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### **Robert Southey and the Peninsular War**

Southey's involvement with Iberia was accidental. In 1795, his uncle, Herbert Hill, chaplain to the British merchant community at Lisbon, attempted to save Southey from an importunate marriage by taking him on an extended visit to the Iberian peninsula (Speck, 58-65). Hill's efforts on the domestic front were to no avail (Southey married before his departure from England) but in another area they were a spectacular success. This first encounter with Iberian landscape, literature, politics, religion and society fired Southey's life-long interest in the peninsula and set him upon the road to becoming a pre-eminent interpreter of Spanish and Portuguese cultures and histories to an Anglophone audience (Saglia, 2000, 48). This essay examines two aspects of Southey's Romantic Iberianism that have often been overlooked – his writings on the peninsular conflict in the *Edinburgh Annual Register*; and his unfinished series of inscriptions on the war.<sup>1</sup> Both shed important light on Southey's developing political ideas and on his sense of his public role. Moreover, they connect Southey the writer of prose (particularly contemporary history) with Southey the controversial Poet Laureate.

Hybridity and diversity – the ability to capture or imagine in both prose and poetry – were embedded in Southey's responses to Iberia from the outset. The most visible product of his 1795-6 visit to the peninsula was *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal*, which mixed travelogue, anecdote, social commentary, prose, poetry, translation and original composition. Published by Joseph Cottle in 1797, it went into new editions in 1799 and 1808. Moreover, Iberia maintained a consistent presence in Southey's poetry from the 1790s onwards: he published translations of Spanish and Portuguese originals in the *Morning Post*, and

used Iberian histories and legends as the basis for ballads ('Queen Urraca and the Five Martyrs of Morocco', 'King Ramiro' and 'Garci Ferrandez'), a monodrama ('Florinda') and an epic romance *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814) (*RSPW*, V, 406-13; *LPW*, I, 180-95; *RSPW*, V, 423-6; *LPW*, II). The peninsula also underpinned his prose writing and in particular fuelled his ambition to become an historian. He embarked on a 'History of Portugal' after a second visit to the peninsula in 1800-1 to undertake research and collect materials. The project was too vast an undertaking even for Southey and remained unfinished and unpublished at his death (Pinto). More manageable, though still intimidatingly large, works took its place, including a three-volume *History of Brazil* (1810-19), and prose translations of the medieval romances *Amadis of Gaul* (1803) and *The Chronicle of the Cid* (1808) (Saglia, 2000, 48-51; Humphreys). Indeed, by 1809 Southey's interest in Iberia seemed firmly fixed on the past. This situation soon took a radical new turn.

Southey's move to the contemporary – like his interest in Iberia – was largely an accident. His developing friendship with Walter Scott drew him into the plans of the latter's business partners, the publishers and printers James and John Ballantyne. In May 1809 James Ballantyne offered Southey the editorship of the *Rhadamanthus*, a new literary journal that focused on non-contemporary works. Southey cautiously accepted (Curry, 22-3). In the event, nothing came of the scheme. However, Scott and the Ballantynes had a more ambitious plan in train – a new annual that would cater to public interest in the contemporary world and challenge other such yearly publications, including the established *Annual Register* (published since 1758) and more recent arrivals such as the *New Annual Register*. Entitled the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, it would appear in two volumes, and contain an account of the year concerned alongside essays on a wide range of subjects, including literature, fine arts, science, commerce and even the weather (*EAR*, 1808, v-xii). The Ballantynes needed someone to write the historical sections of the *Register*, and their first choice was James Kirkpatrick Sharpe, a friend of Scott's. He accepted and then withdrew. A substitute was urgently required and the position was offered to Southey in August 1809. The offer was made not on the grounds that he was an expert on public affairs, but that he was known to Scott and the Ballantynes and might be willing to undertake the task (Curry, 7-9).

Southey agreed immediately. He needed the money and the salary of £400, far more than he had been paid for any other literary work, was very welcome (Speck,

136-53). The work was anonymous, though Southey's authorship became an open secret in literary circles. The labour involved was arduous (*CLRS*, 1975). In 1809-10 it took Southey six months to write the review of the year 1808 - the *Edinburgh Annual Register* appeared two years in arrears - and the three further issues to which he contributed, those covering the years 1809-11, took up a similar amount of time (*CLRS*, 1776). This was hardly surprising as Southey's contribution ran to hundreds of double-columned pages of text per issue. Southey filled 459 pages in the 1808 volume and in the 1809 volume was forced to apologise to readers for presenting them with no fewer than 797 pages (*EAR*, 1809, [v]-vi). Some of his material comprised lengthy quotations from speeches and documents, but much of it consisted of summaries by Southey himself. He was an assiduous researcher, systematically gutting old newspapers and official publications. Moreover, as the years went by he made increasing use of friends like John Rickman, who supplied him with parliamentary papers; and recruited family members to assist him in extracting, collating and filing essential material from newspapers (*CLRS*, 1825, 1877). Although this work was time-consuming, the yearly payments from the Ballantynes made Southey's finances much more secure. However, in 1813 Southey's connection with the *Register* was brought to a sudden end by the Ballantynes' financial instability. Though they had printed 3,000 copies of the *Register* a year, no more than 1,500-2,000 were ever sold. By 1813 the firm was in crisis. The Edinburgh publisher Archibald Constable was called in to help, agreeing to take over the Ballantynes' stock and to wind up their partnership's affairs (Curry, 12-13). The resultant restructuring meant that Southey, to his fury, was not paid for his work on the 1813 volume (which covered 1811) and also found the 1/12th share he had taken in the ownership of the *Register* was worthless (*CLRS*, 2294). He ceased writing for it at the end of 1813, but the resultant financial entanglements dragged on until 1818, when Southey finally received some of the money he was owed (*CLRS*, 3123).

Although Southey's relationship to the *Register* ended acrimoniously, he had never viewed his work for it as purely a commercial transaction. Above all, he saw his *Register* writings as a unique opportunity to support a cause that was close to his heart – Portugal and Spain's resistance to the French invasions of 1807 and 1808. Southey's knowledge of, and identification with, both countries made him a passionate advocate in their fight for independence from France. The *Edinburgh Annual Register* gave Southey a national platform to both inform the public of events

in the peninsula and promote the Spanish and Portuguese cause. He seized the opportunity and devoted approximately half of the first volume, published in 1810, and at least one third of each of the following three volumes (1811-13) to events in Iberia (Curry, 39). The war in the peninsula was of central importance to Britain, as it was the main theatre of the British army's operations against France. Nevertheless, it still required a deliberate decision by Southey to devote so many pages to Spain and Portugal, particularly when compared to domestic concerns, or events elsewhere in the world. Moreover, he took great care not just to report on the British Army's exploits. He also gave space to political events in Spain and Portugal and to the operations of the Spanish armies. The result was a notably non-Anglo-centric account of the conflict written for a British audience.

Southey did not just recount recent events; he also provided a commentary upon them and urged his readers to share his opinions. Southey was a vociferous, though not always successful, advocate for authorial autonomy, and was determined to write 'with perfect freedom and perfect sincerity' in the *Register* (CLRS, 1762). Although James Ballantyne balked at some of Southey's more radical remarks on domestic politics in the first *Edinburgh Annual Register*, he seems to have allowed him to say what he wanted to about Spain and Portugal (CLRS, 1729). In practice, though, this was probably because Southey's anti-French line chimed with the views of the government, Scott and the Ballantynes. The significance of Southey's comments in the *Register* on the situation in Britain has long been recognised. Geoffrey Carnall was the first to point out the crucial difference between Southey's stance in the first and second volumes of the *Register* (Carnall, 94-6, 116-18, 120-2). In the first *Register*, written in 1809-10, he was still in favour of parliamentary reform and mildly complimentary to Sir Francis Burdett, the leading radical. In the second volume, written in 1810-11, Southey moved to a robust defence of the unreformed electoral system and outright hostility to domestic radicalism. Carnall saw the information on parliamentary politics and government policy provided by Rickman as a key factor in this alteration, which marked a crucial point in Southey's transition to his own idiosyncratic brand of conservatism.

Yet although Southey's views on the Peninsular War occupied much more space in the *Register* than his account of radicalism in Britain, they have received less attention than they deserve. This is a strange omission because commenting on and analysing events in the Peninsular War played a key role in Southey's movement

from a radical to a more conservative viewpoint. Indeed, it was only through his analysis of events in Spain and Portugal in the *Register* that Southey finally abandoned any hope of beneficial change in Europe through revolutionary action. In domestic politics, Southey had by 1808 long ceased to hold his youthful democratic and revolutionary opinions (Craig, 45-123). In contrast, his analysis of the situation in Iberia in 1808 saw a return to the views on events in Europe that he had held in the 1790s.

Like most people in Britain Southey believed that France, and especially Napoleon personally, had behaved without any justification in taking over the government of Spain. For him the struggle was a Manichean affair. As Southey fulminated:

The train of perfidy by which he [Napoleon] had thus far accomplished his purpose is unexampled even in the worst ages of history. The whole transaction was, on his part, a business of pure, unmingled wickedness, unprovoked, unextenuated, equally detestable in its motive, its means, and its end. (*EAR, 1808, 266*).

He was full of praise for the selfless courage of the Spanish resistance, which displayed ‘A spirit of patriotism ... which astonished all Europe’ and demonstrated that ‘the Spaniards are an uncorrupted people’ (*EAR, 1808, 277*). As a contest between good and evil, the war had a wider meaning, ‘like the great contest between Greece and Persia, [it] involves the dearest interests of humanity and its story must therefore for ever continue to affect and to influence mankind’ (*EAR, 1809, 470*).

To Southey the most important element in the Spaniards’ resistance was that it was a popular movement. Charles IV had abdicated and his son, Ferdinand VII, had allowed himself to be outwitted and captured by Napoleon, but these were merely the latest in a ‘A series of imbecile sovereigns ...’; the King’s ministers were invariably ‘base’, traditional institutions like the Inquisition were ‘accursed’ (*EAR, 1808, 229, 269*). The Spaniards who resisted Napoleon were, in Southey’s account, those of the ‘lower ranks’; the more wealthy a man was, the more he had to lose and the greater was his temptation to compromise with the French (*EAR, 1809, 531*). In the absence of long-standing sources of authority like the monarch the Spaniards had started to govern themselves through local juntas, ‘by virtue of that right which was inherent in the people’ (*EAR, 1808, 283*). There was an obvious parallel to the situation in revolutionary France in the 1790s, when the French defended themselves against

invasion from abroad, relying on popular rather than traditional authority. Southey had greatly admired and defended the French revolutionaries in their struggle and celebrated French resistance against invasion, particularly by the English, in his epic *Joan of Arc* (1796) (*RSPW*, I, xxxv-lv). In 1808 he made an explicit comparison between the two conflicts:

Our hope was, that those principles against which the combined powers had originally taken arms, and by which they were defeated, were now marshalled on our side; and that the common enemy would be overthrown by the spirit of independence, of liberty, of national pride, and national honour, - by the spirit of revolution which had now manifested itself among a people worthy of being free, and virtuous enough to preserve their freedom, if they should succeed in recovering it.

(*EAR*, 1808, 293)

Southey had never repudiated his support for France's war of defence (as he saw it) in the 1790s. However, to Southey, France's success in that war had ended in disaster, with Napoleon installed as dictator from 1799 onwards and determined to extend his rule over all of Europe. The popular resistance in Spain and Portugal in 1808 offered a chance to replay the scenario of the 1790s, but with a happy ending – the defeat of Napoleon. Unlike the French, the Spanish were 'virtuous' enough to produce a revolution that would end tyranny, not rivet it on Europe.

In 1809-10 Southey was confident that revolutionary France's defence of the homeland through mass popular resistance could be replicated in Spain. He sympathised with those Spaniards who distrusted their army officers and noted how the French revolutionaries had only been successful once their aristocratic officers 'had perished, by the hands of the soldiers or the executioner' (*EAR*, 1808, 402). He celebrated the military efforts of the populace of cities like Zaragoza and advised the Spanish to fight a war of prolonged sieges, with house to house fighting in which ordinary people, priests and women could participate (*EAR*, 1808, 306-20; *EAR*, 1809, 480). He cautioned against any reliance on British military assistance, which had been 'ill timed, ill directed, and inadequate to its object' (*EAR*, 1808, 431), especially given the much-criticised Convention of Cintra (1808) and the disaster of the retreat to Corunna (1809). Instead, Southey urged the Spanish to rely on fighting 'a war of principle', which would inspire a popular uprising in France to depose Napoleon – a people's war would replace the old system of government alliances (*EAR*, 1808, 297).

The problem, though, as Southey recognised, was whether the uprising against the French in Spain and Portugal could also create ‘freedom’, in the sense of liberty, as well as national independence. His advice was that, ideally, these countries should depose ‘the weak and unworthy dynasties of which they had so unexpectedly been rid’ and replace them with a ‘federal commonwealth’ - in other words, a decentralised republic (*EAR*, 1808, 390). Yet Southey knew that something so new was ‘not to be expected’. Instead he added his voice to calls for a newly-elected *Cortes Generales* to meet and wield authority in Spain on the basis of ‘the principles of freedom’ (*EAR*, 1808, 391). In the short term he distrusted the juntas that had grown up around Spain to fill the political vacuum in 1808. He saw them as composed of ‘men whose influence arose from their rank or property’ and were thus tempted to compromise with the French; ‘the majority were either ignorant of the nature of freedom, or ready to betray it’ (*EAR*, 1808, 391, 398). There was also a deeper problem: the Spanish uprising was not motivated by a demand for constitutional government, let alone a republic. The desire for independence was inextricably linked to ‘popular faith’ (*EAR*, 1808, 280) rather than political liberty and might, if victorious, just lead to the re-establishment of royal absolutism and obscurantist Catholicism. This was a huge difficulty for Southey, a determined anti-Catholic – he used the early pages of the first volume of the *Register* to roundly condemn the cause of equal political rights for Catholics in the United Kingdom on the grounds that ‘they who are themselves intolerant have no claim to toleration’ and described Catholicism as a ‘bedarkened and bedarkening superstition’ (*EAR*, 1808, 8). Southey hoped, though, that the struggle against the French would produce a revolutionary transformation in Spanish popular religion, customs and beliefs. As he described the heroism of the defenders of Zaragoza he suggested that they did not merely display ‘bigotry and superstition’: instead ‘the dross and tinsel of their faith disappeared, and its pure gold remained’ (*EAR*, 1808, 308-09).

The optimism found in the first volume of the *Register* gradually subsided over the next three years. The three subsequent issues (covering the events of 1809-11) show Southey’s increasing caution both about the war that needed to be waged against France and about political developments in Spain and Portugal. Southey wanted, above all, to see France (and especially Napoleon) defeated. The key question was how was this to be achieved? Although he continued to celebrate the heroic defence of towns and villages and the activities of the guerrillas, ‘the Cids and

the Laras of their age' (*EAR*, 1810, 473), he increasingly recognised the importance of more conventional forms of warfare. Once Wellington was firmly in command of the British troops in the peninsula and started to secure some successes, Southey was prepared to overlook his role in the Convention of Cintra and became much more positive about the British army's role in the conflict (*EAR*, 1809, 745-6). He recognised that the French possessed a 'fatal superiority in discipline and tactics' over the Spanish forces and the only way to make up for this deficiency was to remodel the Spanish armies 'by the assistance of British officers' – an idea that was probably suggested by the success of William Beresford in reshaping the Portuguese army under British command (*EAR*, 1809, 759, 702). In this scheme, a 'war of partizans' was a holding operation - a way of boosting Spanish morale and draining the French forces' resources until they could be defeated in the field by trained troops (*EAR*, 1809, 759). Moreover, Southey became increasingly dubious that the Spanish could create a revolutionary army on the lines of that produced in France in 1792-3. He began to criticise as pointless the habit of Spanish troops of murdering commanders they regarded as potential traitors ('mobs never reason'; *EAR*, 1809, 482-3); and instead lavished praise on a number of aristocratic Spanish commanders who had successes against the French, especially the Duke of Albuquerque (*EAR*, 1809, 555, 717, 738). This latter development was also closely linked to Southey's increasing access to information from Spain, especially through the medium of Manuel Abella, to whom Henry Crabb Robinson provided an introduction (*CLRS*, 1824, 1832). Abella was a scholar and archivist who held various political appointments, including secretary to the Duke of Albuquerque when the Duke was in London in 1810-11. Abella provided Southey with a flow of *Gazetas* produced by the various juntas, the proceedings of the Cortes after 1810, accounts of the war written by local eyewitnesses and information from other Spanish patriots, such as the Countess of Bureta (*CLRS*, 2007, 2101, 2487). Such information obviously was given with the aim of influencing Southey's views, in favour of Albuquerque in particular, and Southey soon felt obliged to Abella, with whom he kept up a cordial correspondence (*CLRS*, 2071).

The more conventional war that Southey began to advocate by the time he was writing the second volume of the *Register* could not transform the worldview of the Spanish and Portuguese people in the way that Southey had envisaged whilst he was writing his account of the siege of Zaragoza. Instead, he started to suggest that the war



should be seen in a longer-term perspective, rather than as a transformative event. It was a providential visitation that prepared the conditions for future constitutional developments by expiating the guilt of the Spanish and Portuguese nations for previous crimes, especially in their colonies (*EAR, 1809, 536-7*). It also, through the reforms of the French government in Madrid, introduced changes, like the abolition of the Inquisition, that could not be reversed (*EAR, 1809, 761*). However, the war was not necessarily a sharp break with the past; it was part of a long-term process of reform that was already underway. Southey came to believe that ‘Had it not been for the French revolution, Spain and Portugal might have fermented and purified themselves of their civil abuses’ (*EAR, 1810, 418*). He increasingly emphasised that the Spanish ‘revolution’ - Southey came to feel the word was inappropriate (*EAR, 1810, 354*) - was purely reactionary in character, and intended to defend the monarchy and the Church, and the war could not change this situation: ‘The Spaniards, more than any other Europeans, are attached to the laws and customs of their country’ (*EAR, 1810, 493*).

Southey continued to look to the new Cortes which met for the first time in September 1810 to be the main ‘permanent good’ that would come out of the war for Spain – and wished the British had insisted that the Prince Regent should call a Cortes in Portugal, too (*EAR, 1810, 492, 422*). However, because most Spaniards remained attached to old forms and ways of thinking he was increasingly sceptical about how much reform was feasible in the short term and urged that the Cortes should be ‘slow, certain and permanent’ in its operations (*EAR, 1810, 493*). He supported the, ultimately unsuccessful, moderate plan put forward by the eminent Spanish scholar, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, that the Cortes should consist of an elected lower house and an upper house of grandees and ecclesiastics, a view that Abella may have influenced as he had worked with Jovellanos on this plan (*EAR, 1810, 486-9*). Almost as soon as Southey started to describe the Cortes’s actions he began accusing it of displaying ‘something of that precipitation, and something of that proneness to tyranny, by which the proceedings of popular assemblies have so often been disgraced’ (*EAR, 1810, 495*), reflecting his poor opinion of many of the politicians that the war had thrust into prominence. In Southey’s analysis, the assembly was deeply divided: ‘The majority of the cortes were little less bigoted than the most illiterate of their countrymen’; while the more active minority were influenced by ‘French philosophy’ (*EAR, 1811, 364-5*). The latter group had real achievements to their credit, including

abolishing the slave trade, torture and feudal jurisdictions. However, they also meddled with the executive functions of the Regency and engaged in unnecessary and ‘metaphysical’ discussions about a new constitution, which demonstrated how the concept of the ‘sovereignty of the people’ could become ‘unendurably tyrannical’ (*EAR*, 1811, 365). These thoughts, written in 1813, reflected Southey’s opinion that the Cortes had gone on to make a huge mistake in creating the liberal Constitution of 1812. Spain was not ready for such a change and the Constitution reflected the radical ideas of a small minority, who were forcing their scheme on the country. A more moderate, gradualist approach would prevent civil strife in Spain and might take root (*CLRS*, 2209, 2281 2391). In this respect Southey was prescient. When Ferdinand VII returned in 1814 after the defeat of France he re-imposed royal absolutism, only to be forced to reinstate the Constitution by an army revolt in 1820, which was in turn crushed by a French invasion in 1823. Southey increasingly despaired of any reform in Spain in the short term. Ironically, the best solution he could produce was for Ferdinand VII to be deposed and replaced by a more reformist monarch (*CLRS*, 3427) – which was, in a way, what Napoleon had done in 1808, when he overthrew the Bourbon dynasty and made his own older brother, Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain. In effect, Southey used the *Edinburgh Annual Register* to work through his ideas about how Napoleon might be best defeated in Spain and Portugal and how these countries might reform their governments. In doing so, he finally and completely rejected the idea of revolutionary change in favour of moderate reform, using traditional institutions if possible. The last ghost of the French Revolution was exorcised from his thinking in the pages of the *Review* and his views on politics in Britain and the Continent gradually came into alignment.

In his writings for the *Edinburgh Annual Register* Southey had come to believe that only the British army could defeat the French forces in the Iberian peninsula and secure the independence of Spain and Portugal. From late 1813 this conviction was to drive another project, this time in verse, a new series of ‘Inscriptions Triumphal and Sepulchral Recording the Acts of the British Army in Spain and Portugal’.<sup>2</sup> The idea was timely. The war in the Iberian peninsula was coming to an end as the allies crossed into France in October 1813. Moreover, Southey’s appointment to the Poet Laureateship in autumn 1813 had revitalised his desire to write poetry and instilled in him the belief that as the nation’s poet it was his

duty to speak out on momentous contemporary occasions. For Southey, the army's role in the Peninsular War was one such event. He, as Poet Laureate, was therefore the best person to commemorate it on behalf of his fellow Britons. As he wrote of his proposed new inscriptions, they were 'not exactly ex officio, yet I should not have thought of it had it not seemed a fit official undertaking' (CLRS, 2356).

It was possible, in addition, for Southey to make a direct link between the Poet Laureateship and recent happenings in the Iberian peninsula. He claimed to have been offered the post because the Prince Regent, in whose gift the appointment ultimately lay, approved of the "“good things”" he had written "“in favour of the Spaniards”" – presumably his work in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* (CLRS, 2305). Whether or not Southey's report was the truth, exaggeration or hearsay is irrelevant. What mattered was that he chose to believe it and, in the first months of his Laureateship, turned to the Peninsular War as a suitable subject for contemporary poetry and mapped out a 'series of inscriptions', 'triumphal for the battles won and fortresses taken, and monumental for the more distinguished persons who have fallen' (CLRS, 2345).

Southey's choice of genre was telling. It signalled the seriousness of his endeavour and linked back to his early poetic career. The inscription was he claimed, the style of writing 'to which I am more inclined than to any other' (CLRS, 2356). He had discovered the form as a young writer and throughout the 1790s consistently used it as a vehicle for realising the potent connections between place and history in England and in Europe (Pratt, 2010). The territories thus appropriated included Spain, where, in 1795, Southey suggested that a cautionary inscription about the conquistador Pizarro be carved onto a monument at the latter's birthplace, Trujillo:

Pizarro here was born: a greater name  
The list of Glory boasts not. Toil and Want,  
And Danger, never from his course deterred  
This daring soldier: many a fight he won,  
He slaughter'd thousands, he subdued a rich  
And ample realm; such were PIZARRO'S deeds,  
And Wealth, and Power, and Fame were his rewards  
Among mankind. There is another World.  
Oh Reader! if you earn your daily bread  
By daily labour, if your lot be low,

Be hard and wretched, thank the gracious GOD

Who made you, that you are not such as he! (*RSPW*, V, 225)

Whilst 'Pizarro' was for a monument that did not actually exist, the significance of Southey's endeavours and ambitions in writing this and his other early career inscriptions should not be underestimated. As his contemporaries acknowledged, these poems erected imaginary monuments 'to perpetuate the memory of any remarkable event, or deed', cherished patriots, upbraided tyrants and commemorated the spots 'on which any memorable struggle for the welfare, or liberty of mankind had occurred' and by so doing provided 'powerful incentives to virtue, to patriotism, to intellectual perfection' (Drake, 81-2). Southey thus revitalised – and, equally important, was acknowledged as revitalising – the inscription at a period of national and international crisis.

Southey composed no inscriptions between 1799 and 1813. However, he retained an awareness of the genre's distinctive usefulness. It was, he observed in 1812, 'peculiarly adapted for conveying precepts ... <which> are likely to be impressed upon the memory' (*CLRS*, 2148). By the end of 1813, Southey had realised that the inscription's ability to memorialise key events and people and to impress onto readers the lessons they taught, worked as well for the present as it did for the past. This realisation was propelled by his becoming Poet Laureate and by his fervent belief in the exemplary (and cautionary) nature of the Peninsular War. What Southey saw as both a struggle between good and evil and a conflict of permanent importance for the history of mankind, needed to be memorialised. The inscription was the ideal form in which to achieve this.

Southey's Peninsular War sequence was never finished and no complete plan for it survives, if, indeed, one ever existed. It has to be reconstructed from his correspondence and from the poems that were written. Southey's idea was to cover the entire span of the conflict, 'beginning at Vimeiro & ending at the Pyrenees' and to write thirty inscriptions, thus covering 'every battle' and 'all the distinguished officers who fell' (*CLRS*, 2341, 2587). However, his initial plans for speedy publication came to nothing. Instead, Southey worked on the poems intermittently, writing six in early 1814, another ten in 1815, one more in 1816-17, a final poem in 1824 and two verse fragments. He also had ideas for at least two further inscriptions – on Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Taylor, a fellow ex-pupil of Westminster School who had died at Vimeiro, and Major William Nicholas, mortally wounded at Badajoz in 1812 – but

nothing came of these (*CLRS*, 3064, 2592). During this long gestation the format in which the poems would appear before the public shifted. In 1815, during Napoleon's Hundred Days, Southey considered framing them with 'an Ode to the British people: & perhaps one to Buonaparte himself' (*CLRS*, 2585). He also entered into negotiations with Longman, who, hoping to cash in on a topical and potentially popular subject, proposed 'a pocket size' volume, with the notes that Southey planned to accompany the inscriptions 'to be extended to Biographical memoirs' (*CLRS*, 2597). By 1818 Southey's plan was 'not to be in any hurry' with the inscriptions, 'but to correct them at leisure, as severely as possible,' and to 'print them after' the publication of his *History of the Peninsular War*, 'as an accompaniment in the same form' (*CLRS*, 3064). The *History* appeared in three volumes in 1823-32 and was partly based on Southey's writings for the *Edinburgh Annual Register*. However, nothing came of the plans to link it to Southey's peninsular inscriptions. Instead, three of the poems appeared in literary annuals between 1826-7, and in 1837-8 these were collected together and published with the further fifteen completed ones in the final authorised edition of Southey's poetical works (*LPW*, I, 211-53; *PW*, III, 122-56). They were not accompanied by any notes or by any explanation of their origin and they were not typographically distinguished as a separate, distinctive group from the rest of Southey's inscriptions. All Southey said of them in his 'Preface' was that they were 'part of a series which I once hoped to have completed' (*PW*, III, [xi]). The two incomplete poems, 'When B. moved with all his power' and 'Col. Cameron', remained in manuscript and were first published in the 2012 edition of Southey's *Later Poetical Works* (*LPW*, I, 252-3).

The majority of Southey's Peninsular War inscriptions map onto the events he had covered in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* (i.e. they cover the war up to the end of 1811). Only two deal with slightly later events from mid-January 1812: 'For the Walls of Ciudad Rodrigo' and 'To the Memory of Major General Mackinnon' (*LPW*, I, 245-51). Twelve of the completed poems dealt with battles and six with individuals. Moreover, the themes of individual poems within the series were, with a few exceptions, very similar, and reflected the views of the peninsular conflict that Southey had come to by the time he wrote his final *Edinburgh Annual Register* volume in 1812-13. There was no mention of the Spanish guerrillas or their leaders and the whole idea of a popular uprising that Southey had advocated in the first volume of the *Register* was eschewed in favour of a celebration of the feats of British

arms. Indeed, only one Spaniard (General Joaquin Blake y Joyes) was mentioned at all and events in the Spanish resistance to Napoleon that Southey had hymned in the *Register*, notably the siege of Zaragoza, were side-lined (*LPW*, I, 243).

Instead, Southey's inscriptions made it clear that the French had only been defeated by British endeavours. He praised the generalship of Wellington in a number of the poems (*LPW*, I, 223, 224, 230) and emphasised that British victories were the result of the army's ability to match the French forces with 'equal skill' and to surpass them with 'superior courage' (*LPW*, I, 232). Southey even found something positive to say about those commanders, notably Sir John Moore, whose abilities and achievements he had doubted in the *Register* (*EAR*, 1809, 479; *LPW*, I, 225-6). Southey justified the death and destruction wreaked on the French forces as retribution both for the large-scale war crimes committed by French generals and their troops (*LPW*, I, 234, 237-9) and for the injustice of the French invasion of Portugal and Spain (*LPW*, I, 228-30).

Southey's visceral dislike of Bonaparte and the French army were present throughout the poems and many celebrated the liberation of the Spanish and Portuguese people from their presence (*LPW*, I, 224). However, while Southey was convinced of the eternal importance of defeating France, the wider context of the inscriptions was actually rather uncertain. The poems only dealt with the military conflict, thus leaving out the political situation in Spain that had received so much attention from Southey in the *Edinburgh Annual Register*. This meant he did not have to engage with the fact that by 1814-15 his forebodings about Spain's future government had been realised and the Constitution of 1812 had been abolished by the restored Ferdinand VII, who had re-imposed royal absolutism and Catholic authority, including the Inquisition. This awkward fact left it much more unclear whether 'freedom' had actually been at stake in the peninsular conflict. Although Southey avoided this problem in his inscriptions, he was forced to wrestle with it in another of his Laureate poems, *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816). The latter could only retain its optimism about world events by concluding all would come right in the long term (including in Spain) under the guiding hand of Providence:

And in the scale of nations, if the ways  
Of Providence mysterious we may call,  
Yet rightly viewed, all history doth impart  
Comfort and hope and strength to the believing heart.

For through the lapse of ages may the course  
Of moral good progressive still be seen,  
Though mournful dynasties of Fraud and Force,  
Dark Vice, and purblind ignorance intervene;  
Empires and nations rise, decay and fall,  
But still the Good survives and perseveres thro all. (*LPW*, III, 355-6).

This difficult wider context may help to explain why the Peninsular War inscriptions were never completed, despite the importance that Southey attached to the project. Timing was also another key factor. By not finishing and publishing them in 1814-15, Southey had missed the most opportune moment for finding an audience. The Battle of Waterloo in 1815 overshadowed the part played by the conflict in Iberia in the final defeat of Napoleon and the inscriptions' topicality started to fade – a situation Southey himself implicitly acknowledged by turning his attention in late 1815 from the inscriptions to *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816). One of the problems inherent in Southey's turn to the contemporary was that of needing to keep up-to-date in order to capture and capitalise on public interest. Southey's Peninsular War inscriptions failed to do this. They remained an unfinished monument to the conflict. In that respect they were akin to the great national monuments to Waterloo and Trafalgar that Parliament approved on 29 June 1815 and 5 February 1816 respectively, but which never materialised (Stamp).

The poems' 'unfinishedness' may have another aspect, though. Southey's aim was to write triumphal poems to commemorate 'the battles won' and monumental ones 'for the most distinguished persons' who fell in the conflict (*CLRS*, 2345). It was an interesting, even odd, choice, because both battles and heroes potentially presented him with a problem. Southey believed that poetry was unsuited to the task of describing modern warfare, omitting battle scenes from *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816) on the grounds that 'it would be just as possible to make a plum pudding of [the poem] ... , – for battles are as unfit for poetry as they are for puddings' (*CLRS*, 2688). This aversion ensured that none of his inscriptions devoted to individual peninsular engagements actually dealt with the details of the clash between opposing forces – a constraint that may have hampered his ability to inject variety into the poems. Moreover, Southey was never entirely at ease when writing wholly in

praise of 'great men' of his own time. His biography of Horatio Nelson, for example, was critical of the latter's affair with Emma Hamilton and conduct in Naples, particularly the execution of Francesco Caracciolo (Southey, *Nelson*, II, 46-52). This unease extended to poetry. Southey took considerable efforts in his Laureate poems not to heap unctuous praise on the Prince Regent, for instance, thus making his official verse much more difficult to compose than it might have been; and his Odes in 1814 addressed to Alexander I of Russia and Frederick William III of Prussia were constrained by his determination only to mete out 'strictly appropriate' praise (*LPW*, III, 47-51; *CLRS*, 2438). The same concern over exactly who should be singled out for notice can be seen in the two Peninsular War inscriptions that broke away from Southey's plans to celebrate 'the more distinguished persons who have fallen' and instead centred on less illustrious combatants (*CLRS*: 2345). 'A Soldier's Epitaph' purported to be spoken by Ensign Thomas, a fifteen year-old boy-soldier killed at Albuera. The incomplete 'When B. moved with all his power' went further and focussed on the 'poor sixteen' unnamed British soldiers murdered by the French (*LPW*, I, 218-20, 252-3). In so doing it recalled the ordinary soldiers of 'unrecorded name' commemorated in Southey's *Joan of Arc* (1796), and thus offered surprising links between both contemporary and medieval European warfare and the Poet Laureate and the radical poet of the 1790s (*RSPW*, I, 104). Such long-standing reservations about portraying battles and praising only famous men, about what and whom to write about, may, then, have made the Peninsular War inscriptions difficult to finish.

Despite his failure to complete the thirty planned Peninsular War inscriptions, Southey clearly assigned considerable significance to his endeavours. The poems, even in their incomplete state, argue for the crucial importance of the fight against Napoleon, a case he had already made in the pages of the *Edinburgh Annual Register* and was to continue to make in his *History of the Peninsular War*. As 'National Inscriptions' (*CLRS*, 2341) on a national subject (the 'British Army') they are evidence of the seriousness with which Southey regarded his mission as Poet Laureate. They show his determination to use the post to speak what he saw as the truth and to educate the nation at a time of unprecedented need for the nation to be educated. Southey's attempts to reformulate the Poet Laureateship and to promote himself as a voice for the nation set him at war with many of his contemporaries, radicals and conservatives alike, who recognised the potential significance of, but were also deeply



concerned by, what he was doing (*LPW*, III, 8-9, 228-31, 380-4). His inscriptions on the peninsular campaign were intended to take part in that cultural battle. By providing a version of the conflict in Spain and Portugal that reminded readers of the key role of the British army, they were planned to show in its 'proper light' the character of that 'incarnate spirit of Evil' (Napoleon), 'his Marshalls & his soldiers' and thus promote Southey's larger argument for the justice of the war against France (*CLRS*, 2588). Southey's inability to finish the poems in time – to adapt to the demands of writing on contemporary events and to seize the *now* – meant that ultimately the inscriptions became the poetic equivalent of non-combatants. Born out of and into Romantic conflicts – national and cultural – they remained unpublished until the battles that they commemorated and engaged in had themselves become part of history. That, however, should not overshadow the significance of what was Southey's major poetic project during a key point in his career. The peninsular inscriptions link the radical poet of the 1790s with the complex conservative of the 1810s. They also, when read alongside his writings on contemporary Spain and Portugal for the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, connect the poet to the author of prose and thus bring together seemingly disparate periods and areas of Southey's own writing life.

As his writings (poems, essays, travelogues and letters) demonstrate, Southey's response to contemporary Spain was, from his first visit in 1795-6 onwards, a very personal one. In attempting to elaborate that reaction in prose and in poetry he was increasingly to encounter considerable difficulties, culminating in the incomplete Peninsular War inscriptions. Yet to view his 'take' on Iberia purely in terms of, for example, Wordsworthian autobiography or Coleridgean failure to finish would be to miss its wider significance. Spain was, for Southey, never just Spain. It did not exist in isolation, any more than Southey regarded himself as shut off from society in his Lake District home. Instead, as his writings for the *Edinburgh Annual Register* and his 'Inscriptions Triumphal and Sepulchral Recording the Acts of the British Army in Spain and Portugal' show, modern Iberia provided a vehicle via which Southey could both offer up polemical accounts of the rights and wrongs of Europe, including Britain, and vigorously assert his own right to comment publicly on those same contemporary events. They provided compelling evidence that Spain could not be ignored as a backwater, but rather that it was a site of considerable importance for

British readers and of considerable value to ambitious British writers. By so doing, Southey's poetry and prose performed an inestimable service both for Romantic and later readers, authors and critics.

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<sup>1</sup> The inscriptions were published in full for the first time in Pratt, Lynda, Packer, Ian and Bolton, Carol (eds). *Robert Southey: Later Poetical Works, 1811-1838*, vol. I. Pickering & Chatto, 2012, pp. 211-53; and in part in Coletes Blanco, Augustin, and Laspra Rodriguez, Alicia (eds). *Libertad frente a Tirania: Poesía inglesa de la Guerra de la Independencia (1808-1814)*. Antología bilingüe, Fundacion Dos de Mayo, 2013.

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<sup>2</sup> *European Magazine*, vol. 65, Jan. 1814, p. 77