, the actual narrative of his excursions through the country and the description of scenery and manners are slimmer than the profusion of literary and historical material. Indeed, Southey writes several essays on the language and poetry of Spain and Portugal, includes his own translations of many poems, and adds countless narratives of salient historical episodes.⁸ Moreover, while he claims in the Preface that “there are no disquisitions on...politics” (v), he does include a fifty-five-page section he claims to be his abridgement of the papers of a Secretary of State written in 1740 “containing his plans for the improvement of Portugal” (407). A rather transparent attempt at displacing, even while reiterating, his own criticism of the political and religious state of the country, this section of the *Letters* adds to the impression they project of being actual research notes for an in-depth study.⁹ For his initial disgust with Portugal

improved his view of Portugal. For Cabral, the *Portuguese Journals* of 1800 are “the most comprehensive and clear-sighted piece of prose that Southey ever wrote on his beloved Portugal” (*Cabral Journals* xxi).

⁷ Southey's intention to profit from the publication of a record of his earlier travel experiences in Portugal is obvious: his emphasis on “travel” in the Preface suggest the hope of capitalizing on the appeal of travel literature: “The journal of my road is minute:--this minuteness will be useful to those who may travel the same way, and pleasant to such as are already acquainted with it,” he writes (Preface v-vi).

⁸ Generic flexibility has always been a characteristic of travel narratives. It was common for nineteenth-century travelers' accounts of their journeys to include anecdotes and historical information often gleaned from previously published accounts. Some even included a few examples of the literature of the country. Still, Southey's *Letters* are remarkable in this respect because, among other reasons, they are ostensibly written to his bride. As Charles David Ley points out, even if he edited them for publication and “suppressed the personal and intimate side of the letters, one wonders whether Mrs. Southey really appreciated the ample erudition her husband displayed” (4). All in all, though, the *Letters* testify to what Brian Goldberg has called “Southey's... gifts as an anthologizer, a compiler, and a bricoleur” (20).

⁹ From early in his career, Southey kept journals of his travels so that he could later use those materials to write his literary or historical works (*Cabral Journal* xx). During his first stay in

notwithstanding, Southey could not help but make the most of this stay and, true to his scholarly disposition, began to learn Portuguese and to read about the history and the literature of the country in his uncle's well-stocked library.¹⁰ Thus, when, in 1800, the need to leave England for health reasons became clear, Lisbon eventually occurred to him as the ideal destination.¹¹ Likely, his project of writing the *History of Portugal* had been hatching since the first trip, “the embryo skeletons of chapters on the religion, and manners, and the literature of the country” (Cabral *Journals* 64) he claimed to see floating before him in 1800 having actually been set down in the 1797 *Letters*. What I am proposing, then, is that the nature of the *Letters* suggests that they were, in fact, the genesis of the projected *History of Portugal*; that as early as 1795, Southey had began

Portugal, he had already taken pains to gather as much information as possible: “I employed my time there in constant attention, seeing everything and asking questions,—and never went to bed without writing down the information I had acquired during the day” (qtd. in Dennis 103 ed. n).¹⁰ Writing to Grosvenor Bedford on October 23, 1795, Southey complained: “And where, Grosvenor, do you suppose the fates have condemned me for the next six months?—to Spain and Portugal! Indeed, my heart is very heavy” (Dennis 96). But he immediately added: “Cottle is delighted with the idea of a volume of travels.... When I am returned I shall be glad that I have been” (Dennis 96). Knowing that his publisher, Joseph Cottle, was ready to put out an account of the trip gave Southey immediate motivation to research all things Portuguese. As a result, starting in July 1796, before he even published the first edition of the *Letters*, Southey began contributing essays on Portuguese literature to *The Monthly Magazine* (see Cabral *Biografia Literária* 503 for a list of titles). And before his second trip to Portugal in 1800, Southey also published a number of reviews of books on Portugal in *The Critical Review* (see Cabral *Biografia Literária* 504 for a list of titles). It is clear then, that when he wrote to John Rickman in October 1800 about the projected *History* that “My first publication will probably be the literary part of the History, which is too important to be treated in an appendix, or in separate and interrupting chapters” (Cabral *Journals* 138), he was thinking of all the pieces he had already published on Portuguese literature—essays he could revise and develop into a volume of the *History*.

¹¹ Interestingly, in late December 1799, Southey was not yet ready to consider Portugal as his destination. Writing to his friend Grosvenor Bedford (December 21, 1799) about the need to leave off his law studies for a while to go abroad for his health, Southey pointedly mentioned that he did not wish to go to Lisbon: “I must go abroad and recruit under better skies. Not Lisbon. I will see something new, and something better than the Portuguese” (Dennis 118). He eventually changed his mind, however, and in early 1800 already faced the prospect of returning to Portugal with enthusiasm—researching the projected *History of Portugal* seemingly the major reason for his change of heart.

drafting that particular “*opus maximum*” which, in the words of Bernhardt-Kabisch, “would be the supreme vindication of his life of letters” (129).¹²

Reading the *Letters* as an initial, albeit unacknowledged, draft of the projected *History of Portugal* is justified by their content: as we will see, part of what Southey, in 1800, announced he wished to cover in the *History* had already been treated in the *Letters*.¹³ Moreover, such a reading also offers the enticing possibility of scrutinizing the writer’s earliest fashioning of his public persona as the “entire man of letters” Byron grudgingly recognized he was (qtd. in Speck 16; Bolton 1). For if the general critical neglect of Southey’s work, which has finally begun to be redressed, actually started in his own time (Bolton 1-3), Southey himself believed that, culturally, his was “a position of supreme importance” (Bolton 1). To his mind, his efforts in different genres meant that he “truly commanded the cultural field” (Bolton 1).¹⁴ By 1800, in his private correspondence, he openly and repeatedly revealed how much he yearned for the kind of public recognition attainable only through some monumental undertaking such as the projected *History of Portugal*.¹⁵ Between 1795 (when he first traveled to Portugal) and 1797 (when *Letters*

¹² It would be tedious to cite all the references Southey made, in his letters and journals, to the magnitude of his plans for the *History*. But his expectation that it would become an enduring legacy should be noted: in at least two letters he refers to the work as the building of a great pyramid (Cabral *Journals* 85; 87); in another, he speaks of it as made of marble, and as of “eternal durability.... By which I shall be honourably remembered” (Cabral *Journals* 149).

¹³ In fact, the profusion of Southey’s published work on Portugal and Portugese literature before 1800 suggests that he was *de facto* working on the *History* before he consciously conceived of it and that much of the prose he wrote at the time was, in fact, a manifestation of the grandiose project.

¹⁴ In “Robert Southey, Writing and Romanticism,” Lynda Pratt notes that “Southey’s attitude to his own contemporary celebrity was complex. He consciously courted a high public profile, continuing to publish poems on political subjects even in the late 1790s....At the same time he expressed awareness of the dangers of being publicly labeled a radical in a climate that was increasingly repressive and anti-jacobinical” (Pratt 2003-04 1).

¹⁵ In a letter to John May of December 16, 1800, he declares himself “seriously at the great historic task,” claiming that his plan is by then “maturely considered” (Cabral *Journals* 144). His list of what he intends to cover shows the scope of the project: from “the fabulous history

was first published), that yearning was more subtly expressed by a generic reconfiguration of his travel narrative into a historical study—a reconfiguration that suggests that even at the earliest stage of his career, Southey had already chosen to be “the central repository for all the ‘treasure’ of knowledge in the world” (Bolton 1). That idea reflects his perception of his role as historian: a sort of human archive whose erudition facilitated the recovery and dissemination of the recorded past.¹⁶ Arguably, it also kept him somewhat at the margins of the contemporary Romantic view of history that took the present to be a historical moment writers were also fashioning, not just recording in their writings. For as James Chandler stresses in *England in 1819*, Romantic writers were increasingly aware that “to represent a historical state of affairs [was] to begin to transform it, to make “history” [was] to begin to “make history” (93). The “historical-mindedness” that, Stephen Bann notes, characterized the Romantic movement (Bann 6) led to the transformation of the practice of history during that period, and heated debates about the discipline and its methodologies produced a number of competing practices that sometimes also partly overlapped (see Bann and Ernest Breisach, for example, for accounts of the differences and similarities in

[of] Tubal”—said to be a descendant of Noha and to have founded the Portuguese town of Setúbal in 2204 B.C. (Cabral *Journals* 144 n.4)—to “the Gothic period, the Moors, and the various Christian states that grew upon their ruins” (144), including details of the manners of the people “arranged in supplementary chapters” (145), Southey meant to leave no detail unrecorded. “Much matter will descend to the bottom of the page in notes,” he writes, where “all heterogeneous materials may be served up” (145).

¹⁶ Southey’s antiquarian tastes explain his desire to write a work as monumental as the *History of Portugal* was conceived to be. As he wrote to William Taylor, Portugal was enticing because “No country possesses a better series of chronicles. I shall visit the various convent libraries, and hunt out all the scarce documents” (Cabral *Journals* 68). And he stressed that he wished “rather... to resemble the old chroniclers than the modern historians” (Cabral *Journals* 69, emphasis added). Of course, the *History of Portugal* remained largely a project, since Southey only published the three volumes of the *History of Brazil* (1810-1817) meant to be part of it. But he planned and wrote other equally large-scale histories: the two-volume *Life of Nelson* (1813), the three-volume *History of the Peninsular War* (1823-32), and the five-volume *Lives of the British Admirals* (1833). See Cabral *Southey* 494-523.

British, German, and French historiographies). Southey's historical practice, which spanned roughly forty years from the late 1790s to the early 1830s, started before the scientific impulse initiated in Germany by Ranke in the 1820s and ended before Henry Thomas Buckle's briefly successful reconsideration of the science of history in literary terms in the 1850s.¹⁷ Thus, he remained "a man of letters" as the age of the "trained historian" was rising, practicing a genre of historical writing that was associated with the past.¹⁸

Southey's early letters and journals offer plenty of evidence that he viewed his role as a historian as the vehicle to secure him a place in literary history; unsurprisingly, then, history writing remained central to his life's work. This essay will argue that the proposed *History of Portugal* had its genesis in the *Letters*, a work that offers the earliest glimpse of Southey's history-writing practice and sets the tone for his life-long concept of the historian--an erudite unearthing historical records and compiling old chronicles to be, in his own words, "stewed down... into essential sauce" (qtd. in Cabral *Journals* 169). The essay will then conclude with the consideration of Southey's direct engagement with contemporary views of history in his *Sir Thomas More; or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospect of Society* (1829) in order to stress that even though Southey remained at the margins of Romantic historicism, in the *Colloquies* he foregrounds a lingering skepticism regarding generalizing historical interpretations that suggests he might actually have reconsidered pursuing the completion of the projected *History of*

¹⁷ On Buckle see Ian Hesketh's *The Science of History in Victorian Britain* (2011).

¹⁸ In *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820*, Mark Phillips calls attention to the need for more historical studies of the writing of history and stresses the importance of acknowledging that there are many genres of history writing that evolved at least in part in response to social pressures. Like other forms of writing, history "subtly and often silently transformed itself to remain relevant to the needs and interests of ever-new audiences" (12). While Phillips does not examine Southey's historiography, his work focuses on the same historical period and this particular observation is suggestive in the context of the length of Southey's history writing career.

Portugal because he began entertaining doubts about his position as a historian who would rather “resemble the old chroniclers than the modern historians” (Cabral *Journals* 69).

Generic Reconfiguration

The first edition of *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797) comprises a total of thirty letters. In the opening paragraph of the brief Preface, Southey’s remarks address a key expectation of the audience for travel narratives: he professes to have observed first hand what he recorded, to have included only anecdotes he believed were authentic, and to “have given facts”(v). As well, he singles out those readers who might have already traveled to the same places or who might be planning to do so as the audience to whom the detailed “journal of [his] road” (v) might be most “useful” and “pleasant” (v-vi). Finally, he adds, “I have represented things as they appeared to me” (vi) and follows with a short anecdote about a Russian traveler in England who mistook an erased road sign for a cross (vi) to illustrate that “truth” depends on perception. With the exception of a short paragraph clarifying the rationale for his treatment of the poetical illustrations, Southey’s Preface does not sound the scholarly note; rather, it touches on matters directly relevant to travel narratives. If anything, by mentioning that “there are no disquisitions on commerce and politics” (v), and by noting that “the Reader may comment for himself” (v) on what he relates, Southey presents the *Letters* as typical of the genre of travel narrative. But the information the volume includes actually expands the genre to the point of reconfiguration since it covers many historical events, religion, manners, and literature--topics Southey later specified were part of his plan of the projected *History*--in considerable depth and from a scholarly perspective.¹⁹

¹⁹ Since the genre of travel writing typically included a section on the history of the country travelers were writing about, and since official travel guides such as *Murray’s*, *Baedeker’s*, *Bradshaw’s*, and *Cook’s*, which flourished in Britain in the nineteenth century, eventually

Indeed, in several sections of the *Letters* Southey offers in-depth information backed up by rare documents.²⁰ More notably, he consistently evaluates his sources (and even the sources of his sources) in a manner better suited to a scholarly work such as the projected *History* was meant to be. In Letter XVII, for example, Southey covers the earliest information about Portugal contained in classical sources (281-82)—as he had mentioned he meant to do in the *History*-- but he offers that information via their treatment by Antonio de Macedo, a Portuguese historian who “wrote when Portugal was annexed to Spain” (280). In pages dripping with irony, Southey represents Macedo as an unreliable source, using him to foreground his own scholarly zeal: “If however the honour of founding the metropolis of Portugal be contested between Elisa and

formalized the inclusion of a history section in their features, the fact that Southey addresses Portuguese history in his *Letters* does not especially contribute to the generic reconfiguration I am arguing the work performs. But it is still noteworthy that a few of the historical details discussed in the *Letters* precisely coincide with those he mentioned in the brief sketch of the *History* he included in his letter to John May in July of 1800, cited above.

²⁰ The generic reconfiguration caused by this practice did not, in 1797, cause Southey hesitation to publish the *Letters*; however, in 1805, in a letter to Miss Barker, he confesses his disappointment with them:

My own letters [i.e., *Spain and Portugal*] I dislike, because they would have been so infinitely better had I kept them unpublished till this time. There are *materials enough in this very room for another such volume*, which would cost me little more trouble than the mere manual labour of writing. I shall wait till I have been once more to Portugal, and then *melt down* the former volume, and make a good book. (qtd. in Cabral *Journals* 70 n. 5, emphasis added)

Tellingly, Southey had refrained from publishing the journals of his second trip to Portugal, even though the notes were “in th[at] very room;” moreover, he felt that he needed to “melt down” the work on the earlier trip because as he had published it, it was an actual repository of historical and literary information that far exceeded the scope of a travel book (even allowing for the genre’s typical capaciousness). Therefore, when circumstances prevented him from ever returning to Portugal and gathering materials for writing about the northern region, as he had wanted to do, he revised the *Letters* for the publication of their third edition in 1808 (Cabral *Journals* 70). The 1808 edition is virtually identical, except that besides deleting a short section from letter XVII, he precisely excised the essays on Portuguese literature from letters IX and XXVI, and the sermon on the expulsion of the Moriscos from letter XVIII—i.e., the more scholarly sections, which he clearly felt were less suitable to a travel narrative.

Ulysses,” he writes, “there is no controversy concerning the establishment of Setuval by Tubal” (282).²¹ Then he adds:

One of the many excellencies of Portugal is its great population. Do you question this? Macedo tells you that Tubal at his death left sixty-five thousand descendants. Do you object to this as too remote a fact? It contained five hundred and sixty-eight thousand inhabitants in the time of Augustus. But you want to know if it be populous at present. His proof is decisive... (283)

The “proof” he cites, with all possible sarcasm, from his source, includes the preposterous “fact” that “Inez del Casal de Gueday was married seven times and had an hundred and nine children” (283).

In Letter XVIII, Southey again treats historical information in such a way as to emphasize his own erudition. Having transcribed and translated a long poem by Luis de Leon about the legendary King Rodrigo,²² Southey is quick to point out that while all the historians who have written about this king mention another story about him—i.e., “the adventure of Rodrigo in the Enchanted Tower” (302)--none actually included it, “even in their notes” (302). He explains the research that led to his finding it—“I have met with it in an old account of Spain, translated from the French, of the date 1693, which gives it from Abulcacim Tariff Abentarique, who declares he had the relation from the Archbishop Oppas, who was with Rodrigo when he

²¹ In the July 1800 letter to John May cited above, Southey specifically mentioned his intention of narrating the history of Tubal, the purported founder of the city of Setubal. See note 15.

²² Rodrigo, the legendary last King of the Goths, was killed by the Moors during their invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in the early eighth century. Southey later wrote *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*, a volume-length poem based on these sources that saw five editions (1814, 1815, 1816, 1818, 1826).

entered the tower, in search of a treasure supposed to be hidden there” (302)—and then transcribes it (302-304). In the rest of the letter, Southey also transcribes passages from a sermon on the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula which he found in a rare ecclesiastical tract.²³ Thus, besides discussing topics he later specifically mentioned he wished to treat in the *History*, Southey also highlights his pursuit of obscure and rare sources to enrich the account of his travels so substantially as to push genre of this work toward scholarly, humanist historiography, rather than travel writing.

Letter XIX likewise focuses on an early moment in the history of Portugal; namely, the time when many of the Jews forced to leave Spain ended up in Portugal. Southey writes: “The treatment of the Jews on this peninsula, though it forms a less prominent feature than the expulsion of the Moriscoes, may perhaps be productive of more lasting effects. The history may be given in a few lines” (311). He offers a short overview of their expulsion from Spain and of the forced mass baptisms ordered by King Emanuel as the condition of their eventual acceptance in Portugal, and then follows it by a transcription of yet another obscure document related to the subject. Introduced as “A squib of some humour . . . said to have been found among the archives of Toledo” (313), the document consists of letters purportedly exchanged between “the Jews of Spain and those of Constantinople” (313), in which those in Spain asked for help in resisting their persecution and those in Constantinople advised submission as a path that would pave the way to power and wealth, and thus to revenge.

²³ He introduces it as “a very curious sermon, preached by Juan de Ribera, Archbishop of Valencia: it is translated by Geddes; but as the valuable tracts of this author are now rare, I shall transcribe a few extracts” (305). Obviously, at this time Southey had already begun to “hunt out all the scarce documents” in “the various convent libraries” (*Cabral Journals* 68) to gather rare materials about Portuguese history.

Southey adds authorial commentary to the episodes of Portuguese religious history he summarizes in Letters XVIII and XIX, as well as to the contemporary documents he presents.²⁴ At least in part motivated by his abhorrence of Catholicism, Southey's comments are a scathing indictment of the anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish fervor prevalent in Portugal and Spain in the Middle-Ages. As introduction to an excerpt from the sermon on the expulsion of the Moors, he writes:

Recollect that he is preaching on one of the most absurd and barbarous acts of oppression that the history of man, so full of absurdity and barbarity, records; and that to this expulsion of the Moriscoes is the decline of Spain in a great measure to be attributed, and you will find that as this precious Archbishop is a good Christian, he is no less excellent a prophet. (307)

The following passage, from the excerpt Southey transcribed, illustrates the inflaming religious rhetoric that provoked him:

Through the mercy of God and the paternal care of his Majesty, everything will thrive with us, and the earth itself will grow more fertile, and will yield the fruit of blessing. It is a thing ye all know, that we have not had one fertile year since the Moriscoes were baptized, whereas now they will be all fertile, the land having been made barren, and

²⁴ Religion was a topic that absorbed much of Southey's professional energy. Not only did he contribute countless articles to the periodical press reviewing books on religion and participating in the debate about Catholic emancipation (which he saw as a political threat), but he also wrote *The Book of the Church* (1824), and had planned to write the history of monasticism. See Stuart Andrews's *Robert Southey: History, Politics, Religion* for a comprehensive study of Southey's writings on religious topics. As he meant to include chapters on religion in the *History of Portugal*, the fact that the *Letters* treat the subject rather substantially is important for my argument.

poisoned by their blasphemies and heresies; do not think that this is nothing but a fancy, since the divine Scriptures do every where affirm, that for sin God deprives people of temporal blessings. (307)

The extensive commentary he provides emphasizes the catastrophic results of religious intolerance and concludes with a passionate cry against it:

I am sick of intolerance! Every man I meet is a Procrustes, who measures the worth of all besides by the standards of his own opinions. From the Atheist to the Franciscan Friar, thro' the links of the Deist, the Humanist, the Socinian, the low Arian, the high Arian, the orthodox Dissenter, and the high Churchman—all is intolerance! And I can persuade no one that these opposite opinions may exist without affecting the moral character. (309-10)

Typically, in the *Letters*, Southey's condemnation of what he is reporting on is expressed through an ironic distance that reflects an acute sense of cultural detachment: what he represents as the shortcomings of Portuguese culture or the follies of the country's politics and laws seldom appear to elicit more than cold reproof offered in a sarcastic tone. Here, however, Southey does without the mediation of irony or sarcasm. The frustration he expresses extends beyond Portuguese people to include general humanity, and the experience is too sobering for rhetorical strategies of authorial distancing. The letter ends, in fact, on a personal note: "Experience is said to be the mother of Wisdom. I have been married to experience so long, that if little Wisdom be not come yet, the connection will be a barren one" (311).

Given Southey's involvement in discussions about religion in the British periodical press, it is not surprising that his burst of emotion, noted above, was provoked by a reflection on

religious intolerance.²⁵ But in the *Letters* he is far from tolerant in his depiction of Catholic religious practices; in fact, his words betray his profound disgust with the religion. His critique of the Catholic church is unsparing, and he blames it in large measure for the county's backwardness. From mocking popular religious pilgrimages (258-59) and belief in miracles (443) to critiquing monastic orders (271-75, 413-15, 500-08), from calling hermits "vermin" (473, 517) to denouncing the nefarious deeds of the inquisition and their impact on the development of the country and the progress of the people (128-29, 318-25), in the *Letters* Southey offers a fairly clear picture of what the chapters on religion in the projected *History of Portugal* would have looked like. For if his anti-Catholic prejudice determined how he interpreted many of the things he commented on, he also cited enough documents to show that he had done substantial research on the subject before 1800, when he began discussing the plan for the *History*. Letter XIX, for example, ends with a seven-page document listing the names, "crimes" and punishments of the ten penitents of what may have been the last Auto-de-Fé to take place in Lisbon on October 15, 1779. Southey introduces it in very few words that emphasize its documentary importance:

The power of this infernal tribunal is now however seldom exerted. You will be surprised at the mildness of the sentences in the following paper, but you will be more surprised at the charges against the prisoners: the rank of the criminals, and the manner of expressing their opinions render it *a curious paper*, and it is most *probably the last of its kind*. (317, emphasis added)

²⁵ See Andrews for a sustained analysis of Southey's vehement engagement in contemporary religious debates.

Southey briefly brings up religious topics in several of the other letters—for instance, he mentions superstition (Letter XXI), describes the Lent processions (Letter XXIII), and gives the history of different convent (Letters XXIV and XXV).²⁶ He also offers a lengthy depiction of Catholic customs and ceremonies in Letter XXVII, which he witnessed personally while in Lisbon during Good-Friday and Easter Sunday. But in these letters, the scholarly, historical perspective is largely absent as Southey keeps to the travel narrative mode and offers eye-witness accounts of religious manners and customs, or descriptions of monastic architecture he saw during his excursions.

The scholarly mode does surface in Southey's treatment of another subject he more than once stressed would be part of the *History*: the language and literature of Portugal. Many of the *Letters* treat these subjects in some depth, and most of them include examples of the poetry of different ages. For example, Letter IX has a section entitled "Essay on the Poetry of Spain and Portugal" (121).²⁷ In it, he briefly contextualizes Iberian poetry within the English, French and Italian traditions, foregrounding the prominence of translation "in the earliest ages of English poetry" (121), when it "was thought as honourable as... original composition" (121).²⁸ In Letter XVII, Southey quotes, albeit with irony, Antonio de Macedo's list of the "Nine Excellencies in

²⁶ In Letter XXIV, he calls "the new convent of Franciscan nuns... the most splendid monument to the Queen's bigotry" (394), because she reportedly had ordered it built to help ensure the salvation of her soul.

²⁷ *On the Poetry of Spain and Portugal*, an earlier version of this essay, appeared in the July and October 1796 issues of *The Monthly Magazine*. In his bibliography of Southey's works, Cabral inaccurately cites it as *On Spanish and Portuguese Literature* and dates part one as June 1796 (*Biografía Literaria* 503). But he cites it accurately in Appendix IV, where he transcribes it (437).

²⁸ Given that the *Letters* include example upon example of Portuguese and Spanish poetry in the original languages followed by Southey's English translations, this observation is noteworthy since it means to secure him higher recognition for his efforts than he might have gotten otherwise.

the Portuguese Language” (285-287). Letter XVIII includes a long poem by Father Luis de Leon meant to illustrate Iberian lyric poetry (292-296), followed by Southey’s translation (296-301).²⁹

In Letter XXIII he compares the work of Portuguese and Spanish poets:

The Spanish poets please me better than the Portugueze (sic); they possess more dignity, and they are not infected by national vanity which characterizes their neighbours, and which, though it may be very patriotic, is very ridiculous. Camoens, indeed, is as much superior to his countrymen as he is below his Italian competitors; but after his name is mentioned, we may seek in vain to equal the wit of Quevedo, the genius of Luis de Leon, and the sententious strength of the Leonardos. (373-74).

By way of illustration of this analysis, he includes two poems (374-75) followed by his translation (376-77).

In Letter XXVI, which is exclusively dedicated to literary history and commentary, Southey strays even farther away from the genre of travel narrative into a full display of literary erudition better suited to the projected *History*. He begins by discussing the excessive length of Portuguese and Spanish pastoral romances (482); then, he disparagingly notes that it is not “difficult to attain the reputation of a poet in these countries, where whatever is rhyme passes for poetry” (482). By way of transition to a discussion of Portuguese epics, Southey writes: “I will venture to assert that there is more genius in one of our old metrical Romances than can be found in all the Epic Poems of Portugal, not excepting Camoens” (482). He proceeds to demolish two contemporary Portuguese epics, transcribing a portion of one, followed by his translation, to

²⁹ Because between 1580 and 1640, Portugal and Spain were under one king, and until the twelfth century the two kingdoms had not formally been established, when dealing with these periods, Southey, as he does here with Luis de Léon (b. 1527?-d. 1591), treats Portuguese and Spanish literature and history together.

illustrate their inferiority (484-489). When he discusses what works have been translated to Portuguese, among the contemporary English literature available he singles out the pre-Romantics to criticize Portuguese literary taste: he begins with “Night Thoughts” by Young, whom he describes as “a favourite poet of the Portuguese, on account of his forced thoughts that so often totter on the brink of nonsense” (489); he then mentions Harvey, whose “Meditations are on the same account highly esteemed” (489). Further on, he notes that “Many of the Portuguese have wasted their abilities in writing in Latin, instead of enriching their native tongue” (493-94), and stresses that the vernacular poets were more successful.

While the last three letters conform more closely to the genre of travel writing, on occasion they still sound the scholarly note: letter XXVIII describes mainly an excursion to Cintra ; letter XXIX narrates their return trip to Lisbon, but also includes a poem on Cintra someone repeated to him, as well as commentary on historical and political circumstances associated with the Portuguese loss of independence to Spain in 1580; letter XXX wraps up the work with miscellaneous anecdotes and reflections on some of his last interactions with the people and the culture, including his impression that the Portuguese resent the English and their influence (546).

As this analysis so far has demonstrated, in the *Letters*, Southey performs a generic reconfiguration from travel narrative to history that encourages us to read them as the genesis of his projected *History of Portugal*. Written immediately before the time when, Linda Orr reminds us, “the epistemological break between rhetorical, narrative, or philosophical history—that is literature—and analytical, critical, scientific history” (1) was taking place, the *Letters* are an example of a text facilitated by that liminal moment when history and literature intersected easily, before nineteenth-century history’s scientific impulse crystallized. That Southey’s identity

as writer was solidifying at this moment is significant: as Paul Keen points out in *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, even though in the period, “literature [referred] not merely to works of imaginative expression, but to works in any subject” (3), a hierarchical distinction between the “poet” and the “man of letters” gradually obtained. Undoubtedly, Southey identified as both—in the 1790s, his two major publications were the epic poem *Joan of Arc* (1796) and the *Letters* (1797)—but history remained a strong unifying element in his multifarious writing practice.³⁰ This is a compelling reason for exploring Southey’s historiography: his place in “a [literary] culture governed by its mobility and diversity” (Pratt 2003-04, 2) remained, to a great extent, anchored in his identity as a historian; yet that identity became increasingly outdated in his own time.³¹

Conclusion: Southey’s Historiography

In “Southey, Macaulay and the Idea of a Picturesque History,” Esther Wohlgenut discusses Southey’s *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*

³⁰ In *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity*, Brian Goldberg maintains that “writing poetry was always for all of them [Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge], the most valued exercise of the author’s calling” (4). True as that may be, plenty of examples from Southey’s correspondence cited above indicate that he also placed great weight on the impact that history-writing could have on his professional reputation.

³¹ Similarly, Pratt maintains, Southey “demonstrates the importance of a re-historicised Romanticism, of a fuller knowledge of a culture in which a multiplicity of ‘Books’ and literary forms, not just a handful of privileged texts and genres, provide a ‘portrait of the public mind’” (Pratt 2003-04 2). When she writes that Southey “has at last started to become a writer worth reading” (Pratt “Introduction” xix), she notes that it is so precisely because the on-going reconsideration and reformulation of the literary culture of the period has highlighted the degree to which the neglect of Southey and his work was due to the “processes of romantic canon formation that ...excluded ... the kinds of literature and cultural achievements he represented” (xviii). Once the resulting literary hierarchies—which, Pratt and many other critics have stressed, influenced literary critics for generations--began to be examined and revised, Southey emerged as an ideal figure for reevaluation. Here, I argue that his historiography is especially compelling because it hints at his increasingly “outdated” historical practice and at his late ambivalence regarding the possibility of a “correct” interpretation of the past.

(1829) as a text that, in drawing on literary techniques to evoke “sympathetic identification,” foregrounds a particular kind of “affective history”—one dependent on “a generic intersection between history and travel writing” (1). Wohlgemut’s argument is that Southey uses the picturesque in the *Colloquies* to anchor and justify his revisionist take on history—he elevates the feudal past over the present and enlists the moral legitimacy associated with the picturesque to shore up his perspective. Attending to Southey’s “picturesque history” (7), she points out, can help correct a potentially narrow view of Romantic historiography as progressive.³² In contrasting Southey’s “affective” historiography (as it is articulated in his *Colloquies*) with Macaulay’s (as it is outlined in his essays “History” and “Hallam,” as well as in his review of Southey’s *Colloquies*, all in the *Edinburgh Review*), Wohlgemut’s essay helps shed light on Southey’s distance from the then-prevailing progressive view of history. But in Southey’s historical practice, “the conundrums, contradictions, or aporias of Romantic historicism” noted, in a different context, by James Chandler in *England in 1819* (100) are singularly manifested; thus, a more complex picture of that practice emerges if we place the *Colloquies*--a work published in 1829—in context with the *Letters*, published much earlier, in 1797.³³

³² Associated with Macaulay, progressive history came to be dominant at the time; but, she stresses, there were others, such as Southey’s more impressionist one, that “offer[...] an important counterpoint to the historiography of a figure like Macaulay” (1).

³³ As Chandler stressed, despite general critical agreement that between 1770 and 1830 “a radical historiographical transformation” (100) took place, there is no critical consensus on the precise elements of post-Enlightenment historicism (100). Indeed, as Breisach’s *Historiography* asserts, there were a number of different historiographical practices at the time but a “creative synthesis” was missing (223). Because most of Southey’s work falls within this period, and because his early readings included a number of Enlightenment historical works from the Bristol Library Society (among them Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*; see Cabral *Southey* 96-106 for the list of works from that library read by Southey between 1793 and 1795), his historiography exhibits the influence of different currents. Still, and as I stressed above, he remained identified with “the man of letters,” rather than with the “trained historian.”

In 1797, the *Letters*, as we saw, reveal a historian closely influenced by the erudite and antiquarian heritage—a scholar whose main preoccupation is to offer a picture of the past anchored in documents, with limited focus on interpretation.³⁴ When he does offer some judgment of the culture, he shows no particular sensitivity to the temporal or cultural gap that informs his views.³⁵ By contrast, in 1829, in the *Colloquies*, the interpretation of history is the central focus. Indeed, even though it is neither a traditional history, nor a traditional travel narrative, but rather a fictional dramatization of both, the *Colloquies* offers a lengthy commentary on the state of contemporary society via an overview of the history of England. Another example of Southey's facility with generic blending, this text is rather suggestive of the evolution of Southey's historical thought. Set up as a series of dialogues between the narrator, Montesinos, and the ghost of Sir Thomas More—a form that Southey, in the Preface, notes he borrowed from Boethius (xi)—the *Colloquies* implicitly debates the notion of History that

³⁴ His approach to the projected *History* remained the same. Preserving his access to the Portuguese archives was such a preoccupation, that he held off publishing some of his material about Portugal compiled for the *History* for fear that his criticism led authorities to refuse him further access: "Of Portugal I could publish much, but dare not shut the door of the archives against my future researches," he wrote to William Taylor on July 27, 1801 (qtd. in Cabral *Journals* 70 n. 5). In an earlier letter to the same friend, he congratulates himself on that access: "I am up to my ears in chronicles—a pleasant day's amusement.... I have just obtained access to the public manuscripts and the records of the Inquisition tempt me—five folios—the whole black catalogue" (Cabral *Journals* 139). Clearly, one of the main attractions Portugal came to hold for Southey was precisely the amount of original research materials available: "I am no ways weary of Portugal; it would be the country of my choice residency certainly—its climate so entirely suits me; and its materials now afford me such ample employment, that I could beguile a more total solitude than that in which we live," he wrote to John May on May 23, 1801 (Cabral *Journals* 169). And he added: "My History advances well; I have stewed down many a folio into essencial sauce. Half the labour of a first volume is done" (Cabral *Journals* 169).

³⁵ This is especially obvious in his mocking attitude towards his sources in letter XVII, cited above. When discussing António de Macedo's *Excellencies of Portugal* (1631), Southey makes no mention of the more than a century and a half that separates him from this historian; nor does he take into account that the text's hyperbolic celebration of the excellencies of Portugal is the work of an early-seventeenth-century Portuguese writer feeling the yoke of Spanish rule—which, therefore, needs to be interpreted in the context of his wounded patriotism.

proposes that besides erudition, a “correct” interpretation is essential for the historian to perform his role--a notion that, Breisach reminds us, is connected with the movement towards scientific nineteenth-century historicism early associated with Leopold von Ranke (232-34). In each dialogue, Montesino’s erudition is set against the all-knowing consciousness of the ghost of More, his knowledge of the facts of English history repeatedly submitted to More’s subtly correcting perspective. Endorsed in the text as key to historical interpretation, this all-knowing perspective is represented as required for the kind of generalizations about History that would turn the past into a lesson for the present. Suggestively, it is tied to an other-worldly individual. Foregrounding the difficulty, if not the utter impossibility, of this demand on the historian, it is the ghost of More, not the knowledgeable Montesinos, whom the text represents in that role.

More’s lesson on a cautious practice of history is obliquely referred to early in Colloquy V as he cautions Montesinos: “You deduce a large inference from scanty premises” (95). While they were not discussing history in this exchange, the remainder of the Colloquy—much like the rest of the work—dramatizes the lesson. For example, they begin discussing the character of Edward VI as exemplary. More calls him saintly and asserts: “this country was not worthy of him, ... scarcely this earth” (I, 102). Montesinos adds: “His prescriptions are as applicable now as they were then, and in most points as needful” (I 102-03). This opinion—which indicates that Montesinos unproblematically infers that one can replicate the successes of a past age in the present by adopting similar measures—is subtly corrected by More, who pointedly states:

Those great legislative measures whereby the character of a nation is changed and stamped, are more practicable in a barbarous age, than in one so far advanced as that of the Tudors; under a despotic government than a free one; and among an ignorant, rather than an inquiring people. Obedience is then either yielded to a power which is too strong;

or willingly given to the acknowledged superiority of some commanding mind, carrying with it, as in such ages it does, an appearance of divinity. (I 103-04)

The lessons of the past can only serve the present if they are properly understood.

Thus, while in the *Colloquies* Southey repeatedly endorses a conservative view of society's development, his epistemological skepticism regarding the possibility of fully knowing the "truth" about the past ultimately suggests that the conservative turn of this once-radical thinker notwithstanding, he came to an intuitive understanding of the inherently flawed, necessarily partial perspective of any historical practice that claimed to offer a true interpretation of the past.

Ultimately, then, the fact that the projected *History of Portugal* was never finished invites a reassessment of Southey's trajectory as a historian. After writing so many histories, this "grand failure" to complete the *History of Portugal* (despite all the research he had amassed and even, as I have argued, partly written up in the first edition of the *Letters*) is rather suggestive. Long-term as it necessarily was, the project may have outlasted his early convictions about the role of the historian. *The History of Brazil* (1810-1817), "soon disparaged by Southey himself, but... nonetheless doggedly continued" (Bernhardt-Kabisch 159), remained in the historical vein he had started with the *Letters* in 1797.³⁶ But in the 1829 *Colloquies* Southey clearly reassessed his view of history. Having embraced for decades a history-writing practice that was increasingly

³⁶ Bernhardt-Kabisch notes that one episode of the *History* was, in fact, published in 1821: "an extended article [that] appeared originally in the *Edinburgh Annual Register*" (159) under the title *The Expedition of Orsua and the Crimes of Aguirre*. But as Southey explained in the Preface to its reprint as a free-standing volume, the essay "was intended to form a chapter in the *History of Brazil*. To that history the subject in part belongs; but because it is entirely unconnected with all preceding events in Brazil, and with all subsequent ones... I deemed it better to omit it altogether" (Southey *Expedition* v). So even though the work chronicles an expedition that took place in the year 1560—when Portugal was under the Spanish crown-- for the conquest of the El Dorado, it might more accurately be considered, to use Southey's word, an "unconnected" historical episode that he therefore chose to publish separately.

brought under question by “professional historians,” Southey’s failure to complete *The History of Portugal* may indeed be the most interesting of his “grand failures” if it meant that he no longer wished “to resemble the old chroniclers,” and was ready instead to join “the modern historians.”

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