It was, in one reading of Shelley’s “England in 1819,” “time’s worst statute,” and while readers now require a footnote to suggest that Shelley was signaling a position on the rights of Catholics, the debate at the time was inescapable. Bubbling below the surface of the texts we now celebrate as Romantic was a vast discourse charged with the slowly cooling passions of the Reformation and agitated by the anticlericalism of the French Revolution. Broadsheets, pamphlets, books, and periodicals were all employed. The Quarterly spent more time fretting about Papists than murdering poets, although surprisingly John Wilson Croker was a Tory advocate on the liberal side. Stuart Andrews’ new book traces the origins and tenor of Southey’s several interventions in the debate and shows how they involved all three of Andrews’ subtitular nouns. This book is, we are warned in the first sentence, “about Southey the poet laureate, rather than Southey the poet” (ix)—that is, about the true-blue Tory who wrote histories, pamphlets, and reviews to support an argument for the Protestant state.

Andrews’ Southey, then, is an anti-Catholic polemicist distinguished for his eloquence. “In tracing the consistency and growing coherence of Southey’s campaign against the presumed political threat posed by Catholicism,” writes Andrews, “this study illustrates the rhetorical richness of his polemical prose at a time when his main poetic
achievement was behind him” (x). This promise of the Preface is not fully realized. While thoroughly analyzing the content of Southey’s polemics, Andrews mines only a portion of their rhetorical gold. In passing, for instance, he notes Southey’s use of a military metaphor in a Quarterly article (172-73) but does not explore its rhetorical effect. It would be curious to see how well Southey’s nonfiction—long celebrated especially in his Life of Nelson—might hold up if its aesthetic effects (the poetics of its prose) were scrutinized as closely as its content. The recent analysis of Sir William Napier’s prose in Edward Adams’s Liberal Epic (2011) shows that once admired histories can bear aesthetic fruits. Andrews’ study, however, cannot pick all the fruits, and those that chiefly interest him are neither aesthetic nor rhetorical.

When in 1825 Southey published his last long poem, the Spenserian historical epic A Tale of Paraguay, the Eclectic Review was quite taken with it: “Why, why has the Author ever deserted his proper path? It is on works like this, which the public will not willingly let die, that his fame must stand, when his politics and polemics shall be forgiven and forgotten” (Lionel Madden, ed. Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage [London: Routledge, 1972]: 326). The reading public of subsequent generations, however, has willingly let Southey’s epics die—despite such eloquent reminders of their presence as Herbert Tucker’s Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse (Oxford, 2008). Southey’s polemics, however, no longer need forgiveness, and Andrews’ book goes some way toward ensuring that they are not forgotten, at least by political and religious historians of the era. His book thus joins two others that have recently cast fresh light on Southey: W. A. Speck’s Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters (2006), and the splendid electronic
edition of Southey’s correspondence in progress at the Romantic Circles website and reviewed elsewhere on this site.

According to Andrews, Southey turned anti-Catholic in his youth. Even in the radical 1790s, when he was plotting Pantisocracy and penning *Wat Tyler*, his direct experience of the effects of the Catholic church set him against it. Prompted by what he saw during a trip to the Iberian Peninsula with his uncle in 1795, his *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797) reveal, says Andrews, “his deep-rooted hostility to monasticism and monasteries” (33). Consequently, when the debate about Catholic emancipation heated up at the time of the Irish Act of Union, Southey was ready to enter it, and when the Spanish insurrection against Napoleon began the Peninsular Campaign in 1808, he quickly updated his *Letters* and published a revised edition to meet the new circumstances.

It is Southey as a journalist, however, that occupies Andrews in Chapter 3, which tracks his work through a variety of publications from 1808 to 1811, notably in the *Annual Review* and after 1809 the *Quarterly*. Southey wrote journalism to support his family (and to some extent Coleridge’s family as well), but Andrews plainly indicates that he seized gladly rather than dutifully on the relation between church and state. Debates such as those between the smooth, Irish, pro-Catholic Henry Parnell and the elderly but vociferous anti-Catholic Patrick Duigenan drew Southey’s involvement. Andrews clarifies the terms and spells out the impact of his interventions. Southey’s example encouraged others, such as George Isaac Huntingford, Bishop of Gloucester, to take a more active role, and his polemics in periodicals were a natural prelude to working
with John Murray on textbooks to be used in the new Church of England national schools (57).

Andrews’ two chapters (4 and 5) on Southey’s writing in the Regency period turn afresh to his reputation as an apostate. Though the Tory laureate looked like a turncoat when a radical play of his youth—*Wat Tyler*—was surreptitiously published in 1817, and though the witty snipes of Byron (among others) have largely defined him for us, Andrews valuably shows how the anti-Papism of his Tory maturity grew out of the anti-clericalism of his Jacobinical youth (though he would have denied that epithet). In addition, a few relevant digressions into such matters as Barbauld’s state of the nation poem “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” help place Southey within a broader context of national concern as the Napoleonic wars wound down.

In the crucial years 1824-1826, covered in Chapters 6-8, Southey vigorously debated Church history with Charles Butler and John Milner. In a manner more textual than contextual, Andrews recapitulates Southey’s *Book of the Church* (1824), Butler’s rejoinder, *Book of the Roman Catholic Church* (1825) and Milner’s *Strictures on the Poet Laureate’s Book of the Church* (1825) before considering Southey’s defenders in the Tory and Anglican press, such as Blanco White and Henry Phillpotts. In his *Book of the Church*, we learn, Southey champions “the Established Church as an essential political, cultural, and social element of the British Constitution and as an embodiment of the English sense of nationhood” (111). In response, Butler mainly defends the Catholic Church against Southey’s rhetoric and misprisons, and suggests by implication that altering the constitution to remove Catholic disabilities will not fundamentally change the nation. In presenting so fully the details of his core texts, Andrews opens the door for a
wider contextualization of these works, either in the proliferating theoretical studies of nationhood and nationalism in the Romantic era, or in more detailed accounts of the press and the politics of church and state in the mid 1820s. But if Andrews had grappled more directly with the work of such scholars as James Sack, David Simpson, Gerald Newman, et alia, he might have more thoroughly linked the debates in parliament with the newspapers, or calibrated the effect of the bigotry that came Southey’s way. When his close friend John Rickman tells him in 1825 that the Irish are “barbarians” and “savages” ready to massacre with “as hearty a good will as did their forefathers in 1641” (Orlo Williams, *The Life and Letters of John Rickman* [London: Constable, 1911]: 230), one wonders how those comments may have whetted Southey’s anti-Catholicism. But this line of inquiry would have led to a more general and less granular approach.

Chapter 9 documents a mistimed but thorough effort —Southey’s long and well-argued article on Ireland in the *Quarterly* (October 1828). Though that was published too late to have any influence on Wellington’s capitulation to the demand for Catholic emancipation, the article is well reasoned. Like other Tory humanists, Southey argues that government should not let the threat of violence force it to make constitutional change, but should rather use economic means to settle Ireland’s unrest and alleviate its poverty. As Andrews notes, however, “Southey’s social program for the betterment of Ireland was indeed what was needed, but neither Catholic emancipation nor parliamentary reform would wait” (178).

Andrews’ analysis of the journalism he treats is somewhat complicated by the anonymity of its publication. Southey’s unsigned article on Ireland, for instance, would have been readily recognized as his work in 1828, and Andrews rightly discusses it under
the signature “Southey” rather than the corporate sign *Quarterly*. In quoting from *Blackwood’s*, however, Andrews cites unsigned articles as if they were solely the production of the magazine as a corporate entity—although the authors are identified in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*. Earlier he devotes a paragraph to an essay in the *Edinburgh* (138-39) without noting that its author was Henry Parnell, whom he has discussed in a different context in Chapter 3. Though Andrews is hardly the worst offender, it is regrettable that those who cite periodical literature do not routinely use the information compiled so carefully by the *Wellesley* editors and others.

After the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, Southey and Coleridge too wrote differently about Catholicism, the constitution, and the problem of Ireland. In his concluding chapter, Andrews examines Southey’s later prose, such as *Sir Thomas Moore: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829) along with Coleridge’s more influential *On the Constitution of Church and State* and *Aids to Reflection*, and shows how Southey’s thought resurfaces in the early works of the next generation and in the politics of Benjamin Disraeli and “Young England.”

This book clearly and consistently examines Southey’s writings on history, politics, and religion over four decades. Thanks to Andrews’ work, many who wish to know what Southey thought and wrote may not have to read every page of such works as his three-volume *History of Brazil*. But one also hopes that this book will send other readers, historians, and cultural critics back to Southey’s works for a more extended perusal.
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