Jonathan Gonzalez

remembers

Romantic-Era Lakeland: Walking, Viewing, Writing—Robert Southey and Others

(27-28 April 2019, Keswick Museum)

THIS WAS A TWO-DAY CONFERENCE HELD AT THE HEART OF Southey Country: in the recently-renovated Keswick Museum, only ten minutes away from Greta Hall, the Lake District home of Coleridge and Southey for over forty years. On the slopes of Skiddaw, it was the ideal venue from which to bring together research on all aspects of the writing of Southey and his circle in its contexts, with a special emphasis on Romantic-era walking.

Following a special welcome address by the Academic Director of the conference, Tim Fulford, the first panel kicked off to a superb start. Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt provided a fascinating account of their editing work towards the forthcoming volumes of the Romantic Circles edition of *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, offering a peek into the 965 surviving letters addressed to over 150 correspondents throughout the 1820s. Moving from his private towards his public correspondence, Jonathan Gonzalez considered how Southey's own walking adventures found written expression in his *Letters from Spain and Portugal* and *Letters from England*.

In the next panel, Sally Bushell offered a close reading of Wordsworth's 'The Brothers' with particular emphasis on its final twist, yielding a comprehensive examination of the representation of sleepwalking in this piece. Ann C. Colley focused then on Coleridge and the material aspect of Romantic-era walking, while Kerri Andrews's close work on women writers' walking revealed how Harriet Martineau was instrumental in shaping the Lakeland pedestrian aesthetics in the 1850s after the publication of her *Complete Guide to the Lakes*.

The afternoon began with Tom Duggett and a careful consideration of the notion of Southey in foreign and outlandish disguise in *Colloquies on Society*, which set the tone for Stephen Basdeo's discussion of his editing work on Southey's unpublished Robin Hood novel, *Harold; or, the Castle of Morford*. Robin Jarvis's thought-provoking take on Southey's hilarious (yet brilliant) buffet-style approach to the editorial labour for the *Annual Anthology* rounded off the session. The discussion then moved beyond Southey, with Duncan Hay and Rebecca Hutcheon exploring the opportunities and challenges of mapping Coleridge's literary spaces as part of their work on the Chronotopic Cartographies AHRC-funded project. Gregory Leadbetter closed the last panel of the day with an enthralling paper that brought together his work as a scholar and creative writer, featuring readings of both Romantic-era poems and his own work.

On the second day the conference crew returned to the Keswick Museum,

opening the morning with a session that considered the many ways in which walking became an important way to canalise restless textual energies in the Romantic-era. Gabriel Cervantes and Dahlia Porter provided a fascinating reading of the work of William Hayley, Southey and his circle alongside the figure of the early English prison reformer John Howard, bringing together the themes of itineracy and Romantic reform; followed by Judith Thompson's wide-ranging paper that took John Thelwall's engagement with the Lakeland as its focus. Cristina Flores rounded off the panel with a close reading of Southey's engagement with mountaineering in Spain in both his poetry and prose.

The morning continued with three closely-linked papers that were to prompt a stimulating conversation. Chris Donaldson offered a nuanced discussion of the long-term effects of Romantic-era writing upon changing perceptions of the value of the Lakeland landscape, and how these perceptions were mediated in turn by commercially produced guidebooks from the 1750s to the 1950s; while Simon Bainbridge and Alan Vardy both provided fascinating accounts of the often overlooked yet pioneering role of female hillwalkers and climbers in the Lake District, revealing how Dorothy Wordsworth and Elizabeth Smith played a major role in the development of the Romantic culture of ascent. The final panel of the conference focused on the exploration of Coleridgean and Southeyan geographies on foot, engaging first with their pedestrian practices abroad only to finish with a close reading of a walking excursion that set off from Keswick. Maximiliaan van Woudenberg and Patrick Vincent both offered, respectively, thorough examinations of Coleridge's 1799 tour of the Harz Mountains and Southey's thirteen-week continental tour of 1817 with Humphrey Senhouse and Edward Nash; while Tim Fulford closed the panel and therefore the conference with a lively exploration of Southey as the 'unpicturesque tourist', focusing on the account of his walking trip from Keswick to Durham in July 1812.

A tightly scheduled two days which also left some time to indulge in walking excursions in the footsteps of Coleridge and Southey—up to Walla Crag, Latrigg, and over the Newlands Valley—, this conference made for an engaging, inspiring and friendly gathering. The organisers, Tim Fulford and Kerri Andrews, are to be congratulated and thanked for putting together a conference characterised by the high calibre of its papers and the intellectually stimulating discussions that ensued, which amply demonstrated that that both Southeyans and Coleridgeans are a warm and welcoming breed amongst Romanticists.