GREAT BRITAIN AND LATIN AMERICA:

THE ROMANTICS AND THE INFORMAL EMPIRE

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THE ROMANTICS AND THE INFORMAL EMPIRE

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Dedicated to Melanie, Elizabeth, and #2.
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This study examines the cross-influences of Great Britain and Latin America in the Romantic epoch. The study argues that the reflexively imperialist notions and self-assured superiority of the British were slowly being changed by the increased interaction with Latin Americans and the dissemination of information about Latin Americans in this period. The persistent and subtle Eurocentric views did not disappear but were changed—both in a tempering and in a strengthening. In brief, the study examines ways Britain was able to gain influence over such a large portion of the world that it did not have direct control over, using a form of “informal imperialism” by attempting to steer the commerce and political direction of various Latin American nations. British literature about Latin America demonstrated the ambivalences, the paradoxes, and the clashes within British imperialism itself. Likewise, Latin American literature’s pushback against its imperialist influences, including that of Great Britain, demonstrated the unique character of the continent itself. British influence left its trace in Latin American culture, although Latin Americans resisted and subverted this influence.
(Chapter 1) Introduction:

Great Britain and Latin America: The Romantic Shift

This study explores the various approaches to and usages of Latin America by the British writers of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, from the ordinary citizens who wrote travel narratives to some of Great Britain’s most notable Romantic poets, including the poet laureate Robert Southey. To think that the interaction between the Empire and Latin America was just a one-way street, however, would be to miss the crucial voices of the Latin Americans themselves, who developed their own perceptions and rhetoric in response. At the heart of this interaction was the rise of a British informal imperialism marked by the acquisition of power and influence not through direct conquest but through culture, religion, and commerce. British writers pursued a vision of the United Kingdom’s interaction with Latin America as one predicated upon an enlightened liberalism, an ascendancy justified by a moral kinship with the Amerindian and a moral superiority to the Iberian monarchs. The literary interactions of the British Romantic-era writers and Latin America demonstrate the “informal empire” at work, particularly in the treatment of and perceptions of Amerindians, the African and African-descended, Roman Catholics, the Creoles, and the Iberian monarchical powers.

Great Britain’s relationship with Latin America in the epoch of the early 19th century was marked by more overtly commercial rather than directly territorial interests. The literary interest in the New World in this era reveals ways in which rhetoric was used to manipulate and influence not only British perceptions of Latin America but the political
and commercial landscape of Great Britain itself. Britain was a small but key part of the Latin American politics and discourse, whether in agitating for the Spanish colonies’ independence from their Iberian motherlands or in influencing the nature of Latin American poetry. The British saw themselves as important players in the Latin American landscape; underdogs in this arena in comparison to Spain and Portugal, yes, but wily and morally superior enough to become dominant.

At the turn of the century, the Crown seemed most interested in actually fomenting rebellions in the Latin America. However, by 1810 the attraction was the figure of the open markets themselves (Kaufmann 53), using revolutions and unhappiness among the Portuguese and Spanish colonies as a means of expanding British commerce. The expanding influence of France made Europe less accessible as a market; a series of humiliating defeats to Spain made territorial expansion in the Americas less likely; and the loss of the United States closed commercial possibilities even further: “Economically the outlook for Britain was bleak and uninviting unless one considered, as so many did, the unexplored and elusive potentialities of Latin America,” writes William Kaufman (7).

So if territorial usurpation was not always possible, commercial and cultural superiority possibly was—a “second-best” option. In 1822, Foreign Secretary George Canning, just prior to the recognition of some of the newly independent republics of South America, wrote tellingly that “Spanish America is free, and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English” (qtd. in Ferns 48). As Rebecca Heinowitz notes, the tacit understanding is that “commercial pre-eminence in Spanish America was […] tantamount to possession” (4). The Latin American colonies certainly seemed a tempting market for the British. A round trip of goods delivered from London and sold to
the east coast of Brazil took ships only 9 to 12 months, whereas it took upwards of 18 months for a trip to India (Platt 24). British goods penetrated deep into the East Coast of Latin America: cheap British-imported cotton supplanted the home markets of Argentina and Brazil almost entirely (Platt 10), and broadcloths from Yorkshire, stockings from Nottingham, hats from London, and cutlery from Sheffield were sold in remote Brazilian towns for little more than in the British towns in which they were manufactured (Platt 18).

This indirect method of acquiring power and control for the British Empire—this expansion of the “informal empire” through the expansion of culture, missionaries, and most especially commerce—is at the heart of this study’s examination of the cross-influences of Latin America and the United Kingdom. This study argues that the reflexively imperialist notions and self-assured superiority of the British were evident yet slowly being transformed by the increased interaction with Latin Americans and the dissemination of information about Latin Americans—not undone, but evolving into something new. The persistent and subtle Eurocentric views did not disappear, of course, but were changed—both in a tempering and in a strengthening. For example, the use of Amerindians as protagonists, such as in Helen Maria Williams’ Peru, forced British readers to identify with the Amerindian characters—yet only by giving the Amerindians Eurocentric viewpoints. In brief, the study will examine ways Britain was able to gain influence over such a large portion of the world that it did not have direct control over, using a form of “informal imperialism” by attempting to steer the commerce and political direction of various Latin American nations. British literature about Latin America demonstrated the ambivalences, the paradoxes, and the clashes within British imperialism.
itself. Likewise, Latin American literature’s pushback against its imperialist influences, including that of Great Britain, demonstrated the unique character of the continent itself. British influence left its trace in Latin American culture, although Latin Americans resisted it.

The British Empire sought to create dependencies and safe harbors for their trade ships, ensuring that British interests were steadily being promoted, particularly in the area of trade. The informal empire is not a negation of imperialism—it is a form of imperialism, extended. As German historian Wolfgang Mommsen notes, informal imperialism not only may accompany, precede, or replace formal territorial imperialism—it may “even make it unnecessary” (86). The creation of a dependency, through trade, religion, or culture, can suit the purposes of an empire just as well as a naval base in a harbor. Furthermore, the informal empire becomes the norm rather than the exception:

Imperialist forces at the colonial periphery were by no means obliged constantly to resort to the actual use of political power: it was generally quite enough to know that the imperialist groups could count on support from the metropolitan power in the event of a crisis. Formal political rule thus appears only as the most specific, but not the normal type of imperialist dependence. (Mommsen 86)

And, as J. B. Foster notes, nowhere was this type of informal imperialism more evident than in the British role in Latin America: “The clearest example of such informal imperialism was the British role in South America in the nineteenth century” (29).

In order to meet the definition of informal empire, some conditions must be met: extra-territorial privileges granted to the encroaching power; ability to keep other powers
at bay; some strong legal recognition and protection by the ostensible powers of the foreign territory; de facto economic dominance, and the ability to strongly sway policies in the foreign territory (Barton and Bennett 65-86). But where does the concept of “informal empire” come from? One of the seminal texts in the conception of the informal empire is “The Imperialism of Free Trade” by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson (1953). As they write in their introduction, to examine the concept of formal empire alone is “rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line.” (1). Particularly, Gallagher and Robinson point to the steady accretion of power by Great Britain, during parts of the 19th cent in which the formal empire was not expanding rapidly. The explosion of British overseas commercial interests was lucrative—between 1815 and 1880, £1,187,000,000 was credited outside of the shores of Great Britain, but remarkably, less than 18 percent of that was placed in the territories that could be clearly marked as “formal Empire” (Robinson and Gallagher 5).

It was in Latin America that the informal empire reached its apex of informal supremacy, according to Robinson and Gallagher: “would be hard to imagine a more spectacular example of a policy of commercial hegemony in the interests of high politics, or of the use of informal political supremacy in the interests of commercial enterprise” (8). The British found that not only could they move from mercantilism—where the formal rule and protectionist monopolies held sway—to free tree, in addition, could be a better bargain. The slackening of a formal bond could actually be of greater benefit to Great Britain’s long-term needs, because the good-will could strengthen economic dependence, which in turn reinforced Great Britain’s sway in the territory (Robinson and Gallagher 4).
British history in the nineteenth century is a “history of expanding society,” as Robinson and Gallagher put it, marked by “radiations of the social energies of the British peoples” as by-products of the informal empire (5). In this study, four genres by British citizens capture some of these “radiations” of social energies—epic poetry, travel narratives, historiography, and engravings. Each works in a different way to reflect or to propagate the project of the informal empire. With epic poetry Helena Williams’ *Peru*, for example, the national identity of the Amerindian in Peru is appropriated within the genre of epic poetry—notable for its aspirations of high culture and national pride—to clarify a British contrast with the Spanish Empire, the “reluctant Empire” of commerce versus the pillaging, raping evil empire of Spain. By using this genre, the British project of informal empire is furthered by the comparison of Great Britain to Spain.

The travel narratives explore what it means to maintain a British identity in a foreign culture, setting a contrast of what it means to be truly British. Ross Forman, in his study of adventure tales set in Brazil from 1850-1918 “When Britons Brave Brazil,” similarly observes this happening in these later tales, where the heroes of these adventure tales inflect “local surroundings with British ethos—an ethos of honesty, solidarity, and propriety—[attempting] to bring these surroundings into a “Greater British” fold” (456). The protagonists of these tales, Forman writes, would attempt to re-formulate Latin America into a British-minded, Protestant, prosperous part of the economic empire of Great Britain (457). Likewise, the travelogues seek to center around the ideological conflicts, the cultural differences, and economic opportunities of Latin America. Grounded in the text is the voice of the British writer as “expert,” a confident
representative of Britishness who can navigate all worlds with equal ease and inevitable mastery.

The project of British empire is obliquely critiqued and recast by Robert Southey in his *History of Brazil*. The use of the genre of historiography allows a place to navigate in a seemingly more objective space, putting out the facts about a Latin American nation. But the readership that Southey has in mind is British, not Brazilian—and thus, it is to them he is speaking, putting in print his concerns and wishes and justifications for the British imperial project, particularly his anger with of the slave trade. His ostensible topic is Latin America, but his real subject is the informal empire of Great Britain. By using this genre, Southey is able to create a space where he can speak more freely of his perceptions of his homeland’s place in the world.

Finally, the engravings by William Blake for *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* give Blake a way to critique the informal empire, especially in its treatment of African-descended slaves. The informal empire has its own price that must be paid, and paid most heavily by those who benefit least. But by having the argument about the universality of humanity carried in image rather than text, Blake can override ideological blinders more easily, allowing the viewers to be impacted viscerally and emotionally.

The cross-influences of Latin America and Great Britain in the Romantic era are an underexplored area but not one entirely ignored. Rebecca Cole Heinowitz’s *Spanish America and British Romanticism, 1777–1826*, published in 2010, is a recent landmark study. Heinowitz sees this intersection as key to understanding the literary and political
landscape of the time: “By revealing the untold story of Romantic-era Britain’s literary
and political embroilment with Spanish America, we can begin to move beyond the
critical impasse in which Romantic writers appear as either radical defenders of universal
liberty or as Victorian imperialists” (Heinowitz 3). This was particularly true in Britain’s
“informal empire”—the areas under its commercial and, to a lesser extent, cultural
influence yet not under its direct territorial control.

The project of this study differs in expanding beyond just the Spanish Americas to
the areas of Brazil and Surinam. While other studies have explored the connections
between the Spanish-speaking New World and the British Romantics, few have
simultaneously taken a look at how Latin America spoke back. In particular, Brazil,
which had a less-antagonistic relationship with Great Britain due to Portugal’s alliances
with the United Kingdom, has not had its connection with the British Romantics
satisfactorily explored.

One of the great questions of this era is why the British Empire supported the
Imperial project. Yes, there were benefits in trade, but even these material gains would
seem to be swamped by the trade-offs of taxes, blood, and ethical compromise. Surely, to
a clear-eyed observer, the costs outweighed the benefits. In 1989, Jennifer Roback
published a paper a paper titled “Racism as Rent Seeking.” She addressed one interesting
sociological puzzle: why were the streetcars of so many Southern cities legislated to be
segregated? It is a puzzle because, contrary to conventional wisdom, this wasn’t
codifying an already-existing practice. Prior to legislation, passengers sat where they
wished and next to whomever they wished. Were there demands from passengers for
segregation? There is little evidence to indicate that this was so—in fact, passengers of
both races expressed dissatisfaction with the legislation after the fact. Finally, even the streetcar companies themselves disliked the idea—it would be too expensive to implement. Why, then was the legislation enacted? Who wanted it badly enough to implement it? As Roback states, “The most likely candidates are politicians who believed that there existed latent sentiment in favor of segregation among whites. Political entrepreneurs could offer white voters something they valued enough to vote for, but not enough to bear the costs privately. Through collective action, the costs of segregation could be imposed on the (disenfranchised) black passengers and the (regulated) streetcar companies” (672-674). Roback adopts the phrase “psychic rents” to describe the act of imposing an unbalanced cost upon a collective in order to maintain the pleasant or desired feelings for a small subset of a population.

There are clear parallels to the Imperial project and the streetcar disenfranchisement that this study examines—heavy, often unwanted costs to citizen and nation were maintained because the high prestige of having higher status relative to Spain or France or any other rival made it worthwhile. Yet the costs of Empire—particularly slavery—are not forgotten by the British writers of the era. Indeed, it is remarkable how often the writers struggled with the conundrum of pride in the British accomplishments and yet the unease at the social and moral costs. This internal struggle is one factor that leads several writers to endorse the informal empire, particularly that of British commerce, as a “kinder, gentler” version of Empire vastly preferable to territorial conquest. Empire could become more humane and more lucrative at the same time. Moreover, in Latin America, the British could become rescuers of the oppressed classes
under the Spanish thumb, ameliorating the conditions of the Amerindian and the African and African-descended in the Americas.

What are some common characteristics of the writing of this era about Latin America? For one, as Heinowitz points out, there is a common theme about the relative moral superiority of the British colonial project over that of the Iberian colonialism (6). While the informal Empire may have been a “second-best” option to the control of territory, in the minds of some British citizens it could be justified as being more highly moral than the Spanish system. (Although this is not always simply a case of British boosterism by the writers—the slavery question that bothered the liberals of Great Britain is frequently condemned as a blight on the British colonial system by the same British writers, particularly Southey, as Chapter 3 will explain.). Secondly, a common characteristic is the privileging of the autonomous individual, particularly the individual who is Protestant and “free-thinking.” This is of particular note in Chapter 2, where the travel writers in Latin America put a high premium on the concept of “curiosity”—and a sense of overt superiority to the creoles and Amerindian who seemed insufficiently fascinated by their own home continent. Third, the British writing is characterized by a remarkably complicated attitude towards the Amerindian and the African slaves, racked by guilt and shame for their own involvement in their suffering, identifying more strongly with them and their struggles in Latin America than with the Iberian colonial powers, but simultaneously using them as a blank canvas to project their own politics and worldviews, tools to elucidate the poetic and political goals. Brazilian poetry is also characteristic in a few ways. The Brazilian poets who reacted to the European tradition wrote of their disjunction—pride at being Brazilian, but split between the Old World that
taught them and acculturated them and the New World that nurtured them and which they called home. This split is evident in the bittersweet nostalgia—saudades—thematically evident in their writings as well as their fascination with European writers, particularly Lord Byron.

**Helen Maria William’s *Peru***

A brief examination of Helen Maria Williams’ 1786 epic poem *Peru* is a helpful introduction to this study’s project because it is a remarkable distillation of most of the problems and questions being explored. Williams’ 1,500-line poem about the Spanish massacre of the Incas in 1532 is perhaps the most intensely Latin American-oriented British poem of the Romantic era. “Perhaps no other woman of the nineteenth century came to know more about South America and its topographic makeup than Williams,” writes Jessica Damian (“Peruvian Tales”). In the poem, the Spanish are depicted as brutish and cruel. Its critique of the violence of imperialism engenders sympathy for the non-European side of the conflict, unusually so for the era. It did so, however, by creating prominent “royal” families with heroic martyrs, transplanting class-oriented structure and status upon the Amerindians. Its use of the exotic locale such as the Andes as a backdrop was also typical for the era. Interestingly, the allegorical figure of Sensibility herself weeps over the Incas. Williams seems to want to transfer the outrage of the historical events to contemporary times, when she writes that “there is much reason to hope that these injured nations may recover the liberty of which they have been so cruelly deprived” (1:47). As a pacifist and abolitionist, Williams wrote her account to stir the hearts of a British audience against the aggressive colonialization of Latin America, albeit an account that held the Spanish as greater villains than the English.
Williams is careful to construct an image of the Peruvian conquest as a locus of abject human misery. The Amerindian is not ultimately given victory, no, but the Amerindian is given voice and a sensibility superior to the rapacious Iberian invaders. For Williams, the poem was a means to express her abhorrence of despotism, slavery, and war and to galvanize sentiment and action against tyranny. The work is a tool to speak out against tyranny by manifesting characters who exhibited “a peaceful radiance that actively enables social justice” (Duquette 114), a sense of a gentle and pacifistic national agape in the face of the raging barbarism of the conquistadors.

Yet, despite these overt intentions, the poem still functions subtly as an endorsement of the project of the British informal empire. The question returns: How does one pursue imperial expansion without conquest? Importantly, the type of colonization that Williams condemned is the territorial empire of blood and gun but not the informal empire of culture and religion. In fact, by relative comparison, the poem can be read as almost a muted endorsement of Britain’s influence over Spain’s conquests. It is the senseless violence that receives the most condemnation and not necessarily the spirit of Empire itself.

Williams figures a fairly stark story of metaphorical rape—Peru as the innocent maiden and the “sons of Spain,” particularly Pizarro, as the villains driven mad by lust for gold.

Peruvia! oh delightful land; in vain
The virtues flourish’d on thy beauteous plain;
In vain sweet pleasure there was seen to move,
And wore the smile of peace, the bloom of love;
For soon shall burst the unrelenting storm,
Rend her soft robe, and crush her tender form:
Peruvia! soon the fatal hour shall rise,
The hour despair shall waste in tears and sighs;
Fame shall record the horrors of thy fate,
And distant ages weep for ills so great. (1:127–136)

The landscape is feminine, soft, and tender. Her robe is torn; her form is crushed. A short while later, the metaphor of rape is re-emphasized in the description of a “bleeding land” of 1:179. Spain is mentioned four times in the poem. Notably, Spain herself is also feminine, described as “proud.” However, it is her “sons” who do the damage—and they are relentless, arrogant and filled with “sanguine rage” (2:30), wielding “naked sabers” (2:28) that are “red with purple streams” (4:20), rushing upon “Peru’s unarm’d, devoted train” (2:30–31). Williams’ description of Peru as a maiden, generic and vague, is clearly meant to allow readers to inject their own perspective into the work and create a bonded identification with the Amerindian.

Williams’ condemnation of Spain is not done in a political vacuum. Not only does she advocate for the freedom of the Latin American colonies of Spain, she is also writing at a time when Britain’s transatlantic prestige was on a sharp decline. Not only had they lost the United States colonies, but the British also had suffered a series of setbacks against Spain in the Spanish Match crisis, the War of Jenkins’ Ear, and the Seven Years War. By 1783, Britain had not only lost the American colonies but was losing prestige
relative to Spain in its American colonies. By framing the story of Peru as that of rape, Williams works simultaneously to engender indignation at the violence of the conqueror as well as a sense of outraged honor in a British reader, who would feel motivated to emote in vicarious support for the forces rebelling against Spain in the 18th century. Yes, on the one hand the poem’s about the use of the brutish Spanish as a symbol for the need for pacifism. Yet, it can also be seen as anger against Spain—for disrupting the informal empire of Britain’s trade and commerce in the 1770s. Williams advocates for sympathy and sensibility, but this highly charged indignation is directed towards a politically controversial and inevitably violent end: “Williams’s expression of anti-Spanish sentiments at a time when hatred of Spain was intimately tied to Britain’s continued colonial pursuits could . . . be seen as an anxious response to the demise of Britain’s American Empire. In this fashion the poem functions as a propaganda piece fueling rather than impeding Britain’s imperial enterprise through its encouragement of ongoing contentions with Spain” (Sanchez 24). Arguably, Williams’ poem resonates with the British reader less for the injustice itself than for the villain—Spain.

The image of Peru that Williams portrays is of a place wholesome and untrampled, Edenic and ideal. Often, she will connect Peru to the image of flowers and blooming:

And oft she [The Peruvian forces] forc’d Iberia’s band to yield;
Oft tore from Spain’s proud head her laurel bough,
And bade it blossom on Peruvia’s brow (4:29–31)="/"
The flag of freedom rears on Chili’s plain,
And leads to glorious strife his gen’rous train:
And see Iberia bleeds! While vict’ry twines
Her fairest blossoms round Peruvia’s shrines. (6.325–328)

Peru’s cause is just because it is natural and fecund; Spain, in turn, is an empire of blood and death. Williams creates a careful connection between the reader and the Amerindian of Peru, making the connection seem natural and inarguable. Peru and Britain are linked—and Peru could become a natural “growth” for the British Empire. The type of informal empire that Williams seems to advocate is not that of the commercial empire, however. Rebecca Heinowitz convincingly argues that Williams did not have a market relationship between Latin American and Great Britain in mind (41–48), for Williams’ own poetry condemns transatlantic commerce, particularly the slave trade. Instead, she argues, Williams uses a set of tropes “that stress the similarities between the Peruvian and the British national character and works to re-articulate British patriotism in an increasingly global context” (44)—in other words, it seeks to naturalize British sensibilities into the Peruvian character, recasting the Amerindians of her poem into the sort of valiant, peace-loving citizens who responded with arms only in the face of wanton aggression. The blooming and blossoming of flowers suggests that their cause is just, and a cause that the British can and should identify with strongly. The patriotism that would stir in the heart of a Peruvian is the same sort that would move a British citizen. Notably, there is an invocation of liberty that ends Williams’ poem: ‘O Freedom, may thy genius still ascend/ Beneath thy crest may proud Iberia bend’ (VI:340). In one footnote, Williams refers explicitly to the Peruvian Amerindian Túpac Amaru II who led the 1780 uprising: “An Indian descended from the Incas has lately obtained several victories over the Spaniards, the gold mines have been for some time shut up; and there is much reason
to hope, that these injured nations may recover the liberty of which they have been so cruelly deprived” (2:176). Once again, the British reader is meant to identify with the Peruvian Amerindian.

The informal empire advocated by Williams expands in another direction, too, however—that of a Christian faith, a sort of syncretic proto-Christianity that is distinctly non-Catholic. In the poem, the corrupt Roman Catholic priest Valverda tortures an unnamed Peruvian man, Zilia’s father, who is described as being a “meek spirit” who had approach the conquistadors of Spain and “humbly sought its God” (3:34). For his efforts, he is tortured. In his agony, he cries out:

“Oh suff'ring Lord!” he cried, “whose streaming blood

Was pour'd for man—Earth drank the sacred flood—

Whose mercy in the mortal pang forgave

“he murd’rous band, thy love alone could save;

Forgive—thy goodness bursts each narrow bound,

Which feeble thought, and human hope surround;

Forgive the guilty wretch, whose impious hand

From thy pure altar flings the flaming brand,

In human blood that hallow’d altar steeps,
The undeniable inflection of Christ’s words on the cross—calling for God to “forgive”—emphasizes the anti-Christian nature of the conquistador’s pogrom. By recasting the Peruvian man as a proto-Christian, primitive yet closer to the truth of real faith, Williams again creates an identification for the British reader with the Peruvian Amerindian, but she also subtly promotes the idea that the Spanish are not advocating a true form of Christianity. It is in the sickness of a false religion, and not a sensible faith. And if the Spanish church isn’t advocating it, who shall? Perhaps that true form of Christianity needs to be propagated, still, by right-thinking British citizens, in extension of a benevolent, wise empire.

Zilia’s father is rescued by de las Casas, who comforts the tortured man. But de las Casas’ ultimate goal is not merely succor—he seeks to evangelize as well. Speaking of de las Casas’ encouragement, Williams writes, “Oft in the tones of love, the words of peace,/He bids the bitter tears of anguish cease;/Bids drooping hope uplift her languid eyes,/And points a dearer bliss beyond the skies.” (III.137–140). Only a true faith, unbroken by greed and lust for territory, can bring salvation to the people. As Zilia’s father dies, he cries out that he will accept the God of de las Casas: “the God, whom now my vows adore,/My heart thro’ life obey’d, unknowing more;/His mild forgiveness then my soul shall prove,/His mercy share—Las Casa’s God, is Love!” (III.147–150). Spain, goes the tacit argument, could have been more like de las Casas than Valverda and been that elect European nation to have planted Christianity with the necessity of conquest were it not trapped in a lust of gold and blood. The use of force has tainted the Christian faith of Spanish America, and thus, perhaps, with the freedom from Spain can
come a truer, better revelation of Christ’s message. The Peruvians had for long years already served a higher power, in Williams’ view, and were just lacking the clear revelation of Christianity to make their acceptance of faith ready and easy. This was a spiritual harvest that should have been ripe for the plucking; instead, Williams implies, it was burned to the ground. Because they had failed in their divine mission, the thinking goes, the Spanish powers were to be tossed aside for improperly ministering to the lost souls of Peru. This is further played out in the image of de las Casas, who comforts the broken, forgives the trespasses of his fellow sons of Spain, and is in fact resurrected in the figure of Gasca “the messenger of peace”:

Mild Gasca now, the messenger of peace,

Suspends the storm, and bids the tumult cease.

Pure spirit! in Religion’s garb he came,

And all his bosom felt her holy flame;

’Twas then her vot’ries glory, and their care

To bid oppression’s harpy talons spare;

To bend the crimson banner he unfurl’d,

And shelter from his grasp a suff’ring world:

Gasca, the guardian minister of woe,
Bids o’er her wounds the balms of comfort flow (VI.270–280)

Gasca, representative of “true” religion, binds up the broken-hearted of Peru and brings succor. His presence in Peru is brief, however, and he is returned to Spain. The need for proper revealed religion is left unmet and unfulfilled.

With the British writings of this era, the movement towards and rationalization of informal imperialism become clearly apparent, even in the staunchly anti-slavery, marginalized-sympathetic work of Williams. The desire to foment a connection with the Amerindian and the British is admirable in that it does not paint the Peruvians as savages, but it does not truly give them voice, either, except as projections of British conscience and mores.

The Chapters

The four following chapters will explore, in order, (1) travel journals of citizens, particularly British, who traveled to Latin America; (2) Brazilian Romantic poets; (3) Robert Southey’s History of Brazil; and (4) John Stedman’s The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam, which included engravings by William Blake. This order of chapters has been chosen to reflect the cross-pollination of influences. The travelogues reveal the attitudes of the ordinary Westerner, whereas the Brazilian poets give us a glimpse into Latin Americans’ views of themselves. Then, this study catalogues the record of British perceptions of Latin America through prose in Southey and images in Blake.
Chapter 2 explores the British nationals’ travel journals and their views of Latin America, and how these views colored Great Britain’s attitudes towards Latin America. Among the most interesting accounts of Latin America were those of visiting British nationals in the epoch of 1780–1820. Often, British nationals would characterize Latin America from their decidedly British worldview, chastising the locals for a lack of curiosity or for “dirtiness.” Latin America was often viewed, too, as a land of opportunity, not for colonization as much as for commercialization, a new market for expansion. A botched attempt at taking over Buenos Aires in 1806 put a firm stop to the direct usurpation of Latin America by the British, but the attempts to shape Latin America, especially for commercialization, continued apace. (One is reminded of Stuart Laycock’s recent study, which revealed that Great Britain and/or England has invaded or has had a military incursion into roughly 90 percent of the nations of the world—all but 22 of modern-day nations (Woolf).)

The Protestant/Roman Catholic split was responsible for much of the cultural gap between the British and Latin Americans, with the British often seeing their travels to Latin America through the lens of proselytizing and transforming the gothic, “backwards” culture into something more resembling northern European values. At the root, however, was always the failure or success to turn Latin America into a fruitful market. Accounts described frustration at “lazy” locals or the “useless” local customs, frequently describing them in terms of productivity. Even the way the landscape is described is often cast in economic terms; for instance, the British were likely to describe the Argentine pampas as flat, empty, and uninspiring, needing \textit{to be changed into} something full of productive value, whereas the Alps or the Highlands of Europe were
beautiful enough for their own sake to be preserved as they were. As Jean Franco notes, many of these contemporary accounts take pains to point out to the reader “the ugliness and emptiness of nature in order to emphasize that it is above all a place for development” (136). Latin America was a land viewed as strangely unoccupied, one where the peoples living there could either be transformed or co-opted easily into a vision of British commercialism.

Works discussed include the following: Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctal Regions of the New Continent, During the Years 1799–1804*, trans. Helena Maria Williams (1814–29); Charles Waterton, *Wanderings in Latin America, in the Years 1812, 16, 20 and 24* (1825); Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal Written on the Coasts of Chili, Peru and Mexico, in the Years 1820–21–22* (1824); Maria Graham, Lady Callcott, *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil, and Residence There, During Part of the Years 1821, 22, 23* (1824); William Bullock, *Six Months’ Residence and Travels in Mexico* (1824); and Francis Bond Head, *Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes* (1826).

Chapter 3 covers the growing vigour of Brazilian Romantic poetry. In the mid-19th century, Brazil had its own Romantic spring. In 1836, Gonçalves de Magalhães published a Romantic manifesto, *Discurso Sobre a História da Literatura no Brasil*, and, in the same year, published the poetry book *Suspiros Poéticos e Saudades*, the first Romantic work to be written by a Brazilian. Alvares de Azevedo, another Brazilian Romantic, was influenced by Shelley and Byron (Verissimo 44). The greatest of the Brazilian Romantics was Gonçalves Días, whose work was marked by a distinct Indianist sensibility: “Brazilian nativism found the Indian and his civilization a symbol of spiritual,
political, social, and literary independence” (Coutinho 143). Whereas the British Romantic often used mythological archetypes from classical literature, the Brazilian Romantics would take from the Amerindian myths and incorporate them into their own works.

Brazilian poets were able to alchemize the European traditions of Romanticism, particularly those of the British Romantic poets, into something new and marked by a decidedly Brazilian flavor, adapting the Old World’s Romantic aspects yet firmly breaking with established poetic tradition, adding in a new respect for the Amerindian culture and traditions.

Chapter 4 covers Robert Southey’s *History of Brazil*. Southey’s three-volume work on the history of the Brazilian nation is a remarkable feat from an unlikely source. Published between 1810 and 1819, Southey’s historiography received scant praise for his work, with one reviewer sniffing that Brazil was hardly worth the effort of “so many paragraphs” (qtd. in Madden 150). Southey’s undertaking was unusual in that it often had surprisingly sympathetic accounts of Amerindians, in a time where most Europeans viewed Amerindians as savages or cannibals. Southey’s fascination with the cultures and colonies of southern Europe sets him in stark contrast to many of his Romantic counterparts who sought overseas inspiration in Germany and France. From his experiences in living in Portugal, he learned the language and wrote about a continent he himself never even visited.

Southey had many matter-of-fact details, withholding much interpretation or judgment from his accounts. This lends him a surprisingly modern feel, as his work is
free from overt moralizing. As well, Southey’s influential account of Brazil is still regarded by Brazilians as an important collection of their history. With Southey, we have one of the best examples of the Romantic shaping of Latin America, where the collective history of an entire colony was recast by the poet laureate into a nation of promise and heroic roots, in turn giving Brazilians a vision of themselves from the outside that helped form their self-perception as a nation.

The final chapter covers a remarkable look at the Dutch colony of Surinam. John Gabriel Stedman, a British-Dutch soldier, published *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* in 1796. The grim picture of slavery portrayed in his book drew him into the circle of radicals and abolitionists. William Blake engraved some images for the book between December of 1792 and 1794, images showing horrible atrocities against the slaves. Blake’s images depicted hangings, lashings, torture of the slaves. Blake’s works were notably more graphic and forceful than others’ for the same book, giving weight to the horror and urgency of the Surinam slavery experience. Blake would later rework some of these same images for his poem, “Visions of the Daughters of Albion.” Perhaps surprisingly, Stedman himself was not an abolitionist, even defending slavery in the text, arguing that a too-quick emancipation would create chaos. He justified English slavery on the account that the English knew how to treat their slaves well. While he sympathized with individual slaves, including a romance with a mulatto slave named Joanna that resulted in a son, he staunchly defended the institution as a whole. His personal diaries recount numerous sexual encounters with slaves that are omitted from the official account, removing some of the exploitive advantages of the Surinam slavery that he partook of himself.
Of particular interest is the fact that there were three agents who grappled with meaning within the text of Stedman’s *Narrative*: Stedman himself, his editor, William Thomson, who made his work more palatable to the public, and the engraver/poet William Blake, whose images brought a staunchly universal and abolitionary spirit to the work that are not always evident in the text itself. Blake’s images were forceful rejections of the idea of slaves as sub-humans or animal-like savages, butting against the notions held by British society that slavery was beneficial or the best Africans could expect. Blake was often restricted or commanded to etch his engravings in less provocative, anti-slavery ways, but he continually subverted and defied these orders. The study argues that Blake’s images depicted another view of Latin America by the British, giving new force to the abolitionist movement and changing the perceptions of the continent. With this different medium comes a slight shift in how Latin America loomed in the British imagination.
From roughly 1807–15, as the Napoleonic wars raged in Europe, the French and British found themselves at an impasse. Neither could afford to support colonial causes, for fear of driving the Spanish into alliance with either enemy, but neither could they suppress them, for fearing of driving the Spanish colonies into the other’s sphere of influence. Thus, a power vacuum developed in Spanish America (Adelman 180). This power vacuum, coupled with Napoleon closing the European market to the British, led the British to seek commercial markets in Latin America. Where soldiers could not gain a foothold, the merchants were able to establish strongholds. It was only when Spain flipped allegiances to Britain against France that the Crown called back adventurers and the more aggressive merchants (Adelman 179). Still, the precedent had been set, and a new interest in the Latin American world had been opened because, as Alexander Von Humboldt points out in his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain (1811)*, Spanish law had forbidden any Europeans not born on the Iberian peninsula from entering her New Spain colonies (158), which meant there was a great curiosity about this forbidden land that few Northern Europeans had ever seen.

So after centuries of being closed to the rest of the Western world, at the turn of the 19th century Latin America became more accessible and open. First it was to a handful of travelers working for the Iberian governments, but as the Spanish power waned and the Napoleonic wars shifted Portugal’s center of power to Brazil, the continent became ever more welcoming to travelers. The turning point was 1808 (Leask ix), when the Spanish
powers were diverted from their colonies to Europe. Latin America experienced an even
greater opening to travelers from the Old World, and the travel accounts fed a hunger for
information on these independent republics birthing themselves in this faraway continent.
Published journals by British citizens about their travels to Brazil and the Spanish
colonies became best-sellers, and from 1810–1830 there was a surge of these accounts.
The British were keenly interested in establishing their influence in Latin America, but
there it had to function differently from the typical mode it was used to in such places as
South Africa or India—in the southern half of the New World, the British did not rule,
and in fact, much of it was not yet post-colonial.

The published journals of these travelers in Latin America reveal much about the
prevailing attitudes and assumptions of Great Britain. Naturally, characterizing the
attitudes of the British by selections and ruminations from a handful of British
travelogues is necessarily incomplete at best; furthermore, even the attitudes
demonstrated by the journals are not consistent from writer to writer. However, a study of
a handful of these accounts reveals some consistent cultural attitudes towards Latin
America. Of the standard tropes of the travelogues, five stand out: first, that it is a land
populated by the “incurious” and “unscientific”; second, that it is a land not only in
urgent need of commerce and trade but is a potentially enormously profitable market;
third, the Spanish and particularly Roman Catholic aspects of culture are corrupt and
enslaving; fourth, it is a savage land not schooled in the appropriate British grace; fifth,
the Amerindians are both ingenious and incurably lazy.

Sir Walter Raleigh published *The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire
of Guyana* (the present day Venezuela) in 1596. It described his first voyage to the area,
and he wrote somewhat optimistically, “the country hath more quantity of gold, by manifold, than the best parts of the Indies, or Peru” (3). He provided an inviting picture of the land: the Amerindian nations surrounding the area were no danger to England; the Spanish governance was weak and cruel; and the commercial advantages were ample. This vision of Latin America was to be often-repeated in the travelogues of following centuries.

The first and most notable of these travelogues of the Romantic era was written by Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who visited Latin America from 1799–1804. Humboldt’s account, originally published in French in two volumes in 1810 and 1813, translated and published in England in 1814 (Wiegand), was enormously popular in Europe and Great Britain, and with the wars of independence bringing in new opportunities for travel and commerce, a flood of travelogues about Latin America permeated Britain, peaking in the late 1820s (MacNeil and Dean 23).

The first scientist in the European fashion to explore Latin America, Humboldt and his companion Aime Bonpland were regarded as trailblazers. Amazingly, Humboldt has more places named after him than any other figure in history, including a sea on the far side of the moon (Helferich xvii). Humboldt’s love of travel, twinned with his scientific pursuits, painted him as a dashing progressive hero. He combined the nature-love of the Romantic spirit with the naturalist’s desire to catalogue and categorize the New World. Humboldt was a phenomenon in the Western world, whose exploits were followed by newspapers across Europe; he dined in the United States with President Thomas Jefferson, who treated him as an honored guest. By the time he arrived back in Paris, he was an international celebrity, drawing large audiences to his lectures and exhibitions.
Indeed, his celebrity status was second only to Napoleon (Helferich xix). “One can truly say he has no equal in information and lively knowledge,” wrote an admiring Goethe. “Whatever one touches he is everywhere at home and overwhelms one with intellectual treasure” (qtd. in Wilson xxxvii). The revolutionary hero Simon Bolivar declared Humboldt was the first true discoverer of South America (Helferich xxi).

Humboldt’s impact on British society was enormous as well. Dometa Wiegand points out that Samuel Taylor Coleridge had met Humboldt in 1806 and mentioned him extensively in his journals and lectures over the next twenty years. Robert Southey commented that Humboldt ‘is among travelers what Wordsworth is among poets. The extent of his knowledge and the perfect command which he has of it are truly surprising; and with this he unites a painter’s eye and a poet’s feelings” (qtd. in Leask 52). William Wordsworth cites him in a footnote to his sonnet “American Tradition,” in support of the lines “And carved, on mural cliff’s undreaded side./ Sun, moon, and stars, and beast of chase or prey;/ Whate’er they sought, shunned, loved, or deified!” (12-14). In the fourth canto of Don Juan, Byron satirizes his fame, writing

Humboldt, “the first of travellers,” but not
The last, if late accounts be accurate,
Invented, by some name I have forgot,
As well as the sublime discovery’s date,
An airy instrument, with which he sought
To ascertain the atmospheric state,
By measuring “the intensity of blue;” (268)
Where does a travelogue like Humboldt’s fit in the history of science? Humboldt grounded his text in a repudiation of “querelle d’ Amerique” of Georg Buffon (Pratt 120), the French naturalist of the 18th century who considered the plants and animals of the Americas to be inferior to the Old World’s and argued that species transported to the New World from the Old would degenerate. Humboldt doesn’t directly tackle Buffon, but his depiction of the abundance of the New World stands as a self-representing repudiation of Buffon’s views.

Humboldt’s journey claimed for itself a noble pursuit—scientific knowledge and inquiry. There was a desire for progress and rational exploration, categorizing and collecting the flora and fauna of the landscape, and observing the local customs with mild detachment that wasn’t above the occasional reproof. On a trip to eastern Venezuela, he writes about staying with a local parish priest:

Our host could hardly believe how people born in northern Europe could arrive in his village from the frontiers with Brazil by the Rio Negro, and not by the Cuman coast. Although affable, he was also extremely curious, like everyone who meets travelers who are not Spanish. He was sure that the minerals we carried contained gold, and that the plants we had dried were medicinal. Here, as in many parts of Europe, sciences interest people only if they bring immediate and practical benefit. (100)

Humboldt hits upon one of the many tropes of the travelogues in this brief account—for example, the vast and somewhat insidious powers of the Roman Catholic priesthood,
who were both materialistic and lacking of knowledge. As well, while the priest has the
virtue of curiosity, it is not the virtue of scientific curiosity. The materialism of the
hunger for gold or the short-sightedness of seeing only the pragmatic uses of a medicinal
herb is of the inferior kind—and one, Humboldt notes, that so many Europeans share as
well.

For Humboldt, “curiosity” of the proper kind was an enormously important
characteristic. In her 1979 essay “A Not So Romantic Journey,” Jean Franco notes that
one of the dominant characteristics of the British travelogue is the obsession with
curiosity as a noble attribute, British travelers who perceive the authentic task of the
traveler to be ever-curious, and this would be “a sign of superior intelligence” and “an
attribute of a progressive mentality” (141). The obsession with the nobility of curiosity,
particularly the disdain for the seeming lack of curiosity among Latin American locals, is
a peculiar trope that appears over and over in the British travelogues.

Humboldt does note other instances of curiosity from locals, however, like the parish
priest who believed Humboldt must be transporting gold and medicinal herbs. But where
he does, he maintains a strict hierarchy—the curiosity driven by profit or materialism as
tainted versus the curiosity of nature’s work or scientific progress. Humboldt mentions a
Francisco Loranzo, a laborer in a village near present-day Cumaná, Venezuela, who had
nursed a child with his own breast milk. His wife had fallen ill and to calm the baby he
had held it at his breast. The child began suckling and the father began lactating, feeding
the child two or three times a day for the first five months of its life. Humboldt
encounters the man and his now-teenage son, and attests to how the whole village
corroborated Loranzo’s story. At the end of his account, Humboldt notes that “He drew
on himself the attention of his neighbours, but he never thought, as he probably would have done in Europe, of deriving any advantage from the curiosity he excited” (59). This divorce of curiosity from profit is a peculiar quality to Humboldt—and his tone is a bit admiring. The curiosity of the villagers is undeniable, for a lactating man is a bizarre spectacle indeed. But the man’s turn from commerce—“cashing in” on what would no doubt be perceived as his freakish nature—is in Humboldt’s view a point for the South American rather than the European nature. In fact, argues Humboldt, the locals are more interested in natural wonders and marvels precisely because they do not have the European distractions, particularly that of urban excitement: “A lively interest in the phenomena of nature is preserved wherever society may be said to be without life; where, in dull monotony, it presents only simple relations little fitted to excite the ardour of curiosity” (Humboldt 62). The “ardour of curiosity” is kindled by the natural phenomenon all the more so because the provincial people cannot participate in the social hum of Europe’s great cities. But this is to Humboldt’s satisfaction, as he too shares in the marvels of the natural world the locals would share with him.

William Bullock’s perception of curiosity, however, was less flattering to the creoles and Amerindians than Humboldt’s. Bullock, a Sheffield goldsmith, taxidermist, and jeweler, had created in Great Britain a collection of artifacts, antiquities, and stuffed animals that he dubbed a “Museum of Natural Curiosities” (Aguirre 36). The collection grew until in 1819 he sold 32,000 pieces at an auction. Mexico gained its independence in 1821, and Bullock saw opportunities in curio collecting and silver mine speculations. In 1823 and 1827, Bullock visited Mexico and acquired many artifacts and specimens. His initial trip was one of the first of a British citizen in the new nation. Bullock collected a
variety of curios to bring back with him to Great Britain. On April 8, 1824, Bullock opened an exhibition at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly to the public. Mexican artifacts, fauna, figurines, particularly of Aztec and Mayan background, were prominently displayed. There was even an Amerindian from Texcoco, a José Cayetano Ponce de Leon, who stood by a model Mexican cottage. Dorothy Wordsworth, who visited the exhibition in the first week of its launch, remarked, “it was all very amusing ‘and the live Mexican not the least interesting object’” (qtd. in Costeloe 278). The exhibition was a financial success, with more than 50,000 curiosity-seekers paying nearly four shillings for the visit (Costeloe 278). An article in The Times (January 12, 1824) headlined “Travels and Acquisitions in Mexico,” wrote admiringly in a preview that “our most innovating countryman was allowed to ransack the superb capital of Mexico.”

Bullock published an account of his first journey to Mexico, Six Months’ Residence and Travels in Mexico, in 1824. The book was an instant best-seller, selling out two editions in its first two years of publication. As Costeloe notes, “The work gave a glowing picture not only of Mexico as a country for tourists, but also as a place of unrivaled opportunities for commerce and investment” (284), with Bullock frequently emphasizing how ripe a market Mexico would be for the British. Like Raleigh, Bullock focused on the opportunities of this new world; like Humboldt, he claimed scientific progress and inquiry as his primary motivations.

For Bullock, curiosity was characterized by the acquisition of objects. Carlos Maria de Bustamante, an official who kept tabs on Bullock’s quest to remove antiquities from Mexico to Great Britain, lamented how the opening to British commerce had coincided with the outflow of antiquities. Peculiarly, he complained how the British were driven by
“la curiosidad” (Aguirre 31). Bullock represents himself as a mere searcher of antiquities whose motives are of curiosity only (Aguirre 2), but “these self-representations only masked a larger ambition of turning cultural inquiry to economic advantage, of unearthing and extracting precious metals as well as buried sculptures” (Aguirre 3). The curiosity that drove Bullock was marked in decidedly Western terms—scientific in the categorization of all things, like Humboldt, but also pragmatic in the acquisition of wealth.

Curiosity for Bullock was also marked in expressly materialistic and instrumental terms: new things were good only to the extent that they were useful. Bullock complained vocally about the locals’ lack of learning and curiosity, stating at one point that “the Indian workmen, like all uninformed people, are strongly prejudiced in favour of their own customs; and the Europeans who have taken mines in Mexico will have much to contend with before they can bring them to work under their directions. They are indeed particularly averse to innovation,” complained Bullock (262). For Bullock, the “innovation” they needed was obedience—the acceptance of British norms.

Another example of the “curious” British traveler was Charles Waterton. Waterton, who between 1812 and 1824 made several trips to Guiana and Brazil, wrote Waterton’s Wanderings in South America. His account was more colorful than the standard travelogue: “Waterton rejects the plain, descriptive style of conventional travelogue for rhetorical high colouring, seeking to bring his romantic adventures to life in the reader’s imagination” (Leask 132). He heard tales of the vampire bat and was fascinated by it. He wrote, “I had often wished to have been once sucked by the vampire [bat], in order that I might have it in my power to say it had really happened to me. There can be no pain in
the operation, for the patient is always asleep when the vampire is sucking him; and as for the loss of a few ounces of blood, that would be a trifle in the long run” (Waterton 160). In fact, he claimed, he often slept with a foot extended, hoping that a bat would take the bait, which it never did, to his disappointment. Waterton had an atavistic penchant for bloodletting, a fact act which made his ease with the idea a bit easier to understand. But the idea still is tinged with madness—the curiosity of the British citizen, in this case, was driven far beyond a reasonable course of action.

The epithet of “incurious” is thrown not only at the Iberian colonists and Amerindians but often at the British who had settled in Latin America as well. Maria Graham was the wife of a ship captain and had already written a travelogue about India before she and her husband traveled to Chile. On the way to South America, her husband died and to the shock of the British expats, she stayed a full year in Chile rather than return to England. After Chile, she went to Brazil, where she secured a job as the governess to Maria da Gloria, heir to the Portuguese monarchy then situated in Salvador. Upon her return to Great Britain, she published two accounts, one of her year in Chile and another of her time in Brazil, *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil, and Residence There, During Part of the Years 1821, 1822, 1823* (Akel xiii). In her residence, she was irritated with her countrymen who could not answer her questions about the Brazilian countryside: “Not one knew the name of the plants around his own door; not one is acquainted with the country ten miles beyond St. Salvador’s; not one could tell me even the situation of the fine red clay, of which the only manufacture, pottery, here is made: in short, I was completely out of patience with these incurious money-makers. I was perhaps unjust to my countrymen: I dare say there are many who *could* have told me these things, but I am
sure none *did* tell me, and equally sure that I asked information of all I met with. But a woman is not, I believe, considered as privileged to know anything by these commercial personages” (Graham 222).

One picks up on a hint of flattery in these accounts, however—flattery of the readers. After all, Graham insinuates, had her readers been there, they, too, would have been just as curious as she and scornful of the “commercial personages” who couldn’t be bothered with the wonders of the natural world. It is this sort of flattery of the reader that marks so many of the travelogues. After all, why would one purchase the account of a trip to a foreign land if not for reasons of curiosity? The reader would imagine him or herself as awestruck and full of questions; the fact that one who lived there, and had immediate access to ways to satisfy this natural curiosity would fail to do so, is a testament to the weakness of his character. For Graham and her readers, curiosity about the foreign land and its exotic nature was the overwhelming, central urge. To know about Latin America was, in a sense, to control it; and British readers took command by satiating their curiosity. The British could be proud of their hunger to know without considering that this hunger was also a desire for power.

But while Graham expressed distaste for “commercial personages,” this was not the norm among the British travelers. Again and again we see Latin America described as fertile ground for commercial opportunities. The opening of the Spanish colonies led to a rash of speculators in the Spanish-influenced Latin America. Meanwhile, as Akel notes, the safe passage by the English of the Portuguese royalty to Brazil gained them an 1810 treaty that opened Brazilian ports to British ships, giving them the right to build and repair ships as well as extract timber (93). The markets in Latin America were opening to
the British, whether by coercion, favor-trading, or bold opportunism. The potential commercial benefits of Latin America were never far from the surface.

Indeed, several of the travelers’ accounts were the result of commercial undertakings—mining expeditions or trading houses. The eye to commerce permeates much of the travelogues, even in the case of a naturalist like Humboldt. Humboldt, breathless with the possibilities for this “new” land, wrote of the newly independent nations, tidily bunching progress with intellectualism and commercial wealth. When Great Britain formally recognized the newly independent Latin American colonies in the 1820s, it did so by signing commercial treaties (Aguirre xxi). Trade became the main way Britain related with Latin America, and its road to supremacy in the political was through supremacy in the commercial. The travelogue was one of many genres that reinforced the informal imperialism of Great Britain. Aguirre argues that travel journals contributed to a vision of Latin America as a “visually seductive panoramic display[ing] foreign land as rich, available, and conquerable” and represented Latin America as “empty and the population destined for decline or extinction” (xvi).

For instance, Captain Joseph Andrews, an Englishman who in the 1820’s surveyed Chile on behalf of Peruvian and Chilean mining associations, thinks of the historical ruins of Spanish dominance purely in terms of exchange value. An ancient copse of trees is viewed dispassionately as a likely sacrifice for the mining operation. Upon visiting the ruins of a Jesuit mission, Andrews harangues the Catholic establishment and points out that in England, the ruins would be converted to something “more useful or honorable, for example, a cotton factory or a Lancaster school” (Andrews 163).
Andrews’ account is notable as well for following one of the many clichés of the British Latin America travelogue—a set itinerary. A unifying feature of these travel accounts is their shared itinerary. Pratt writes that “one itinerary in particular became a canonical heroic paradigm for the Englishman’s South American journey: landing in the port of Buenos Aires, he made his way overland across the Argentinean pampas, up over the Andean Cordillera and down the other side to the capitals of Chile or Peru, from which he eventually embarked by sea for home” (148). Much as the Grand Tour of Europe followed certain prescribed points and experiences, so soon did the “Grand Tour” of Latin America.

The emptiness of the South American landscape relative to Europe’s preponderance of ancient ruins marked it as a place in desperate need of investment, suggested many of the journals. The travelogues constantly remind the reader “of the ugliness and emptiness of nature in order to emphasize that it is above all a place for development” (Franco 136). Andrews fantasizes about industry reforming the Andes, submitting to the mining companies, and in his imagination the British “erected airy castles on their huge sides. We excavated rich veins of ore, we erected furnaces for smelting, we saw in imagination a crowd of workmen moving like busy insects along the eminencies, and fancied the wild and vast region peopled by the energies of Britons from a distance of nine or ten thousand miles” (114–115). ¹The fantasy here for Andrews is explicitly imperial—filled with

¹ Humboldt too thought of the Andes as a place that was remarkable but not quite as good as Europe: he observed that “The aspect of this spot is majestic even to the eye of a traveller accustomed to the picturesque scenes of the higher Alps” (71), reassuring his readers that the Latin America views were inferior although sublime.
feudal imagery and vast “armies” and the acquisition of power. For Andrews, the glory of Empire was what fueled his excitement for the landscape.

Andrews saw the market liberalization and the imports of British goods as a natural step for a new republic, good both for Britain and for Chile: “In Chile, as we have just seen, national independence had been for several years established, and a free and extensive commerce had, as a natural consequence, speedily sprung up” (Andrews 167). In contrast, Peru was still under Spanish control and resistant to the encroachment of British merchants. He wrote grumpily that “In Lima, where such free sentiments were still deemed treasonable, prejudice and error had established their headquarters; and the obstinate bigotry with which old customs and opinions were adhered to, was rather strengthened than diminished by the apprehension of a total subversion of the whole system” (Andrews 167).

Andrews saw the opening of markets and the self-determination of a republic as in lock-step—one should accompany the other. And indeed, independence of Spanish colonies was valuable only to the degree that it enabled the British to trade with them. Thus, it required changing hearts and minds in the ruling class of these nascent nations, getting them to accept ideologically the naturalness and rightness of freer trade with Great Britain. As Aguirre points out, “Since Latin America attracted relatively few British immigrants, the export of ideologies and practices was all the more necessary for the creation of ‘congenial collaborating elites’ who could be depended upon to great the machinery of finance and trade” (Aguirre xxi). Basil Hall, a Scottish naval officer whose *Extracts from a Journal Written on the Coasts of Chile, Peru and Mexico* was published in 1824, noted the Spanish government still in Peru regarded all England with ill-favor as
their hopes of hanging on to power faded: “It was in vain, by a frank and open behavior, to hope to escape suspicion; for it had become a sort of disease amongst the Spaniards to suspect the English; and its symptoms were aggravated every moment by the increasing distresses to which they were exposed” (174). It is a small wonder, as the hope that the British commercial empire would grow at the expense of the Spanish formal power was not well-disguised.

The desire to open up Latin America commercially relied on persuading the elites of the new republics to support free trade while the desire to persuade potential British investors to contribute to speculations in Latin America required painting a picture of Latin America as backwards, savage, and in dire need of Protestant Christianity. Aguirre notes how the representations in travelogues, Bullock’s for example, served to paint an ideological message to the British audience: “Mexico, backward and ignorant; Britain, technologically advanced and enlightened; Spain, cruel and superstitious, and unscientific—[these] reinforce a progressive, industrial narrative of history that assumes Mexico’s economic and cultural inferiority, and ultimately its availability for exploitation” (Aguirre 26).

The Roman Catholic influence is constantly derided and defamed in the British travelogues. This prejudice was not unique to the journals; its presence in the contemporary society was well-documented. A typical English view of Roman Catholicism then was that it was “cruel, superstitious, and hypocritical” (Paz 60). Protestants fought for freedom; Roman Catholics maintained barbarism and slavery. The traditional view of Spanish colonialism was that it was particularly brutal (Aguirre 24). Throughout, there was a popular suspicion that “Roman Catholic priests generally, and
Jesuits especially, were wicked, scheming, implacable, greedy, cold, evil, sensuous, worldly-minded, expedient men who constantly plotted to advance their Popish lust for power” (Paz 1).

The suspicion of Roman Catholicism had a lengthy background in the Protestant Great Britain. For example, William Hogarth’s “The Invasion” print of 1756 captures the same basic anti-Catholicism that persists fifty years later in British travel narrative. Created at the inception of the French and Indian War, when a French invasion seemed likely, this propaganda piece depicted the French danger in starkly anti-Catholic terms—a monk sharpening an executioner’s axe, a statue of St. Anthony, a plan for a monastery in London.
Where does this anti-Catholic feeling come from? The 1778 and the 1791 Roman Catholic Relief Acts re-instated a number of rights to Roman Catholics, including the ability to practice law and establish schools. While not a full emancipation—for one, priests and Roman Catholic teachers were required to register with the government—there was outrage among some citizens that the Roman Catholics had gained in status, culminating most clearly in the Gordon Riots of 1780, fueled by rumors that it was a plot by the French to destabilize England before an invasion. Generally, the feeling among the discontented was that Parliament was out of step with the sentiments of the nation at large—they were clueless to the vigor with which the citizens disliked the Roman Catholic faith and feared the influence of the continental Catholic powers (Haydon 204–206). It was dangerous and seditious to enable the Roman Catholics.

For the Protestant travel writer, very often the equation was that the Protestant faith represented enlightenment, education, autonomy, progress, and proper national pride. Catholicism, on the other hand, was steeped in devotion to a foreign power, superstitious, manipulative of the peasant class. Protestants in both Germany and England saw it as a suspicious “religion focused on magic, plaster saints, rituals, and processions” (Wallis and Monroe 3). Humboldt, a Prussian, was clear that he shared the same views of Roman Catholicism: “In the relation of my travels I feel no propensity to pause at a picture of individual calamity, of evils which are everywhere frequent, where there are masters and slaves, civilized Europeans living with people in a state of barbarism, and priests executing the plenitude of arbitrary power on men ignorant and without defence” (103), he fumed. He recounted an alleged instance in 1797 where a Jesuit led an expedition of savage Amerindians to attack a tribe of Guahiba, kidnapping a mother and her children in
the process: “The monk, seated in his boat, waited the issue of an expedition, of which he partook not the danger. Had the mother made too violent a resistance, the Indians would have killed her, for everything is permitted when they go to the conquest of souls (á la conquista espiritual), and it is children in particular they seek to capture, in order to treat them in the mission as poitos, or slaves of the Christians” (Humboldt 99). The shocking barbarism and single-minded pursuit of religious conversion was a typical trope, assuming that the Roman Catholic faith justified any means to reach their end, no matter how cruel or dark. It was then easy to justify the investment and addition of Protestant influence in Latin America, not only to make scientific inquiries and commercial investments but to dilute and break the Gothic and dark power of Roman Catholicism over the deluded souls in Spanish-controlled Latin America.

Bullock searched in Mexico for the temples of Teotihuacan and complained that no one knew where they were; near the Mayan pyramids, he asked an old Amerindian woman about the ruins and she claimed they had been built by St. Franciso (240), an obviously incorrect assumption. Crediting a Roman Catholic saint irritated Bullock to no end: “The Conquerors employed all their means to efface every vestige and recollection of what had been from the minds of the subjugated people,” said Bullock, continuing with the lament that “All their valuable books, hieroglyphics, paintings, and historical manuscripts which could be discovered, either by art or force, were indiscriminately committed to the flames” (243). The equation for Bullock was clear: the English brought enlightenment; the Spanish, ignorance. The British salvaged culture while the Spanish destroyed it: “For Bullock, Britain’s effort to collect, preserve, display, and study the material remains of the past is convincing evidence of its cultural superiority and ethical
advance over Spain. Whereas Spain came to plunder and sack, Britain comes only to
trade and exchange but also to shed light on the mysteries of the Mexican past, to
increase wealth and knowledge. But just as Bullock characterizes British travelers as
savers of the past, he also presents them as forward-looking agents of the new industrial
future: innovative, progressive, and technologically advanced” (Aguirre 25).

This unquestioned assumption of British superiority is also clearly marked throughout
many of the travelogues of the era. Hall often expressed his enthusiasm for the
burgeoning markets in South America and was often frustrated by what he viewed as the
sloth and backwardness of the former Spanish colonies. He observed two customs that
faded with independence in Spanish-controlled Latin America: “In every instance in
South America, where the cause of independence has succeeded, two measures have been
invariably adopted: one the abolition of the slave-trade, and as far as possible of slavery;
the other, the relinquishment of bull-fights” (182-183) he wrote.

I heard a Chilian gentleman offer a curious theory on this subject. He declared
that the Spaniards had systematically sought by these cruel shows, and other
similar means, to degrade the taste of the Colonies, and thereby more easily to
tyranimize over the inhabitants. The people, he said, first rendered utterly
insensible to the feelings of others, by a constant familiarity with cruelty and
injustice, soon became indifferent to the wrongs of their country, and in the end
lost all motive to generous exertion in themselves. (Hall 182–183)
The gentleman, he continued, “acknowledged with shame that these scenes, horrible as they were, had always been encouraged by the Viceroy, and other Spanish rulers of the country” (Hall 184).

Why does this need to compare British customs and power with that of Spain seem to rise so frequently, so urgently? The British Imperial system, after all, exacted a heavy and constant price on the citizens of the Empire, exploiting the body and time and coin of its citizens. What benefits, then, did the citizens get? A partial answer is a reflected glory—to achieve a vicarious satisfaction that while one’s station may be low, one’s nation’s glory was high. Even at the stark and steep cost of the Imperial project, the psychic benefits of being attached to the grand project were their own rewards. And the travel writing, by comparing Britain to its foreign neighbors, near and far, reasserted that project.

For Hall, the barbarity of the customs were clearly connected with the evil of the Spanish governance—British rule would be far more civilized. Curiously, while slave trade ended in the British colonies in 1807, slavery was not abolished in Britain until 1833. The smugness rested on a very thin premise, indeed.

Graham’s critique of slavery seems more heartfelt. Her depiction of a Brazilian slave market demonstrates its grotesque nature clearly: “About fifty young creatures, boys and girls, with all the appearance of disease and famine consequent upon scanty food and long confinement in unwholesome places, were sitting and lying about among the filthiest animals in the streets. The sight sent us home to the ship with the heart-ache: and resolution, ‘not loud but deep,’ that nothing in our power should be considered too little,
or too great, that can tend to abolish or to alleviate slavery” (Graham 206). Graham’s journal demonstrates an evolution in her thinking, as she moved from indifference to heart-felt sentiment against the notion of slavery. Yet often as she brings up slavery it is to contrast the barbarism of another colonial power with the uprightness of Britain (Akel 32), or as she becomes more closely tied to the Emperor, to justify it as necessary for the Emperor’s sake (Akel 117).

For Graham, the cultural superiority of Britain was clear in another area. Graham expressed disgust at Portuguese women’s sense of fashion and decorum: “I could scarcely believe that one half were gentlewomen. As they wear neither stay nor bodice, the figure becomes almost indecently slovenly, after very early youth; and this is the more disgusting as they are very thinly clad, wear no neck-handkerchiefs, and scarcely any sleeves. Then, in this hot climate, it is unpleasant to see dark cottons and stuffs, without any white linen, near the skin. Hair black, ill combed, and disheveled, or knotted unbecomingly, or still worse, en papillote, and the whole person having an unwashed appearance” (214–215). Graham contrasted the Portuguese women with the English women of her acquaintance, which she noted with approval that “Our English ladies, though quite of the second rate of even colonial gentility, however, bore away the prize of beauty and grace; for after all, the clothes, however elegant, that are not worn habitually, can only embarrass and cramp the native movements; and, as Mademoiselle Clairon remarks, ‘she who would act a gentlewoman in public, must be one in private life’” (Graham 216). Clearly, the English women’s sense of fashion was not merely a cultural difference but a moral one as well.
A stark contrast to the jingoism common among the travel journals of the British in Latin America was Francis Bond Head, who in the 1820’s was a member of the British Corps of Engineers and the head of the Río de la Plata Mining Company. After its dissolution, he traveled the Andes and the pampas, giving a vivid description of the region in *Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes* (1827). Head reversed the standard account of the Pampas as a bleak, inhospitable region, expressing “a wild, unmitigated enthusiasm for free-wheeling pampa life,” as Pratt notes, and “his account stands out among those of the business emissaries for its critical perspective on Euroexpansionism and its relativizing perspective on culture” (153–4). For Head, the critique of Latin America for being backwards and undeveloped is hard to grasp. He wrote admiringly of the gaucho of the Pampas that “It is true he is of little service to the great cause of civilization, which it is the duty of every rational being to promote; but an humble individual, living by himself in a boundless plain, cannot introduce into the vast uninhabited regions which surround him either arts or sciences; he may, therefore, without blame be permitted to leave them as he found them, and as they must remain, until population, which will create wants, devises the means of supplying them” (Head 286). He wrote admiringly of the Gauchos that “The unrestrained freedom of such a life he fully appreciates; and, unacquainted with subjection of any sort, his mind is often filled with sentiments of liberty which are as noble as they are harmless, although they of course partake of the wild habits of his life. Vain is the endeavour to explain to him the luxuries and blessings of a more civilized life; his ideas are, that the noblest effort of man is to raise himself off the ground and ride instead of walk—that no rich garments or variety of food can atone for the want of a
horse—and that the print of the human foot on the ground is in his mind the symbol of uncivilization” (284).

The autonomy of the gauchos is one aspect that Head can unreservedly admire—perhaps, in no small part, because autonomy is one aspect that the travel writers of this era unabashedly espoused. Mary Louise Pratt argues that the travel writing of the era grounds itself in a few historical standard tropes: that it should be readable, that it should be addressed to the metropolitan audiences, and that it celebrates the autonomy of the individual traveler (4–6). Head is able to hit all three tropes—his writing is accessible, his tone forthright and amiable. He speaks of the men who live in the wilderness in the bewildered yet admiring voice of the city-dweller, and he most of all praises the freedom and lack of restriction on the gauchos, subtly foregrounding that the European traveler like himself has even more freedom—for such a traveler can walk these grounds as well as those of Europe and any other land the European Empire touched. Head’s identification with the gauchos is also a distinctly Romantic response to the Other.

While Head praised the gauchos, he was more ambivalent to the Amerindians, however. Head wrote of the constant skirmishes between the creole gauchos and the Amerindians: “To people accustomed to the cold passions of England, it would be impossible to describe the savage, inveterate, furious hatred which exists between the Gauchos and the Indians. The latter invade the country for the ecstatic pleasure of murdering the Christians, and in the contests which take place between them mercy is unknown” (Head 306). But Head’s account also speaks of the Amerindian with respect and admiration, at odds with the standard travelogue. “The life which the Indian leads
must satisfy any unprejudiced person that he must necessarily possess high courage” (308), he wrote; “A fair description of the Indians I believe does not exist” (300).

The view of Amerindians in the travelogues is a complex one. The creole and mixed races of Latin America are viewed as ignorant, backwards, and trampled by their religion. The Amerindians, however, are both unaccountably savage and wonderfully pure, a strange Other who must either by removed or studied as a curio. (An interesting contrast to the way Robert Southey saw them—as vital, self-autonomous agents—and how the Indianist Brazilian poets saw them, as Romantic symbols for pliable poetic use.) Head does give a lengthy and remarkable defense of the Amerindian: “It is painful to consider what the sufferings of the Indians have been, and still may be. Whatever may be their physical or moral character, whether more or less puny in body or in mind than the inhabitants of the old world, still they are the human beings placed there by the Almighty; the country belonged to them, and they are therefore entitled to the regard of every man who has religion enough to believe that God has made nothing in vain, or whose mind is just enough to respect the persons and the rights of his fellow-creatures” (300). The Spanish turned them into slaves and claimed the nation for the Pope, says Head in a typical British vein: “The Indians, unable to comprehend this claim, and sinking under the burdens which they were doomed to carry, died in great numbers. It was therefore convenient to vote that they were imbecile both in body and mind; the vote was seconded by the greedy voice of avarice, and carried by the artifices of the designing, and the careless indolence of those who had no interest in the question: it became a statement which historians have now recorded” (Head 301).
The compartmentalizing of the Amerindian as an alien Other, as a group that is simultaneously savage yet childlike, is a common trope. In his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain (1811)*, Humboldt examines the mixing of races disinterestedly, noting that “the mixture of European and negro . . . produces a race of men more active and more assiduously industrious than the mixture of the whites with the Indian” (177). By 1800, about 55 percent of the Spanish Empire’s 14.1 million persons in Latin America were Amerindian; another 20 percent were mestizo or mixed race. The Europeans were clearly a minority (Leask ix). Bullock described the emptiness of the landscape, meeting no one “except occasionally meeting small groups of Indians, carrying the productions of their little farms to the market of Toluca, or even as far as Mexico. From these simple people the unprotected traveler has nothing to fear; they are the most courteous, gentle, and unoffending creatures in existence, and never pass, without saluting, a stranger” (Bullock 248).

To sum up the observations on the British travelogues of the era, it clear that there are distinct ideologies manifested by the British travelers that remain distinct throughout the various journals of the era. The median journal views Latin America as a place of commercial opportunities, ripe for the investment of British citizens, who were bringing not only superior Protestant faith and freedom but also their keen curiosity, their desire to know and control the new continent in both scientific and commercial ways.

The travelogues were a distinctly different and interesting genre. There is naturally a sharp contrast between the work of the Romantic poets and that of the British travelogue of the era. Jean Franco noted that the travelogues are a simple form of narrative, with unencumbered subjects observing their world, their movement relatively unhindered and
their ideology intact, carrying their worldview so tightly that they never really leave their homelands in spirit. Where a novel has to construct an imaginary space where differing world views act, or where the heightened language of a poem makes for non-linear reading, “travel books introduce heterogeneity only to explain it away” (135). Excepting Humboldt and a few others, the fondness for nature and the seeking of the sublime rarely penetrated the typical travel journal; the purposes were more often than not pragmatic and commercial, concerned with opening this new land to immigration and financial ventures. The qualities of Britishness that were introduced by the traveler were not lessened, nor dampened, in the typical account.

The curiosity of Europe for Latin America was not a one-way street, however: the citizens of Latin America would speak as well. In early 19th century Brazil, a newly independent, monarchial nation started its own Romantic movement in poetry, alchemizing national identity and European traditions into a new, original form. The object of fascination—Latin America—would return the gaze back to Europe over the Atlantic and refashion its own identity. Like the travel writers, the Brazilian Romantics were fascinated by the natural landscapes and biosphere of Latin America, but where they were a subject of indifferent interest for the Europeans, they became a source of comfort and fierce nationalistic identity for the Brazilians. The Amerindian fairs, perhaps, a bit better with the Brazilian Romantic—rather than dismissed, the Amerindian is revered as a symbol of authentic Brazilianess—albeit one revered more in the abstract than the concrete. Of great interest in the same fascination with the grandeur of Empire that marks both the European travel writers and the Brazilian poets—an Imperial mindset that has
been internalized by the Brazilian poets, sublimated into the very nature of their writing, as will be explored in the next chapter.
(Chapter 3) As Saudades:

The Brazilian Romantic Movement

Brazil had its own Romantic movement in literature in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1836, José Gonçalves de Magalhães published a Romantic manifesto, *Discurso Sobre a História da Literatura no Brasil* as well as a volume of poems, *Suspiros Poéticos e Saudades*, the first work of Brazilian Romantic literature. The movement clearly had its influences from Europe—for example, Alvares de Azevedo, another Brazilian Romantic, was influenced by Shelley and Byron (Verísimo 44). However, Brazilian Romanticism had its own distinctiveness separate from European influences. European Romanticism, particularly British Romanticism, was republican in nature, contra norms and rationality. Brazilian Romanticism, in contrast, born nearly two generations later, was tempered by Portuguese nationalism’s clearer loyalties to the monarchy. Ferdinand Denis, a nineteenth-century French writer, wrote *Résumé de l’histoire littéraire du Portugal, suivi du résumé de l’histoire littéraire du Brésil* (Paris, 1826) or *Summary of the Literary History of Portugal, Followed by the Summary of the Literary History of Brazil*. He singled out the beauty of Brazil’s landscape, writing, “In these beautiful countries, so favored by nature, one’s thought must spread wings to match the spectacle offered to it; majestic . . . it must remain independent. . . . In sum, America must be free as much in her poetry as in her government” (qtd. in Freire 21). Brazilian Romantic poetry was less republican than its European counterparts, defying expectations, because it emerged before political republican independence—and the typical poet was more closely aligned, psychically and socially, with the ruling class of Brazil. Brazilian Romanticism was distinguished by a conflict—on one hand, a proto-
nationalist movement that felt secure in its relatively high status in comparison to its Hispanic neighbors; on the other hand, there was also a keen sense of a need to validate the Brazilian stature by extolling the virtues of the natural landscape and the Amerindian of Brazil.

Brazilian literature is a breed apart from both its European influences and its Spanish-speaking neighbors. Outside of accidental historical bonds, argues critic Régis Bonvicino, there is little connection to speak of: Excepting the United States, the nations of the Americas had close economic ties to their European mother nations, yet their literary models came from a variety of European sources, “which is not enough to even postulate a unity among these diverse countries” (Bonvicino 2). What makes Brazilian literature distinct is that it lacks the rancor often found in the literature of the Spanish-speaking colonies; even though a rivalry existed between the European and American nations, the rivalry lacked the bitterness of much Spanish-American literature. There is an easiness with the imperial project that is much more pronounced in the Brazilian poets. Part of this is for historical reasons—as the Napoleonic wars raged in Europe, the seat of the Portuguese Empire was moved to Brazil by João VI, making Rio de Janeiro the center point of the lusophone world. In 1822, his son Pedro declared the independence of Brazil, making it an independent, European-styled monarchy, unlike its Hispanic neighbors. This gave Brazilians a political stability and high status that was not afforded necessarily to many of its neighbors.

*A Brief History of Brazilian Romanticism*
It is during the epoch of Pedro I that the Brazilian Romantics came into being. The Brazilian Romantics are generally viewed as lasting three generations (ending in 1880), with each adopting different emphases but continuing the themes of individual expression and nationalistic inspiration. This work focuses on the first two generations, where the Romantic impulses were strongest. Romantic poetry dominated the century, from 1836 to the early 1880s, receiving new life from succeeding generations of poets. Changes were introduced in theme, sentiment, and tone, however, rather than in matters of style (vocabulary, syntax, meter, versification), which remained substantially unaltered. Brazilian poets were able to alchemize the European traditions of Romanticism, particularly those of the British Romantic poets, into something new and marked by a decidedly Brazilian flavor, replacing the inspiration of Greco-Roman mythology with Amerindian mythology and featuring a thematic emphasis on *saudades* (the idea of a sharp, piquant nostalgia), and the use of the Byronic hero and themes. With these three aspects, Brazilian Romantic poets achieved a remarkable new creation, a version of Romanticism unique to their country.

Helpful to understanding this scholarship is a brief history of the Romantic movement in Brazil, as it was marked out by two important generations of poets. The first was the Indianist generation, lasting from 1836 to the late 1840s. Key poets included Antônio Gonçalves Días and José Gonçalves de Magalhães. The most famous and best-remembered of the Brazilian Romantics was Gonçalves Días, whose work was marked by a distinct Indianist sensibility: “Brazilian nativism found the Indian and his civilization a symbol of spiritual, political, social, and literary independence” (Coutinho 143). Much as the 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads* is taken as a convenient date for
the inception of British Romanticism, so is the 1836 publication in Paris of an article by José Gonçalves Magalhães taken as the inception of Brazilian Romanticism: the first generation. The article, entitled *Ensaio sobre a história da literatura do Brasil—estudo preliminar* or *Essay on the history of the literature of Brazil—preliminary study* in the magazine *Niteroy*, was a Brazilian Romantic manifesto that would later be expanded into the full version of *Discurso*. Brazilian poets, he argued, could be inspired by the grandeur of Brazil’s natural beauty and have their imaginations piqued by the Amerindian. Brazilian Romanticism would abandon the European landscape and its mythologies in favor of Brazilian nature and religion; classical poetic rules would be abandoned in favor of individual inspiration (Freire 25).

The first generation of Brazilian Romantics was marked by poems about lush Brazilian landscapes and nostalgia for the homeland. Indianist mythology loomed large. The first generation was interested in creating a decidedly Brazilian, nationalistic literature that threw off Portuguese influences. Brazil always had an uneasy kinship with its mother colonizer, Portugal. There was never a revolution in the sense that the United States or the Bolivaran Spanish colonies experienced revolutions; rather, the Napoleonic wars sent Dom João VI and his family to Brazil, escorted by English military ships in 1808. For thirteen years, the Portuguese empire was ruled from the Brazilian colony, until Dom João’s son, Pedro I, became emperor of Brazil itself in 1825. This lack of a clean break made Brazil’s relationship with its European colonizer much different than the Spanish-speaking Americas. For one thing, unlike the Spanish colonies, Brazil’s status was co-equal with Portugal: “The worst fears of Portugal’s elite, eagerly awaiting the return of Lisbon’s pre-eminence, were confirmed when João raised Brazil to the status of
a kingdom, not merely an overseas dominion or colony, co-equal with Portugal. In 1808, as prince regent, he had thrown open the ports and markets of Brazil to merchants of all nations. These free trade decrees had deprived Portuguese merchants of their long-held, lucrative monopoly over Brazilian commerce. It stripped Lisbon and Porto of their cherished position as entrepôts for the re-export of Brazilian commodities to the markets of northern Europe” (Paquette 1). And then in 1820, a revolution in Portugal erupted, one that sought a constitutional monarchy that would bring Lisbon back to central dominance. João was compelled to return to Europe, leaving his son and heir, Pedro, to serve as a bulwark against any political conspiracies. When the Portuguese parliament demanded that the prince return as well, Pedro refused and, following a complicated series of events, declared Brazil independent, an act that most likely was endorsed privately by his father. Pedro thus became emperor of an independent Brazilian empire. By opting for monarchy, retaining a European dynasty on the throne and calling the new nation an “empire,” Pedro guaranteed that Brazil’s future would differ distinctly from that of its republican neighbors (Paquette 2).

The second generation of Brazilian Romantics was dubbed “the Byronic generation”: “represented by the São Paulo school of Álvares de Azevedo and his companions, pessimism and the despairing or cynical tone of Byron and Musset prevail” among this generation (Bandeira 67). It lasted roughly from the early 1850s through the middle of the 1860s. Casimiro de Abreu and Álvares de Azevedo (whose death by tuberculosis at twenty-one, incidentally, makes him a Keatsian figure in Brazilian literature) were two of the most significant poets of this era. European poetry came back in vogue, especially that of Lord Byron (it helped that Byron was disdained in Portugal
by the poets of the day, making Brazilians all the more eager to identify with him). Its themes were gothic, sentimental, and obsessed with the tragic life. Interestingly, Byron was less of an inspiration as a poet but was revered rather for the symbolism of his mysterious and bohemian lifestyle, even to an obsession with alcohol and tobacco, two items of consumption closely linked to him (Freire 108).

**Indianism**

In his 1836 manifesto, de Magalhães admitted that Brazil had inherited its literature and its poetry from Portugal: “Along with this poetry came all the pagan gods. They spread abroad throughout Brazil, taking possession of the skies, the forests, and the rivers. Brazilian poetry is not a civilized Indian maiden: she is a Greek, clad after the manner of France and Portugal, and acclimated to Brazil. She is a virgin from Helicon, seated in the shade of American palms, . . . mistaking for a nightingale the sabiá which sings in the orange tree. Enchanted by this seductive goddess, by this fair stranger, Brazilian poets have allowed themselves to be carried away by her music and have forgotten the simple images offered in such profusion by virgin Nature.” He went on to add: “So great was the influence exercised upon the Brazilian mind by Greek mythology, as purveyed by Portuguese poets, that many times Brazilian poets became transformed into shepherds and went feeding their flocks on the banks of the Tagus and singing in the shade of the beech trees.” In the middle of the article he inquired: “Can Brazil inspire the imagination of poets? Did its aborigines cultivate the poetic art?” His conclusion was

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2 Outside the scope of this study is what Brazilian scholars views, traditionally, as yet a third “generation” of Brazilian Romantics in the late 19th century, one which focused more on the plight of the African-descended in Brazil but lacked the some of the same vigor and clarity of the previous two generations.
affirmative. If up to then Brazilian poetry had not possessed a new and original character, this was the fault of the poets, who had not had “sufficient strength to free themselves from the yoke of laws, generally arbitrary, imposed by those who had arrogated unto themselves the right to torture genius, setting themselves up as the legislators of Parnassus” (qtd. in Bandeira 65–66). For de Magalhães, the crucial lament was that Brazilian poetry did not take on its own identity but rather slavishly imitated the European form. Until the Brazilians could break from this, their poetry could not achieve true sublimity. Where, then, could Brazilians find this inspiration? By looking not to the old myths of the East, but rather, the Amerindian of the West.

Capistrano de Abreu, Brazilian poet, wrote in 1875: “One of the first visible heralds of the movement that ended in independence [was] the feeling of superiority to Portugal. Effectively it was necessary for a grave shift in the conditions of society, for the inspiration to return to the forests and the primitive indigenous, which until then had been avoided. A shift [as large as] Indianism was too widespread to arise by simply individual causes” ³ (de Abreu 57, translated by author). Abreu claims that rather than being transplanted from European writers or writers from the United States like Fenimore

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³ “um dos primeiros pródromos visíveis do movimento que enfim culminou na independência: o sentimento de superioridade a Portugal. Efetivamente era necessária grave mudança nas condições da sociedade, para a inspiração se voltasse para as florestas e íncolas primitivos, que até então evitara, mudança tanto mais grave quanto o indianismo foi muito geral para surgir de causas puramente individuais.”
Cooper, Brazilian Indianism had its roots in Brazilian folk tradition. The idealization of the Indian pre-dated Romanticism, he claimed, and would last long after (57–58).

Thus in Brazilian Romanticism’s first inception, Indianism became the focus of Brazilian poetry as poets attempted to replace the European influences like Greek mythology. Indianist works had Amerindians as the central protagonists, and themes of nationalism and pride in the Americas’ resources. Why did the Brazilians feel this pressure to lift up the indigenous peoples and the Brazilian culture? Arguably, less for the sake of the Amerindians themselves than for their symbolic Brazilianness and non-Europeanness, a fusion of Rousseau’s noble savage with nationalistic movements.

Notably, the Amerindian culture portrayed in much of the poetry of this era is a romantic fantasy that had little to do with the reality of the Amerindians and their struggles with the Europeans. The fantasy is particularly relevant in Antônio Gonçalves Días, who used the Indian mythology most often. Días’ depiction, however, was a marked fabrication, an “Indian Dreamworld.” Notably, “Indianism was for Gonçalves Días closely related to the revival of the myth of childhood and the return to childlike innocence, a general characteristic of romanticism” (Coutinho 143). When he went to actually live among Amerindians, for example, he came back hugely disappointed and embittered, claiming that they were not “true” Indians at all because they did not match his fantasy. This mattered little, however, because for Días, the Amerindian was a symbol rather than a cause to be championed, a political symbol that transcended its identification with the actual indigenous past. Indeed, for the Brazilian poets, the Amerindian had as little to do with championing the cause of the beleaguered people as
did the British Romantics use of Greco-Roman mythology have to do with championing the cause of the contemporary Greeks (notable exceptions like Byron notwithstanding). Critic Brookshaw notes:

As in other Latin American countries, the first human symbol of a native identity was the original inhabitant, the American Indian. In Brazil, he was a far more abstract figure than in most Spanish-speaking countries, given the fact that by the time of Independence, the only Indians left dwelt far from the nuclei of white settlement, and therefore outside the social structure of the nation. Nineteenth-century literary nationalism therefore derived its inspiration from a mythical native, rather than a colonized African, still suffering the abuses of a slavery which was vital to the economy of the country. (10)

Antônio Gonçalves Días writes in his unfinished “Os Timbiras,” Canto III, about the Amerindians and the Americas at the dawn of the Age of Discovery:

Unhappy America! Who knows well
That He created you to be so beautiful and so lonely;
Your cursed fate! Great and sublime,
You run from pole to pole between which you are, oceans /
greatest of the globe: years of infancy
You had for centuries! That life
Was not yours in the flowering season.
What majestic fruits, in your time,
Did you not have, the greatest daughter of Eternity?
Wretched ward! Your abundant inheritance
Wasted, weakened; and intertwined in the years
Of Youth in bloom—the grey hair and life
Of the old man, who already hang and declines
In the undeserved conjugal bed
To the tombstone, where perhaps it cares to find you!
You, son of the Jaguar, illustrious warrior
And those others of you that we occupied:
When lined up in your seas
The ships of the Dutch, the galleons of Spain,
The frigates of France; when the carvels
And Portuguese boats collided with each other,
Dividing your domain amongst themselves,
Whose if not yours had it been? They burned the forest,
Boiled the sea with fire at midnight,
Thick fumes of smoke condensed
Blocking out stars and sky; and the sea and the mountains
Awoke to the booming sound
Of never-before-seen battle! You, warriors,
You, what did you do when you saw the wild as a
Terrified beast seeks asylum
In the deepest wilds, and on the beach the monster marine, to which the sea, no longer secure shield against human industry and force cast alien and fearful on the sand?

Sharp arrows, strong cudgels

Did you make, perhaps?

But no, [you made] shrines,
shrines you decorated to adorn

the victor; garlands you hung

from the ornamented roofs, so that it might be seen

The strangers, whose fathers’ bones

They had left behind,

Bereft of accompanying spirits;

The sons of Tupa host them,

In the land which the Tupa had not chained!  

4 América infeliz!— que bem sabia,
Quem te criou tão bela e tão sozinha,
Dos teus destinos maus! Grande e sublime
Corres de pólo a pólo entre os sois mares
Máximos de globo: anos da infância
Contavas tu por séculos! que vida
Não fora a tua na sazão das flores!
Que majestosos frutos, na velhice,
Não deras tu, filha melhor do Eterno?!
Velho tutor e avaro cubiçou-te,
Desvalida pupila, a herança pingue
Cedeste, fraca; e entrelaçaste os anos
Da mocidade em flor—ás cãs e à vida
Do velho, que já pende e já declina
Of particular note is the sexually charged imagery of lines 88–98, where the ward of the Americas is corrupted by the elderly Europe, seduced and left with her inheritance squandered by the one who was to protect her. Her nubile youth is shackled to a Europe that’s already half-dead—her riches spent, her youth wasted. Días laments the fallen Americas, describing a vision of a rapacious European host invading the welcoming

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Do leito conjugal imerecido  
À campa, onde talvez cuida encontrar-te!

Tu, filho de Jaguar, guerreiro ilustre,

E os teus, de que então vós ocupáveis,  
Quando nos vossos mares alinhadas
As naus de Holanda, os galeões de Espanha,  
As fragatas de França, e as caravelas
E portuguesas naus se abalroavam,  
Retalhado entre si vosso domínio,
Qual se vosso não fora? Ardia o prélio,  
Fervia o mar em fogo a meia-noite,  
Nuvem de espesso fumo condensado
Toldava astros e céus; eo mar e os montes
Acordavam rugindo aos sons troantes
Da insólita peleja! — Vós, guerreiros,
Vós, que fazíeis, quando a espavorida
Fera bravíssima procurava asilo
Nas fundas matas, e na praia o monstro
Marinho, a quem o mar, já não seguro
Reparo contra a fôrça e indústria humana,
Lançava alheio e pávido na areia?
Agudas setas, válidos tacapes
Fabricavam talvez! . . . ai não . . . capelas,
Capelas enastraavam para ornato
Do vencedor; — grinaldas penduravam
Dos alindados tetos, por que vissem
Os forasteiros, que os paternos ossos
Deixando atrás, sem manitôs vagavam,
Os filhos de Tupã como os hospedam
Na terra, a que Tupã não dera ferros!
Amerindians’ lands and destroying the natural beauty. The land he envisions is welcoming—its crime, in fact, is that it is too welcoming, sacrificing discretion for naïve openness. The Amerindians’ view is the dominant one in the work, taking the view of the invading Europeans as hostile invaders—the “we” of the poem is the Amerindian, not the European. Yet the view is curiously apolitical—the invasion is a thing that happens, like a tidal wave, not an inexorable march of an imperialist ideology nor the product of monarchies and bureaucrats making decisions. The Amerindian is victim, but the European is not criminal or at fault; merely carrier of the contagion.

The Amerindian of Días is trusting and kind, a Rousseauvian noble savage who pre-emptively places the garlands of victory on the invading aliens even while the beasts of the wilderness know instinctively to flee. As it is the Tupi Amerindians who garner the audience’s identification, what does Días imply, then, about the Brazilian audience for whom he symbolizes the Amerindian? For him, the Brazilian is the child of rape—fathered from the European conquerors but born by the land of Brazil. However, the child does not trace his lineage from the Tupi and the Amerindian physically but spiritually—the innocent child born of broken and bloody beginnings. For Días, there is an important and subtle influence of the spirituality of the Tupi. The Europeans had arrived in Brazil, he claims, with neither the same gentle spirits of the Tupi nor the literal bones of their forefathers, left behind in the Old World. Spiritually bankrupt and adrift from their traditions, the Europeans created a cruel and violent world upon the new shores.

Yet despite his protestations, Días in a large part internalizes and normalizes the role of Empire—the new empire of Brazil. Where the Portuguese was savage and rapacious, the new Empire, by tacit comparison, could be kind and paternal. Where the
Portuguese brought their fathers’ bones to this land, the Brazil nation had its roots here already. Much like the British Empire sought to extend itself informally into the economy of the Brazil, so did the citizens of the Brazilian Empire seek to extend itself into the lives of the Amerindian, removing autonomy for a vague sense of paternal obligation.

**Nostalgia**

*Saudades, only the speakers of Portuguese are able to feel them well.
Because they have the word to say that they have them.
— Fernando Pessoa

Brazilians and other Portuguese-speakers take a great deal of pride in the concept of “as saudades,” an inexplicable longing, an unnamed and enigmatic yearning of the soul, connected to nostalgia and the heartache of missing someone or something. This concept of *saudade* is crystalized in the poems of the Brazilian Romantics, taking their *saudade* to an apotheosis.

The elites of Brazil sent their children to Europe—the Grand Tour extended to a “Grand Late Childhood,” prolonging the stay for many years. Yet the memories of the early Brazilian childhood idealized the fervent admiration the expatriates had for their motherland:

 Unlike in Spanish America, where American-born creoles were systematically excluded from consideration for the plum official appointments, Brazilian elites
were consciously co-opted by the Portuguese metropole. They routinely sent their children to study at the University of Coimbra in Portugal to be groomed for positions in the imperial bureaucracy, from Goa to Luanda to São Paulo. Discontent was not altogether absent, but the combination of geography, fear of slave revolts and conciliatory policy defused tensions. (Paquette 80)

Días’ most famous poem, “Canção do Exílio,” was written while he was in Portugal, longing for the Brazil of his childhood. It is a poem thick with saudade. Several other Brazilian poets would pick up this theme of longing for the Brazil of the past—perhaps because so many of them also lived and wrote in Europe for long stretches at a time. Días described his own poetry thus: “I like to turn my eyes from the spectacle of national politics to the contemplation of my soul, resolving in harmonious and rhythmic language a thought which suddenly comes to me, or the ideas which are awakened within me by the sight of a landscape or the ocean—in other words, the varying aspects of nature. To wed thus thought with sentiment and idea with passion, to color all this with imagination, to fuse all this with a feeling of religion and divinity—this is poetry, poetry great and holy, poetry as I understand it without being able to define it, as I feel it without being able to give it expression” (Gonçalves Días qtd. in Bandeira 71). Días’ simple, affective poem reads:

My land has palm trees, 1
Where the thrush sings.
The birds that sing here
Do not sing as they do there.
Our skies have more stars,
Our valleys have more flowers.
Our forests have more life,
Our lives have more loves.

When dreaming, alone, at night,
I find more pleasure there.
My land has palm trees
Where the thrush sings.

My land has beauties
Which cannot be found here.
In dreaming — alone, at night—
I find more pleasure there.
My land has palm trees
Where the thrush sings.

God, forbid
That I die before I return;
That I do not see the beauties
That I cannot find here;
That I do not see the palm trees
Where the thrush sings.  

5

5
Bandeira claims that there is a bitter-sweet quality of Días’ that is in all his poetry—a profound nostalgia, a grief of love contradicted by destiny, the consolation in nature, and his affection for his friends and his religious faith (54). The thrush is a bird found nearly as widespread as humanity itself, but the sabiá in particular, known also as the rufous-bellied thrush (*Turdus rufiventris*) is native only to the southern cone of South America. (In fact, due to the influence of this poem, the sabiá is the national bird of Brazil; the lines

Minha terra tem palmeiras,
Onde canta o Sabiá;
As aves, que aqui gorjeiam,
Não gorjeiam como lá.

Nosso céu tem mais estrelas,
Nossas várzeas têm mais flores,
Nossos bosques têm mais vida,
Nossa vida mais amores.

Em cismar, sozinho, à noite,
Mais prazer eu encontro lá;
Minha terra tem palmeiras,
Onde canta o Sabiá.

Minha terra tem primores,
Que tais não encontro eu cá;
Em cismar—sozinho, à noite—
Mais prazer eu encontro lá;
Minha terra tem palmeiras,
Onde canta o Sabiá.

Não permita Deus que eu morra,
Sem que eu volte para lá;
Sem que disfrute os primores
Que não encontro por cá;
Sem qu'inda aviste as palmeiras,
Onde canta o Sabiá.

From *Primeiros cantos* (1847)
“Nossos bosques têm mais vida / Nossa vida mais amores” are included in the Brazilian national anthem.) Días is not the only one to note the Brazilian quality of the sabiá—in his *Discurso*, de Magalhães singles out the virtues of the sabiá over that of the nightingale as a source for Brazilian identity.

Días speaks of his native land as a place of abundance—overflowing with beauty and affection. As one critic notes, “The feeling for nature, an essential characteristic of Romanticism, was translated in Brazilian literature into an exalted thing, becoming almost a religion. The attraction of South American nature, its beauty, its hostile and majestic savagery, exercised a real fascination upon the minds of writers” (Coutinho 145). Curiously, the bird and the palm trees are the only markers that the poem is speaking of Brazil. The thrush and trees are not strange to the European reader, thus making this poem about missing Brazil more universal; the Brazilian natural world is exotic yet homey. By using elements that are in common with Europe—trees, thrushes, skies, stars, family—Días heightens the differences between the two places. The poet is not nostalgic because his land of exile is so different but because it is similar enough to fail in comparison.

Dom Casimiro also has a poem about saudade that is useful as comparison. His work has the exact same title as Días (“Canção do Exílio), one of many inspired by Días’ original poem. It was written in Lisbon in 1857.

If I must die during my time of flowering,

My God! Let it be not yet;

I want to hear in the orange tree, in the afternoon,
The thrush singing!

My God, I feel as though—and You can well see—that I am dying
Breathing this air;
Let me live, oh Lord! Grant me once again
The joy of my land.

A foreign land more beautiful
Than my homeland does not exist;
And this world is not worth even one of the kisses
Of so sweet a mother!

Give me the sweet places where I played
In my childhood haunts;
Grant me that I can see the sky of my homeland,
The sky of my Brazil!

*If I must die during my time of flowering,*

*My God! Let it be not yet;*

*I want to hear in the orange tree, in the afternoon,*

*The thrush singing!*

I want to see the sky of my land,
So beautiful and so blue!
And the rose-colored clouds that pass,
Running from the south!

I want to sleep in the shade of the coconut palms,
Those canopy leaves,
And see if I can catch the white butterfly
That flits in the orchard!

I want to sit by the brook
As the afternoon falls,
And brood alone in the twilight
Over the dreams of my future!

If I must die during my time of flowering,
My God! Let it be not yet;
I want to hear in the orange tree, in the afternoon,
The thrush singing!

Let me die surrounded by the perfumes
Of a tropical climate,
And feel, while gasping, the harmonies
Of my birthplace.
My grave shall be among the mango trees,
Bathed in the moonlight,
And I’d slumber contentedly
In the shadow of my home.

The waterfalls would give heartfelt cries
Because I died so soon,
And I would dream in the grave, my loves,
Of the land where I was born!

*If I must die during my time of flowering,*

*My God! Let it be not yet;*

*I want to hear in the orange tree, in the afternoon,*

*The thrush singing!*

(translated by author) 6

6 “Canção do Exílo,” Casimiro

Se eu tenho de morrer na flor dos anos,
Meu Deus! não seja já;
Eu quero ouvir na laranjeira, à tarde,
Cantar o sabiá!

Meu Deus, eu sinto e tu bem vês que eu morro
Respirando este ar;
Faz que eu viva, Senhor! dá-me de novo
Os gozos do meu lar!
O país estrangeiro mais belezas
Do que a pátria, não tem;
E este mundo não vale um só dos beijos
Tão doces duma mãe!

Dá-me os sítios gentis onde eu brincava
Lá na quadra infantil;
Dá que eu veja uma vez o céu da pátria,
O céu do meu Brasil!

Se eu tenho de morrer na flor dos anos,
Meu Deus! não seja já!
Eu quero ouvir na laranjeira, à tarde,
Cantar o sabiá!

Quero ver esse céu da minha terra
Tão lindo e tão azul!
E a nuvem cor de rosa que passava
Correndo lá do sul!

Quero dormir à sombra dos coqueiros,
As folhas por dossel;
E ver se apanho a borboleta branca,
Que voa no vergel!

Quero sentar-me à beira do riacho
Das tardes ao cair,
E sozinho cismando no crepúsculo
Os sonhos do porvir!

Se eu tenho de morrer na flor dos anos,
Meu Deus! não seja já;
Eu quero ouvir na laranjeira, à tarde,
A voz do sabiá!

Quero morrer cercado dos perfumes
Dum clima tropical,
E sentir, expirando, as harmonias
Do meu berço natal!

Minha campa será entre as mangueiras
Banhada do luar,
E eu contente dormirei tranqüilo
À sombra do meu lar!
Casimiro was the most pastoral of the Romantics, a bard of sentimental nostalgia and a lover of his distant land. His work was obsessed with the shadows of bittersweet longing. There was no hint in his poetry of cynicism or irony towards the longing of childhood. (Carvalho 232, 234, paraphrased by author). Where Días’ poem is simply about his missing homeland, Casimiro’s tactic is subtly more self-focused, speaking about his own health and his own youth. The world he paints is more decidedly exotic than that of Días, but both are set in the southern, more temperate climes of Brazil, near the coast, far from the fierce Amazon jungle. Yet like the Indianist poems, both poems are curiously apolitical, speaking simply of a missed homeland rather than social injustices or idealized politics. Both are addressed to God, but stripped of any overt theological overtones. The poems speak in studiously neutral tones, uncontroversially dedicated to a soft patriotism and little else. Unlike Días, however, Casimiro does not emphasize the elements in common that Brazil tends to have in superior quality; rather, focuses on the elements that Brazil has that Europe lacks—the fruit trees, the indigenous butterflies, the odors of the tropical climate. For Casimiro, Brazil is a place of exotic beauty unmatched; for Días, a place of homey comforts forgone. For the Brazilian Romantics of this generation, Brazil is a place marked with a sharp tinge of nostalgia—a

As cachoeiras chorarão sentidas  
Porque cedo morri,  
E eu sonho no sepulcro os meus amores  	Na terra onde nasci!

Se eu tenho de morrer na flor dos anos,  
Meu Deus! não seja já  
Eu quero ouvir na laranjeira, à tarde,  
Cantar o sabiá!
place where the alien forms of Europe are denied in favor of the strength of the sentimental in Brazil.

“O Mal Byronico” or “The Byronic Malady”

For the Brazilian Romantic of the 19th century, there seems to be no clearer, no more vivid English influence than one club-footed aristocrat, a scandalous revolutionary and, as it happens, a great poet. Rafael Freire’s survey of the references of Brazilian Romantics to English authors—in epigraphs or in content—reveals a clear winner, a towering figure that looms large over the entire nation’s 19th century verse: George Gordon, Lord Byron. William Shakespeare, Ossian, Thomas Moore, and Williams Cowper get brief mentions. Of the rest of the traditional six great poets of British Romanticism, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Blake are not mentioned at all. Percy Bysshe Shelley gets some scant notice. For Brazilians, it was Byron who mattered most—perhaps, mattered only. Indeed, “Byron’s influence in Brazil was so powerful and controversial that he has been referenced in nearly every critical text and anthology of Brazilian literature at the heart of Brazilian Romanticism and throughout Brazil’s national literature” (60).

Byron was a mania, an idol, an inspiration, an inescapable fad. By the time Brazilian Romanticism began to bloom, Byron was out of fashion with Portuguese poets, a fact that made him all the more attractive to the Brazilians (Freire 50). Father of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, the Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis (1839–1908) wrote in 1866—a few years after Azevedo’s death—his account on the influence of Byron in the second Romantic generation in Brazil:
This was the era when Brazilian poetry fell victim to a “Byronic” illness; great was the seduction of young imaginations by the English poet; no one could compete with his dominating influences: his originality, his diseased immorality, his prodigious genius, his romantic life, the nights in Italy, the adventures in England [. . .] and even his death in the land of Homer.\textsuperscript{7} (qtd. in Júnior 39.
Translation by author.)

Byron’s life seemed to have been more influential than his work; his originality and genius in poetry served as inspirations rather than as models. Byron’s role was more along the lines of an inspiration and muse than as a model of writing good poetry. Some of the Brazilian Romantics were caught in the thrall of Byron to their detriment; it was known as “O Mal Byronico” or “The Byronic Malady,” overblown sensibilities and anti-social behavior (Freire 50). In his 1873 memoir “Why I am a Romantic,” Brazilian poet José de Alencar wrote:

In 1845 the itch to write returned to me. But this year was consecrated to the raging mania of “Byronizing.” Every student of the slightest imagination wanted to be Byron and by some inevitable fate had copied or translated the English bard. So it is that I never got beyond a few frivolous plays, of which I was neither the hero nor the author, because I’d amuse myself by writing them with the names of

\textit{Houve um dia em que a poesia brasileira adoeceu do mal byrônico; foi a grande sedução das imaginações juvenis pelo poeta inglês; tudo concorria nele para essa influência dominadora: a originalidade da poesia, a sua doença moral, o prodigioso do seu gênio, o romanesco da sua vida, as noites de Itália, as aventuras de Inglaterra [. . .] e até a morte na terra de Homero.
Byron, Hugo, or Lamartine within the walls of my room at Rua de Santa Teresa. It was an insult to the illustrious poets to compare their verses with my confections. I could not find inner satisfaction as a student—one of these poems was reread by others with enthusiasm, my readers no doubt seduced by my pseudo-authorship. (33) 

It is Azevedo, however, who looms largest among the Brazilian poets inspired by Byron. He was one of the few who read Byron in the original English, (the other Romantic poets generally read Byron in the French translations of Amédée Pichot). Azevedo was a child prodigy and voracious reader in a multitude of European languages; “In his only and posthumous book of poetry—*A Lira Dos Vinte Anos*—he demonstrates his voracious literary appetite for the European literary canon, with allusions and references to authors including Bocage, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, Ossian, Goethe, Dumas, Musset, Vigney, Moore, Shelley, and many others” (Freire 46). Like the other poets of the era, the poems were incurious about politics—“The political aspect of Byron’s poetry never had any influence on Azevedo; the only remarkable elements that feature in his poems were the enhanced feeling of melancholy, inaccessible love, and the desire for death or oblivion which indeed characterized

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8 *Em 1845 voltou-me o prurido de escritor: mas êsse ano foi consagrado à mania que então grassava de byronizar. Todo estudante de alguma imaginação queria ser um Byron, e tinha por destino inexorável copiar ou traduzir o bardo inglês. . . . Assim é que nunca passei de algumas peças ligeiras, das quais não me figurava herói e nem mesmo autor, pois me divertia escrevê-las com o nome de Byron, Hugo, ou Lamartine nas paredes do meu aposento à Rua de Santa Teresa. . . . Era um desacato aos ilustres poetas atribuir-lhes versos de confecção minha . . . Que satisfação íntima não tive eu, quando um estudante . . . releu com entusiasmo uma dessas poesias, seduzido sem dúvida pelo nome do pseudo-autor. Translated by author.*
Byron’s heroes but were far from being the main subject of the poems” (Freire 109–110). Byron’s influence is not that of a worldview, or diction, or style—his influence is that of a totem, an avatar of poetic sentimentality and emotion to stand as a symbol of the gothic, Romantic impulses of young Brazilian poets.

Azevedo’s longest and perhaps most Byronic poem, “O Conde Lopo,” demonstrates Byron’s central position in Brazilian Romanticism and his status as a Brazilian idol. It is a poem where the hero is portrayed with the most essential characteristics of Byron’s Don Juan: adventurous, exotic, and fatalistic. The third canto of “O Conde Lopo” (an unfinished epic poem), entitled “Invocation,” begins with the poet summoning Byron as his muse:

Soul of fire, heart of flames,
Mysterious Briton of burning dreams
My muse you will be—high poet
From the mist of Albion, brilliant brow
In troubled excitement—to you therefore,
Errant bard of obscure soul.
You were a poet, Byron! The wave howling
Rocked your thoughts— and by the sound of the winds
from the wild fibers of your harp
Emanated the roar amongst sorrow!
Of unrestrained inspiration the ardent voice
As the galloping of the courser from Ukraine
In a feverish flow that floods the chest
Who is not touched when reading you;
You were Ariosto on the pursuing of verses,
You were Dante on the tenebrous singing,
Camões in love and Tasso in kindness,
You were a poet, Byron!
Since my song to you—singer of sorrows
Of deep agony!—to you my hymns,
Poet of torment—sleeping soul
To the howling of the ocean beasts,
Sublime bard from British fogs! (translated by Freire 75)

For Azevedo, again, Byron is a muse and inspiration, not a model. It is his tenor and character that inspire and are to be emulated, not his actual poems. It is his sardonic, gothic, morbid qualities that appeal to Azevedo. But why Byron rather than, say, Shelley or Wordsworth? The Byronic larger-than-life characters of Don Juan, Childe Harold, and Manfred, blended with Byron’s own outrageous and short-lived experiences, seemed to have held large sway over the imaginations of the poets. Byron surely as well encapsulated an aspect of Empire that appealed to the Brazilian aristocrats and poets—he was a figure of vigor, of fascination, and of nobility. He was a manifestation of the power of British thinking yet decoupled from British arms—and thus an embodiment of the informal empire’s burgeoning sense of self, a diplomat for Britain’s growing affluence and soft power.
With these three aspects of their poetry—Indianism, sharp nostalgia, and Byronism—the Brazilian poets were able to recast the traditions of European poetry into their own image, albeit an image that was still very much interested in the imperial project. For the travel writers, Brazil was a place of curiosity; for the Brazilian poets, a place of nostalgia and comfort. For Robert Southey, however, Brazil was a place where a formula for a new vision of Empire could be most clearly seen—a new Empire that did not fall prey to the crimes of slavery, as did the British and their European counterparts, nor to barbarity towards the Amerindian. Southey saw Brazil as an object lesson for the British empire in the 19th century. The lessons of the history of the nation of Brazil, for Southey, were those of a new Empire, more moral and more just, and one that could be proud of its superiority to the imperial projects of its neighbors.
Robert Southey’s History of Brazil

Robert Southey’s three-volume work on the history of the Brazilian nation (1810–1819) is a remarkable, exhaustive feat from an unlikely source. Southey’s undertaking was unusual in that it often had surprisingly sympathetic accounts of Amerindians, in a time when most Europeans viewed Amerindians as savages or cannibals. Southey’s writing often has a surprisingly modern feel, as he adopts the mode of the neutral historian, on one hand, yet pillories the colonial project on the other. As well, Southey’s influential account of Brazil is still regarded by Brazilians as an important collection of their history. With Southey, we have one of the best examples of the Romantic shaping of Latin America, where the collective history of an entire colony was recast by the British poet laureate as a history of a nation of promise and heroic roots, in turn giving Brazilians a vision of themselves from the outside that helped form their self-perception as a nation.

Southey’s fascination with the cultures and colonies of the Iberian Peninsula set him in stark contrast to many of his Romantic counterparts, who sought overseas inspiration in Germany and France. From his experiences in living in Portugal, he learned the language and wrote about a continent he himself never even visited. In 1800, a twenty-six-year-old Southey visited his uncle, the prominent preacher Henry Hill, in Lisbon, Portugal. His uncle was well-connected and had an enormous library of Portuguese histories. Official Portuguese documents were scarce and the kingdom jealously guarded the extent of its South American empire, leaving Brazil a tantalizing mystery. Even a request to the Secretary of State of Great Britain yielded little help, as the interest in Latin America extended only to the Spanish-speaking portion—it was “the
wrong side of South America,” said Lord Grenville of the Foreign Office (qtd. in de Sousa-Leão 181). In a letter to John Rickman, Southey expressed his growing interest in the colony of Brazil: “and you need not be told with what an absurd amount of secrecy they hide from the world all information respecting that country: the population of Brazil is said to double that of the mother, and now dependent, country. So heavy a branch cannot long remain upon so rotten a trunk” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 138–139).

This notion of Brazil as a country of destiny, inevitably headed for greatness, appealed to the young Southey, and he embarked on his exhaustive research and writing project. In 1807 international events piqued the interest in Brazil amongst the literate English class: Napoleon was ravaging the Iberian Peninsula; the royal family of Portugal sailed to Brazil under the protection of the English fleet; and commercial treaties opened up the Portuguese empire to British interests. Southey hurried his first volume to press in 1809, but interest had already waned and by 1819 it was a mystifyingly obscure topic to the English reading class.

When each volume was published, respectively, in 1810, 1817, and 1819, Southey received scant praise for his work, with one reviewer sniffing that Brazil was hardly worth the effort of “so many paragraphs” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 150). Reginald Heber in his review of the first volume in the Quarterly complained of this “want of broad and general views of his subject, and of those bird’s eye recapitulations, which serve as a resting-place to the attention, and bring at once before the reader’s observation the relative harmony of the objects he has gone through in detail” (qtd. in Curry 125–126). Southev himself viewed the project as a great work that would avail little fruit. “The most laborious historical work which has ever been composed in our language” he called it in a
...letter to Rev. Joseph Blanco White—and “a most laborious work which will be most inadequately remunerated” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 46).

For all its lack of critical respect, the historical project would be pivotal in its portrayal of Brazilian history, particularly in its treatment of marginalized groups like African slaves and Amerindians. Southey’s style is one of matter-of-fact details, but one that is not reluctant to signal disapproval of Portuguese colonialism, particularly in regards to the harsh slavery and mistreatment of Amerindians. Southey, a strident abolitionist, would frequently smuggle his abolitionist sympathies into his interpretations of Brazilian historical events. Southey emphasized the uprisings of escaped slaves and the agency of Amerindians much more so than other contemporary histories of Brazil in a complicated way—his purpose was more to emphasize the nobility of the British Empire, with his own brand of informal imperialism, but in the process he genuinely extols the accomplishments of marginalized groups. When the English powers are noted in the books, they are described with words like “prudent” (III.294), “unjustly accused,” (III.138) yet also “rash” (III.694) when attacking Buenos Aires. Southey’s *History of Brazil* worked in two ways to purge Great Britain of imperial guilt. First, “the not as bad” argument—as bad as we were, we were never that bad. Secondly, we did bad things, but that was then, and we’ve learned from our mistakes.

*The History of Brazil and the Slavery of Amerindians*

Southey maintains a consistent and unfailing critique of slavery in his history—unabashedly and unreservedly. Curiously, Southey seems to indict the slavery of the
Amerindian in a far harsher light than the enslavement of Africans. For the Amerindians, the fate of slavery was worse than being eaten by cannibals. Southey recounts how “cord Indians” ⁹ would prefer to be eaten rather than sold into slavery to the Portuguese—one party of Portuguese came upon a tied-up woman about to be eaten and paid dearly for her freedom. But when they went to untie her, “her contentment was changed to tears, and she lamented her fate, that instead of dying at so famous a feast, and leaving behind her a celebrated name, she was to become a slave among the white people” (II.639–640). As Southey recounts time and time again, death was considered preferable to the savage experience of slavery to the Portuguese:

There were instances when the man-hunters having surrounded whole families in one of their large dwellings, and endeavoured vainly to persuade them by fair promises to surrender, set fire to the house, thinking thus to force them out; and these poor Indians, parent and child clinging to each other, chose rather to perish in the flames than submit to the miserable state of existence which was the only alternative. The slaves who were fairly purchased were very few compared with those who were kidnapped. Great numbers perished before they were brought down to the Portuguese settlements. It was the custom to turn them as they were caught, like cattle, into a pen, till a large herd could be sent off at once: they were thus miserably shut up for eight or nine months in a state of inaction, and entire exposure to the elements, which their habit of sleeping in rooms heated by constant fires rendered doubly prejudicial; and in this manner innumerable lives

⁹ “Cord” Indians were, according to Southey, Amerindians who had been captured by other Amerindian nations in war and were thus “destined to be eaten” unless sold to Europeans (II. 470).
were destroyed. A Portugueze seldom brought home more than half the number which had fallen to his share. There was also a great consumption of those who accompanied the slave-traders, a far greater proportion of Indians than of any other class dying in these expeditions (II.641–642).

Why is Southey so intent on casting aspersions on the Portuguese enslavement of the Amerindian? Doubtlessly, it truly was a galling and appalling treatment of human beings. And, like the Brazilian Romantic poets, Southey finds a powerful symbol at work in figure of the Amerindian. Yet it is inescapably true that the British perpetrated their own virulent slavery in this era. By contrasting the particular terribleness of the Portuguese colonial powers—that death by fire or anthropophagy is preferable to its slavery—he makes the British colonial project seem more benign in comparison. Southey does have gradations of slavery in mind—best were the English, in the middle were the Dutch, then Spain, and worst of all Portugal: “No task-masters were ever more merciless than the Portugueze of the seventeenth century, not even their rivals the Dutch” (II.639). There exists a tension between Southey the bland historian who wishes to give all the facts and Southey the patriot, who will elevate the project of British colonialism over that of its rivals: Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Spain. For Southey, the informal empire of Britain is the best of bad systems.

Yet why is Southey so partial to the Amerindian, particularly since he takes such pains to point out that many of them were frequently cannibals? And while Southey does take up the cause of brutal slavery of the Africans, as will be pointed out later, their cause does not seem to fill him with the same admiration or pity as the plight of the Amerindian. The fierceness and gothic savagery of the anthropophagous nations
fascinates and repels—they are not the same “meek” people that seemed to populate other parts of the Americas, particularly the Caribbean of Columbus’ time (in perception more than reality, no doubt), but rather agents of unwholesome vigor and power. Even the Amerindian of the British colonies is superior to the Amerindians of the Portuguese colonies. As well, the contrast of the horror of cannibals with the horror of Portuguese slavery made for an apt and effective rhetorical tool—the moral and economic “cannibalism” of the Portuguese in comparison to the cannibalism of the Amerindian, savagery versus savages. In comparison, “The cannibalism of the Indians is desirable, estimable, and normal compared to the alternative slave systems of the Portuguese invader” (Wood 211).

Critic Marcus Wood observes that the very first mention of slavery in History of Brazil concerns the corrupting influence of the slave trade on Amerindians, who began as early as 1516 to slave-trade their own people to sell to the Portuguese (210). For Southey, the great crime of the Portuguese is less the fact of slavery than the horrendous consequences to the Amerindians. Southey also calls on a common theme of the nineteenth-century abolitionists: that slavery is degrading not only for the subject but for the owner. Whites, argues Southey, were falsely drawn into thinking that physical labor was fit only for slaves, thus corrupted by the pernicious effects of slavery themselves. Slavery perverted good morals, twisting even the powerful and good men of the nation into justifying its abhorrence:
“If,” says Manoel Guedes Aranha,10 “the nobles in civilized countries are held in high esteem, with greater reason should white men be esteemed in a land of heathens, because they have been brought up with the milk of the Church and of the Christian faith. Moreover, different men are fit for different things; we are fit to introduce religion among them, and they are fit to serve us, to hunt for us, fish for us, and work for us.” Even the humaner and more religious part of the community thought it perfectly right that the Indians should be compelled to labour for the Portugueze, in gratitude for the instruction which they received. Manoel da Vide Sotto-Mayor 11recommends that this should be explained to them when they were allotted from the Aldeas, that they should be informed how reasonable it was, and exhorted to conform to the tenor of the King’s laws with good will and like good subjects, seeing it was for the advantage of the white men, to whom they were indebted. . . . The person who reasoned thus was a good and religious man, . . . if such then were his sentiments, it may be supposed what would be those of the slavers. (II.637–638).

There is here an interesting stylistic twist to Southey’s indictment—he presents two quotations with relatively little comment, one galling in its savagery and the other galling in its moral blindness. Southey lets the quotations doubly-condemn slavery—certainly a reader would not usually identify with the callous Aranha, but the “benevolent” da vide Sotto-Mayor’s frightening obliviousness to his own wickedness is all the more impactful because it is put side-to-side with the other quotation.

10 1654 quotation from the attorney-general of the state of Maranhão
11 17th century colonial sheriff of Belem and contemporary of Aranha’s
The Slavery of Africans and the Palmares Quilombo

For Southey, the plight of the African slave was of no small importance. A staunch abolitionist, he works are marked by a resolute and unflagging disapproval of the institution, even in places where his tone is matter of fact. This leads him to emphasize certain aspects of the Africans’ experience in Brazil that other historiographers would elide or redescribe.

Southey is at odds with his two twin aims when describing the African in Brazil. His first aim—to espouse the glory of the British Empire and inflate its sense of moral and cultural superiority—wars with the second, which is his deep disgust with the institution of slavery as supported by the British. These two warring goals come through clearly in passages like these:

Frezier\(^{12}\) guessed the proportion of the black to the white inhabitants of Bahia\(^{13}\) as twenty to one, and certainly did not overrate it; it was greater there than in any other part of Brazil, because the Engenhos\(^{14}\) were much more numerous, and upon a larger scale. He speaks with indignation of having seen the miserable Negroes exposed for sale in warehouses, stark naked, to be handled like beasts, purchased like beasts, worked like beasts, and he might have added, treated more inhumanly.

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\(^{12}\) Amédée-François Frézier, French explorer whose observations of Brazil and other South American nations—*Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud, aux côtes du Chili, du Pérou et de Brésil*—was published in 1717 in an English translation.

\(^{13}\) Brazilian colony—and eventually state—in the Northeast corner of the nation.

\(^{14}\) As Southey defines “engenho” in an appendix, “the establishment of a sugar-cane planter, with all its appendages”—in other words, a sugar-cane mill (I.899).
than beasts; . . . for in the treatment of their slaves the Brazilians are said
ininitely to have exceeded the English in cruelty. \textit{Would that the English, with
whom this infamous comparison was made in the seventeenth century, were
worthy to be compared at this time with the Brazilians for the treatment of their
slaves, and the laws by which their deplorable situation is mitigated!} Vieyra
compares the lives of slaves in an Engenho to the sufferings of that Redeemer in
whom he exhorted them to look for comfort; . . . bonds, stripes, wounds, and
revilings; to be deprived of rest by night and day; to be stript, to be scourged, to
be hungered, such he said were their sufferings; and if they endured them with
patience, they would have the merit as well as the torments of martyrdom.
Persons who had no lands to cultivate, bought slaves in order to live by their
labour, and requiring from each a certain sum weekly, took no farther care of
them, but let them provide for their own maintenance, and for their weekly poll-
tax, as they could. If these wretches did not earn enough, as sometimes must have
happened, or if they gambled away what they had acquired, (for they were greatly
addicted to gaming,) they had recourse to robbery and murder: and though the
magistrates punished such crimes with great severity, (being perhaps the only
criimes which were punished at all,) they were so frequent that it was dangerous to
pass the streets after night had closed. It is asserted that women of rank and
character trained up their females slaves for prostitution, for the sake of the profit
obtained by thus employing them. \textit{The practices of our own Sugar Islands render
credible this and every other abomination connected with slavery} (II.674–676,
emphases added).
Southey’s indictment of English slavery here seems to belie his earlier castigation of the Portuguese, but it is of course more complicated than that. Southey ruefully condemns the slavery of the English—the slavery of his time and his readers’. The pride that the English might take on being more merciful is undercut by the savagery that his 19th century audience was complicit in—the brutality of slavery. While extolling the virtues of the English, Southey can’t help but chide his Empire’s moral shortcomings, which had outlawed slavery in 1807 but still permitted its practice legally in the Sugar Islands.

Southey takes a particular interest in one of the more interesting aspects of the African culture in Brazil—quilombos, or colonies of escaped slaves in the hinterlands. While other historiographers of the 19th century regarded these escapees as traitors or dangerous insurgents, Southey viewed them with some admiration—particularly the quilombo of Palmares, (much like John Gabriel Stedman does in Surinam, as will be explored in the next chapter). These independent towns and states of escaped Africans—quilombos15—were a phenomenon that occurred throughout the New World 16 but were most prevalent, by all accounts, in Brazil. While non-African-descended, non-slave people lived there as well—typically people in the margins of Brazilian society—they were primarily occupied by escaped African slaves. Whereas in the Portuguese-

15 “Quilombo” is the term Southey uses, although scholars disagree about the best term. Alternate terms include “marronages,” “mocambos,” and “palenques.” Because quilombo is what Southey used, this work will use the same term.

16 Columbia has San Basilio de Palenque, a village founded by escaped Africans, still in existence. Trujillo in Honduras was founded by escaped slaves, and the Miskito Sambu of the Nicaragua area were a tribe of mixed African slave/Amerindian heritage who had relatively complete autonomy from the early 17th century to late 19th century. Brazil, however, had the greatest number of quilombos.
controlled colonies no “Mulatto within the fourth degree” could hold public office of any kind unless married to white woman (III.250), in the “illegal” quilombos the Africans and mixed-race could hold power and authority.

Southey describes in his third volume the head price for escaped African slaves: four oitavas for a slave apprehended within a league of a town; eight if it was more than one league; for two days’ journey, twelve; and four more for each doubling of distance. There was one exception, however. Regardless of distance, “If more than four Negroes were found in a Quilombo, with their huts, vessels for peeling rice, and means of subsisting themselves there, it was considered of so much importance to destroy one of these settlements before it acquired strength, that the head-money was increased to twenty oitava” (III.248). No slaves were so dangerous as those who were part of a quilombo.

Southey produced the first extended sympathetic account of the legendary quilombo of Palmares—a state that persisted for nearly 100 years, 1605–1694, and whose population may have been as great as 30,000, in what is the present-day Brazilian state of Alagoas. Quilombos included not only escaped slaves and their descendants but Amerindians and poor whites who wished to flee the colonies. Quilombos were viewed as a severe threat by the Portuguese colonists—not only because they were a successful society outside of the Portuguese jurisdiction, but because the inhabitants of Palmares had begun trading with the colonies and integrating themselves into those economies. Not only was Palmares beginning to become an equal—it was beginning to become a necessity for their economic well-being (Wood 213). The colonists were uneasy with their growing dependency. Some slaves who lived in Palmares but were recaptured or
returned voluntarily to their Portuguese masters reported the huge size and strength of the settlement, so “the Governors of Pernambuco for many years considered it too hazardous an undertaking to attack them; . . . [they left ] the responsibility to their successors” (III.25). The quilombo’s last leader was a warrior named Zumbi, who led this resistant state that existed outside of the Portuguese hegemony. Finally, in 1694 a huge expedition of Portuguese was sent to crush the free state. After their defeat, “Zombi and the most resolute of his followers retired to the summit of the rock; and preferring death to slavery, threw themselves from the precipice . . . men worthy of a better fate for their courage and their cause” (III.28–29).

Southey’s account of the rise and fall of Palmares runs counter to the typical Brazilian historiography, notes Marcus Wood (212). These African-descended revolutionaries were portrayed in histories as enemies of the state, pirates and rapists who had to be quelled, up until the mid-20th century—except by Southey. While Southey acknowledges that the rebellion had to be eliminated—“the necessity of rooting out such enemies from their own border is clear and indisputable” (29)—he lamented the inhumane treatment of the defeated Palmares peoples and the culture of slavery that had fomented its creation to begin with (III.29). He admires the bravery and skill of Zumbi and his warriors. He viewed the society of Palmares as democratic, one of social harmony, worthy of respect, highly organized, and sophisticated militarily. Today, Zumbi is a symbol of African-Brazilian consciousness and resistance. “It was only in the later twentieth century that Zumbi was erected as the figurehead of the Luso-Brazilian colonial resistance,” notes Wood. “Southey anticipated the attitude of black radical consciousness

17 Southey spells his name “Zombi”; most modern scholars spell it Zumbi.
in Brazil today. No doubt Southey produced his reading of Zumbi’s resistance because it could be used to defame Portuguese colonialism. Yet, whatever the political motives, the narrative effect is close to that of contemporary black Brazilian celebration of the slave revolution” (212).

Southey celebrated the Palmares residents, stating that their history “will not be perused without some feeling of respect for their character and compassion for their fate. They were under the government of an elective Chief, who was chosen for his justice as well as his valour, and held the office for life: all men of experience and good repute had access to him as counselors: he was obeyed with perfect loyalty; and it was said that no conspiracies or struggles for power had ever been known among them” (III.24). Among the 19th century historians of the Palmares quilombo, only Southey celebrated it

The free state of Palmares predates the Haitian revolution (1791–1804) by nearly 200 years; its strength and independence belied the cultural assumptions that only Europeans could thrive in the New World. Southey’s respectful portrayal of Palmares challenged British cultural constructions of race by rendering these African-descended and mixed-race peoples an agency and power in their own right. Once again Southey raises the specter of the corrupting power of slavery, which created the necessity of Palmares in the first place. As Wood notes, this account of Palmares complicates the perception of Southey as an apostate radical—the one-time critic of the Crown who became a complicit sell-out.

For Southey, the Palmares free state was an emblem of the great range and possibilities of a free African-descended population. While his more liberal compatriots
in England may have been disappointed in his turn towards conservative respectability, Southey never lost his underlying moral verve. Southey may have been a turncoat radical, but he never lost his sense of championing the underdog—as long, of course, as it wasn’t a Catholic underdog.

**The Jesuits and Roman Catholics**

One of the elements of Southey’s *History* that stands out is how complicated Southey’s attitudes are—a mix of praise and pillorying, admiration and disdain for the same groups or the same individuals. This is especially clear in his approach to the “Romish” church, the Jesuits in particular. While he fumes about their dangerous religious syncretism on one hand, he simultaneously bemoans their lack of ameliorating influence (after they were banned from Brazil in 1759) on the other. He grudgingly admires their dedication—especially when compared to the savageness of the colonial governors—but frequently dismisses their claims of miracles as specious, mere trickery to influence the Amerindians. With the Roman Catholic Church, his tone of careful historical objectivity erodes more obviously, revealing his disdain for the non-Protestant Christians.

[T]he Romish Church […] contents itself with the husk of superstitious ceremonies and the chaff of superstitious works, and supports its empire by the boldest arts of impudent imposture . . . a Church, which from the earliest ages of its history to the present day, has systematically juggled with the credulity of

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18 Ostensibly because they were trading with Amerindians without government consent; more likely because their influence was inconvenient to the colonial powers.
mankind. The monastic orders vied with each other in inventing fables, to exaggerate the merits of their respective Founders and Saints; and the wildest fictions of romance are not more monstrous than these legends, which were believed by the people, approved by the Inquisition, and ratified by the Church. It would be impossible to say which Order has exceeded the others in Europe in this rivalry, each having carried the audacity of falsehood to its utmost bounds: but in Brazil the Jesuits bore the palm. The hostile Orders opposed with virulent animosity their exertions in behalf of the Indians, and hated them as much for their zeal as for their superior influence; but they were unable to rival them in reputation: few of their members made any pretensions to sanctity, or even decency of life, and the Jesuits had the field of honour to themselves. They made a full use of their advantage. (II.681–682)

Why is there this complicated tone from Southey? No doubt part of it stems from his Protestant background, culturally inclined at the time against Roman Catholics. Catholics were believers, yes, but barely, as Southey indicates when discussing the mixed influence of the Roman Catholics: “Christianity, even when so disfigured and defiled, is still, from those moral and domestic precepts which are inseparable from it, a great and powerful engine of civilization, a great and inestimable blessing” (I.223). When describing the story of forty Jesuits who were martyred, killed by French Huguenot pirates in 1570, Southey’s tone is matter-of-fact and cool: the pirate Jacques de Sore “did by the Jesuits as they would have done by him and all of his sect . . . put them to death” (I.121, ellipses in original text). Southey is impatient as well with the legacy of these forty
deaths: “The Company never, either before or since, sustained at one time so severe a loss; in their own language they never obtained so glorious a triumph; and this was as much the language of policy as of fanaticism. The machinery of miracles was soon added to a story, which surely needed not the aid of falsehood to render it impressive” (322). Especially when contrasted to his sympathetic portrayal of Amerindians and the Palmares peoples—although certainly less “Christian” than the Jesuits—his attitude is distinctly cool. 

His disdain for the “machinery of miracles” is another reason for his complicated attitude towards the Catholics. He scorns “miracles,” saying they were invented by the chicanery of Jesuits, but in the next sentence solemnly describes a ceremony by the Tinimaacas nation, in which a priest named Mapono appeared to have the power to fly in religious ceremonies, without a similar hint of incredulity (III.184–185). Part of this discrepancy in attitude, naturally, comes from the fact that the Iberian nations and Catholicism were seen as rivals to British glory and empire: the Amerindians of Tinimaacas, however, were mere curiosities. There was no need to denigrate the indigenous because they could not possibly be rivals to the glory of the British colonial project. Within the informal empire, there could be a threat from a European nation or even a creole rebellion—but the Amerindian was at best a minor annoyance. Because the Amerindian could not be a rival, he could not be a threat—and because he could not be a threat, he could receive the bemused praised of a comfortable Englishman. 

Southey revels in descriptions of the Jesuits as superstitious and mad with fanaticism—yet their methods were not ineffectual. When writing about their missionary exploits, he writes:
One of the Jesuits succeeded in effectually abolishing [cannibalism] among some clans by going through them and flogging himself before their doors till he was covered with blood, telling them he thus tormented himself to avert the punishment which God would otherwise inflict upon them for this crying sin. They could not bear this, they confessed that what they had done was wrong, and enacted heavy punishments against any person who should again be guilty. With other hordes the Fathers thought themselves fortunate when they could obtain permission to visit the prisoners and instruct them in the saving faith, before they were put to death. But the Savages soon took a conceit that the water of baptism spoilt the taste of the meat, and therefore would not let them baptize any more. The Jesuits then carried with them wet handkerchiefs, or contrived to wet the skirt or sleeve of their habit, that out of it they might squeeze water enough upon the victim’s head to fulfil the condition of salvation, without which they were persuaded that eternal fire must have been his portion. What will not man believe, if he can believe this of his Maker! (I.264–265).

Southey gawks at the self-mutilation and self-deception yet cannot help but note that the practice seemed at least temporarily effective in some cases. And the subterfuge of baptism by holy water seems to Southey to be risible yet clearly, utterly sincere. The Jesuits earn begrudging admiration from Southey. For one, they spoke out against the enslavement of the Amerindians, a cause dear to Southey.

Nobrega and his companions refused to administer the sacraments of the Church to those persons who retained native women as concubines, or men as slaves. Many were reclaimed by this resolute and Christian conduct; some because their
consciences had not been dead, but sleeping; others for worldly fear, because they believed the Jesuits were armed with secular as well as spiritual authority. The good effect which was produced upon such persons was, therefore, only for a season. Mighty as the Catholic religion is, avarice is mightier; and in spite of all the efforts of some of the best and ablest men that ever the Jesuit order, so fertile of great men, had had to glory in, the practice of enslaving the natives continued (I.267–269).

It is worth noting, however, that Southey seems almost smug that the Roman Catholic church’s power was insufficient to curtail the practice of slavery. Southey noted with chagrin that the expulsion of the Jesuits in the late 18th century removed their ameliorating influence, putting the Amerindians under the more brutal control of the governors. Without them, the project of putting Amerindian and Brazilians of European ancestry on equal footing was doomed to failure (III. 697). The Jesuits led by example, and “possessed an authority which they always exercised with prudence, and which, if it did not amend a vicious disposition, served at least to prevent the commission of open vice” (III.699). Their “wholesome discipline,” he laments, cannot be “laid aside without injury to the commonwealth” (III.699). Where non-Jesuit priests would often “assert that the Indians were wild beasts of the forest, and had no more souls than so many dogs, till God infused a soul when they were baptized” (II.638) and be motivated according to Southey by greed for gain, the Jesuits were motivated by zeal, virtue, and desire for knowledge (II.638).

The Colonists and Colonial Powers
In one of his closing chapters, Southey writes, “No nation has ever accomplished such great things in proportion to its means as the Portugueze. Inconsiderable in size as Portugal is, and far from being fully peopled, it has possessed itself, by fair occupancy, of the finest portion of the New World; and whatever changes may take place, Brazil will always be the inheritance of the Portugueze people” (III.696).

Behind Southey’s vision of Brazil is a project—the desire to galvanize a benevolent imperialism. The colonizing of Brazil by the British, one is led to infer from Southey, would have been much more humane. Portugal’s political accomplishments may be admirable for so small a kingdom, but its colonization was overly brutal, as Southey assessed it. Brazil will always be the inheritance of the Portuguese, perhaps, but who was to say that the nation holding sway over the inheritance couldn’t be British? An indirect rule of this land would benefit the English greatly. Increasing the British influence in Brazil would not only benefit Britain, Southey implies, but would be good for the Brazilian nation as well. Like the British travel writers, Southey sees Latin America and the rest of Brazil as a place for the informal empire to flourish—a land ripe for commercial investment and growing British stature.

Southey’s view of colonialism is marked by two attitudes—one, that the English were truly terrible and brutal, but two, that the English would be much better than the alternatives. Southey held that the past was bad—every imperial power was wicked, although some more so than others. Southey describes an abortive 17th century English colony in the present-day state of Para, which attracted enormous support from Amerindians because “no yoke could be more intolerable than that of the Portugueze” (I. 671). The Portuguese ruthlessly put down the colony: “The English Commander was one
Thomas, an old soldier, who had served with reputation in the Low Countries; he was
overpowered here, attempted to escape by night in a launch, and was overtaken and cut to
pieces according to the usual barbarity with which war was carried on in the New World,
by all nations alike” (I.672). Southey notes several times that it was the English who
attracted desperate support from the indigenous of the area, hoping to throw off the
Portuguese. Unfailingly, the Portuguese governors are described as greatly brutal—“the
Governor of every Captaincy exercised uncontrolled authority, and consequently abused
it; the property, and honour, and lives of the colonists, were at the mercy of these Lords,
and the people groaned under their intolerable oppression” (I.221).

Southey’s approach, biased as it was, also helped uncover stories obscured or
suppressed by the biases of historians who were as complicit in endorsing Portuguese
colonialism as Southey was interested in endorsing contemporary British colonialism. In
particular, noted Brazilian historian J. de Sousa-Leão credits Southey with reviving two
key figures in Brazilian history who had been suppressed or forgotten: Zumbi and the
Palmares state, and the figure of Joao Fernandes Vieira (186–187), a mixed-race
revolutionary who helped overthrow the Dutch colonial power.\footnote{From 1630–1654, the Dutch conquered and ruled about half of the area previously settled by the Portuguese, controlling in particular the lucrative sugar-cane industry.}

Vieira actually prospered under Dutch rule, growing wealthy. He became a
prominent citizen but worked clandestinely to overthrow the Dutch. His motives, claimed
Southey, were based on a dread that the Protestant Dutch’s influence was eating away at
the Roman Catholic Church: “With many good qualities, and many great ones, Joam
Fernandes Vieira was blindly devoted to the Romish superstitions; and his abhorrence of
heresy, and his dread of the progress which it might make among a catholic people, strengthened the patriotic resolution which he had formed” (II.66). Southey seemed especially skeptical of the miracles reported around Vieira’s success—churches miraculously opened from the inside (II.86); visions of Mary in the battlefield carrying the Infant Christ, appearing to give strength to the Catholic side (II.114); and a “loaves and fishes” story in which the “patriot had only two pounds of powder, and no other balls than what were made for the occasion from pewter plates; yet they fired more than a thousand shots, and powder and ball were left” (II.114). Later Southey grumbles darkly about Vieira’s tactics, saying that “The tricks by which Joam Fernandes persuaded the Pernambucans that the Saints had actually engaged in their behalf, were borrowed from the practices of the Church” (II.681–682): the chicanery of the Roman Catholics was pervasive and corrupting.

Even so, despite Southey’s distaste for Catholicism, his comprehensive relation of the exploits of Vieira was the most complete and thorough of the 19th century—it is likely that the mulatto revolutionary was ignored due to his racial background, a factor which Southey was less influenced by. While he scorned Vieira’s piety, he expressed admiration for his cleverness and bravery—in part, perhaps, because he saw Vieira as an abolitionist symbol, a man who embodied anti-racist ideals.

The Amerindians, Beauchamp, and Southey’s Vision of History

Southey’s efforts to synthesize large pieces of previous scholarship on Brazil into one coherent narrative were the first of its scope. It was the most significant histiography
in any language to cover Brazil from the colonial period up to the arrival of the
Portuguese court. Certainly books about Brazil’s history were published previously but
not with quite the same scope and ambition. Travel narratives, journals of colonists, and
books about the history of Brazil tended to favor descriptions of the new continent,
including flora and fauna. Amerindians were featured, but often disdainfully or
dismissively: These volumes were often “marked by an Edenic vision or by an emphasis
on the corporal, moral and behavioral deformities of the peoples of the New World”
(Jinzenji and Galvao 121). It is to Southey’s credit, then, that he complicates this—less
merely naturalistic, more observational, more comprehensive, especially when it comes
to the Amerindians.

The Brazilian Amerindian as portrayed by Southey was, in contrast to the
perceived meekness of the Caribbean tribes encountered years earlier by Christopher
Columbus, fierce. The legends of cannibalism made them loom larger. Southey admires
the martial prowess of the Amerindians greatly, frequently lavishing praise on them: “A
Tupinamba would shoot twelve arrows before an Englishman could let fly six. Guns
terrified them, but when they learned that it had to be loaded, they were dismissive,
saying they could ‘dispatch six arrows while a gun was being loaded once’” (I.215). The
Guaycurü were a legendarily tough nation. Southey recounts their initiation rites. An
aspirant would shear his head, paint himself in colors, and ornament himself in feathers.
At daybreak he’d beat a drum and sing till the afternoon: “Then he called upon the
veterans, seven in number, whom he had chosen to officiate, and to each of whom he had
given a sharp bone, and a sting of the ray-fish. With these each wounded him four or five
times, while he stood without flinching, or betraying the slightest sense of pain. They
then wetted his head and his whole body with the blood that ran from these wounds and thus the initiation was completed” (III.388).

Southeys emphasis on the Amerindian: “the amount of information in the work on indigenous peoples is amazing, for he considers them as historical agents equivalent to the colonists. Southeys makes clear his view: Indians and Portuguese are equally barbarous and cruel, though fitted by these qualities to establish civilization and build the state”20 (par. 5, translated by author). Southeys optimism for Brazil and his declaration that the peoples would be melded into one nation were also noteworthy to Morel. However, the Amerindians portrayal is not exactly flattering—their portrayal seems to emphasize the lurid aspects, albeit aspects that make them seem less like passive reactors to European imperialism. Like the Brazilian Romantics, Southeys sees the Amerindian as more than a brutal cipher for savagery—but unlike those poets, Southeys sees the Amerindian less as a symbol of Romantic ideals than as anthropological items to be studied, a subject for his and his reader’s curiosity.

Southeys approach to the Amerindians stands in marked contrast to that of another, more popular vision of Brazil’s history from France. Southeys History of Brazil

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20 “é impressionante a massa de informações na obra sobre as populações indígenas, considerando-as, portanto, como agentes históricos equivalentes aos colonizadores. Southey deixa claro seu ponto de vista: índios e portugueses são igualmente bárbaros e cruéis, embora tenha cabido a estes implantar a civilização e construir o Estado.”
was not an immediate hit in Brazil. It wasn’t translated into Portuguese until 1862, with its one-thousand-run printing taking twenty years to sell out. Southey had a rival who far outstripped him in popularity in the 19th century: Frenchman Alphonse de Beauchamp. His *Histoire du Brésil*, published shortly after Southey’s first volume, became the overwhelming favorite in Brazilian circles. It was published in Portuguese, for one, shortly after it appeared in 1818 and 1819. Beauchamp liberally borrowed from Southey, using his text as a blueprint, with some chapters appearing nearly as verbatim translations. Both ordered their texts in similar fashion—first with the conquistadors, then the Jesuits, the explorers, and the wars against Amerindian and other European powers. Curiously, however, Beauchamp suppressed “the tracts in which Southey sticks in long and detailed descriptions, especially when he deals with various indigenous groups and their characteristics and habits” (Jinzenji and Galvao 126). In particular, the descriptions of polygamy and anthropophagic rituals were excised: “passages referring both to anthropophagy and the concubinage of Indian women with the Portuguese and the sale of Indian women were referred to with ‘anthropological naturality’ by Robert Southey and omitted by Beauchamp” (Jinzenji and Galvao 127). Neither Beuchamp nor Southey stand as feckless champions of the Amerindian, but the approaches of both provide sharply contrasting perspectives. Southey’s details present the Amerindians as barbaric, godless pagans who needed the influence of Europeans—yet figures who were agents in their own world. They were feral, yes, and in need of civilization but capable and bold actors in their own realms. Beauchamp’s repressions, however, emphasize a simple, childlike Amerindian who also needed domesticating colonial aid but was not capable of self-determination.
Interestingly, Beauchamp uses two sources that Southey does not use—*Chronica da Companhia de Jesu do Estado do Brasil: do que obraram seus filhos nesta parte do novo mundo* (1663), from the Portuguese Jesuit Simão de Vasconcellos (1597–1671) and *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil, autrement dite Amerique* (1578) by the French Calvinist Jean de Léry (1534–1611), both of which were travel reports written in a narrative format. The former describes Jesuits sympathetically as misunderstood missionaries; the latter emphasizes French success in colonizing Brazil (Jinzenji and Galvao 134). Neither, it would seem, were convenient to the story Southey was trying to tell about the wickedness of Catholicism and the superiority of the British colonial experiment to that of other European powers. Jinzenji and Galvao argue that Beauchamp’s version succeeded in Brazil more than Southey’s because “the history of Brazil written by Beauchamp more closely approximates the ‘image that Brazil had of itself’ in the nineteenth century, or the image it wanted to construct and disseminate through its past, at a time when the country aimed to affirm itself as an independent and civilized nation” (135).

How do we judge Southey as a historian? From a 21st century vantage, the modern reader can condemn his imperialist sympathies and his religious bigotry—his biases are all too clear. Yet his 19th century critics of nearly 200 years past criticized him for being too reserved and not overt enough with his opinions. The anonymous reviewer of the *Eclectic Review* wrote that “we see no indication in the present work that Mr. Southey was endowed with the most important qualities of a great historian. The comprehensive views of the great philosopher do not appear to predominate in his mind” (149). The criticism, then, is that the narrative is not overt enough—a coherent
ideological take is not clear enough to the reviewer’s satisfaction. Joseph Lowe of the *Monthly Review*, quoted earlier, remarked in a contemporary review that “without entering into any general discussion of the best mode of writing history, we must say that Mr. Southey has gone greatly too far into particular detail for the taste of the present generation: which expect something more than a succession of objects and occurrences, clearly and specifically described, but not brought together so as to produce effect by combination” (151). Southey, he complains, presents facts without interpretation.

It must be said to Southey’s credit, then, that he bucked the expectations of a strong authorial voice of his era, a clearer tone of hectoring morality and bully patriotism that would have been likely expected. His prioritizing of comprehensiveness and detail over sweep and message is more to be admired than criticized. This isn’t to say that Southey is not complicit with his readers—he, too, is a loyal British citizen wanting to give a vision of the world that his readers would prefer more than a vision of the world as it truly was.

Southey’s description of Brazil has some remarkable parallels to the depiction of Surinam in John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 1774–1779*, his account of his time as a soldier for hire for the Dutch colonial government. Like Southey, Stedman recounts with some admiration the colonies of runaway Africans in the hinterlands. These quilombos of Surinam, however, are experienced firsthand and in fact suppressed with the help of Stedman. Stedman has mixed emotions about slavery, deploring its excesses yet believing its abandonment would bear too harsh a price on white slave owners. Where Southey was
unabashedly abolitionist, Stedman charted a “moderate” course in desire only to curb the worst excesses of the slave system.
(Chapter 5) Joanna as Eve:

The Multiple Agents Shaping the Perception of the Latin American Slave

in Stedman’s Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition

John Gabriel Stedman, a Scotsman but the son of a Dutchman, served in Surinam (modern-day Guyana) at the behest of the government of the Netherlands in the 1770s to help suppress escaped slaves. There he not only witnessed the brutalities of the slave system, but he also developed a relationship with a mulatto slave named Joanna and had a son with her. When his tenure was finished, however, he returned to Great Britain with neither Joanna nor his son and married an English woman, settling into a respectable life.

Surinam was a lucrative venture for the Dutch and a humming hive of commerce. By the mid-eighteenth century, it was said to be producing more revenue and consuming more imported manufactured goods, per capita, than any other Caribbean colony (Price and Price xii). Yet a heavy reliance on African slaves produced a high ratio of African slave-to-free whites, which in turn meant that the colony was continually troubled by insurrection and escaped slaves. Stedman’s expedition was sent in to quell the slave rebels. The expedition was bleak and bloody on both sides of the conflict. At the end of their tenure, when Stedman’s company was recalled to Paramaribo, only nine of the original fifty-four members had survived, most killed by disease. Stedman estimated that of the 1,200 Dutch troops sent out to Surinam in 1772, only a hundred returned to Holland in 1777 (Richards 94).
Stedman wrote a book based on his journals, *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 1771–1777.* It was purchased by publisher Joseph Johnson in 1791. Johnson hired some engravers to construct images for his texts, including Francesco Bartolozzi. Most famously, one of the engravers Johnson hired was poet William Blake, who worked from Stedman’s sketches to create sixteen engravings. Some of these images and themes were re-appropriated by Blake in his own works, particularly *America, a Prophecy* (1793), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), and *Europe, a Prophecy* (1794). In 1791, soon after the publishers received the text, Haiti rebelled against France, resulting in a republic of free African-descended men and women forming in the Caribbean. Consequently, much of Stedman’s text underwent editorial changes to ensure that it could not be viewed as support for other rebellions among slaves in the New World. These and other editorial changes enraged Stedman. Still, despite the edits and Stedman’s own personal ambivalence towards slavery, Stedman’s account became a tool in the abolitionist protests against the inhumanity of slavery and the slave trade. Notably, however, Stedman himself was not a full abolitionist, instead arguing for an amelioration of the slavery system. While the text was used to champion abolitionist causes, the text was also a complicated, often troubling apology for slavery; as well, women are given very little agency and are more prop than player, with the work functioning as much as an erotic fantasy and clichéd romance as an exposé of the horrors of colonial slavery.

As *Narrative* was prepared and then sent to press, there emerged three key agents in the battleground of the text—three agents that all shifted the view of the South American African-descended slaves and their condition. Each agent attempted to
commandeer the text in his own fashion for his own purposes, waging battles over the
turf of the South American slave in *Narrative*: first, Stedman and his ambivalence
towards slavery and the African-descended; second, editorial changes by editor William
Thomson at the behest of publisher Joseph Johnson to make the text palatable; and third,
William Blake’s engravings, which emphasized the universality of the African-descended
slave and the debasement of slavery, building on Stedman’s own sketches. Each of these
three squirm around the knotty issues of slavery in one way or another; none gives full
voice to the true slave experience, although Blake arguably comes closest. The text,
three-times filtered and reshaped, vibrates with its contradictions and complexities:
Stedman as a hero yet a knave; Surinam as a new Eden yet a hell; slavery as an institution
undeniably cruel and barbarous yet “justifiably” necessary. These narrative moldings
work to reveal the contradictions at the heart of the British views of slavery and the
African in Latin America.

Of the three voices, only Blake’s is clearly abolitionist. Stedman deplores the
brutality of the slaves’ condition but feels that freeing slaves would be too unfair to their
owners; Thomson wishes to avoid offending the middle-of-the-road consumer and being
accused of inciting abolitionist rage. How, then, does the text become such a centerpiece
for abolitionist sentiment? It is William Blake’s engravings that belie the ambivalence of
the text and strike a strong stance for universal equality and the dignity of the enslaved
African.
Stedman’s Adaptations of His Journals into *Narrative* 21

Stedman fashioned *Narrative* from the journals he kept during his years in Surinam. The story that his journals tell is often markedly different from the story of *Narrative*, however. For example, Stedman matter-of-factly lists sexual conquests in his journal that in *Narrative* are changed to more romantic or coded versions. Payment for sex and haggling with prostitutes, often a daily activity for him in Surinam, goes markedly unmentioned in *Narrative*.

Stedman’s representation of himself is also given a tweak. Ultimately, there are two versions of Stedman’s self in *Narrative*: first, Stedman the scientific explorer and naturalist, impartially observing and reporting the tales of savagery and debauchery in Surinam. Stedman separates his own conduct from that of the colonists, setting himself above them. Yet, in his journal Stedman has passages like this, which are suppressed in *Narrative*: “A negro woman offers me the use of her daughter while here, for a certain sum. We don’t agree about the price” (qtd in Richards 100). Both the journals and *Narrative* describe some bleak sexual practices, but when *Narrative* does so, it is at a

21 The number of versions of Stedman’s account that will be referred to can quickly become confusing. This research uses three different texts: Stedman’s original journal of 1790, (*Journal* 1790); the Thomson-edited version of 1796 (*Narrative* 1796); and a revised edition published in 1988 by Richard and Sally Price that incorporated the original journals into a version that was closer to Stedman’s journals 1790 (*Narrative* 1988).
narrative distance, belying Stedman’s direct involvement. Rather than the remote observer, then, Stedman was often a direct agent.

Yet, as well, there is Stedman’s self-depiction as “Stedman the romantic,” whose love for Joanna pulls him into a plot that much resembles the sentimental novels of the era. As Richard and Sally Price note, Stedman envisions himself as something like a character out of Tom Jones or Roderick Random, a rebel who bucks the system, gets into fights, and lands sexual conquest after sexual conquest (xiv). Stedman was consciously adopting the tone of romantic works: “However trifling, and like the style of romance, this relation may appear to some, it is nevertheless a genuine account, and on that score I flatter myself may not entirely be uninteresting to others” (Narrative 1796, 90).

Stedman’s relationship with Joanna is the most heavily romanticized aspect of Narrative. The marriage is one of convenience until it becomes inconvenient. This vision of Joanna reconfigures the mercenary and savage nature of sexuality in the colony into an acceptable narrative of sentimental novels, reshaping the events into a flattering romance. The sentimental nature of Narrative is strengthened rather than weakened by the gruesome and horrific backdrop of the world of slavery, with the horror-filled landscape giving a sharp, titillating contrast to the romance Stedman describes. Stedman shifts the landscape, however, feeling free to downplay the institutional brutalities of the land, making the horrors seem random and nearly agent-free. For example, the routine, depersonalized sex slave mills described in the Journal are transformed in Narrative. Stedman transforms Surinam “into merely another exotic backdrop for a romantic tale about star-crossed lovers” (Price and Price xxxii). Stedman’s sexual conduct is shaped into the narrative of a tragic love story:
His goal is to present his sexual activities in the best possible light, one which ignores the essential determinants of power, violence and money which conditioned all relationships between white men and black women in the colony, in favour of a sentimentalisation of the progress of love and his depiction of Joanna as an ornament to the civilised society of a European ladies’ salon. Stedman recasts his love story as a decorous affair but one which is constantly undermined and desentimentalised by the historical conditions of colonial Surinam. Stedman becomes, in Narrative, acutely aware of the climate of decorum of his readership. The affair with Joanna was made, as much as it was possible to make it, as inoffensive and as like the conduct of a drawing-room romance as possible. (Richards 102)

The role of the observer gave Stedman a privilege of distance from the events of *Narrative* when he so desired; the role of the romantic allowed him personal triumph and involvement when he wanted it. This dual self-image allowed for two reflections on the African in Surinam, both problematic. The observer allows Stedman to deny culpability; the amorous view allows Stedman to play benevolent romantic. They work in tandem to give Stedman a moral voice, more moral than the one he actually seemed to have adopted in the jungles of South America. As David Richards writes, “the whole nature of Captain Stedman’s representation of Surinam depends upon that sense of difference: difference from his other, Journal identity and from the other white colonists” (92). Together, they work to distance the concrete experiences of the Surinam slave from Stedman, moving them into convenient abstraction. Stedman’s writing is filled with dissociations, notes Richards: “the anti-slavery slave-owner; the soldier/ethnographer, killing and describing
by turns; Joanna’s lover and the cartographer of a racial geography; the survivor of the Cottica and the ethnographer of a sublime savagery which he saw existing in that same place; the critic of the colonial psyche and the prospective governor of the Berbicé; romance imagist, epistolary novelist, picaresque/romance stylist. None of these contradictions seem to offer a perceptible challenge to Stedman’s moral authority” (106).

Along with his dual self-image, Stedman crafted a narrative about the Surinam slave that justified his own views of slavery. At the time he was writing *Narrative*, his positions were well within the mainstream of contemporary educated British opinion—ambivalence and equivocation about slavery and the trade as institutions, combined with genuine compassion for oppressed humanity. Stedman was certainly not an abolitionist sympathizer, as Johnson or Blake were, but within the mores of the contemporary London public, he was certainly no conservative either. Rather, Stedman saw himself as a pragmatic centrist, occupying a middle-of-the-road reasonableness, denying both the universalist abolitionist and those who would “persevere in the most unjust and diabolical barbarity . . . for the sake of drinking rum, and eating sugar” (88). Stedman’s attitudes are complicated. As David Erdman notes, “The fortitude of the tortured Negroes and the ‘compassion’ of their Negro executioners impressed Stedman and led him to conclude that Europeans were ‘the greater barbarians.’ Yet he could repeat the myth that these same dignified people were ‘perfectly savage’ in Africa and would only be harmed by ‘sudden emancipation.’ His ‘ears were stunned with the clang of the whip and the dismal yells’; yet he was reassured by the consideration that the tortures were legal punishment and were not occurring in a British colony” (245). As scholar Anne Mellor writers, concurring,
Stedman’s *Narrative* re-iterates the familiar arguments of the proslavery lobby: the captured Africans were slaves in their own countries; the Africans may live happier in the West Indies than they ever did in the Forests of Africa; and are certainly treated no worse than the hordes of starving and abused sailors, soldiers, and prostitutes in Europe; under a fair master, slavery is but a name and the slave more accurately called a “Menial Servant”; and the slave trade, properly managed, contributes to the welfare of Europe and the colonies alike. Moreover, the Africans are, in Stedman’s opinion, incapable of self-government. As he concludes,

“the Grand Question that remains to be solved is—are these Negroes to be Slaves or a free People—to which I answer without hesitation—dependent, & under proper restrictions . . . for the Sake of . . . the African himself, with whose passions, debauchery and indolence, I am perfectly acquainted, and who like a Spirited Horse, when unbridled often Gallops to destruction himself while he tramples under his feet all that he meets with—they would indeed in time provide for their immediate Subsistence but would no more think . . . of amassing Wealth by industry than their Countrymen the Orangoutang.” (172) (Mellor 351)

For Stedman, slavery was a “private evil” from which was derived “a general good” (80). The benefits were large, while the misery concentrated on a few. While he had empathy for the slaves, he had no serious questioning of the moral order. “Besides” he wrote, “I cannot help thinking it is ungenerous thus wishing to deprive the West India Planters of their Property, by a sudden abolition of the Slave trade, who after their many hazards, and their loss of health, Wealth, and time, have no other method of procuring a subsistence
for their families” (qtd. in Thomas 126–127). For Stedman, the misery of the white planters was of still far greater consideration than the agony of the African-descended slave.

Perversely, as Price and Price point out (xiii), some of the abolitionist power of Stedman’s account comes precisely because he is no abolitionist. His “moderate” positions give him the authority of the disinterested outsider rather than that of an earnest protester. The text and images themselves seem to bely Stedman’s stated views, and a vigorous ethical condemnation of the grotesque immorality of the slavery system seeps unbidden, even after Thomson’s diligent scrubbing, through the text. For Stedman, his carefully sculpted account of the Surinam slave system works counter to his stated goal, nevertheless revealing the degradation of the Surinam African.

There is one final way that Stedman’s portrayal of the Surinam African helped shape a narrative of the slavery system: the strange silence of the female slaves. Stedman is filled with admiration for the vigor of the maroons and escaped slaves he combats in the wilderness, speaking admiringly as well of the African-descended rangers who fought alongside him against the rebels (212). Yet when it comes to the African woman in Surinam, he grants them no voice nor agency. He decries the slave women as debauched—yet avails himself of their sensuality. He views the slaves as indolent and passionate, yet his own text reveals him as the most indolent victim to passions. Stedman depicts the women as mute sacrifices or wantons who scheme and lust, ignoring his “own evident investment in titillation, as well as his participation in the voyeurism—not to
mention his involvement in the purchase and use of a 'Negroe Maid' like those displayed,” (Gwilliam 659). On one event, Stedman wrote on behalf of a slave woman:

The first object that attracted my compassion . . . was a truly beautiful Samboe girl of about eighteen, tied up with both arms to a tree, as naked as she came to the world, and lacerated in such a shocking condition by the whips . . . that she was, from neck to her ankles, literally dyed over with blood. It was after receiving two hundred lashes that I perceived her with her head hanging downwards, a most miserable spectacle. Thus, turning to the overseer, I implored that she might be untied . . . but my answer from that humane gentleman was, that to prevent all strangers from interfering with his government, he had made it an unalterable rule in that case always to redouble [the punishment].” (Narrative 1790, 264)

Strangely, he describes the slave woman but gives her no voice. When describing the torture of the male slave, Neptune, in contrast, that slave is given a clear voice of calmness and condemnation. The women, however, are silent, as other critics have noted: “One of the striking features of Stedman’s scenes that involve female slaves is that he never endows the female victims with a voice. They all seemingly bear their pain with complete passivity, as, for example, the six women who ‘were broken alive upon the rack . . . through which tortures they went without uttering a sigh.’ It is only the male slaves that are granted agency during their bondage” (Klarer 564).

We see the clearest of these depictions of the voiceless African-descended woman in Stedman’s romance with Joanna. For Stedman, their story is an account of sexual
liberty; for Joanna, silence. He compares them to Adam and Eve—yet he leaves “the
garden” without her or their son. When Stedman first meets Joanna, his description of her
emphasizes her beauty but does little to give her a sense of agency or self-awareness:

She was perfectly streight with the most elegant Shapes that can be view’d in
nature moving her well-form’d Limbs as when a Goddess walk’d—Her face was
full of Native Modesty and the most distinguished Sweetness—Her Eyes as black
as Ebony were large and full of expression, bespeaking the Goodness of her heart.
With Cheeks through which glow’d/ in spite of her olive Complexion /a beautiful
tinge of vermilion when gazed upon—her nose was perfectly well formed rather
small, her lips a little prominent which when she spoked [sic] is covered two
regular rows of pearls as white as Mountain Snow—her hair was a dark brown-next
to black, forming a beauteous Globe of small ringlets, ornamented with flowers
and Gold Spangles-round her neck her Arms and her ancles she wore Gold Chains
rings and Medals—while a Shaul of finest indian Muslin the end of which was
negligently thrown over her polished Shoulder gracefully covered part of her
lovely bosom. (*Narrative* 1796, 87–88)

As Tassie Gwilliam notes, Stedman’s description emphasizes heavily the products of
empire that she wears (657). There is no doubt from the description that she is a slave,
but she’s granted some European qualities—enough to make her worthy as the subject of
romance from a European man but not enough to make her unexotic.
While adopting the mode of the romantic in a sentimental novel, Stedman’s version of events comes to an awkward end with his noncommittal marriage to Joanna. The sentimental version of the romance clashes acutely with the reality of her slave-hood, and Stedman privileges respectability and duty to the colonizer over any feelings of affection or commitment to Joanna and his son with her. The romance ends in a dissatisfying way with Joanna staying in Surinam, dashing to pieces the romantic fantasy of Stedman the devoted lover: “It is particularly over the issue of marriage that the gaps open between Stedman’s desire to offer a sentimental narrative and his claim to a faithful recounting of his experiences. Paradoxically, even those gaps can form part of a sentimental reading—one, however, that casts Stedman as a cad, not the hero of sensibility he has been striving to seem” (Gwilliam 660). The vision of Stedman as savior from slavery is ultimately shifted by the underlying discourse, where colonial power and racial privilege trump all else. Stedman returns to Great Britain and remarries, maintaining an “allegiance ultimately to colonizer and not the colonized” (Thomas 132). For the African female in Surinam, there is no return or triumph, just silence. While the African man is given a limited agency, the depiction of the slave woman is muted and objectified.

William Thomson’s Edits

The self-serving changes Stedman made from the journal to Narrative, however, were altered much further by William Thomson. Joseph Johnson hired Thomson in 1794 to sanitize and commercialize Stedman’s text. Thomson rewrote Narrative extensively,
nearly line for line. He removed statements of racial and moral equality and added sensational warnings about slave insurrections and violence. His edits ranged from minor rewording to substantial thematic revisions, editing or even eradicating some of Stedman’s views on race, slavery, and social justice (Price and Price xlviii). Thomson was responsible for making the book more marketable and palatable, and given the success of Narrative, which went through twenty editions in six languages (Price and Price xv), his choices may very well have been the savviest.

Curiously, the Thomson edits seemed to try to do two contradictory things at once—first, to create a narrative that would sell well with abolitionist-leaning audiences in London, but simultaneously to excise or ameliorate the most brutal and uncomfortable aspects of the Surinam slaves’ lives and to cut any perceived support for slave insurrections in the Caribbean. Thomson molded the text to make aspects like the universality of man less prominent, toning down much of the rhetoric that would have smacked of Thomas Paine-like revolutionary fervor. Yet, the market of abolitionist readers, who were eager to hear about the evils of slavery, meant that there had to be a careful balance of lurid—enough descriptions of slavery yet restrained enough to not offend the wrong sensibilities. Thomson thus has to mold the text in a careful balance.

Many of Thomson’s changes revolved around changing Stedman’s narrative about slavery. Stedman’s views on slavery, the slave trade, social justice, and organized religion were substantially and systematically altered for the 1796 publication. Thomson suppressed many of the anti-Empire passages in Narrative, partly due to the fears in England about Jacobin rebellions and the stunning 1791 slave uprising in Haiti; sentiment was not kindly towards rebellions and uprising slaves. Thus, Stedman’s text was shaped
to soothe worries about the potential for rebellion. After all, he had been sent to suppress rebels, and by all appearance his efforts helped maintain the colonial machinery (Lezra 7). There was nothing to worry about, **Narrative** seemed to say. The nervous public of England and the rest of Europe could be placated with the notion that the uprising in Latin America would amount to nothing in the end.

Many of the most horrific depictions of slavery were excised. For example, the following passages disappear in **Narrative**: “During my absence three negroes were hang’d on the boat and two whipt below the gallows. On the eighth, being the Prince of Orange, his birthday, Col. Fourgeoud gave a genteel supper and ball to the ladies and gentlemen, la salle de danse [was in the] officers’ guardroom” (**Journal** 1790, 122). And later, “Nothing happened worth mentioning except the cruelty; of which Mr. Matthew and Vischer took pleasure, of letting a cook [sic *cock*?], with his throat half cut, cripple up and down the post, to excite the laughter of the other beasts” (**Journal** 1790, 192). Thomson was not above portraying the brutality of the slave experience—rather, he seemed interested in abstracting it and making it more palatable. The changes were not about disguising the degradations of slavery as much as they were about assuring audiences that the colonial system would persist, and where slavery was especially cruel, it was perpetrated by foreigners like the Dutch, not the English. This nationalistic element would make the depictions of slavery serve double purpose—to titillate with depictions of slavery but to assuage the British citizen’s guilt by assuring him that his colonial empire wasn’t as bad and cruel, relatively speaking, as the others. Much the like travel writers’ implicit intentions of affirming the superiority of the British culture or Southey’s
desire to affirm the relatively strong moral stance of the British Empire, Thomson’s edits were fashion to assuage British guilt and affirm their superiority.

Strikingly, however, while the brutalities of slavery were glossed over, Stedman’s casual support for the institution itself was modified for an abolitionist audience. Stedman says that slavery should be preserved.

I wish from the bottom of my heart that my Words may be the Anticipation of what shall be pronounced by so illustrious a body as the British Parliament upon the subject; but should it not be so I take the Liberty to prophesy, that thousands and thousands shall repent [abolition], and more be ruined by the rash proceeding, while it is not less for the benefit of the African than for that of this glorious Island [England] that I have Spoke them, being neither interested one way or the other . . . such measures . . . may make with even an Accumulation to the Wealth of their masters (Journal 1790, 173).

Thomson submits a key change, however, noted by italics below. His interpolation doesn’t just slant Stedman’s views—it completely changes it.

I wish from the bottom of my heart that my Words could be submitted to the consideration of that respectabe body the British parliament; and so far be regarded, as to prevent the fatal decision of a total abolition of slavery till 1800, or the beginning of the next century. For if such a measure should be rashly enforced, I take the liberty to prophesy, that
thousands and thousands, both white and black, may repent. (*Narrative*
1796, 194).

Thomson’s edits make Stedman’s original position—that slavery should be preserved—and ameliorates it for an abolitionist-sympathetic audience, suggesting that Thomson strove to hit a middle course between a full depiction of slavery’s horror and a blasé acceptance of slavery as eternal and necessary.

Thomson made a consistent attempt to slant Stedman’s “moderate” opinions, as expressed in the 1790 *Narrative*, deleting many of Stedman’s observations that suggested the common humanity of Africans and Europeans. Thomson often altered Stedman’s middle-of-the-road humanitarianism and strong penchant for cultural relativism. Stedman frequently depicted the African as Natural Man, exactly like a European but for the mixed blessings of “civilization”: “the Africans in a State of nature, Are not that Wretched People Which they are by too Many ignorant European Wretches Represented” ; “the africans are not so intirely destitute of morality and even Religion as a number of ignorant Europeans imagine”; “their own Religion being much more Comodious [than ours], and not so much divested of Common Sence as numberless Stupid Europeans imagine”; and yet more forcefully, “the African Negroes though by Some Stupid Europeans treated as Brutes Are made of no Inferior Clay but in every one Particular are our Equals “ (qtd. in Price lviii). Thomson, however, scrubbed such ambivalences out of the final text. By 1796, all of these passages (and others like them) had been expunged and, in their place, the “national character of [the African] people” was now described as being “perfectly savage” (1796, 1:203) (Price and Price lviii–lix).
Some of Stedman’s blunt depictions of females were modified as well. Passages about the sadistic treatment of slaves by European women, wives of plantation owners, were omitted. Sexual relations between Stedman and the African women were omitted or curtailed (Thomas 126). Most importantly, Thomson modified the Joanna relationship even further than Stedman had. Stedman’s version suggested greater intimacy and sexual fervor; Thomson made the relationship more distant, more romantic, yet simultaneously cast Joanna as a more sympathetic figure (Rubenstein and Towsnend 287). For example, Thomson changed Stedman’s rationale for purchasing Joanna out of his sexual desire for her and attraction to her beauty into one more of compassion and sympathy for her plight. The change in the Stedman-Joanna relationship, under Thomson’s editorial process, shifted simultaneously into two seemingly different directions—first, the gulf between the two lovers’ status is emphasized much more, yet second, the romantic aspect is emphasized equally as a love more platonic and ideal and less erotically charged. Where Stedman’s initial version described Joanna’s erotic appeal and described his desire to raise her status through education and marriage, Thomson’s edits deleted the descriptions of her beauty and rather shifted focus to her sad plight. He “makes Stedman her protector and patron, rather than her lover-aspiring-to-be-her-husband” (Price and Price lvii). The relationship with Joanna, already once changed by Stedman to emphasize romance and sentimentalism, shifts further into a formulaic romance. Thomson also de-emphasized sexual contact between European men and the African-descended slaves, creating a greater social distance between them (with the notable exception of Joanna).

The abolitionist publisher Johnson realized that the tales of barbarism and the graphic events in the engravings would, even in the sanitized Thomson edits, would be a
strong indictment against the slavery system. The strong public reaction to the book would seem to support his conclusion. In a contemporary review, an anonymous writer for *Analytical Review* claimed:

> It will be impossible to peruse the numerous relations of shocking cruelties and barbarities contained in these volumes without a degree of painful sympathy, which will often rise into horror. Many of the facts are indeed so dreadful, that nothing could justify the writer in narrating them, but the hope of inciting in the breasts of his readers a degree of indignation, which will stimulate vigorous and effectual exertions for the speedy termination of the execrable traffic in human flesh, which, to the disgrace of civilized society, is still suffered to exist and is, even in Christian countries, sanctioned by law. (qtd. in Price and Price lxi).

And *Critical Review* (January 1797) wrote that “we have never opened any work which is so admirably calculated to excite the most heart-felt abhorrence and detestation of that grossest insult on human nature,—domestic slavery” (qtd. in Price and Price lxi).

Thomson’s editorial choices seem to have been remarkably canny, whatever their faults. For the English abolitionist population (and those who were merely made uneasy by slavery), the accounts of brutality in Surinam, even as glossed over as they were, served doubly—not only to give more moral weight to the cause of anti-slavery but also as a patriotic salve, an argument to bolster the self-image of “at least we’re not as bad as our neighbors in the Netherlands.” In Surinam at the time, “The whites had domestic
jurisdiction over their black slaves and were permitted to perform any act of punishment except mutilation and the death penalty, and even in those cases charges against a slave owner were dropped on the payment of a small fine. No slave was permitted to bear witness against a white person; the only status a slave had before the law and the only time the law recognized his/her existence, was as a felon” (Richards 90).

For his part, Stedman was furious at Thomson’s editorial decisions. He would fume that he despised the “lies and preaching” added to his book (qtd. in Rubenstein and Townsend 288). Yet Thomson’s edits no doubt “improved” the text in one way—it made it much more commercial. A 1796 reviewer for the British Critic noted with approval, “The tale in particular of Joanna, and of the author’s attachment to her, is highly honourable to both parties” (qtd. in Price and Price lvii). As Price and Price note, “Thomson’s political alterations of Narrative, then, not only may have squared with his own views; they also seem to have been in step with changing public opinion and to have protected the book against the new sedition law, and they might even have been expected to help sell a few additional copies of the work” (lx–lxi).

**Blake’s Engravings**

If neither Stedman nor Thomson were that interested in championing the cause of the African in Surinam, then, how did Narrative become such a renowned work in abolitionist circles? A large part of the credit rests with the striking images William Blake created for the book. Much of Thomson’s efforts to rework the text would be belied by Blake’s strong sense of universal humanism, which imbued the images with a frank
egalitarianism that was not elided as they would be in the text. David Erdman credits Blake’s images for lending more dignity to the slaves than did Stedman’s text (244). As Rubenstein and Townsend note, “The (mis)reading of Stedman’s narrative as an anti-slavery document was shaped not only by editorial changes but much more by its illustrations, particularly those done by Blake” (289).

For Blake, the work on The Narrative would be consequential and important. Although Blake was not the only artist whose engravings appeared with the manuscript, his sixteen plates are among the strongest of the book, and even of his career: they “have long been recognized as among the best executed and most generally interesting of all his journeyman work . . . [and] particularly in the large paper copies with the engravings colored by hand, are some of [his] most interesting and important book illustrations” (Keynes 988). Moreover, Blake’s work on Narrative would reverberate in some of his later work. For example, “The persons and problems of Stedman’s Narrative reappear, creatively modified, in the text and illustrations of Blake’s [1793] Visions of the Daughters of Albion]: the rape and torture of the virgin slave, her pride in the purity and equality of her soul, and the frustrated desire of her lover and husband” (Erdman 1952, 245). And there are numerous detailed textual and visual parallels between Theotormon’s love in this poem for the gentle Oothoon, whom he is unable to set free, and Stedman’s love for the enslaved Joanna. (Price and Price xxxviii–xxxix).

Three Blake engravings are of particular interest in showing how Narrative helped to shape a story of the Surinam slave. Perhaps the most famous engraving is the image of “Europe Supported by Africa & America,” which has drawn much critical attention. Charitable critics point out that the image demonstrates how Europe depends
on her two “sister” continents; more skeptical critics point out that the representations of Africa and America are subservient and wearing bonds.

The engraving accompanies Stedman’s earnest closing words: “Going now to take my leave of Surinam, after all the horrors and cruelties with which I must have hurt both the eye and the heart of the reader, I will close with an emblematical picture of Europe supported by Africa and America, accompanied by an ardent wish that the friendly manner as they are represented, they may henceforth and to all eternity be the props of each other. . . . We only differ in colour, but are certainly all created by the same hand” (Narrative 1796, 618).
The three women are depicted as equally lovely and alluring. The nakedness of the women emphasizes not so much lust as divine forms uncovered, demigoddesses exposed. Europe is central, yet supported—all three are depicted in the same style. The interlinking banner (perhaps a tobacco leaf) binds the women together, albeit loosely. Without Africa or America, Blake seems to suggest, Europe would falter and slump. The image does not denounce slavery—Blake is never that unsubtle in these images—but it indirectly calls to question the legitimacy of an institution that would bind equal sisters to a lower status. They are naked except for the products produced by Africa and America—a stark materialization of the rents extracted by Europe from her “sisters.” The collection of products contrasted with the nakedness highlights the cost of the production upon the fragile human bodies.

A second key engraving by Blake is of the flogging of a slave called Neptune, who is broken on a rack for stealing a sheep and killing an overseer in self-defense. He is sentenced to a tortured death without the benefit of a mercy killing. He is killed slowly and painfully, with his hand cut off and his executioner, a fellow African-descended man, deliberately stretching the agony. Stedman attests to his admiration of this bravery.
When the executioner finished, the ropes were untied and Stedman thought him dead. However, Neptune writhes from the rack, falling to the ground:

He fell on the grass, and damned them all, as a set of barbarous rascals; at the same time removing his right hand by the help of his’ teeth, he rested his head on part of the timber, and asked the by-standers for a pipe of tobacco, which was
infamously answered by kicking and spitting on him; till I, with some American seamen, thought proper to prevent it. He then begged that his head might be chopped off; but to no purpose. At last, seeing no end to his misery, he declared, “that though he had deserved death, he had not expected to die so many deaths: however, (said he) you Christians have missed your aim at last, and I now care not, were I to remain thus one month longer.” . . . Wonderful it is indeed, that human nature should be able to endure so much torture, which assuredly could only be supported by a mixture of rage, contempt, pride, and the glory of braving his tormentors, from whom he was so soon to escape. (Narrative 1796, 546–547)

While arguably the grisliest, darkest plate in the book, the image is still not quite as gruesome as Stedman’s depiction. Where Stedman describes the scene as hair-raisingly uncanny—the seemingly dead man speaking, singing songs—the depiction of Neptune for Blake is one of a beatific, iconic Christ-like figure—a holy victim rather the terrible villain.

Of interest as well is to compare Neptune and his torturer’s expressions to the expression in another one of Blake’s plates from the book, Plate 13, “Family of Negro Slaves from Loango.” At first glance, this is a very peculiar image of slavery for Blake to portray—a family of seemingly contented slaves, despite the man in the image having been actually branded with John Gabriel Stedman’s initials with a silver signet. Why is Blake so complicit with this narrative of the happy slave? Yet a striking observation occurs when comparing the expression of this man with Neptune—they have nearly identical expressions—beatific, Mona Lisa smiles that dissemble, hiding agonies behind their smiles. Could Blake’s subtle point be that neither of these two slaves—the one on
the rack and the one “free”—could do anything but give soft, innocent smiles to the cruel world they inhabited? Neptune’s torturer was himself an African-descended slave. In the slave system, the immediate controllers and punishers were themselves also African, part of the system that oppressed people like them. Thus, it is worthy of note that likewise, the executioner himself has a curiously inscrutable expression, similar to the other two men except unsmiling. But his is not necessarily an expression of justice or anger or compassion—it is another mask, drawn over a slave whose job it is to kill and torture other slaves. With Blake’s depiction, we see less a villain than a fellow victim—a man whose true thoughts must remain hidden.
Blake’s third notable image is that of the whipped woman, a “beautiful Samboe girl” as Stedman calls her. As recalled earlier, Stedman viewed the whipping of the slave woman and spoke on her behalf, moved by her beauty to intercede with the man who was punishing her.
While she is being brutally punished for essentially refusing to be raped, Stedman’s sympathy is not aroused by the injustice but by her beauty. Here Blake’s image seems to be less provocative than in the previous Neptune engraving, for while the martyred Neptune is a figure fully meant to arouse our sympathy in Blake’s engraving, in this case the woman is pictured as demure, healthy, and modest, not giving place adequately to the truly horrific details of Stedman’s account. Her features are European, allowing her a degree of connection but also increasing her erotic appeal to a European
audience. Notably, the man striking the woman, whom Stedman describes in detail, is absent from the image.

Yet, arguably Blake’s abolitionist sympathies were better strategized by making the woman less an agent of defiance and more a passive symbol of brutality. To the audience of the era, the depiction of a nude woman being beaten by a white man might have been too harsh. By creating a “noble savage,” a demure woman in pain, the sympathy is heightened without the recoil of shocking brutality. As well, in the background we see both slave master and slave in equal height and proportion, suggesting complicity between the two parties—but also, an equal stature. Marcus Wood notes that this image was particularly popular among the audience of the age, and that of the explanatory Stedman quotations that accompanied the images, this image had the longest quote, detailing in gruesome fashion the tortures with which she was subjected (235).

Clear from this image and the preceding two engravings is the stature of the human figure, looming large over the landscape. The background foliage appears small, limp, and inconsequential in all three images. However, in this third image the figures of men, white and black, are diminutive as well. Unlike Stedman, Blake gives prominent importance to his female figure. The two white men in the image are each pointing upwards, forcing the viewer’s perspective towards the slave woman and creating a visual pyramid, heightening the drama. The figure on the left (and the slave woman’s right) is Stedman himself, and his gesture suggests one of resignation: his back is turned and his figure is small and puny—despite having a sword, he does not attempt a heroic rescue but rather exhibits a Pontius Pilate-like resignation. The slave-master on the right (her left)
points upwards and downwards in the direction of the slave woman, animated in his conversation with the slaves but with his face averted—even he must shield his gaze from the terrible destruction. Only the slave woman faces the audience fully and clearly—only she is meant to be identified with fully, not Stedman. Stedman, for his part, is portrayed as a perpetrator of moral cowardice—he slinks away, forgoing any role as the heroic rescuer.

These three battling agents of the Narrative—Stedman, Thomson, and Blake—all ultimately left their marks on the battlefield of the text. From each we pick up the nuances of differing worldviews—the self-aggrandizing, “middle-ground” views of Stedman; the canny assessor and confirmer of public taste in Thomson, and the abolitionary and egalitarian spirit of William Blake. For all three, the slave experience became a battleground, a text upon which each tried to write his own narrative. As was the case for the travel writers, for the Brazilian Romantics, and for Southey, the experiences and land of Latin American became a place to create a narrative about Empire and its role; a place in which the next shape of the imperial project began to take form.
Coda

Four key areas were examined. First, the travel writers, mostly British, all popular with the British public, affirmed the British sense of superiority by portraying themselves as scientifically curious, commercially astute, morally Protestant, cultured, and astutely observant about the Amerindian. The informal empire, although arguably the better option, was a less-glorious perpetuation of the imperial project. The travel writers’ accounts, however, were able to refocus this “second-best” version of Empire as a worthy endeavor; less violent, less barbaric, and profitable too; able to spread the superior cultural and religious values to the practically-empty lands of the far-off Americas.

Secondly, the Brazilian poets of the Romantic era did not absorb the same lessons of Empire that the travel writers did, but they did become, inadvertently, proponents of the informal empire themselves. By recasting the European mythology with Amerindians as replacement for Greco-Roman myths, they did succeed in creating something new; however, the function was in an idealized form and not in a form that granted the Amerindian autonomy or their own dignity. The concept of saudades brought the natural landscape to the forefront, marking a fierce pride in the natural and homey beauties of the New World; yet the focus on the rural and natural also emphasized an “empty” land open for the benevolent, paternal use of a good Empire. And the co-option of Britain’s Byron gave the Brazilians an image stripped of voice—a royal, noble figure who could be coopted into changing the tone of the imperial project into something less formal, less territorial yet unabashedly noble and gentried. Thus the imperial project was not rejected as much as it was reformed, appropriated for a new empire in the Americas, one that
took its identity and sense of relative stature from its European rivals and forebears and reshaped it into a new informal empire of their own.

Thirdly, Robert Southey’s *History of Brazil* played with a different brand of Empire, one that saw a place for a vigorous Britain in the informal empire of the 19th century that would treat Amerindian and African-descended slaves more humanely and as independent agents, bringing the superiority of British intellect and culture to the far-off lands of Latin America. South had twin projects: to affirm that the British history of imperialism, while tainted, was relatively good compared to its rivals; and secondly, that the British Empire, humbled, would learn from its mistakes in a way that its European neighbors could not.

Finally, the three battling agents of the *Narrative*—Stedman, Thomson, and Blake—all ultimately left their marks on the battlefield of the text. All three were eager to create a narrative about Latin America for the British public—for Stedman, it was to portray a version of himself that was strong and moral and “wise” in his moderate views of slavery; for Thomson, it was to affirm the biases of the British reading public in a manner that would offend the least and sell the most; for Blake, it was to impress about the viewers of his engravings the universal humanity of all mankind and the deplorable wickedness of slavery. Each saw a vision of Empire and the role it could play—whether as a voice of complacency, of self-satisfaction, or for self-rousing action.

The examination of “informal empire” as an extension of the imperial project—the desire to gain power and stature over ones rivals and neighbors—has been the center of this study. The interaction of Latin American and British literature of this the turn of
the 19th century has proven to be a fruitful corner of study because so many of the fault lines are evident—the desire to expand commerce in “empty” lands, the callous disregard for Africans and Amerindians, the internalized assumptions of Eurocentric superiority, and the desire to assuage the doubts about Britain’s standing in the international stage.
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