

INTRODUCTION

This book is about one of the most popular writers of one of the most studied eras of English literature. Described as ‘the only existing entire man of letters’, Robert Southey was a writer whose very variety led, during the twentieth-century professionalization of literary criticism as an academic discipline, to his disappearance from the scholarly map.¹ Neither a ‘prophet of nature’ in the Wordsworthian mould, nor an architect of the Victorian novel in that of Eliot, Southey fitted into no critic’s ‘great tradition’. Yet in his own mind, it was ‘the man of letters’ – the writer professional in many genres – who truly commanded the cultural field. He considered the implications of his role in a journal article of 1808:

For whom however is the purest honey hoarded that the bees of this world elaborate, if it be not for the man of letters? The exploits of the kings and conquerors of old serve for nothing now but to fill story books for his amusement. It was to delight his leisure, and stimulate his admiration that Homer sung, and Alexander conquered. It is to gratify his curiosity that adventurers have traversed deserts and savage countries and explored the seas from pole to pole. The revolutions of the planet which he inhabits are but matters for his speculation, and the deluges and conflagrations which it has undergone, the sport of his philosophy. He is the inheritor of whatever has been discovered by persevering labour, or created by genius; the wise of all ages have heaped up a treasure for him which rust doth not corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal.²

As the central repository for all the ‘treasure’ of knowledge in the world, Southey allocates himself a position of supreme importance.³ The ‘exploits’ of history are for his ‘amusement’, and for his benefit ‘adventurers’ explore the world. Even planetary events are for his ‘speculation’. Southey creates an impression of the world’s vastness and historical longevity, in order to put himself at its centre and remind readers of his prominent role in early nineteenth-century British culture. The epistemological egocentrism that Southey displays here is indistinguishable from his anglocentric viewpoint, which he felt qualified him to take a global scope within his grasp and bring it home to a domestic centre, where its true worth could be divulged to readers. Southey’s consciousness of himself as an

‘inheritor’ of all the world’s knowledge suggests he saw himself in a powerful position of trust. It also implies, through the process of inheritance, a further transmission to posterity of this knowledge.

On the face of it, given the twentieth-century neglect of his work, Southey’s conception of the man of letters can be considered mere vain self-promotion. I will argue in this book, however, that his egotism should not blind us to his importance: he was not only a pioneer in many genres, but he became a vital ideologue of, and commentator on, empire. This was a culturally crucial role in setting the agenda for the British imperialism of the Victorian age, at a time when significant events were taking place all over the world:

The history and politics of the years 1785–1830 were marked not just by the French Revolution, but by the loss of the American colonies, the impeachment of Warren Hastings (the Governor of Bengal), the transportation of convicts to Australia, the campaign to abolish the slave-trade, the acquisition of new colonies in the Mediterranean and Africa, the development of Canada and the administration of older colonies in India, Africa and Ireland.⁴

As its title, *Writing the Empire*, suggests, this book takes as its subject texts from the British Romantic period (1780–1830) that reflect these global events. In doing so it examines Southey’s significant public role in communicating them to British readers. Southey was pre-eminent among his literary peers for his direct and consistent engagement with colonial issues. This was because (as his attitude towards Britain’s political structures changed) he considered the British Empire a crucial political entity. This book presents a close analysis of his writing on this theme – writing that was often intended to be foundational in the context of nation and empire-building.

Southey has been unjustly neglected since his own time, largely because one strand of writing (with one kind of author) has taken precedence over others in the formation of the Romantic canon.⁵ The presentation of Romanticism as an aesthetic movement that privileges introspective, self-expressive forms of writing (and writers) has seen the subjugation, until recently, of other forms and authors. In the same way that the positions of female and labouring-class writers have often been sidelined, so have the views of those, like Southey, who had a wider, global perspective than the eurocentric one which previously dominated Romantic studies. Southey’s work contributes to the ‘public face’ of Romanticism – that he keenly engaged in through the social and political topics he discussed in his journalism and poetry (and in his position as Poet Laureate, after 1813) – and which has often been overlooked in prioritizing a ‘private’ form of Romanticism.

The canonical revisionism of the last decade has resulted in a massive resurgence of interest both in Southey’s life and writing and in his relationship to

Romantic period culture. His early and mid-career poetry is now available for the first time in a scholarly edition – the *Poetical Works, 1793–1810* (2004)⁶ – and four further volumes covering his later career will appear in 2010. In addition, new biographies by Mark Storey and Bill Speck have allowed a more comprehensive (and complex) picture of Southey to emerge than the peripheral figure who existed previously in the margins of the life-histories of Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁷ This new Southeyan scholarship has also reinvigorated the idea of him as a public figure, rather than a reclusive ‘laker’. Southey emerges as a reliable, industrious source of support to a large group of relations and friends (including Coleridge’s family). He is also (re-)placed at the centre of a much wider social and political network. Southey met and communicated with politicians (William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, John Wilson Croker), literary figures (Anna Seward, Walter Scott, James Montgomery) and social reformers (Mary Wollstonecraft, George Dyer, Thomas Beddoes), and discussed with them (sometimes controversially) many of the important issues of the day. An even more complete understanding of the central and public role he played in Romantic period culture will emerge from another major editorial project – the first ever edition of Southey’s *Collected Letters*. Under the general editorship of Tim Fulford and Lynda Pratt, this will be published between 2007 and 2014 and will make his surviving correspondence available on a free-access website.

Writing the Empire builds on current critical interest in Southey. It augments the work of Marilyn Butler, Tim Fulford, Nigel Leask and Lynda Pratt by restoring him to the canon in a historicized manner that illuminates the relationship of Romantic writing to the politics of empire.⁸ My intention in this book is to demonstrate how crucial Southey was to the development of ideas on non-European cultures and societies during the Romantic period. I examine his writing within its original contexts of the journalism, political commentary and explorers’ narratives that originated from this period of colonial expansion and settlement. This demonstrates the direct link between the political and the personal in the literature he created from his source material, as he interposed his own views and values on colonialist discourse to present it in fictional form for his readers. Southey’s increasingly dominant position as a member of the literati meant that his own ideas in turn were transmitted through other writers. The literary relationships between Southey and Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron, as well as less well-known authors such as Mary Russell Mitford and James Montgomery, are explored in detail here, by examining the similarities (and differences) between these writers who often publicized Southey’s world-view, whether by promoting it or reacting against it.

My methodology comes primarily from the fields of new historicism and post-colonialism, in order to highlight the relationship of the avowedly aesthetic

discourse of Romanticism to the explicitly imperialist discourses of the period in which Britain acquired its second empire.⁹ At its base is the recognition that literary texts are embedded in their socio-political history and that this history itself is not a homogenous and completely stable 'background' of events. The early nineteenth century is considered a watershed in British colonial history before a more formalized Victorian imperialism came into place – it was therefore a time in which there was not necessarily one common, governing, dominant ideology, just as there was never only one style of discourse.

While Edward Said has demonstrated that the occidental fascination with all things eastern created 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient', Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Spivak have questioned such solid distinctions.¹⁰ The (re-)examination of colonialist discourse in the light of this analysis reveals the indeterminacies that fracture such hegemonic constructions (even in the moment of their production), so exposing the illusory nature of binary distinctions between the positions of colonizer and colonized. The critical analysis of Romantic texts through this methodology – by John Barrell and Nigel Leask, for instance – has revealed similar ambiguities and contradictions, so mirroring the fragmented, diverse nature of the British colonies, rather than projecting a concrete image of empire.¹¹ *Writing the Empire* focuses upon these 'anxieties and instabilities', which (often unwittingly) undermine the projected 'positivities and totalities', so discovering a productive dialectic.¹² As Bhaba states, one of the reasons for these 'instabilities' was that writers like Southey discussed foreign cultures in terms of their own society and, while 'othering' them, attempted to domesticate them.¹³ This was especially true of colonial societies, where, despite his fascination for unfamiliar cultural practices, Southey often considered them moral aberrations to be extinguished by correct (British) models of government and society. Although he used the exotic strangeness of foreign locations to make his poetry more exciting, Southey's assimilation of the alien attributes he found there to make them more 'like' Britain created much of the ambiguity in his texts.

These ambiguities also originate in Southey's inability to express his poetic or political manifesto explicitly, as Lynda Pratt has pointed out.¹⁴ A representative example of this is his journalism on foreign affairs, which, rather than clearly stating his colonial ambitions for Britain, presents his own subjective and idiosyncratic reactions to events. It is only through the iterative style of his writing and his concluding summations that the policy behind his prose is revealed. But it should be remembered that much of what we now consider as solid legislative or political fixities in the imperial arena originated in the (often tentative) exploratory ideas of individuals who were faced with administering alien territories and governing indigenous native populations (of which they sometimes

had little knowledge). Southey's speculative responses to colonial matters simply reflect the uncertainties and anxieties that beset others in implementing imperial strategy – and which could disrupt the coherence of political (and literary) aims and ambitions. In Southey's case, his technique of 'commingling' elements, by combining constituent (often disparate) parts in his construction (including elements from very different locations and temporalities), meant that they always threatened to fall apart again, so problematizing the totality of his 'empire-building' vision.¹⁵

Southey's inability to express his ideas directly causes another 'instability' in his writing, which manifests itself as 'a resistance to affirmation on its own terms, a means of being positive via the negative'.¹⁶ This also applies to the topics Southey chose to represent. Despite his declaration that 'England should be the scene of an Englishman's poem', he was reluctant to write the history of England as a national epic.¹⁷ No doubt this was due to the ideology (as well as the discourse) of radicalism that he had adopted in his youth, making it impossible to write about English mythological or historical subjects. Instead Southey used a foreign 'negative', criticizing the inadequacies (as he saw it) of other races and cultures for the edification of his readers. His development as a writer was synchronous with his awareness of the responsibility his role entailed as a social and moral watchdog. Therefore he felt it his civic and Christian duty to comment on social mores, whether at home or abroad, to inculcate what he considered to be an appropriate moral rectitude in the British public.

The impossibly virtuous heroes of Southey's poetry were designed to inspire an empathetic ambition in his readers to discover these similar qualities in themselves. His articles for periodicals such as the *Annual Review* (1802–9) and the *Quarterly Review* (1809–39) were written to instruct Britons in a correct ethical code and criticize those that he felt had strayed from it. The fact that he made foreign territories his specialism in his journalism (as he had in his poetry) meant that again he was holding up the 'other' he found there for public disapproval. Even in his biographies and histories, his representation of his subjects' deeds and actions are intended to contribute to his code of morality. That Southey was trying to define such qualities as 'British' can be seen in his *Life of Nelson* (1813), with its 'eulogy of our great naval hero'.¹⁸ However, his promotion of British values often publicized his own subjective personal likes and dislikes. Southey's individual principles – which had in the past been used to oppose British society – were made 'safe' over his lifetime by being assimilated into national (rather than autonomous and therefore dangerous) values. Through this process of change his nationalism became established. The historical sense of what Britishness is, which he promotes in his writing – his 'inheritance' from the 'treasure' trove of the past – is no less than Southey himself, parading in the imposing costume of

Britannia for his readers. In promulgating his own personal code he intended to build a moral empire, with Britain at its centre.

This desire to instil in the British public his own moral code – which encouraged qualities such as decency, duty, piety and purity – had its roots in Southey's radical youth. In 1794 when he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge at Oxford, the two men defined a system by which they could live their lives, governed by the democratic principles that they embraced. Their plan to found a new society, Pantisocracy, set out their egalitarian ethos based on abolishing private property and endowing all community members with equal rights. Though Southey felt later that this 'mania of man-mending', as he referred to it, had passed away with his youth, it would in fact mark his writing for the rest of his life.¹⁹ While the political content of his manifesto changed, his ethical values never did and this was what he aspired to impose on the British public. In later life, once Southey had come to present his own conservative beliefs as 'British', the demonization of other cultures that he often indulged in was intended not only to demonstrate to his readers proper forms of behaviour, but also to teach them the worth of their own government and society (which reinforced these values).

Writing the Empire tracks the changes over Southey's life and literary output from his youthful rejection of British 'systems' to a position in which he felt able to accept the British political establishment and even reinforce it in his writing. The progression it delineates was also crucial in forming Southey's responses to colonial politics. Whereas in the 1790s he had advocated emigration in order to escape what he saw as Britain's restrictive political regime for a dream of democracy, by 1810 he could recommend the expansion of empire in order to export British institutions and values across the world. Southey's political position only became more entrenched after what Geoffrey Carnall refers to as his 'conversion to conservatism'.²⁰ Carnall's study, more than any other, follows this political progression, however what he does not elucidate, is how Southey's movement from radical to reactionary was represented in his opinions on colonial affairs, or – by the time *The Curse of Kehama* was published in 1810 – his overt nationalism. The purpose of this book is to explain this trajectory in terms of Southey's responses to colonial, as well as domestic, politics.

First, however, it is necessary to explain what Southey felt his poetical impulses to be, as his poetry was so important in transmitting his ideas to the public. In his review of *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, Francis Jeffrey recognized that Southey was creating a new kind of aesthetic in his poetry. In accusing him of being the leader of a new 'sect of poets', Jeffrey used religious dissension as a metaphor for poetic individualism. For Jeffrey, Southey's poetry attempted to challenge the work of established writers – which he saw as a transgression against literary 'laws':

Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question.²¹

Jeffrey's review points out other such misdemeanours by Southey and the 'disciples of this school' of poetry, of which he claims he is the leader. They have 'abandoned the old models', show 'discontent with the present constitution of society' and 'constitute, at present, the most formidable conspiracy that has lately been formed against sound judgement in matters poetical'.²² In the same way that Wordsworth and Coleridge were laying down their poetical manifesto in *Lyrical Ballads*, Southey was laying down his in poems such as *Thalaba*.

The 'affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language' that Jeffrey objected to in *Thalaba* was part of Southey's drive to make his credo clear to his readers.²³ And when Jeffrey went on to accuse Southey of 'childishness' for his dualistic vision of the world in *Kehama*, he was again attacking this same impulse.²⁴ But for Southey it was important that his message was clearly conveyed to the public, and belief in his own moral purpose meant he could shrug off these negative comments on *Thalaba* to produce another oriental 'epic' that employed the same ethical framework. It was probably for Jeffrey's benefit that Southey included a motto from George Withers at the beginning of *Kehama*:

FOR I WILL FOR NO MAN'S PLEASURE
CHANGE A SYLLABLE OR MEASURE;
PEDANTS SHALL NOT TIE MY STRAINS
TO OUR ANTIQUE POETS' VEINS;
BEING BORN AS FREE AS THESE,
I WILL SING AS I SHALL PLEASE.²⁵

It declares Southey's independence from poetic pedantry and also confirms that he is creating a new aesthetic in his writing.

As early as 1803 Southey felt that he had given up financial reward in the expression of his literary and moral individualism:

I am pleased and satisfied with my lot. In a profession I might have made a fortune. I shall yet make what will be a fortune to me, and that in a way obedient to the call and impulse of my own nature, and best adapted to develop every moral and intellectual germ implanted in me. How I must by many be regarded as an improvident man, squandering talents that might have made him opulent and raised him to a high rank! Upon their views I confess the charge; but it is a virtue for which I already receive the reward of my own applause, and shall receive the highest rewards as the feelings and truths which I shall enforce produce their effect age after age, so long as our language and our literature endure.²⁶

For Southey, writing was a course of moral improvement, enabling him to work out his principles on paper. His career would have its own 'highest rewards' in those true feelings which would be inculcated in his readers and endure for eternity. His concern with his future reputation does not just refer to his literary career but to his position as a moral custodian, as the following incident reveals.

Southey had entrusted supervision of the publication of one of his works, *Specimens of the Later English Poets* (1807), to his close friend Grosvenor Charles Bedford. When Southey saw the published text he was outraged, not simply by the amount of uncorrected errors he found, but that Bedford should have:

selected anything immoral, and sent it into the world under the sanction of my name. As for my literary character, I am sufficiently careless about it; so much so that even the errors which deface almost every page of this book ... do not give me five minutes' concern; but this is not the case with respect to my character as a moralist – of that I am as jealous as a soldier of his honour.²⁷

Southey had a moral test for literature which he had instructed Bedford to apply to all the material in the *Specimens* – 'that which a woman would not like to read aloud, ought not to be inserted'.²⁸ Southey regarded his primary role as a writer to be to inculcate correct moral principles in his readers (many of which he assumed to be female), so conflating his own ethics into a public value-system.

Southey did not stop fighting battles all his life. He had high principles and held on to them despite risking unpopularity with others. The youthful ideals he held of liberty and equality became a middle-aged, narrow desire to impose his own code of beliefs on others and a concern to protect Britain from political and moral danger. Despite his changing political beliefs (which made him a target for contemporary attacks) he remained consistent in his opinion that a 'storm' was coming to Britain; the anticipation of a *bellum servile* that haunts his letters. In his youth he embraced such massive political and societal change because he would, he believed, be in America with his family, far from its terrors. From Southey's more conservative perspective and Lake District domicile (after 1803) he greatly feared such an event. It is easy to forget now the impact of having lived through a time which was marked by the American and French (and industrial) revolutions and – as Carnall rightly points out – 'His beliefs were a response to [these] alarming political and social movements'.²⁹

Wherever we, as readers, stand on Southey's apostasy, it makes sense of his colonialist policy. Growing comfortably more reactionary himself and seeing huge change around him, he found little difference in his fears of the 'mob', whether they were at home or abroad (reinforced by his largely negative experiences of Portuguese society and religion). But by concentrating simply on Southey's representations of other nations it is too easy to assume that he delib-

erately intended to reinforce the divisions between them and Britain. In fact his distinction is more refined than this, it marks the difference between moral, upright Christian citizens (like himself) and those, wherever they may be, who seek to undermine them. Unfortunately he elides this distinction so that a 'British' figure is compared against a religious, political, moral, inferior 'other'.

While during this period of colonial history there was 'no fully crystallised stereotype about the peoples who were subjected to empire', certainly towards its end these structures were becoming evident.³⁰ The responses of those who travelled to new territories – explorers, settlers and colonial administrators – as well as those who wrote about them at home, were crucial in presenting these places to their metropolitan readers. As Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs point out, 'Writing and travel have always been intimately connected'.³¹ Because in 'travelling' abroad Southey used his depictions of other cultures to define correct British values – in which he often employed a negative, foreign 'other' – his representations contribute to modern racial stereotypes. Retracing the origins of these opinions, from the primary sources of travel narratives, through secondary (often fictional) accounts, to their subsequent existence in the public imagination, demonstrates the egocentricity (and fragility) of such constructions. Travellers, writers and readers often relied on fulfilling their own personal and cultural expectations, so finding in new locations and strange cultures those things they were looking for. This is because Romantic colonialism – evinced as much in the writing of Coleridge and Wordsworth as Southey – entails a psychological self-exploration, in which the writer's own values and concerns are (often unknowingly) projected onto the peoples and places that are 'discovered', in a process of 'psycho-imperialism'.

My analysis of Southey's writing deconstructs this combination of subjective values and objective knowledge to demonstrate his method of appropriating and domesticating the foreign. However, one of the problems of analysing colonialist discourse is using its terminology without incorporating the contemporary value judgments of the 'colonizer'. Because terms such as 'Indian' (for native American), 'negro' or 'Mohammedan' were prevalent in Romantic writing and it would be anachronistic to avoid them, they are used here without intending any negative connotations. Place names that were in common usage have also been replicated for accuracy and historical authenticity, while recognizing the colonialist ideology that brought them into existence (Chapter 2 particularly discusses this issue in depth). For instance in the South Pacific, to take just one example, loco-descriptive terms, such as the 'South Seas', 'Polynesia' and 'Melanesia', were in common usage, as were British names given to islands, such as 'St Christina' for Tahuata, in the Marquesas Islands. In over two hundred years geographical regions and their political boundaries or colonial identities have often changed, therefore territories are discussed as they existed in textual references at the time.

However more correct terms and names are given in each chapter in parentheses.

A further proviso applies to the different applications of the term ‘colonial’ in this book. It is often used to refer to Britain’s intervention in non-European countries at a time before the more concrete Victorian structures of the British Empire came into place – and by this definition it is used interchangeably with ‘imperial’, not simply as a reference to settlement. In this respect, Britain’s relationship with America (after it gained independence in 1783) is still a colonial one – especially because, due to the recentness of the American revolution, many contemporary writers still referred to it in these terms. And of course many accounts of life there, which included topographical, climatic and agricultural detail – such as Thomas Cooper’s *Some Information Respecting America* (1794) – were written to encourage British settlement in America. Representations of the Middle East and the Islamic religion (in Chapter 4) can be said to be ‘colonialist’ in that orientalist writers were often attempting to impose a western value-system on the alien structures of society and religion that they found there. ‘Romantic colonialism’ is a blanket term that covers a great many diverse examples of imperial expansion and government (as well as referring to literary engagement with its policies). Andrew Porter identifies the different imperial models that were in place at the end of the eighteenth century:

An Empire of white settlement, truncated by losses in America, was already growing again by 1800; an Empire in India had expanded enormously since 1756; and an Empire of conquests or wartime acquisitions, the ‘dependent empire’ was continually added to between 1780 and 1914.³²

Within these three strands of colonial expansion, there were several different departments that were responsible for governing these territories, as well as varying forms of control over them. For instance the British settler colonies of Canada increasingly became self-governing, whereas ‘Crown Colony’ territories (such as in Australia and the West Indies) were governed by British colonial administrators. In the South Pacific, however, despite the ‘colonial’ intervention of explorers such as Louis Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook, neither they, nor their representative governments, envisaged these islands as imperial outposts settled by Europeans.³³

In conformity to a post-colonial (as opposed to a colonialist) view of the world, each chapter of *Writing the Empire* deals with one geographical place or discrete geo-political issue. This avoids replicating the conflation of cultures and locations that often occurs in Romantic literature, as well as providing a coherent structure for navigating Southey’s textual representations of Africa, America, the South Pacific, the Middle East and India. This book, while being grounded in historical and political contextual realities, largely presents an imaginative

engagement with the issues of colonialism, in that Southey's responses were literary (rather than political). In this respect, Southey differed from those officials and administrators whose task it was to implement imperial policy. He had the freedom to apply his creative energies to this topic, unbounded (except ideologically) by the practical realities of its execution. However his published views on these matters were, and still are, influential. Southey's journalism presented topical issues to the public and suggested solutions to the problems he identified, so providing his readers (past and present) with a valuable source of contemporary reaction to colonial policy. His poetry, which sought to instruct by entertaining, created lasting impressions on those who read it. Both in the original context of its creation and in analysis of its representations in the twenty-first century, it demonstrates the ways in which reactions to new places and cultures could operate in the public imagination. The value of Southey's work can be seen in the effect it had on his peers. Whether they responded positively, in imitative works and public approbation, or negatively, by vilifying him in the press, Southey was never ignored, revealing the dominant status he held among his contemporaries.

One of the most important colonial issues that Southey was keen to address, and which some of his earliest published poetry reacts against, was British involvement in the slave trade. This saw its apogee in the 1780s, at the 'exact moment that the British also began to dominate abolition efforts,' as Debbie Lee points out.³⁴ Chapter 1 examines Southey's poetry and journalism on the subject of abolition, as well as his collaborative attempts with Coleridge to oppose the slave trade in his home town of Bristol. Southey's abolitionist position was just one strand of his radical rejection of the British polity. But in later life (and after the slave trade had been abolished in 1807) he attempted to construct Britain as a responsible example of justice and morality for the rest of the world, as this chapter demonstrates. It also considers Southey's proposals for the future of Africa and the West Indian colonies, in which the latter would benefit from a loyal African work-force, 'civilized' by English education and Christian religion. Southey's literary output on this subject over his lifetime reflects its importance as a political issue during the Romantic period, but his changing priorities also demonstrate how responses to the slave trade could be impelled as much by domestic concerns as by humanitarian impulses to alleviate African suffering.

As British expansion incorporated 'new' and unfamiliar territories all over the globe, written accounts of these regions and their inhabitants were brought back to an enthusiastic reading public. Many of Southey's opinions on colonial politics were formed by reading these narratives, and he was particularly interested in those that originated from Britain's 'first empire' in America, which influenced him and Coleridge in their scheme to emigrate there in 1794. Chapter 2 traces the origins of Southey's Pantisocratic ideas in his long narrative poem,

Madoc (1805), which depicts the institution of a Welsh colony in America. The idea of this continent as an imaginative solution to the problems of Britain in a period of revolution, war and social change operated strongly on Southey. It also influenced Wordsworth in creating his poem 'Ruth' (1800), while the tropes of discovery and exploration that he found in travel accounts contributed to his own poetic 'journey' through the Lake District in 'Poems on the Naming of Places' (1800). However this chapter also demonstrates that, while American travel narratives provided these writers with source material for their poetic constructions, they also contributed to their destabilization.

America was not the only geographical location that Southey perceived as an ideal setting for human society in the 1790s. The published accounts of the expeditions of Bougainville and Cook to the South Pacific (during the 1760s and 1770s) had a huge impact on the British reading public, as Bernard Smith has shown.³⁵ Chapter 3 discusses the influence of these accounts on Southey, as well as his enthusiasm for Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse Upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind* (1755). These texts contributed to Southey's impression that the Polynesians were 'noble savages', existing in a state of nature that he felt contrasted vividly with his own corrupt and enfeebled society. However this youthful idealism was eroded after reading and reviewing missionary accounts of these islands for the *Annual Review* and the *Quarterly Review*.³⁶ This chapter examines the way in which reports of excessive female sexuality in the South Pacific were projected onto Southey's concerns for the morals of his own society. Other representations of the South Pacific – by P. M. James, Mary Russell Mitford, Byron and James Montgomery – are compared and contrasted to Southey's journal articles and narrative poems to consider the extent of his influence on these writers, as well as the dialogic nature of aesthetic responses to colonial discourse during this period.

As Southey became increasingly conservative – reinforced by his visits to Portugal in 1795 and 1800 – he became more censorious of foreign cultural practices and religious beliefs that did not conform to his moral precepts. He brought this critical spirit to other regions of the globe, including the Middle East, which he used as the setting for his long narrative poem *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). Chapter 4 demonstrates the hybrid nature of this poem, which amalgamated the disparate accounts of European travellers to the region, orientalist fantasies (such as the *Arabian Nights*), as well as Southey's reading of the Koran. My analysis of this poem shows that Thalaba's divinely-ordained mission against superstition, magic and rationalism in fact serves to criticize Southey's own society and religion – as well as Middle Eastern culture and the Islamic religion – in holding up his virtuous hero as a moral exemplar to both.