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978-0-521-85624-9 - The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry

Linda K. Hughes

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*The Cambridge Introduction to
Victorian Poetry*

Victorian poetry was read and enjoyed by a much larger audience than is sometimes thought. Publication in widely circulating periodicals, reprinting in book reviews, and excerpting in novels and essays ensured that major poets such as Tennyson, Browning, Hardy, and Rossetti were household names, and they remain popular today. *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry* provides an accessible overview of British poetry from 1830 to 1901, paying particular attention to its role in mass-media print culture. Designed to interest both students and scholars, the book traces lively dialogues between poets and explains poets' choices of form, style, and language. It also demonstrates poetry's relevance to Victorian debates on science, social justice, religion, imperialism, and art. Featuring a glossary of literary terms, a guide to further reading, and two examples of close readings of Victorian poems, this introduction is the ideal starting-point for the study of verse in the nineteenth century.

Linda K. Hughes is Addie Levy Professor of Literature at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas.

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*For
Carroll, Colin, and Haley*

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Preface

While presenting an overview of the key developments, features, and preoccupations of Victorian poetry, *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry* has two additional aims: to argue that Victorian poetry was inseparable from the mass print culture within which it found an audience, and to reinterpret the “rhetoric” of Victorian poetry in this context. Rather than surveying major authors, the *Introduction* maps formal practices and a series of social debates within which poems, both canonical and lesser-known, jostled against, answered, and challenged each other for aesthetic and cultural pre-eminence. It is a less tidy, occasionally even more discordant, account of poetry than is found in some literary histories, but is meant to highlight the liveliness and vibrancy of poetry in its day and to suggest sources of its continuing appeal.

I customarily pair works to indicate the dialogues in which poems engaged and those they initiated for Victorian audiences. I also indicate when poems were first published in periodicals, a medium that George Saintsbury, the prominent late-Victorian critic and literary scholar, termed the defining genre of the age in *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature* (1896). The frequency with which this notation occurs in following pages underscores Victorian poetry’s wide circulation among readers (which has sometimes been underestimated) and poetry’s intersection with other print forms in the first mass-media era.

Insofar as poetry is itself a medium, of course, it cannot be understood apart from its intrinsic aesthetic features. However briefly I take up a poem, I direct attention to the role of form in conveying its meaning, significance, and effects. Two appended close readings of narrative and lyric poems from mid-century and century’s end extend this focus.

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Permission to quote these poems has been granted as follows: M. E. Braddon, "Delhi," by Jennifer Carnell; Emily Brontë, "No Coward Soul is Mine," by Oxford University Press; John Clare, "Sonnet" ("I am"), by Curtis Brown Group Ltd., London, on behalf of Eric Robinson (© Eric Robinson 1966); Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring and Fall," by Oxford University Press on behalf of The British Province of the Society of Jesus; and Christina Rossetti, "Up-hill," "A Better Resurrection," "Angels at the Foot," "Who Has Seen the Wind?" and "When I am dead, my dearest" by LSU Press.

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