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978-0-521-86106-9 - Nineteenth-Century English: Stability and Change

Edited by Merja Kyto, Mats Ryden and Erik Smitterberg

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Nineteenth-century English

The study of the recent history of English is crucial in making connections between early and present-day English. This volume focuses on the nineteenth century, an important period of both stability and change for the English language. Through ten detailed case studies, it highlights the relationships between English, its users and nineteenth-century society, looking particularly at gender differences and variation across genres. It also discusses major structural aspects of nineteenth-century English, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, and Germanic vs Romance vocabulary. Although the nineteenth century is often viewed as a relatively stable period in the development of the language, this volume shows the 1800s to be a time of significant change, some of which continued into the twentieth century. By making comparisons possible with both earlier and later periods, it makes an important contribution to our overall understanding of the history of the English language.

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Many scholars will agree that knowledge of the past is necessary for a full understanding of the present. Nineteenth-century English, the subject of this book, is part of the linguistic past, but is also close enough to the present to give a modern impression in many respects. Partly as a consequence of this seemingly intermediate status, the English of the 1800s has received comparatively little attention from language historians. The ten case studies in the present volume aim at compensating for this relative dearth of research; they also shed light on the tension between stability and change which is shown to characterize nineteenth-century English.

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The Editors