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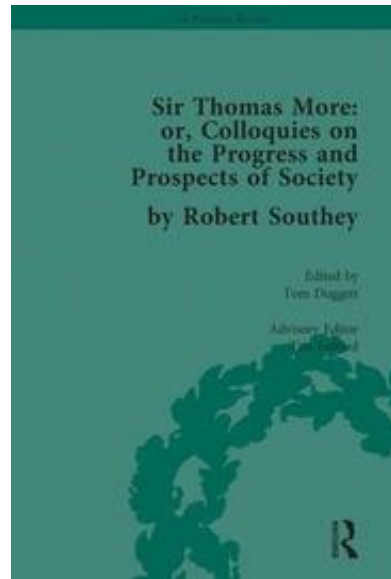
Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on The Progress and Prospects of Society by Robert Southey

edited by Tom Duggett¹

REVIEWING TOM DUGGETT'S EDITION of Southey's *Colloquies* has improved my impression of Southey in the 1810s and 1820s and the significance of his late work for scholars of the nineteenth century. This eminently scholarly edition is not one that most of us would seek out for a student's first encounter with the *Colloquies*. But for those of us who have enjoyed exploring Southey's personal correspondence, who have known Southey as a conversational thinker, host, and walker about Derwent and Keswick, to encounter a thoroughly researched scholarly edition of the *Colloquies* is unexpectedly refreshing.

If we could have visited Southey and the family at Greta Hall, as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Robert Owen did, we might have enjoyed a hike into the low mountains just as Sir Thomas More joins Montesinos, Southey's Spanish alter-ego in the *Colloquies*. Perhaps much of this book is a memorial tribute to vigorous intellectual discussions like those Southey shared in letters with friends like John Rickman. I have frankly dreaded a thorough reading of the *Colloquies*, expecting a heavy-handed moralism, yet I came away with a comforting and familiar impression emanating from the ghostly Sir Thomas More, who expresses the motivation of his visit as a deep sympathy for Montesinos from shared experience. Despite their profoundly different backgrounds, More explains, 'it is your lot, as it was mine, to live during one of the grand climacterics of the world' (I: 10). Perhaps the dialogic experiment is more significant for us now than the moral pronouncements of either character.

Tom Duggett's impressively thorough scholarship constitutes a vital reassessment of the importance of the *Colloquies* against a couple of centuries that have misread it or even misunderstood its very structure. The introduction orients us to a little-known origin story for this text, locating it in several distinct encounters Southey made with the radical ideology of his younger self in the 1810s. Duggett particularly emphasizes the influence on the *Colloquies* of Southey's multiple visits with Robert Owen in combination with his long-



¹ Tom Duggett, ed., *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on The Progress and Prospects of Society*, by Robert Southey, 2 vols., The Pickering Masters (London: Routledge, 2018).

standing fascination with beguinages (communal residences supporting women living independently). Certainly, the humiliating scandal of *Wat Tyler's* pirated publication looms behind this text, such that the settled Lake-dwelling figure of Montesinos must be significantly different than Don Espriella writing home about a strange England. But *Colloquies* resembles *Letters from England* in the effort to view Southey's native land through the eyes of a stranger from the distant past, as More is first introduced. As Duggett points out, dialogue with a ghost sets a groundwork for ghost-haunted Victorian medievalism as well as a spectral view of a too-rapidly changing present. Repeatedly I found myself entertaining a hunch that Charles Dickens must have at least paged through the *Colloquies* before taking Ebenezer Scrooge on his personal and national ghost-led tour through England's past and present.

Indeed, Southey's ghost of More is a kind mentor and sympathetic friend as much as an intellectual debater. Not always does More appear in a chair in the study, but he joins Montesinos on a hike into the mountains with his children unaware of the presence of their father's guest (the kids will just hear the poet muttering to himself and think that he's composing). On another occasion, as Montesinos reflects on dead friends and his own mortality, More announces his presence with a touch on Montesino's shoulder, with a ready comment on how a ghost is capable of leaving a sensory impression on the living. We certainly do not see a debate of Catholic against Protestant, but rather a view of More as one who reconciles the idea of Reformation to the effective methods of Catholicism to hold a population's beliefs. More and Montesinos find common ground beyond religious distinction, and a common capacity to critique where English Protestantism can be found wanting.

Duggett's impressive reception history helps to highlight how much has been misread, oversimplified, and forgotten about the Southey's book at a time when Thomas Macaulay's review is given more attention in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* than the *Colloquies* themselves. More patient Southey scholarship of the past two decades suggests an indeterminacy to the *Colloquies*, though perhaps 'forecasting—if not sedimenting—a future of open-ended and unwinnable culture wars' (I:xxxiv). For Southey scholars reading *The Colloquies*, there are plenty of familiar cross-cultural flourishes, as the origins of England are compared with the Homeric Greeks and with Pacific Island cultures visited by Captain Cook, before evaluating the variety of systems of human slavery practiced around the planet (Colloquy IV, I:34–37). This is a persistent thread with Southey's earlier writings, expanding the reader's frame of reference for the present state of the world.

To read Robert Southey in any edition is a navigation challenge that seems to require getting lost in the notes at the foot of the text, at the end or start of the next volume. There is a certain expense and challenge to the publisher in the craft of a Southey edition, too, whether in the nineteenth or the twenty-first century, and whether it is one of his epic poems like *The Curse of Kehama* or the prose work in multiple sections presently under review. Coping with multiple layers of paratext, with footnotes at the bottom of the page combined with

'Illustration' notes after the text, a scholar might well opt to read Southey's 'Illustration' notes separately for their own variegated interest. Perhaps from the first printing of this book we see evidence of some pressing against the physical bindings that constrain the branching associative imagination of a Southeyan writing process. We could model Southey's footnoting as an elaborate network of concepts and of the books in his immense library, but to page through it with an effort to connect text to each layer of paratext, particularly when we attempt to connect with Duggett's lengthy editorial notes and appendices, the scholarly edition cries out for hypertextual links and full-text searching.

These two volumes are most explicitly addressed to seasoned scholars familiar with the problems of reading editions with layers of referentiality. I admire Tom Duggett's eminently scholarly edition for the print-bound Pickering Masters series, and I must regret the sheer expense of it. Priced at the date of this writing at £417 (or \$450 USD), this edition is two or three times more expensive than the others produced in the Pickering Masters series of Southey's poetry and prose works in the past decade. Of course, it belongs with that eminent series, but this particular volume seems anything but readily accessible to new scholars, despite its importance to Victorian medievalism and politics. In this complicated edition, the challenge is to present Duggett's impressively observant and thoroughly researched editorial footnotes in some way to accompany Southey's footnotes and endnote 'Illustrations'. Duggett's edition carries the complexity a stage further by collating the only two existing print editions of 1829 and 1831 printed in Southey's lifetime. The collation effort does generate distractions and reading challenges in the P&C print volume structure: on a given representative page of this edition are multiple square-bracketed passages that indicate either a running head from the early editions or a moment when Southey signalled an 'Illustration'. Where originally Southey's Illustrations constituted 113 pages to be found at the end of the first volume, they now appear as the first section of volume two. This volume is entirely devoted to elaborate paratexts: Southey's Illustrations followed by Duggett's extensive endnotes and appendices that do far more than merely elaborate on Southey's sources. Duggett's notes sometimes constitute summary articles that educate the reader not just about which books Southey was consulting but about his complicated outlook on world cultures, which is why this volume should be valuable to new Southey scholars if they are fortunate to be able to read it and patient enough to read across the two volumes and multiple layers of annotation.

The scholarly editor clearly thought of this elaborately structured work in the hypertextual context of digital reading in our time. Duggett describes the effort to preserve each running page head of the 1829 edition as preserving "backwards-compatibility" with the critical heritage of Southey scholarship, and further that positioning Southey's Illustrations at the start of volume two 'provides links forward from the main text' (I:lxix–lxx). We wish we could link immediately from Colloquy to Illustration and endnotes as we laboriously page

through the second volume, and we readily imagine a more efficient and accessible digital edition built on the elaborately layered scholarship of this work. A valuable accompaniment to the scholar who lacks a copious supply of bookmarks might be to open the Project Gutenberg edition in the browser to search for a phrase like ‘moral pestilence’, locate particular *Colloquies* that bear the phrase, and dive into Duggett’s edition to follow the text and associated paratexts.

Duggett’s footnotes in the first volume do offer immediate translation of Greek and Latin as we read and represent a first, vital wave of orientation for the non-classically educated scholars of our time. In the second volume, Duggett’s endnotes meticulously investigate every reference, allusion, and pertinent related commentary. These are complemented by three appendices: Appendix A provides full-text contemporary reviews, while Appendix B represents Duggett’s thorough investigation of the many-faceted aspects of the name Montesinos, a Spanish word for ‘mountain man’ of the Lake District, as a sympathizer with abolitionist Catholic monks, and as a sign of the worldly Southey. Appendix C offers a listing of books from the sale catalogue of Southey’s library, featuring some like Christopher Wordsworth’s biography of Sir Thomas More, found in the library opened to a page describing his dietary predilections, which Southey wrote about in *Colloquy II*. Such nuggets of finely researched detail proliferate across these two volumes.

Opening Duggett’s notes in the second volume at random, I discovered myself in familiar Southeyan territory, reading at one (now lost) point about airships designed in past centuries, and alas, failing to locate where that was hinged to the *Colloquies*. As with most of his complicated books, the delight of discovering *Colloquies* is in finding Southey at work in his cosmopolitan library and crafting it as an elaborate annotated conversation with a friendly learned ghost emanating from the old tomes in Greta Hall’s library.