

# Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy

## ROBERT SOUTHEY AND ROMANTIC APOSTASY



POLITICAL ARGUMENT IN BRITAIN  
1780-1840

David M. Craig

STUDIES IN HISTORY

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出版者:Boydell & Brewer Inc

出版时间:2007-7

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780861932917

Like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey has been remembered not just as a romantic poet but also as a political apostate. In the 1790s he was fired by enthusiasm for the French Revolution, and was known as a radical and a republican. By the 1820s, however, he was not only the poet laureate, but a fierce conservative who opposed the reform of Church and State. Yet at the same time his reactionary politics were mixed with anxiety about the effects of industrialisation and the growth of poverty, leading some commentators to view him as a precursor of socialism and collectivism. This book charts the development of Southey's social and political ideas in order to throw light on the problems generated by the concept of 'romantic apostasy'. It draws on his poetry, histories, journalism and letters to show that his intellectual evolution was more complex than has previously been thought. In so doing it touches on numerous themes: theological politics, national character, the 'social question', providence and history, questions of race, empire and civilisation as well as the nature of republicanism and the evolution of conservatism. As such it is an important contribution towards the wider understanding of the intellectual aftermath of the French Revolution in Britain. David M. Craig is a lecturer in history at the University of Durham.

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