

THE PICKERING MASTERS

Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793–1810

Thalaba the Destroyer

Edited by
Tim Fulford



ROUTLEDGE


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Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793–1810

General Editor:

Lynda Pratt

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Volume 1: *Joan of Arc*, ed. Lynda Pratt

Volume 2: *Madoc*, ed. Lynda Pratt

Volume 3: *Thalaba the Destroyer*, ed. Tim Fulford

Volume 4: *The Curse of Kehama*, ed. Daniel Sanjiv Roberts

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Volume 3

Thalaba the Destroyer

Edited by
Tim Fulford

with the assistance of
Daniel E. White and Carol Bolton

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INTRODUCTION

Origins: A Male Joan Of Arc

Writing to his friend William Taylor in 1805, Southey made a comment that reveals much about the origin of the poem that would, in 1801, be published as *Thalaba the Destroyer*. ‘There is’, he wrote, ‘that moral mannerism which you have detected; Thalaba is a male Joan of Arc’ (Robberds, Vol. II, p. 82). The young poet who had published *Joan of Arc* (1796) had incautiously displayed, in its Preface, his belief that the ancient genre of the epic was passé and that he was destined to replace it with a new kind of long poem. *Joan*, the result, would reform the epic by incorporating more varied forms of metre, new subject-matter and a topical hero, a female hero derived from modern history, a hero, moreover, from Britain’s enemy in war, France.

The hostile reaction that *Joan* received from readers who disliked its pretensions and detested its politics did not deter Southey from again so explicitly attacking an ancient genre, though he was more careful how he allegorised contemporary politics. And he did not abandon his central interest, revealed throughout *Joan* and, indeed, in the medieval Welsh ‘epic’ that followed it, *Madoc*, in a military leader whose moral authority stems from his or her unswerving conviction that he acts out the will of an austere God. It was this interest that he developed, in an Islamic context, in *Thalaba*. Like Joan, the young hero sacrifices himself, believing it his divinely-appointed mission to destroy the idolatrous enemies of his religion. Unlike Joan, however, the youth is Eastern, an Arabian Muslim; his opponents, moreover, are not his fellow religionists as were hers, nor are they even mortal. They are a crew of sorcerers and witches. Southey, in other words, had shifted the stage of his moral drama from Europe, with Europe’s relevance to contemporary Anglo-French enmity, to medieval Arabia. He had displaced the concerns of his French revolutionary years eastwards: *Thalaba* is the destination of his poetic journey from historical realism to Oriental romance. Like the *Arabian Nights*, Southey’s poem is romantic in the eighteenth-century sense that it dramatizes a world in which the evidence of our senses is constantly superseded, a world where the supernatural intervenes in the natural as a matter of course. And yet it is markedly different in tone from the *Arabian Nights*: Southey’s Arabia is not only romantic, it is also a strange blend of the spectacularly fictional with the factual – a mythological world as seen by

someone who believes in that myth. As Taylor put it in a letter to Southey of September 1798, ‘it remained for you to assert a claim to a certain wildness of fancy – to what shall I call it? – to mythological imagination’ (Robberds, Vol. I, p. 227). Southey’s ‘mythological imagination’ presented as a total reality, as a matter of fact to which there is no alternative, the world as seen by superstitious eyes. The sorcerers and witches are apparently real: their ability to overcome time and space is taken for granted. Milton and Spenser had treated supernatural characters with realism in their great epics, of course, but they had done so in the framework of classical mythology and Christian scripture. Southey, radically, asked readers to take the same degree of moral interest in the spells and charms of Oriental stories as they were used to taking in Satan and Abdiel. And to further dismay traditionalist readers, Southey’s hero, whom they were supposed to admire because he destroyed superstition and idolatry, did so in the cause of a religion they were used to regarding as the enemy of Christianity – Islam. To his critics this was not only new but wrong, an aesthetic and moral error because it turned the world of the epic poem into the world as seen through the superstitious eyes of Orientals, a world then purged by a hero from an erroneous faith.

As a radical opposed to the influence on society of established churches (both Anglican and, when he lived in Portugal, Catholic), Southey saw superstition as a product of the ignorance in which the self-serving clergy kept the people. He condemned it. But as a poet he was obsessed by investigating its power and portraying its effects. In *Joan* and *Madoc* he depicted its deleterious social effects in keeping the people in willing thrall to their priests. In *Thalaba*, he condemned superstition yet simultaneously made his story depend on readers believing in the supernatural power of sorcerers and demons. Unlike the *Arabian Nights*, but like *Joan*, *Thalaba*’s form, diction and metre insist, despite the explicit condemnations Southey included, on the moral gravity of the tale’s supernatural events and on its seriousness as a high cultural form. The result is an odd, and often uneasy, hybrid, a moralising epic in the dress of a romantic entertainment.

Joan was one origin of the poem. What pushed Southey eastwards to his Arabian subject-matter, however, was his admiration of several recent Orientalist works in which conflict between good and evil took supernatural form. In the background was William Beckford’s *Vathek*, the 1786 Gothic tale in which the Arabian hero journeys down into the underworld caverns of Eblis to meet, as *Thalaba* does, his death. Southey took Beckford as his model, writing to Taylor that ‘the poem compares more fairly with *Vathek* than with any existing work, and I think may stand by its side for invention’ (Robberds, Vol. I, p. 371). This comment suggests that Southey valued Beckford’s Oriental tale for the variety of new motifs it contained, and it is certainly true that *Thalaba* matches it in gruesome Gothic details, often derived, like Beckford’s, from the author’s research into the folk customs of Eastern Europe and the Orient. Many of these customs are described in the copious notes that Southey affixed to his text, in conscious emulation of the notes appended to *Vathek* by Henley. *Thalaba* became, as a result, the first of a new, Romantic, genre, an updated Oriental tale, now in verse

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and with a weighty apparatus of factual footnotes to convince the reader of its historical veracity. *Queen Mab* (1813) and *Lalla Rookh* (1817) were to follow suit.

Southey departed from Beckford in one respect. His hero, the male Joan, remained untempted by evil. Southey had no interest in portraying the corrupting allure of evil, or in depicting the area in which moral opposites blur into ambiguity, guilt, and complicity. For this reason he was a less true successor to Beckford than was Byron, although Byron could not have written his Oriental romances without the example of *Thalaba* to imitate and depart from. Southey was, however, a worthy developer of a poet who later became his friend, Walter Savage Landor. It was Landor's 1796 poem *Gebir* that impressed Southey, not least because it resembled his own *Madoc* and thereby reassured him that his own innovations were part of a new radical wave. Landor's eponymous hero, like Madoc, comes from a corrupt, hierarchical old world – an Iberia that Southey was not alone in reading as an allegory of William Pitt's repressive Britain.¹ Frustrated at home, Gebir sails not west, as Madoc does, but east, invading an Egypt that displays many of the features Southey went on to make characteristic of the Orient in *Thalaba*. These include a tyrannical court that relies on witchcraft to maintain its power. Landor's witch Myrthyr clearly inspired Southey's demon Khawla: both reveal the poets' like of Gothic imagery and dislike of powerful women. The two demonic females act as synecdoches of a despotic Orient dominated by deceit. Indeed, their association with bodily corruption – the rotting flesh they procure for their spells – figures the corruption of the state (and other similar states by implication). Southey would later view the body of the self-styled prophetess Joanna Southcott, swollen by her phantom pregnancy with Shiloh, the returning saviour, as a sign of the decay of the British body politic. His misogynistic Orient prepared him for such statements, and was itself derived from Landor's portrayal of the evil of feminised government.

It was not just its witch that made *Gebir* a seminal text in the genesis of *Thalaba*. Southey mined Landor's work for motifs, including a journey to the underworld to encounter the confined spirits of former rulers, a meeting amid the broken buildings of a ruined city, a pastoral love affair with a lowly peasant girl and the death of one of the protagonists at their own wedding. Above all, Southey took Landor's potent blend of Miltonic Latinisms and Gothic images as licence to combine his own predilection for these traits in an Eastern setting that was clearly an allegory of politics and religion at home. It helped that Landor had attained what Southey desired for himself – the vatic role of a poet who figured forth the state of the nations and predicted their future. No sooner had Landor published *Gebir* than it seemed to come true, as Napoleon invaded Egypt, seemingly the very Corsican liberator that the poet had foreseen. In Southey's eyes, Landor had indeed renewed the Miltonic epic for a new age; he read *Gebir* again and again as he composed *Thalaba*, praised it highly in *The Critical Review* and told Joseph Cottle that it contained 'some of most exquisite poetry in the language' (*L&C*, Vol. II, p. 24).

If it was Beckford and Landor who persuaded Southey of the contemporary power of the narrative of the East, it was an older-style Oriental tale that gave him the idea he would work out in his plot. As he himself recorded in his Preface, he came upon a continuation of the Arabian Nights stories (*La Suite des Mille et Une Nuits, Contes Arabes*, translated into English by Robert Heron as *Arabian Tales, or, A Continuation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1792)). In this collection of Oriental tales, he found the scenario of the Dom Daniel cavern, in which dwelt the evil sorcerer Maugraby, chief of a ‘school of magic whose rulers tyrannize over all the wicked spirits that desolate the earth’.² This became the basis for *Thalaba*, – as is revealed by the fact that Southey titled his work-in-progress ‘the Dom Daniel’ until late October 1799, when the first five books were already complete. As was the case with *Vathek*, it was the orientalisation of the Miltonic plot that attracted him. In the tale of the Dom Daniel he saw a way in which the ancient conflict of evil with good could be rewritten with a dramatis personae that had about it, on the one hand, the sublimity that stems from importance in a mythological tradition (albeit an Oriental one) and on the other (at least for Western readers), novelty. Milton had his hell and Satan; Southey his Dom Daniel and Mohareb. Milton, of course, had the advantage that his readers were steeped in the biblical narrative, and *believed* it true. Southey’s knew little of the Dom Daniel, and believed less – but he hoped to educate them.

His hopes were naïve. An epic romance depends on a degree of familiarity and acceptance of its materials. It is no place for giving a basic course in complicated foreign traditions. Worse still, the tale of Maugraby was not genuinely Oriental, for the *La Suite des Mille et Une Nuits* was a French faux-Arabian collection. Speaking no eastern language, knowing no Orientalist scholars, Southey developed *Thalaba* as an imitation of ‘Oriental’ tales that were already imitations made in Europe. His poem, that is to say, grew from western fantasies about the East and had at its root the desire to use the Orient as an exotic other – a stage on which the dilemmas produced in the west could be played out.

As if in acknowledgement that his sources were European fictions, Southey, as he began writing the verse that became *Thalaba*, commenced collecting factual prose about the East. In other words, he had no pre-existing deep learning about the Orient (either about its societies or its religions) but undertook a crash course, even as he composed the poem, in an effort to give himself both plot materials and local colour. In September 1799 he was ‘gutting’ Exeter libraries for books; he also read renaissance texts in Hereford cathedral and had friends send him (western) commentaries on the Koran as he travelled around the West Country. This course of reading emerged, as Southey always meant it to, as notes to the published poem, allowing readers to undertake a shortened version of the course Southey himself had sat and assuring them that the fanciful events of the verse had a basis in factual prose (or, conversely, that if the events were too fanciful this was because Orientals shared a credulity that he, and the sober western commentators he quoted, did not). In this latter case, Southey’s notes tended to undermine faith in his story, producing a tension that has puzzled readers ever

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since. It is, however, a genuine tension, an ambivalence stemming from Southey's own uneasy mixture of admiration and distaste for the supernatural narratives he assiduously incorporated.

Tension also stemmed from Southey's own tacit participation in a newer European interest in the East than that which made the *Arabian Nights Tales* and their imitations so fashionable. This newer interest was bound up with the expansion of European colonialism: as Britain acquired more territory in India it began to collect and classify information about the history and beliefs of the people it governed, both in order to govern them more efficiently and because many of the governors developed a profound curiosity about the culture they ruled. None more so than Sir William 'Persian' Jones, whose learned commentaries on middle eastern poetry Southey cited as sources both for the imagery of his poem and for its treatment of history.³ Citing other contemporary scholars on the region, Southey deliberately placed his poem as an example of the modern enquiry into the East – an enquiry frequently born of admiration but nevertheless one instituted in the wake of empire.

The French attempted a still more systematic enquiry in the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and while most of the vast trawl of facts and artefacts that the savants brought back to Europe arrived too late for *Thalaba*, Southey was able to rely on the same texts that informed the savants' enquiries. One of these was Constantin Volney's *Les Ruines* (1791), which Southey quoted extensively in his notes. Volney's text combined his firsthand impressions of the ruins and the customs he witnessed in Syria and Egypt with a Rousseauvian argument that organised religion assisted tyrannical monarchs in subduing the people. In the remains of ancient civilisations, Volney saw the traces of self-aggrandisement and imposition by kings and priests. The East, that is to say, taught the West an anti-clerical republican lesson, revealing, in its broken statues, the monstrosity and futility of despotism. Southey was to take exactly this attitude in Book I of the poem:

Here, frequent in the walks
The marble statue stood
Of heroes and of chiefs,
The trees and flowers remain
By nature's care perpetuate and self-sown.
The marble statues long have lost all trace
Of heroes and of chiefs,
Huge shapeless stones they lie
O'er-grown with many a flower. (ll. 270–8)

Southey's description, in turn, prompted Shelley's 'Ozymandias'.

Thalaba did not only originate in Southey's ambivalent response to aspects of eighteenth-century Orientalism. His eastern poem owed much to his continuing interest in the cultural forms of northern Europe. As early as 1794 Southey had become excited by the possibility that in the ancient folk poetry of the north he might find a model for a freer verse form than neo-classical tradition allowed the

writer of a heroic poem. His model, however, was not as might be expected, Macpherson's Ossian, but Dr Frank Sayers (1763–1817). Southey recorded his admiration for Sayers's *Poems, Containing Sketches of Northern Mythology* (London, 1792) in a letter of 24 January 1794, to Horace Walpole Bedford (NL, Vol. I, p. 45). What he admired was Sayers's abandonment of the neo-classical couplet. For Sayers, the heroic and the irregular could fit together and Southey concluded that the latter was a token of the heroic in the kind of rustic, oral society that he wished to uphold as a corrective to the despotic society in which he lived. Like his friends Coleridge and Wordsworth, whose *Lyrical Ballads* echo in *Thalaba*, Southey was developing, for reasons of social and moral reform, the trend for northern, rural verse forms that Hugh Blair, Thomas Percy and Robert Lowth had helped establish.⁴ Unlike the Lyrical Balladeers, however, he needed a form – or several forms – in which he could write a long heroic narrative. Sayers's irregular lines helped him find one, and he was convinced that it was both new and groundbreaking, telling Cottle 'from the success of its metre, [*Thalaba*'s] publication may probably make an era in the history of English poetry' (letter of 12 October 1799).⁵

So too did another northern source: Gottfried August Bürger's 'Lenore', a supernatural ballad featuring a thrilling chase narrated in fast-moving verse. Southey encountered it after its 1796 translation in the *Monthly Magazine*. At first, he assumed it had been rendered into English by Sayers, only to discover that the translator was Sayers's friend, the hitherto-unknown William Taylor. The poem had an enormous impact on Southey, who later wrote to Taylor 'You taught me to write English by what you said of Bürger's language and by what I felt from your translations, – one of the eras in my intellectual history ...' (Robberds, Vol. I, p. 453). He visited Taylor and Sayers in May 1798, and by the autumn he had also begun to write a ballad in the 'Lenore' style himself – contrasting it with Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', which he called 'a Dutch attempt at German sublimity'.⁶ Southey's ballad, 'The Old Woman of Berkeley', features in the notes to *Thalaba* and its style – Southey's *English* attempt at German sublimity – is echoed by the last three books of *Thalaba* itself. Quick-moving narrative, rhetorical questions, repetitions of dialogue all derive from the German school as rendered by Sayers and Taylor: so does the subject-matter, for Thalaba pursues his goal across a snowy landscape by sleigh, following in Bürger's tracks. Southey, however, eschews the archaisms that he disliked in the 'Ancient Mariner' and omits any exploration of the hero's psyche: in the Southeyan ballad-style the whole narrative reads as if told by a witness who believes its supernatural events utterly. There is no frame narrative, no wedding guest to provoke readers into questions about the subjectivity of such belief.

Composition

By April 1799, Southey, still composing *Madoc*, had nevertheless started actively to plan *Thalaba*. He declared that he was taking Taylor's advice that his 'Dom Daniel' poem should be written in stanzas. By July, he had decided he would write it irregularly, without rhyme, and on the thirteenth of that month, the day after finishing his Welsh epic, he set to work. Southey was immensely industrious and single-minded, and he continued the poem through personal difficulties that would have led many to lay it aside. But to begin with, all went swimmingly, and by the nineteenth he was tackling the second book, having already concluded the description of the Domdaniel sorcerers and of the fallen city of Irem that occupies the first. Even as he wrote, he was mining travel narratives for information: the early books show the impression of Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels Through Arabia* (1792) and of older narratives, including Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, And Discoveries Of The English Nations* (1598–1600) and Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage* (1614), from which he had copied passages the year before in Hereford.

By August Southey was on a pilgrimage of his own, having left the house of his friend Charles Danvers in Bristol (where he'd begun the poem) for Minehead, Nether Stowey and an attempted reconciliation with Coleridge, who had recently returned from Germany and was keen to renew old ties. After an exchange of letters the two met and by the twentieth Southey was, as in the Bristol days of 1795, writing at the same desk as his old friend. What he was writing was not only *Thalaba* but several joint works, including the comic political ballad 'The Devil's Thoughts' and 'Mohammed' (see Volume 5 of this edition). The latter of these, especially, grew out of the same material Southey was using for *Thalaba* – George Sale's translation of the Koran (1734), as well as D'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697). An epic on the prophet's life, it was to have employed the hexameters that Taylor admired in the German poets. It fell foul of Coleridge's indolence and Southey's scepticism about whether Mohammed himself believed his own claims. An epic on a male Joan of Arc, who believed his own inspiration even if others did not, Southey was prepared to write. One on an imposter, who pretended to an inspiration he did not feel, he was not.

And so the failure with 'Mohammed' clarified the direction of the Islamic poem Southey did write. It also clarified Coleridge's priorities: not for him a long historical narrative poem; instead, influenced by the extracts from travel narratives made available to him by Southey's *Commonplace Book* and by the early books of *Thalaba* itself, Coleridge wrote 'Kubla Khan'.⁷ His great lyric, as Elisabeth Schneider and Warren U. Ober have shown, is commonly misdated.⁸ He did not, as he himself later claimed, write it in 1798 but in the following year, when Southey introduced him to European stories about the artificial paradises of Aloadin and of Kublai Khan, and when, in August, the two poets walked together, past Porlock and Lynton, towards Coleridge's birthplace in Devon. It

must have been on this trip that Coleridge, indisposed, retired to a farmhouse and composed his fragment – his gnomic response to Southey's sources, and an interiorisation of Southey's poem of external action.

Into September, Southey and Coleridge stayed together with their families in Ottery St Mary and then in Exeter. When Coleridge departed, Southey stayed on, 'gutting' libraries for notes and materials for *Thalaba*. Pleasant though the stay was, it did not obscure the fact that Southey had, at this time, no home to call his own. *Thalaba*'s wanderings within the poem reflect the author's own: he intended to move into a cottage in Burton, near Christchurch in Hampshire, but when it was ready in October arrival simply precipitated a breakdown. A year of working intensely on poems and editions, of publishing piece after piece to meet his bills, left Southey unable to face any more mental effort. Though by 23 October he had finished Book IV, November saw him prostrate with 'nervous fever'. He moved back to Bristol at the start of December for treatment by Thomas Beddoes and Humphry Davy with the newly-isolated gas, nitrus oxide.

The treatment saw an improvement, signalled by a returning enthusiasm for out of the way folklore and the poetic use he might make of it. He planned stories about vampires, and the materials he gathered emerged as notes to Book VIII of *Thalaba*. And he came to a significant decision that altered the status of the poem in his mind: he would go abroad for his health. *Thalaba*, because as an exotic Oriental tale it was the most likely of his pieces to be popular, would pay for the trip. Coleridge was to arrange publication, perhaps with Longman in London, and the poem must, therefore, be substantial. By 27 January 1800 he had decided that it must reach twelve books – 'two more than my first plan'.⁹ He had already written eight.

With returning industry, Southey prepared for his voyage, fixing on Portugal, where he had travelled in 1796 and where his uncle, Herbert Hill, could smooth his way. He put *Thalaba* aside on 29 January and did not take it up again until April, when he departed for Lisbon. He told Coleridge he would take *Lyrical Ballads* and *Gebir* with him: these by-now familiar works would be his touchstones as he tried to complete a modern work that would transfer the virtues of rustic life onto the grand historical stage. By mid-April, the arrangements were complete: Southey sent a transcript of Books I to VIII of the poem to Charles Watkin Williams Wynn and, on the nineteenth, travelled with his wife Edith to Falmouth to take passage to Lisbon. While waiting there, he began Book IX, reading *Gebir* and observing sea-anemones on the beach. On board ship, he redrafted his plan for the poem's conclusion and continued writing. By 28 May, Book IX was finished in Lisbon and, on 15 June, Book X. Southey had a tremendous determination to complete what he had begun, and writing the poem had become the laborious mainstay of an uncertain and peripatetic existence.

Portugal influenced *Thalaba* because Southey deepened there his fascinated hatred of the appeal that Catholicism (especially southern European Catholicism) made to the senses. His journals record his disgust at the processions, relics and fake miracles by which the priests encouraged the faith of the common

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people.¹⁰ A long passage at the end of Book IX of the poem, dropped after the first edition, described such a procession, its Iberian setting simply transferred to the Orient (Book IX, ll. 560–662). The procession is witnessed by the imprisoned Thalaba, standing in for the horrified Southey – a foreigner watching with revulsion the superstitious rites of a sensual religion and despotic state. At this point of the poem the coincidence of Protestant poet and Muslim hero is especially close: both are monotheist, both abhor idolatrous representations of a God who communicates to them directly. Both relate such representations to a culture of cruelty.

Having finished Book IX, Southey pressed ahead. Book X was finished by mid-June and on 23 July he was able to write to Wynn that he had finished the whole poem, was now correcting it and would send Books IX–XII to join those he had left with Wynn before leaving England. Publication was a nearing prospect: his friend John Rickman was to negotiate with booksellers. First at Lisbon, then in retirement at Cintra from the infections of the city, Southey was living a productive and bookish life. But it was not to last, for the final two books gave him more difficulty than the entire rest of the poem. His letter to Wynn turned out to have been premature: he had not finished the whole poem, at least not to his satisfaction, and had to recast its conclusion twice before he arrived at the version that eventually saw print – a process not concluded until spring 1801, eight months later. A series of letters to friends in England explained, in part, what occurred. On 25 August he sounded a depressed note: ‘Thalaba has taken up too much of my time and I am eager to send it off, and wash my hands of all that could have been written in England: it is finished, and half ready for the press. I am polishing and polishing, and hewing it to pieces with surgeon severity. Yesterday I drew the pen across six hundred lines’ (*L&C*, Vol. II, p. 108). In October he wrote again to Wynn:

The four concluding books of Thalaba are transcribed for you and wait only an opportunity to embark for England. The conclusion of the eleventh and first half of the twelfth I have since rewritten – from the Simorg’s speech to the actual descent. I send you the lines as originally written, and will transmit the substituted ones by letter ... And now Thalaba is off my hands completely; corrected – transcribed – annotated – and ready to be shipped off to market. Rickman whom you saw at Bristol is my agent (Cabral, pp. 115–17).

This letter indicates that Wynn had still not been sent the last four books promised in July, and suggests that the rewritten versions of the last two were so recent that there had not yet been time to transcribe them so that they might replace the older versions now being transmitted. In effect, Wynn was getting a packet of verse already out of date. The new ending would come to him bit by bit in later letters. So it proved, and the packet of four books and the later letters arrived separately: they now form parts of two manuscripts in the National Library of

Wales (the packet catalogued as MS 1487A, the letters as MS 4819E: see below, pp. xxxii–xxxv for my discussion of the MSS versions of the poem).

Meanwhile, another transcription had been prepared for Southey's brother Thomas. Southey commented on this manuscript in a letter to his mother of 21 August 1800: 'tell him [Thomas] that Thalaba has monopolised me; that by the King George, in her next voyage (about three weeks hence), I send over his copy, together with that for the press' (*L&C*, Vol. II, p. 100). This manuscript, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, is close to that of the packet sent to Wynn: the final books appear in their original, unrevised, state, as Southey himself suggested in a letter of 6 November to Danvers (*NL*, Vol. I, p. 230).

Considerable effort had been made to transcribe the poem and send it to friends and family. Clearly, as late as autumn 1800, Southey was not expecting to make wholesale revision to the last books. Yet by October he had dropped his original ending and made a first attempt at revision. Another letter to Wynn (October 1800, Cabral, pp. 127–9) suggests that he did so in order to assuage his friends' doubts about the hero's inactivity, the narrative's reliance on unlikely contrivance, and the moral's obscurity:

The value of the tenth B[ook] does not appear till its close – that it turns upon an equivocation is no fault ... From the speech of the Simorg to the actual descent into the Domdaniel all is rewritten and the new lines may possibly reach you before the old ones. Those in the eleventh you will like – they excite that calm and unagitating expectation which is perhaps the pleasantest state of mind that poetry can occasion. In the 12th the object of the new lines was to connect the overthrow of the Domdaniel with some obvious good, and not let Thalaba work so wholly in obscurity. The other Books are all corrected, and in some of them passages of some length are inserted. Should you wish to see the copy designed for the Press it will be within your reach. Rickman is my agent with the booksellers and he lodges at 33 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, where a note from you may in five minutes reach him ... I have just room for the contents of Thalaba

The Extirpation.

The Incantation.

The Education.

The Conversation.

The Expiation.

The Preservation.

The Temptation.

The Peregrination.

The Salvation.

The Explanation.

The Navigation.

The Consummation.

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The manuscript sent to Rickman is not extant, and the Latinate book titles never appeared in print, but sufficient manuscripts have survived for us to trace the revision process through its stages, as Southey responded to his friends' criticism.

The copy lodged with Rickman may, if Southey's later recollection was correct, have been sent on to Bristol. He certainly gave that impression in 1837, writing:

A fair transcript was sent to England. Mr. Rickman, with whom I had fallen in at Christ Church in 1797, and whose friendship from that time I have ever accounted among the singular advantages and happinesses of my life, negociated for its publication with Messrs. Longman and Rees. It was printed at Bristol by Biggs and Cottle, and the task of correcting the press was undertaken for me by Davy and our common friend Danvers, under whose roof it had been begun.

If Rickman's copy did go to Danvers for the printers, then it was probably out of date by the time the presses began to work, for the revisions of autumn 1800 were superseded by further changes. Certainly, Southey was sending a copy of the last book, revised a second time, to Danvers in early 1801, admonishing his friend on 28 March 'You have not written, and I am rather anxious lest the new "Thalaba" book should not have reached you. I sent a copy to Wynn, to guard against the accident. Longman advertises it a *poetical* romance, – on the half-title you will take care to use the more proper word *metrical*' (Cabral, p. 157). Wynn did indeed receive a transcription of the final book as revised a second time, with instructions to send it on to Danvers if necessary. He did not, which suggests that the copy about which Southey wrote to Danvers did in fact reach Bristol safely.

In addition to the revised versions sent to Danvers and also, in letters, to Wynn a transcription of the whole poem now rests in the British Library. It is this manuscript that Southey describes in his 1838 Preface to *Thalaba* in his *Poetical Works*:

The copy which was made from the original draught, regularly as the poem proceeded, is still in my possession. The first corrections were made as they occurred in the process of transcribing, at which time the verses were tried upon my own ear, and had the advantage of being seen in a fair and remarkably legible handwriting. In this transcript the dates of time and place were noted, and things which would otherwise have been forgotten have thus been brought to my recollection. Herein also the alterations were inserted which the poem underwent before it was printed. They were very numerous. Much was pruned off, and more was ingrafted. I was not satisfied with the first part of the concluding book; it was therefore crossed out, and something substituted altogether different in design; but this substitution was so far from being fortunate, that it neither pleased my friends in England nor myself. I then made a third attempt, which succeeded to my own satisfaction and theirs.

Yet this third attempt is not quite the same as the text as printed: a few differences indicate that the now-lost manuscript from which Biggs and Cottle set up the type (that sent by Southey to Danvers) was slightly different from the version he kept in his own possession. Nevertheless, the British Library manuscript is the most complete, and the closest to the published poem, that remains. And because it contains not only the original cancelled drafts of the last two books, but also both the second and third drafts, it allows us to observe the stages of revision.

First, Southey cancelled a passage from Book V, in which Thalaba is tempted by a sophisticated spirit to give up his faith in Allah and take a manicheistic view of good and evil. Southey moved much of the passage to Book IX, and transferred it to Mohareb, thus sharpening the central conflict between the sorcerer and his hero as the denouement and resolution of the poem approached. In Book XI, he also strove to remove lines that diverted attention from Thalaba himself and from his incipient showdown with the Domdanielites. Essentially, this entailed removing additional companions on Thalaba's sleigh and boat journey towards the cavern. Ghostly boatmen and damsel disappeared, and with them went evidence that Southey, for all his denigration of Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', was indebted to it. These cancelled lines (see draft 2 in MSS Drafts, below, pp. 301–29) borrow quite clearly from the Lyrical Ballad:

Four boatmen plied the oars,
Another held the helm.
No word they spake, but where the ready youth
Stood on the shore they urged the little boat.
The gleam of the northern sky,
Fell on the faces of the oarmen strong,
Each was a corpse, with deathly lips that breathed,
And dull dead eyes that moved.
The helmsmans face was shadowed, but the light
Shone on his livid hand, & nails
Purple with stagnant blood. (BL Add. MS 47884)

Thalaba, itself an influence on 'Kubla Khan', was far more closely bound up with the innovations that Coleridge was introducing to English poetry than twentieth-century critics chose to remember.

But Southey abandoned his Coleridgean lines in Book XI. He cut them because his presentation of Thalaba's quest failed to arrive at a proper climax. In the text as originally written, the fight with the witch Khawla comes too soon and the hero is too dependent on the aid of his magic ring for his safety, making him passive and defeating Southey's moral purpose – since Thalaba is supposed to be destroying the power of evil magic and undoing superstitious belief, not relying on it. So too in Book XII, where Thalaba's triumph over evil relied too heavily for the taste of Southey's friends on unlikely tricks rather than his own deeds. Wynn and Grosvenor Charles Bedford disliked a passage in which the Koran acts as a talisman, its pages physically shielding the hero from his enemy's

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spear thrust: 'That moment at his breast a javelin stroke /Is driven, the Koran leaves received its point /His buckler of salvation. Yet again /Mohareb aims the blow' (draft 5, MSS Drafts, NLW MS 4817A). This seemed to endorse the very superstitions that *Thalaba* supposedly meant to destroy.

Other passages, meanwhile, showed Southey revelling in the bloodthirsty:

Then suddenly alarmed he stopt,
For, not stroke-distant, from the wall came out
A human arm, that held
The pointed dagger: stained with blood its blade
Returned no warning glitter to the light,
And the dark hand that held it lay concealed
In the kindred hue of darkness. Twas too near,
Too home a peril for the arrows aid.
Thalaba caught the wrist, & with the strength
Of hand, arm, shoulder, & the bodys weight
Firm pressing forward, bent it, till the bone
Snapt, & the fingers from their loosening grasp
Let fall the dagger (BL Add. MS 47884, ff. 257–8)

Faced by his friends' scepticism, Southey altered direction completely. His first attempt at revision (draft 4 in MSS Drafts, preserved in BL Add. MS 47884 as a cancelled draft and in NLW MS 4819E) contains a sub-Spenserian knightly tournament, described in archaic diction, in which *Thalaba* fights *Leoline*, once the champion of the virtuous damsel and her mother who ruled the land, now an enthralled servant of the evil sorcerer who has usurped the throne. This draft is notable only because it shows the enormous impact Coleridge's 'Christabel' made on Southey. It reads, in fact, as a prequel to Coleridge's unfinished poem, showing *Leoline* in his youth as a great warrior, and explaining his retreat to his lonely castle in the woods by creating a story about his shameful past. Clearly, Southey was trying to work through the mysterious relationship of innocence and guilt in Coleridge's poem, for he turns *Thalaba* into a Bard Bracy figure, who restores the proper relationship of damsel-daughter and knight, helping to free *Leoline* from the evil spell that has him fighting against the virtuous. It is significant that in Southey's conventional chivalric version, it is the knight and not the innocent damsel who is enchanted and guilty. Southey effectively rewrites Coleridge's troubling version of the chivalric tale with a more orthodox morality and more conventional understanding of gender and sexuality. The effect is to confirm *Thalaba* as a poem whose genesis was intimately bound up with the *Lyrical Ballads* – as a poem intended as a corrective to the moral ambivalence and psychological complicity that Coleridge kept discovering in the old genres of ballad and romance.

Southey knew he had been sidetracked. He dropped *Leoline*, the tournament, and the damsel who had lost her realm because they introduced new elements just as the poem approached resolution, thus displacing its hero and his quest to the margins. He knew too that the archaic diction he had adopted as he tried to

develop Coleridge's adaptation of Spenser was wooden. In an undated letter to Wynn transmitting a second revision of the last two books, he declared 'You will I know not be displeased at the total omission of the Queen & Leoline – a bungling piece of botch work at which my own conscience and taste revolted very soon' (NLW MS 4819E). So he pruned the new characters and kept his language on the path provided by Taylor's 'Lenore', leaving Walter Scott and Lord Byron to respond publicly to the strange possibilities that 'Christabel' offered the writer of romance.

By April 1801, the revision process was complete and the new lines sent – or on their way – to the press. Here is a summary of the process and its effect on the manuscripts of the poem:

Summer/autumn 1800. The original draft of the whole poem, transcribed in three MSS, one kept by Southey himself, now British Library Additional MS 47884, one sent to Wynn, now National Library of Wales MS 1487A, and one sent to Thomas Southey, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library LHMS MA 415. (These are described below in the section entitled MSS Drafts: the original drafts of Books XI and XII appear there as drafts 2 and 5).

Late autumn/winter 1800. A first revision (what Southey calls his 'second attempt') of Books XI and XII. This revision appears as a cancelled draft in BL Add. MS 47884 and in a letter of 30 December 1800 to Wynn now forming part of NLW MS 4819E. (This revision of Books XI and XII is given below as drafts 3 and 4 in MSS Drafts).

Winter early 1801. A second revision ('my third attempt') of Books XI and XII. This revision appears in BL Add. MS 47884 and in two letters to Wynn (undated and 15 February 1801) now forming part of NLW MS 4819E. It was also transmitted by letter to Charles Danvers in Bristol. This second revision became the published text, though the MS from which the printers worked (i.e. the MS sent to Danvers in Bristol – either via Rickman in London, or directly from Portugal) is not extant. That lost manuscript, presumably, also contained the notes to the poem, for which no other manuscript text survives.

Publication

Long before he submitted his last revisions to Danvers in Bristol, Southey had been planning for publication. Since *Thalaba* was to pay his Portuguese expenses it was important that a favourable bargain was struck with a publisher. As his first long poem since *Joan*, it was vital that it enhanced his reputation. Yet all had to be done by remote control – hence the choice of Rickman, a shrewd man good with figures, as representative. On 22 August 1800 Southey sent him instructions: 'if the booksellers fall into my terms, a London printer will dispatch one quarto in a month, or two pocket volumes in a fortnight: £100 I will have

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for 400 4to copies, £130 for 1000 of the smaller size. The whole property I will not sell, because I expect the poem will become popular, and of course productive' (*L&C*, Vol. II, p. 104). Again, on 30–1 October, Southey wrote to Rickman 'At last the opportunity is arrived of sending my important parcel. My private instructions must be vague, – to make the best bargain you can, and on no terms sell the copyright ... The sale of the book is not doubtful; my name would carry it through an edition though it were worthless' (Cabral, p. 137). By the end of February 1801 Southey was able to report that Rickman had done the deal: 'My price for *Thalaba* was', he told Wynn, 'for 1000 copies, 115£, twelve copies being allowed me; the booksellers would have bargained for a quarto edition also, but it would have been ill-judged to have glutted the public' (Cabral, p. 149). And so *Thalaba* was published in two volumes in the less-prestigious octavo, under the imprint of Longman and Rees, printed for them by Southey's old friend Cottle, under the supervision of Danvers and Davy. He did well from the deal, for *Thalaba* proved a slow seller: only three hundred copies were sold by 20 November, at 14 shillings each.

Southey himself had returned to England in July 1801 to find his poem had just been published. All was not as he had expected, for numerous typographical errors had escaped Davy's and Danvers's attention and his voluminous notes appeared at the page foot, despite his earlier decision that 'My notes will be too numerous and too entertaining to print at the bottom of the page' (letter to CW, 15 June 1800: Cabral, pp. 97–8). Southey was proud of his erudition, comparing his notes favourably with those added by Henley to Beckford's *Vathek*, but he did not want the verse to be eclipsed by the sheer volume of small-print prose on each page. Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, from which Southey borrowed in Book IX,¹¹ had faced the same potential problem, even in the larger size of a quarto edition. In octavo, *Thalaba* seemed all notes and no poem and even more obviously a modern text in this respect than Darwin's and Beckford's.

Reviews

Southey returned in time to hear the responses of his friends to the poem. They were not encouraging: Taylor complained of 'a want of sufficient concatenation of events'; Bedford that the 'miracles like pantomime trials were so rapid as to weary & satiate' (letter of 27 July 1801).¹² Southey defended himself, but the private verdicts were reinforced when the first reviews appeared in September. An attack from the *British Critic* was predictable, since it sought to defend established power and conventional taste and since Southey had disparaged the heroic couplet employed by Pope and Dryden in his Preface, much as Wordsworth did in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. The nature of the attack, however, was wounding, because its language was so extreme, its condemnation so wholesale: 'A more complete monument of vile and depraved taste no man ever raised'; the

poem was a ‘rhapsody of Twelve Books in a sort of irregular lyric, so unlike verse or sense’ that it was all equally absurd. Southey’s much vaunted new metre was not so much irregular as non-existent: ‘were not the lines divided by the printer, no living creature would suspect [them] to be even intended for verse’. Just as bad, the page was ‘loaded with notes ... often as nonsensical as the text itself’.¹³ Southey’s innovations, intentional and otherwise, were utter failures.

There was worse. In October *The Monthly Mirror* regretted the party political bias of the *British*, and offered itself as a more temperate and sober judge. This tone of reasonableness only made its verdicts more damaging. Deploring Southey’s provocative attack on the heroic couplet in his Preface, the reviewer considered Southey’s metre with as open a mind as he could, only to conclude that it was neither poetry nor more metrical than speech. Only when Southey resorted to traditional blank verse for the narrative and lyrical rhyme for the dialogue did he succeed. So too with his diction: his innovatory introduction of commonplaces into a heroic poem seemed a matter of ‘affectation, puerility, and false English’ rather than radical, levelling boldness reinvigorating a dying genre.¹⁴ And while *The Monthly Magazine* noted the ‘splendid variety of description’, it agreed with Southey’s friends that he had overdone the supernatural: ‘every incident is a miracle; every utensil, an amulet ...’ and it was these tricks that organised the action, not ‘human desires and passions, which always must excite the vivid sympathy of men’.¹⁵

The most comprehensive review of the poem was also the most acute. Francis Jeffrey devoted twenty pages of the first issue of *The Edinburgh Review* to the poem. It was a showpiece exercise in which Jeffrey set out to demonstrate the critical standards and principles that he hoped would make his new journal authoritative. It was also a frontal attack not just on *Thalaba* but on the trend in poetry that Jeffrey thought *Thalaba* exemplified. Southey was one of the ‘chief champions and apostles’ of ‘a sect of poets’ (Jeffrey would later christen them ‘the Lake school’). He named Lamb and Coleridge as fellow members; Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* was also in his mind. These poets rejected ‘antient authority’ in favour of German versification and Rousseauvian principles, but their ‘great simplicity and familiarity of language’ demonstrated ‘affectation’ and ‘false taste’ rather than originality. They upset poetry’s observance of social propriety by using vulgar language to ‘express the sentiments of the refined’. Yet at the same time their ‘low-bred heroes’ were not realistic common people but ‘imaginary beings whose characters and language are in contrast with their situation’.

Southey resented what he termed Jeffrey’s ‘Thalabacide’ and felt he had been tarred with a brush meant principally for Wordsworth. This was not the case: Jeffrey’s criticism of Southey’s versification (‘a jumble of all the measures that are known in English poetry, (and a few more)’) was specific. So were his judgments that *Thalaba*’s plot ‘set nature and probability at defiance’ and was derived, like a ‘patchwork drapery’ from ‘scraps, borrowed from oriental tale books, and travels into the Mahometan countries’: ‘his poem is little else than his commonplace

book versified'. The inadvertent printing of the notes at the bottom of each page had left Southey open to Jeffrey's attack, in which there is some justice: Southey had indeed never been to any of the countries he described and had indeed derived many of the poem's incidents from his collection of notes.

Both Jeffrey's specific and general objections hit home. Southey had, in the Preface to *Thalaba*, announced his rejection of traditional poetic models just as Wordsworth had in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. If Southey's poem seemed, in its very individuality, to exhibit in extreme degree the principles announced by Wordsworth, it was largely his own fault. In fact, Jeffrey was diagnosing perceptively, albeit as a hostile defender of linguistic and social hierarchy, the innovations for which Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey stood. He was, in effect, making the first public definition of what we now call Romanticism, understanding perfectly that its assault on conventional taste and established poetic models was related to a social and political radicalism also detectable in its choice of subject-matter. That he made this definition in response to *Thalaba* as well as *Lyrical Ballads*, however, should remind us now, after more than a century of neglect, that Southey was at the heart of the movement we call Romanticism and that his Oriental romance, just as much as 'Tintern Abbey' or the 'Ancient Mariner', is a quintessential Romantic poem. Jeffrey, that is to say, did not make the error of so many twentieth-century critics, the error of leaving Southey out of the Romantic canon because, to a superficial eye, his long verse narratives were not of a kind with Wordsworth's and Coleridge's shorter, internalised lyrics. For Jeffrey, Southey's addiction to 'perpetual exaggeration of thought', his piling-up of 'striking passages' was self-defeating just as Wordsworth's was: by wrapping an 'ordinary conception' in 'a veil of mysterious and unintelligible language' both poets wearied rather than enthralled the reader.¹⁶

Thalaba's kinship with *Lyrical Ballads* is apparent at several levels. First, Southey did conceive of it as a challenge to the social and political hierarchy that Jeffrey wished to uphold. When planning the poem in his *Commonplace Book*, he wrote 'Cannot the Dom Danael be made to allegorise those systems that make the misery of mankind?' (*CB*, Vol. IV, p. 812). Second, Southey did make his hero a man of radical sensibility, easily moved to tears, which are tokens of virtuous power rather than weakness. In Book I, for example, Houd, the prophet, bursts into tears when surveying the idolatrous multitude; in Book VI *Thalaba* responds to the erotic dance he is forced to witness with a gush of emotion:

He rose, and from the banquet room he rushed,
And tears ran down his burning cheek,
And nature for a moment woke the thought
And murmured, that from all domestic joys
Estranged, he wandered o'er the world
A lonely being, far from all he loved. (ll. 367–72)

Comparisons with the lonely and tearful wanderer of Coleridge's 'Foster Mother's Tale' are appropriate. So too, with Coleridge's 'To a Young Ass', for

compassion towards helpless animals is repeatedly identified as one of Thalaba's virtues, aligning him with the politicised 'man of feeling' whose humane sentiments identify him as an anti-establishment figure.

In fact, the points of similarity between Southey's poem and those of *Lyrical Ballads* are numerous. Thalaba is a simply-raised rustic, who grows up in a desert tent and prefers water to wine. His encounters with the supernatural resemble the Ancient Mariner's – in fact, Southey and Coleridge may have shared sources, as they did for 'Kubla Khan', since the 'hand of glory' that Southey describes in Book V, when Mohareb lights the way to the underworld with a severed, mummified human hand holding a candle, appears, in altered form, when Coleridge's mariner encounters figures who resemble living torches:

The bodies had advance'd, and now
Before the mast they stood.
They lifted up their stiff right arms,
They held them strait and tight;
And each right-arm burnt like a torch,
A torch that's borne upright.
Their stony eye-balls glitter'd on
In the red and smoky light.¹⁷

It was also Southey who presented stories about vampires for the first time in an English fiction,¹⁸ stories which stand behind the description of Oneiza's vampire-spirit in Book VIII as well as Coleridge's portrait of the living dead who crew the ship.

Reception

The very features that drew the scorn of reviewers attracted a generation of young poets. The variety of supernatural and exotic incident that Southey included, the irregular verse forms, the Oriental setting, the combination of verse with notes, the examination of Islam, all impressed young writers who also wished to defy the traditional. *Thalaba* seemed 'Tales of Terror, run mad' to its early reviewers; to Scott, Moore, Byron and the Shelleys it was a seminal text.¹⁹

For Percy Shelley it was Southey's 'mythological imagination' that presented most possibilities, so much so that when, in November 1811, Shelley arrived in the Lake District, he declared 'the object most interesting to my feelings is Southey's habitation'.²⁰ And although the meetings between the two men left Shelley with a poorer opinion of the elder poet, he remained powerfully energised by Southey's Oriental poem. Likewise Scott, who announced that he modelled his own verse romances on *Thalaba*: for both men, Southey showed how an exotic culture, believing in the supernatural, could be turned into narrative, using the motifs of chivalric verse – the quest, the battle – in a new context. For Shelley, Southey also opened the possibility of questioning the orthodoxies

of religious and political Britain by dramatising the belief-systems of eastern cultures. Shelley launched his poetic career with *Queen Mab*, a long poem whose radical Orientalism, expressed as much in the voluminous prose notes as in the verse, derived from *Thalaba*'s example (as well as that of Southey's oft-cited source Volney) and whose opening line echoed Southey's. But it was in *Alastor* (1816) that Shelley most successfully developed the themes and methods of *Thalaba*. Southey's landscapes inform Shelley's throughout the poem. Compare, for example, Shelley's description of 'red volcanoes', 'bitumen lakes', and 'secret caves' (*Alastor*, ll. 83, 85, 87) with Southey's descriptions of the 'infernal fires' of Vesuvian volcanoes where 'from a cave, with torrent force /And everlasting roar, the black bitumen rolled' (Book V, ll. 21–2). Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers have also noted parallels between Shelley's description and Book VI of *Thalaba*, and Neville Rogers suggests that readers compare *Alastor*, ll. 31ff. and 374–5 with Southey's Book X, ll. 31ff. and Book VII, ll. 6ff.²¹

Most significantly, Shelley's whole quest-narrative follows Southey's almost exactly, as his poet-hero, like Thalaba, leaves the desert and the pastoral love of an Arab maiden:

an Arab maiden brought his food,
Her daily portion, from her father's tent,
And spread her matting for his couch, and stole
From duties and repose to tend his steps –
Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe
To speak her love (ll. 129–34)

The veiled maiden in *Alastor*, moreover, evokes the pre-history of Southey's ancient sorceress Maimuna, who binds Thalaba with magical threads and bewitches him with an 'unintelligible song' (Book VIII, l. 25). Shelley's descriptions of the dream-maiden's 'woven sounds' (l. 155), 'ineffable tale' (l. 168), 'sinuous veil /Of woven wind' (ll. 176–7), and 'dark locks floating in the breath of night' (l. 178) echo Southey's descriptions of Maimuna with 'hair flowing like the silver streams /That streak the northern night' (Book IX, l. 2), who, 'singing as she spun' (Book VIII, l. 23), lured Thalaba into a silken bondage.

This configuration of Maimuna as the veiled maiden of *Alastor* is further suggested by the textual history of Shelley's poem. *Alastor* is a reconfiguration of Shelley's earlier prose fragment 'The Assassins' which overtly engages the themes of *Thalaba*. Composed during Shelley's European tour in 1814, this romance focuses on a small band of Arabian Christians and the chance encounter between one of its members, Albedir, and a mysterious stranger. Like Shelley's prefatory descriptions of the *Alastor* Poet's encounter with the veiled maiden, this stranger delivers a 'strange and mysterious soliloquy'.²² His address lulls Albedir into 'a trance of wild and delightful imagination' (p. 136), full of visionary hopes and phantoms of the intellect. This, of course, later becomes the central narrative event of *Alastor*, and Shelley reemploys much of the language of these descriptions in the poem. However, Shelley's fragment also describes the childhood

experiences of Albedir's children, Maimuna and Abdallah, both of whom figure as central figures in *Thalaba* (representing the sorceress and hero's grandfather, respectively). When Shelley rewrote the 'Assassins' concept in the central narrative of *Alastor*, the continued emphasis on the veiled maiden as a Maimuna figure, and on the Poet's enchanted reverie, reveal that *Thalaba* remained the generative text behind both.²³

Even the *Alastor* Poet's route follows Thalaba's – first to Babylon and then on, by magic boat, through caverns that lead to death. Shelley, of course, internalises the quest: his hero is searching within, and his external landscape, influenced by Southey's luxurious and ornamented descriptions, allegorises an internal one of sexual desire and intellectual longing. But the fact remains that it is Southey he is distilling: the author of *Thalaba* had made themes, ideas, a plot and a diction available for younger poets to model their own innovations upon. Contra Harold Bloom, it was precisely because Southey was *not* a strong poetic father that they were able to develop his work in this way. In Byron's words, Southey 'has *passages* equal to anything': these parts could be imitated without the imitators feeling intimidated by a whole so majestic that only by an oedipal struggle could they achieve their own voice.²⁴

Byron was frequently witty at Southey's expense, yet he had a shrewd sense of what could be borrowed from him. Writing to Thomas Moore in 1813, he recognised that Orientalism was the coming thing and that Southey was the pioneer. 'Stick to the East', he told Moore, 'the public are Orientalising.'²⁵ Southey had opened a new field but his own works were 'unsaleables', being too long and too dense. Shorter and lighter narratives were needed, and from *Thalaba* he developed his Eastern Tales, adding an illicit love-interest to spice and focus the Southeyan elements. These included the clash of religions, opulent descriptions of oriental gardens and a strain of Gothic imagery. The formula was wildly successful: in *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Giaour* (1813), Byron had brought passion to Southey's tepid romances. As Marilyn Butler has written, it was from *Thalaba* that Byron derived

The Giaour's two nastiest signifiers of the religious imagination: the Turkish fisherman's curse (that the Giaour will return from the grave as a vampire to 'suck the blood of all thy race') and the monk's guess that he is already possessed:

On cliff he hath been known to stand
And rave as to some bloody hand
Fresh sever'd from its parent limb,
Invisible to all but him,
Which beckons onward to his grave,
And lures to leap into the wave. (ll. 758, 826–31)²⁶

The hand of glory and the vampire were becoming hallmarks of the new poetry.

Not just the poetry: John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) originated in the famous story-competiton among the Shelley-Byron circle that also gave rise to

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Frankenstein (1818). Mary Shelley was as steeped in *Thalaba* as her husband and Byron. She ordered a copy in late 1812 and read it out to the Clairmont sisters in late September 1814.²⁷ It remains, with the ‘Ancient Mariner’, the strongest influence on her novel, as well as Polidori’s. When, for instance, Frankenstein animates the corpse he has assembled from the severed parts of dead bodies, he acts as Southey’s witch Khawla does in Book II:

She said, and muttered charms that Hell in fear
And Heaven in horror heard.
Soon the stiff eye-balls rolled,
The muscles with convulsive motion shook,
The white lips quivered. Khawla saw, her soul
Exulted, and she cried,
‘Prophet! behold my power!
Not even death secures
Thy slaves from Khawla’s Spell!’
(ll. 174–82; see also Book XII, ll. 398–401)

Shelley would also have seen the extensive notes that Southey assembled about vampires and body-haunting in Greece and Transylvania. *Thalaba* had become a repository of images for the younger Romantics, images gleaned from the recondite traditions of Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

By 1817 an older, more conservative Southey deprecated much of the work of Byron and his circle, despite (or perhaps because) it developed certain traits of his own earlier work. The most popular Oriental poem of all was a case in point. Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1817) showed that its author had taken Byron’s advice: it did indeed stick to the East. In so doing, it fulfilled one of the ambitions that *Thalaba* had kindled in Southey, who had written in 1801, ‘And have you received “Thalaba”? and would you like another story to the same tune? It has long been my intention to try the different mythologies that are almost new to poetry. “Thalaba” shows the Mohammedan. The Hindoo, the Runic, and the old Persian are all striking enough and [not?] enough known’ (letter to GCB, June 1801). Southey himself tackled the Hindu in *The Curse of Kehama*; Moore dramatized the ‘old Persian’ in his ‘The Fire Worshippers’, a section of *Lalla Rookh* in which Zoroastrian Persians heroically resist the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslim forces. Here again, the allegorical intent of the poet was plain, although the import of the allegory was different. Moore indicated his sympathy with the Catholic Irish, subjected to Protestant supremacy, in his account of Persians being subdued by a militaristic Islam.

Editions

By 1817, Southey’s poem had become an established part of the literary scene, its innovations absorbed into the main current of fashionable poetry. Moore, for

instance, featured scholarly prose notes about the cultures portrayed in *Lalla Rookh*, some derived from the same sources as Southey's. *Thalaba* was in its third edition by then, and had undergone some changes that were mirrored in its successor poems. The changes began in 1808, for in October of that year Southey heard from the publishers that

the edition of 'Thalaba' had at last reached the end of its slow seven years' sale; that its later movement had been rather of accelerated pace, and that they recommended reprinting it with as little delay as possible. The property now reverts to me, and as the sale certainly will not slacken, I may, in the course of a second seven years, look for another £115 from this source. The most apparent alteration will be in the manner of placing the notes; for many pages have only a line of text, and so the eye runs faster than the fingers can turn them over. I shall now place the notes at the end of each book (letter to John May, 12 October 1808: Warton, Vol. II, pp. 101–2).

Southey would fulfil his original intention of a page uncluttered by footnotes.

He made other changes too, cutting the description of the procession, torture and sacrifice of the Christian captive at the end of Book IX, adding epigraphs and amending punctuation. The first edition had, in places, followed Southey manuscript practice of beginning sentences with a lower case, rather than a capital, letter. This was rectified and many commas were introduced. Stanzas were reorganised where the printers in 1801 had failed to recognise, from the manuscript, where divisions were supposed to come. The edition appeared in 1809.

The third edition was published in 1814. This time Southey made few verbal changes, but numbered the stanzas and centred the verse lines (thus tacitly admitting that his previous use of different layouts for different stanzas had not persuaded readers that he had found an individual metre for each). The irregularity of metre that had so annoyed early reviewers was now less obvious to the eye.

The fourth edition of 1821, still in two volumes octavo, was essentially a reissue of the third and it was not until *Thalaba* appeared as part of a pirate edition, published by Gagliani in Paris in 1829, that Longmans decided to give Southey the opportunity to revise the poem for inclusion in a multi-volume *Collected Poems*. In April 1837 Southey was able to tell his correspondent William Lisle Bowles that he was 'setting his house in order', mending those of his old poems that were worth the trouble (letter of 25 April 1837: *L&C*, Vol. VI, p. 333). In the case of *Thalaba*, the mending process was considerable. Southey altered passages, often removing colloquialisms in favour of more Latinate phrases. He added many notes, thus ensuring that the verse narrative appeared as a tale framed by a western scholarly tradition, rather than as an unmediated story that the author simply endorsed. He also removed many of the explicit references to Allah: the 1838 *Thalaba* was a hero of his conservative years, one who spoke, like a good iconoclastic Protestant, of 'the Lord' rather than a fervent believer in Mohammed. Southey no longer wished to disturb traditional loyalties to Church and State.

Later Reception

Poetical Works Collected by Himself was the last edition to appear in Southey's lifetime. By his death in 1843 he was read more for his many prose works than for his poems. Wordsworth summed matters up when noting that Southey's works were 'read once but how rarely are they recurred to! How seldom quoted ...'.²⁸ Walter Bagehot agreed, taking it as a matter of fact that Southey's epics were 'already dead'.²⁹ Nevertheless, the determination of Thalaba's lonely moral quest and the rectitude of his unswerving obedience to his God appealed to some eminent Victorians. John Henry Newman, pursuing his own determined religious quest, called *Thalaba* 'the most Sublime of English Poems ... I mean *morally* sublime'.³⁰

Few in the twentieth century agreed with Newman. A secularising age had less and less time for the religious epics of the Romantics: not only *Thalaba* but Wordsworth's *Excursion*, a key poem for the Victorians, was gradually eased out of the canon, which came to centre on *The Prelude* and on the internalised lyrics. 'Tintern Abbey', 'Kubla Khan', *Alastor*, among others, were seen as the essential Romantic poems, in which contemporary readers could discover a psychological and spiritual self-scrutiny that was truly modern. The relationship of these poems to the political and religious epics of their authors was little examined, and their indebtedness to Southey almost completely ignored. This lack of interest was reflected in the publishing history of *Thalaba*: only one-volume reprints of the 1837–8 *Collected Poems* and a 1909 Oxford *Poetical Works* (ed. M. H. Fitzgerald) presented the poem among Southey's whole oeuvre, while, after octavo reprints in 1853 and 1860, no editions of the single poem appeared between 1861 and 1991, when Woodstock Books published a facsimile of the 1801 publication.

The Woodstock edition reflected a revival of scholarly interest in Southey that began in the 1980s, as critics began to revise their notions of Romanticism as a historical movement. Marilyn Butler, in the wake of Edward Said's analysis of the discourse of Orientalism, emphasised that Romantic poetry was, from the outset, involved in producing a new (western) version of the East, with Southey a founding father of this process. 'With *Thalaba*', Butler wrote, 'the eighteenth-century Arabian-French prose oriental tale suddenly emerges in its full flowering as Romantic narrative poetry – which means that it is also an eclectic historical pastiche'.³¹ Butler's point was soon taken up by others, who assessed in detail a mass of texts, popular at the start of the nineteenth century but neglected in the twentieth, that portrayed an exotic East for an English-speaking public. For these critics, including Javed Majeed, Nigel Leask and Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Thalaba* was at the centre of a historicised Romanticism, both as a symptom of the ambivalent attitudes Britons exhibited towards the Oriental civilisations that empire was bringing them into contact with and as a constitutive work that helped establish the exotic romance-narrative as the quintessential Romantic genre. *The Prelude*, on this account, was no more the centre of Romanticism in

the last years of the twentieth century than it had been in the early years of the nineteenth: *Thalaba*, Byron's *Eastern Tales*, *Lalla Rookh* and *Prometheus Unbound* were all more typical and/or more popular.

As a central Romantic poem, *Thalaba* attained a critical significance it had not possessed since Jeffrey saw it as the epitome of the innovations that Wordsworth and Coleridge were also attempting. Accordingly, its exact political and aesthetic bearings were of new importance. Debate came to centre on the relationship to imperialist discourses of the poem (and by inference of Romanticism in general). Sharafuddin argued, for example, that 'it is the redemption of the East *as the East*, and not the imposition of western ideology, that is Southey's fundamental concern', an endorsement of Southey's anti-imperialist, pro-Islamic credentials that, on the face of it, is hard to square with lines such as these from Book V: 'So one day may the Crescent from thy Mosques /Be plucked by Wisdom, when the enlightened arm /Of Europe conquers to redeem the East' (ll. 84–6).³² Leask, by contrast, has taken a more sceptical view of Southey's rendering of Islam, arguing that *Thalaba* is essentially a dissenting Protestant (like Southey himself in the 1790s) – dressed in eastern clothes. The poem shows 'Islam as a rational Unitarian religion'.³³ On this reading, Southey endorses an eastern religion only after he has first purged it of its difference from a western faith, using it chiefly to displace to fresh ground an old argument between English dissenters and the established Anglican church. He thus colonises an Oriental tradition, approving only what will aid his cause in a western debate.

That there is more than a grain of truth in Leask's argument is indicated by Southey's own reminder to himself 'I must build a Saracenic mosque, not a Quaker meeting-house' (*NL*, Vol. I, p. 272). However, as Daniel White argues, it was finally not *rationalist* Christian sects that Southey allegorised in the poem, but fatalist ones.³⁴ *Thalaba* frequently reveals the trait that Southey thought was most specific to uneducated enthusiasts, whether Protestant millenarians, Portuguese Catholics or Arabian Muslims – the trait of fatalism. He told Taylor in 1804 'Fatalism is the corner-stone of Mahometry, the hero of the Islamic romance was to act therefore under the impulse of Destiny' (*Robberds*, Vol. I, p. 502). Fatalism, for Southey, meant that the believer, without the need for priestly mediation, recognised God's communication with him. This communication, however, occurred through sensual evidence rather than through rational debate – through signs and wonders – which the believer regarded as manifestations of Allah's ineluctable will, leaving him no choice. The patterns discerned on a locust's back, the sting of a bee, for instance, are, for *Thalaba*, signs of God's will for him. Such fatalistic interpretations were, Southey told Taylor in 1805, 'the most poetical parts of Islam' (*Robberds*, Vol. II, p. 111), presumably because they represented in external, sensual, images the point at which the individual accepts the determination of history – and therefore of himself – by the divine. It was Southey's ambivalence about such fatalism, first explored in *Joan of Arc*, that led him both imaginatively to endorse it and, drawing back, to condemn it, wherever it was found. As Majeed has put it, Southey 'acted as

though he were in a laboratory of cultures, experimenting with and constructing different cultural identities' (p. 53) – only to withdraw.³⁵ The result was an ambivalent, varied text that fell short of a full endorsement either of fatalism or rationalism, either of eastern difference or of western norms.³⁶ And a consequence of this was that readers could enjoy the poem in parts – empathise, for instance, with the Islamic hero, without feeling called upon to accept Islam and reject Christianity wholesale. Another consequence, however, was that the poem seemed contradictory, its imaginative engagement with eastern discourses undermined by frequent dismissals of those very discourses. It was for this reason that the poem seemed 'mad' and 'monstrous' to its early reviewers. In Majeed's words, 'Southey betrays European aesthetic standards while professing an adherence to them, and the monstrosity of his epics is legitimized by their fidelity to non-European standards. It is this double allegiance and betrayal which characterises his epics'.³⁷

This Edition

Current critical debate about the poem has been hampered by one glaring omission that this edition is designed to rectify: no scholarly edition of *Thalaba* has been published.³⁸ It has been difficult to judge the poem's attitude to Islam, for example, without a text that displays Southey's removal of many specific references to Allah and Mohammed in the 1838 revision. Equally, evaluating the worth of Jeffrey's judgement that *Thalaba* was the quintessential production of the 'Lake school' has been difficult without knowledge of the many manuscript similarities between it, 'Kubla Khan', the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel'. This editor has aimed to make it possible to answer these and many other questions about the poem and its context by enabling systematic comparisons of the texts of the different lifetime editions with each other and with the manuscript drafts. Accordingly, I have collated the text of the 1801 edition with the extant manuscripts and with the 1809, 1814, 1821, and 1838 editions, listing verbal variants at the foot of each page. Longer cancelled manuscript drafts are given on pp. 301–29. As a result, scholars can now access in this one volume every extant word that Southey wrote of *Thalaba*.

I have chosen the 1801 text as the main text for this edition for two reasons. First, I do not subscribe to the editorial assumption that the last edition produced under the author's own supervision should be the copy text for scholars. Last thoughts are not necessarily the best. Second, *Thalaba* made its impact on its first publication: it was the first edition that provoked Jeffrey into identifying a 'sect' of poets (that he later called 'the Lake school'); it was the first edition that precipitated a turn to historical romance by Walter Scott and then, in turn, by Shelley, Byron and Moore. If we wish to study Romanticism as a number of historical discourses, to examine the dawn of the very concept that a Romantic

movement existed, then it is to the impact of the 1801 *Thalaba* that we must turn. Accordingly, I present the 1801 poem and preface as the main text on historicist, rather than aesthetic, grounds, while allowing comparison with manuscript and later editions to be easily made. Only in one respect have I deviated from the 1801 edition, and that for reasons of clarity. I have moved Southey's notes from the page foot, where they appeared to his chagrin in 1801, to the end of the poem. Although Southey himself did this from 1809 onwards, I would have preserved their position in the first edition, so as to reproduce the 1801 volume as accurately as possible, had not doing so threatened to make this edition unusable. A page that featured Southey's verse, editorial recording of verse variants, Southey's notes, editorial recording of note variants, and editorial notes on Southey's sources, would have caused, at best, confusion and, at worst, the total eclipse of the verse by notes and apparatus.

Southey's notes have again become, as they were for the early reviewers, an area of interest. Today's critics debate whether the carapace of notes in which the author encased his verse constituted an imperialist subordination of eastern difference to a western scholarly tradition. They argue as to whether the notes effectively distance the reader from the action, ensuring the Islamic story is framed by multiple Christian perspectives and cannot be swallowed whole. Again, however, critical debate has been hindered by the fact that neither Southey nor later scholars accurately identified his sources.³⁹ *Thalaba* includes hundreds of quotations from travellers to, scholars of and commentators on the East. It also includes translations of Persian and Arabic verse. But only the most perfunctory references for these are given: Southey was no more specific in giving chapter and verse, or even name and title, than the loose scholarly conventions of his time demanded. This edition changes the picture completely: I, with considerable help from Carol Bolton and Daniel White, have traced all but one of Southey's notes to its source in his reading, giving the author, title and page number of each book from which he quoted (wherever possible identifying the exact edition he used). I have also included translations of his Latin, Greek, Italian, French and Spanish notes. The effect of this, I hope, will be to reveal for the first time the range and depth of Southey's Orientalist reading and to enable scholars to reconstitute the body of knowledge from which Romantic Orientalism was born.

Extant Manuscripts of *Thalaba*

There are several extant manuscripts of *Thalaba*, in full or in part:

1. British Library Add. MS 47884

Paper; ff. ii + 285. Octavo. 1799–1800. Brown calf binding. Autograph of RS and ES.

Introduction

RS describes this MS in the Preface to *Thalaba* 1838: ‘The copy which was made from the original draught, regularly as the poem proceeded, is still in my possession. The first corrections were made as they occurred in the process of transcribing, at which time the verses were tried upon my own ear, and had the advantage of being seen in a fair and remarkably legible handwriting. In this transcript the dates of time and place were noted, and things which would otherwise have been forgotten have thus been brought to my recollection. Herein also the alterations were inserted which the poem underwent before it was printed. They were very numerous. Much was pruned off, and more was ingrafted. I was not satisfied with the first part of the concluding book; it was therefore crossed out, and something substituted altogether different in design; but this substitution was so far from being fortunate, that it neither pleased my friends in England nor myself. I then made a third attempt, which succeeded to my own satisfaction and theirs.’

2. *National Library of Wales MS 1487A*

Paper; unfoliated. 16.5 cm x 10 cm (some cropping). 1800. Calf binding. Autograph of RS and ES. Bookplate ‘from the library of the Late Rt. Hon. C. W. Williams Wynn, M.P. for the County of Montgomery, 1797–1850. Presented by A. W. Williams Wynn, Esquire, D. L., J.P., Coed-y-Maen, 6 June 1922.’

This MS comprises the whole poem, but transcribed before the final changes to the last book, for it does not contain the text of the last book as finalised in BL Add. MS 47884 or as published.

The physical condition of the MS reveals that it represents two periods of work, for the last four books are written on different paper from the first eight. In fact, RS transcribed Books I–VIII, and sent them to CW from Bristol in early April 1800 before leaving for Portugal. See RS’s letters to STC 1 April and to CW 8 April 1800 (*L&C*, Vol. II, pp. 53–6; NLW MS 4811D).

Books IX–XII were transcribed in Portugal and sent to CW after October 1800. RS notified CW of this in a letter 1 October 1800 (NLW MS 4819E): ‘The four concluding books of *Thalaba* are transcribed for you, & wait only an opportunity to embark for England. The conclusion of the eleventh & the first half of the twelfth I have since rewritten – from the Simorgs speech to the actual descent. I send you the lines as originally written, & will transmit the substituted ones by letter.’ The ‘letters’ to which RS refers, transmitting the substituted lines, now form part of NLW MS 4819E.

3. *National Library of Wales MS 4819E: letters to C.W.W. Wynn from RS in Portugal*. Autograph of RS.

- a. Letter, undated: draft of Book I
- b. Letter of Tuesday 30 December 1800: draft entitled ‘*Thalaba* Book the last’ begins ‘Then said the grey old man to *Thalaba*’ and ends ‘Two dives are on its brink – &c &c’ (draft 4 below). After the last line, RS comments ‘With all this I am little satisfied. It is the worst of the poem – far the worst.’
- c. Letter, undated [1801?]: draft of Book XI
RS begins ‘My dear Wynn, I send you the supplementary *Thalaba*. my brain has been at work for you with a somewhat unlucky activity – as it has made a great outline & finished nothing. In fact I have mapped out my Hindoo Romance

- while only designing to furnish you with a fragment. ... I have written no line of poetry here save Thalaba. ... but to Thalaba – Book 11 – Simorg’s Speech’. The draft of Book 11 then begins at the line ‘Thus prepared ascend the sledge’ continues to ‘They sung the dirge of death’ (cf. draft 3 below). After the last line, RS then adds to CW ‘The next part of the last book shall follow by the next packet’ and declares ‘You will I know not be displeased at the total omission of the Queen & Leoline – a bungling piece of botch work at which my own conscience and taste revolted very soon. I doubt not the next packet will bring you the continuation. This is well joined – & for the most part well written in my own judgement.’
- d. Letter of 15 February 1801: draft of Books XI and XII from ‘It is it is the land’ to ‘And Thalaba with numbing force /Smites his raised arm & rushes by &c’ (cf. Books XI and XII of the poem, above). After the last line, RS adds an entreaty to CW: ‘Will you inclose this to Mr Danvers. 9 St. James’s Place. Kingsdown. Bristol lest the copy transmitted by the last packet for the press should by any accident have been lost.’

4. Pierpont Morgan Library LHMS MA 415

Paper, ff. 116, duodecimo, 1800, brown leather in blue cloth box. On f. 1, the signature: Thos. Southey 1800; on last page: ‘This MS was written for me, partly by Edith and partly by Robert. Thos. Southey’; on inner cover the (cut-out) bookplate of Robert Southey by Thomas Bewick.

A fair copy of the MS in the autograph of ES and RS: given to TS (brother of the poet).

RS refers to this MS in a letter to his mother of 21 August 1800: ‘tell him [TS] that Thalaba has monopolised me; that by the King George, in her next voyage (about three weeks hence), I send over his copy, together with that for the press’ (*L&C*, Vol. II, p. 100).

A letter from RS to CD, 6 November 1800, indicates that this MS draft of the poem, like the one sent to CW (item 2 above), includes the cancelled drafts of ‘the last half of B. [Book] 11 and the first half of B. [Book] 12 as originally written’ (*NL*, Vol. I, p. 230).

5. Saffron Walden Museum, Essex. Box of RS’s papers, MSS 41501, contains RS’s notebook (temporary number 41584)

Paper, ff. 272 + 3 containing a subject index. 20 cm x 13.5 cm (8" x 5"), 1798–?, black leather, brown ink. Autograph of RS. Inscription at front ‘Robert Southey August 10 1798’.

This notebook contains the sketch of the poem transcribed and published in *CB*, Vol. IV, pp. 181–9.

6. A now-missing MS from which the printed text was set up

RS refers to this MS in a letter to CW of 1 October 1800: ‘And now Thalaba is off my hands compleaty; corrected, transcribed, annotated – & ready to be shipped off to market. Rickman whom you saw at Bristol is my agent’ (*NLW MS 4819E*). See also the 1838 Preface to the poem: ‘A fair transcript was sent to England. Mr. Rickman, with whom I had fallen in at Christ Church in 1797, and whose friendship from that

time I have ever accounted among the singular advantages and happinesses of my life, negotiated for its publication with Messrs. Longman and Rees. It was printed at Bristol by Biggs and Cottle, and the task of correcting the press was undertaken for me by Davy and our common friend Danvers, under whose roof it had been begun.’

Endnotes

1. As Nigel Leask and Marilyn Butler show, De Quincey argued that Landor’s politics in *Gebir* were such that the authorities were likely to view him as being seditious. See Leask, *Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 26; Butler, ‘Orientalism’ in David B. Pirie (ed.), *The Romantic Period: The Penguin History of Literature*, 5 (London, 1994), pp. 395–447 (p. 411).
2. I quote William Haller, *The Early Life of Robert Southey 1774–1803* (New York, 1917), p. 261.
3. See, for example, Southey’s note to Book III, l. 323. On Jones see Garland Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1991) and *Objects of Enquiry: The Life, Contributions and Influences of Sir William Jones (1746–1794)*, ed. Garland Cannon and Kevin R. Brine (New York and London, 1995).
4. Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London, 1763); Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London, 1763); Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poesy of the Hebrews*, 2 vols (London, 1787).
5. MS in Beinecke Library, Yale University, quoted in Mark Storey, *Robert Southey: A Life* (Oxford, 1997), p. 131.
6. Southey’s remark from his review of *Lyrical Ballads* in *The Critical Review*, October 1798. On the ‘Ancient Mariner’, Southey, Taylor and Sayers, see David Chandler’s article ‘Southey’s “Ancient Mariner” and Norwich Balladry’ in the special Southey issue of *Romanticism on the Net*, ed. Lynda Pratt, 2004, to which my account is indebted.
7. For the parts of *Thalaba* that ‘Kubla Khan’ resembles, see Book I, ll. 255–70; Book VI, ll. 105–22 and the accompanying notes.
8. Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and ‘Kubla Khan’* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 235 passim; Warren U. Ober, ‘Southey, Coleridge and “Kubla Khan”’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, (1959), pp. 414–22.
9. See BL Add. MS 47890, ff. 26–7.
10. See the journal entries collected in Cabral.
11. Southey derives his image of the upas tree (Book IX, l. 662) from Darwin’s poem.
12. Huntington Library MS quoted in Storey, *Southey: A Life*, p. 145.
13. *The British Critic* (September 1801), in Lionel Madden (ed.), *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston, 1972), pp. 63–4.
14. *The Monthly Mirror* (October 1801), in Madden, *Southey: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 65–6.
15. *The Monthly Magazine* (January 1802), in Madden, *Southey: The Critical Heritage*, p. 67.

16. All quotations from Francis Jeffrey, in *The Edinburgh Review* (October 1802), in Madden, *Southey: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 68–90.
17. ‘The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere’, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), ll. 491–8. On this, see David B. Pirie’s notes to the ‘Ancient Mariner’ in William Empson and David B. Pirie (ed.), *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Selected Poems* (London, 1972).
18. On body-haunting, vampires, zombies, Southey and Coleridge see Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 119–20, 150, 153.
19. *The British Critic* quoted in Madden, *Southey: The Critical Heritage*, p. 64.
20. Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener of 14 November 1811, quoted in Storey, *Southey: A Life*, p. 212.
21. *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Neville Rogers, 4 vols (Oxford, 1975).
22. *Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray, Vol. I (Oxford, 1993), p. 134.
23. I am indebted to Tilar J. Mazzeo for the information on and interpretation of Shelley’s Southey given here.
24. *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand, 12 vols (London 1973–82), entry of 22 November 1813, Vol. III, p. 214.
25. *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, Vol. III, p. 101.
26. Butler, ‘Orientalism’, pp. 431–2.
27. See *Mary Shelley’s Journal*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman, OK, 1947) and *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. 45–6.
28. *Letters of William And Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1988), Vol. VII, pp. 614–15.
29. In ‘Shakespeare the Man’, *Literary Studies* (1879).
30. *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. C. S. Dessain et al. (London, 1961), Vol. XIII, p. 449.
31. Butler, ‘Orientalism’, p. 413. See also Butler, ‘Literature As Heritage or Reading Other Ways’, Inaugural Lecture, 10 November 1987 (Cambridge, 1987).
32. Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London, 1994), p. 66.
33. Leask, *Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 26.
34. Daniel White, ‘Southey’s *Thalaba*: Orientalism, Dissidence, and Dissent’, chapter of *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent: Under the Eye of the Public*, forthcoming.
35. Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings. James Mill’s The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992), p. 53.
36. On this issue see Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, *Robert Southey* (Boston, MA, 1977), p. 95 and Stuart Curran *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford, 1986), p. 134.
37. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 85.
38. An unpublished Ph.D. dissertation has, however, provided some help in the preparation of this edition. John J. Lavelle, *Robert Southey’s Thalaba the Destroyer A New Edition Based Upon the Original Manuscript*. New York University, 1971.
39. Exceptions include Haller, in *The Early Life of Robert Southey*.

THALABA THE DESTROYER,^a

A

METRICAL ROMANCE.^b

BY

ROBERT SOUTHEY,

TWO VOLUMES.

^a epigraph: 'Facile credo, plures esses naturas invisibiles quam visibiles, in rerum universitate; pluresque Angelorum ordines in coelo, quam sunt pisces in mari: sed horum omnium familiam quis nobis enarrabit et gradus, & cognationes, & discrimina, & singulorum numera? Harum rerum notitiam semper ambivit ingenium humanum, nunquam attigit. – Juvat tamen, non diffiteor, quandoque in animo tanquam in tabulá, majoris & melioris mundi imaginem contemplari; ne mens assuefacta hodiernae vitae minuitur se contrahat nimis, & tota subsidat in pusillas cogitationes. Sed veritati interea invigilandum est, modusque servandus, ut certa ab incertis, diem a nocte, distinguamur. *Burnet Archaeologiae Philosophicae*¹ *BL Add. MS 47884 f. 1, NLW MS 1487A*; 'There are more things in Heaven & Earth, Horatio/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy!' *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 5, 166–7 *BL Add. MS 47884 f. 1*; 'Ποιητικης ἀκρατης ή ελενδερία, και νόμος / Είς, τά δόξαν τω ποιήτη. Lucian'² *BL Add. MS 47884 f. 1*.

^b METRICAL ROMANCE.] RHYTHMICAL ROMANCE. 1809; 1814, 1821, 1838 no subtitle

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PREFACE

In the continuation of the Arabian Tales, the Domdaniel^a is mentioned; a seminary for evil Magicians under the Roots of the Sea. From this seed the present Romance has grown. Let me not be supposed to prefer the metre^b in which it is written, abstractly considered, to the regular blank verse; the noblest measure, in my judgement, of which our admirable language is capable. For the following Poem I have preferred it, because it suits the varied subject; it is the *Arabesque* ornament of an Arabian tale.

The dramatic sketches of Dr. Sayer,^c a volume which no lover of poetry will recollect without pleasure, induced me when a young versifier, to practise in this metre.^d I felt that while it gave the poet a wider range of expression, it satisfied the ear of the reader. It were easy to make a parade of learning by enumerating the various feet which it admits; it is only needful to observe that no two lines are employed in *sequence* which can be read into one. Two six-syllable lines (it will perhaps be answered) compose an Alexandrine: the truth is that the Alexandrine, when harmonious, is composed of two six-syllable lines.

One advantage this metre assuredly possesses; the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord: he may read it with a *prose mouth*,^e but its flow and fall will still be perceptible. Verse is not enough favoured by the English reader: perhaps this is owing to the obtrusiveness, the regular Jews-harp *twing-twang*, of what has been foolishly called heroic measure. I do not wish the *improvisatorè* tune, but something that denotes the sense of harmony, something like the accent of feeling; like the tone which every Poet necessarily gives to Poetry.^f

^a Domdaniel] Dondaniel 1838

^b metre] rhythm 1809, 1814, 1821, 1838

^c Dr. Sayer,] Sayers, 1809, 1814, 1821, 1838

^d metre.] rhythm. 1809, 1814, 1821, 1838

^e prose mouth,] prosaically, 1809, 1814, 1821, 1838

^f Cintra, October 1800 1809, 1814, 1821, 1838; in 1838, RS added a new Preface to the volume of his *Poetical Works* containing *Thalaba* (IV):

It was said, in the original Preface to Joan of Arc, that the Author would not be in England to witness its reception, but that he would attend to liberal criticism, and hope to profit by it in the composition of a poem upon the discovery of America by the Welsh prince Madoc.

That subject I had fixed upon when a schoolboy, and had often conversed upon the probabilities of the story with the schoolfellow to whom, sixteen years afterwards, I had the satisfaction of inscribing the poem. It was commenced at Bath in the autumn of 1794;