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In *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry*, Matthew Campbell explores the work of four Victorian poets – Tennyson, Browning, Hopkins and Hardy – as they show a consistent and innovative concern with questions of human agency and will. The Victorians saw the virtues attendant upon a strong will as central to themselves and to their culture, and Victorian poetry strove to find an aesthetic form to represent this sense of the human will. Through close study of the metre, rhyme and rhythm of a wide range of poems – including monologue, lyric and elegy – Campbell reveals how closely technical questions of poetics are related, in the work of these poets, to issues of psychology, ethics and social change. He goes on to discuss more general questions of poetics, and the implications of the achievement of the Victorian poets in a wider context, from Milton through Romanticism and into contemporary critical debate.

Matthew Campbell is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Sheffield, and co-editor of *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics* (1994). He has published articles in *Essays in Criticism*, *English*, *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, *Bullán* and the *European Journal of English Studies*.

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MATTHEW CAMPBELL



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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>  
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1999

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12.5 pt [vsn]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Campbell, Matthew (Matthew J. B.)

Rhythm and will in Victorian poetry / Matthew Campbell.

p. cm. — (Cambridge Studies in nineteenth-century literature and culture: 22)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 64295 7

1. English poetry — 19th century — History and criticism. 2. Will in literature. 3. Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, Baron, 1809–1892 — Criticism and interpretation. 4. Browning, Robert, 1812–1889 — Criticism and interpretation. 5. Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 1844–1889 — Criticism and interpretation. 6. Hardy, Thomas, 1840–1928 — Poetic works. 7. Literature and society — Great Britain — History — 19th century. 8. English language — 19th century — Rhythm.

I. Title. II. Series.

PR595.W45C36 1999  
 821'.809384 — dc21 98-38095 CIP

ISBN 0 521 64295 7 hardback

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*For Valerie, Maeve and Hannah*

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## *Preface and acknowledgements*

Discussing the inappropriateness of Gerard Manley Hopkins' use of the word 'counterpoint' as a musical analogy for 'the relation between iambic norm and rhythmic actuality', John Hollander reminds us that any would-be 'clarifier of the talk of prosodists . . . would try to illuminate the ways in which linguistic and conceptual habit produced garbled descriptions of prosodic events nevertheless clearly and effortlessly *perceived* and understood'.<sup>1</sup> This is a reassurance not only to those who find Hopkins' own metrical practice 'garbled', but also to those who have difficulty perceiving rhythm at all. Whatever the method of description, all the prosodist is describing is the perception, in which all who listen may share.

The habit of listening to the rhythms of poetry has passed from the skills imparted to many students and scholars of poetry alike. Consequently, I have attempted to scan the rhythms of the poems discussed in this book with a methodology derived from the classical model which 'the talk of prosodists' has declared to be a limited means of describing the dominantly accentual-syllabic rhythms of English poetry. Alternative scansions of some of the poems described here could be supplied by applying the Trager-Smith system of scansion, according to four degrees of stress, which important books on the rhythm of English by Derek Attridge and Philip Hobsbaum have adopted.<sup>2</sup> Despite the anxieties of Tennyson, who greatly desired the introduction of a system of notation which would fix his sonic intentions in print, or the consistent prosodic theorising of Hopkins, the classical model of scansion was the one in which the poets discussed in this book described their own verse. That alternative systems of scansion have not, as yet, supplanted the older means of describing English rhythm can be seen in a recent colloquium in which the poet Robert Wallace goads a number of fellow critics and poets into responses to his call for a clarification of prosodic discussion, and a reclamation of it back from the linguists.<sup>3</sup> Hopefully,



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an ear for prosodic events can then return to the skills the poet or critic expect from their readers.

However, this book is not entirely a book on metre or rhythm, as it is not entirely a book on Victorian will. That latter distinction must belong to John R. Reed's encyclopaedic *Victorian Will*. Rather, this is a study of the *rhythm of will* as marked mainly in the work of only four major Victorian poets, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy. It touches on contemporary and Victorian prosodic theory and practice where necessary, as it also attempts to provide some historical basis for what might be meant by 'will' in this period. But this is a book about poetic form and its relation to the concern that the poets considered here show with decision, action and event. It seeks to describe how, in lyric, narrative, dramatic and elegiac forms, these poets construct versions of a Victorian self which is shown acting through a medium which can analyse motive in deliberation, purpose and intention, and out to decision, action and event. Key 'prosodic events' in the poems discussed here provide a means of relating poetic form to Victorian conceptions of self and will. No matter how the apprehension of the will is sounded in the rhythms of the poets here, finding and describing a 'rhythm of will' serves as a key means of showing its formal embodiment in Victorian poetry. Tennyson's speaker in *In Memoriam* tells us that he knows better than others, 'How much of act at human hands / The sense of human will demands' (lxxxv, 39-40). This book seeks to locate the aesthetic demands of that sense of will primarily, but not exclusively, within the rhythms of the poems discussed here.

Parts of chapters six and eight have appeared elsewhere, in *Essays in Criticism* and *Memory and Memorials, 1789-1914*. This book began as a PhD thesis on Tennyson's poetry at the University of Cambridge, under the supervision of Eric Griffiths. There are many ways in which this book, or indeed my own discovery of the importance of the sound of poetry, could not have happened without his close attention, and the brilliant example of his own work on Victorian poetry and voice. Others have read and commented on parts of this work, and to them I owe a debt: Antoinette Quinn, Jeremy Prynne, Aidan Day, Rod Mengham, Neil Roberts, Tim Armstrong, Christopher Ricks, John Haffenden, Sally Shuttleworth, and the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press. At the Press, Kevin Taylor first put faith in this project, and Josie Dixon and Linda Bree have seen it through a long period of gestation. Others have given help in no less tangible ways: Patrick Close, Sean

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Doran, Nicholas Grene and Philip Roberts. My parents, Brian and Paula Campbell, supported me unconditionally through much of this work. Valerie Cotter has lived most of it, for a number of years now, and to her I owe a great debt for her patience and love.

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## *Texts used*

Unless otherwise noted, the following editions have been preferred in this book.

- Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. J. Pettigrew and T. J. Collins, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).  
*The Ring and the Book*, ed. Richard D. Altick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).  
*The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Samuel Hynes, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982–95)  
*Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Catherine Phillips, the Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).  
*The Poems of Tennyson*, 2nd edn, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1987).