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Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters

W. A. Speck

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Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters W. A. Speck
In his lifetime Robert Southey was very much the equal of his fellow 'Lake poets', Coleridge and Wordsworth. But since his death his reputation has been overshadowed by their success. In this new biography W.A. Speck argues that if Southey's poetry is no longer considered as significant, his other writings were more salient and his political views far more influential than those of his fellow poets. He was, as Byron conceded, England's 'only existing entire man of letters'. The book engages with Southey's voluminous publications, weaving discussion of them into the narrative of his life. It shows how he moved from self-confessed republican and admirer of the French Revolution in the 1790s, to 'the most powerful literary supporter of the stories' by the 1820s. Speck has explored Southey's full correspondence, not simply that which appeared in the editions edited by his descendants. They reveal a man of considerably greater emotional complexity than previously assumed. Far from a happily married man, Southey sought intellectual and emotional fulfillment outside a tepid marriage, first from Mary Barker, and then from Caroline Bowles who became his second wife. The first fully rounded life for sixty years, Speck's account sets Southey in historical context and restores him to the map of English literature.

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