VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE OTHER GERMANY

Shedding new light on the alternative, emancipatory Germany discovered and written about by progressive women writers during the long nineteenth century, this illuminating study uncovers a country that offered a degree of freedom and intellectual agency unheard of in England. Opening with the striking account of Anna Jameson and her friendship with Ottilie von Goethe, Linda K. Hughes shows how cultural differences spurred ten writers' advocacy of progressive ideas and provided fresh materials for publishing careers. Alongside well-known writers – Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Michael Field, Elizabeth von Arnim, and Vernon Lee – this study sheds light on the lesser-known writers Mary and Anna Mary Howitt, Jessie Fothergill, and the important Anglo-Jewish lesbian writer Amy Levy. Armed with their knowledge of the German language, each of these women championed an extraordinarily productive openness to cultural exchange and, by approaching Germany through a female lens, imported an alternative, 'other' Germany into English letters.

LINDA K. HUGHES is Addie Levy Professor of Literature at Texas Christian University. She edited *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and has published extensively on long nineteenth-century literature, culture, and women's and gender studies. Her earlier books include *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and *Graham R.: Rosamund Marriott Watson, Woman of Letters* (2005), which received the Colby Prize.

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VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE OTHER GERMANY

Cross-Cultural Freedoms and Female Opportunity

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For Carroll,
life partner and fellow traveller

The Germany I am speaking of is not the one which colonises or makes cheap goods, or frightens the rest of the world in various ways . . .

Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci* (1899)

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Preface/Vorwort

Why did so many British women travel to Germany and live there for months or years? This is the question I asked myself when I realised that three writers I had recently written about, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Amy Levy, had done so. Wondering how common such experiences were for women writers, I ventured on a tag search of Germany and 1800–1900 in the *Orlando* database of British women writers edited by Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, having no idea what to expect. I was startled when some 625 hits suddenly appeared on the computer screen. Why had I never heard of women writers' interest in things German when it was so widespread? I was familiar with the attractions of France and Italy for Victorian women, but their attraction to Germany was a blank.[1] And thus was this project born.

The many reasons for Victorian women's travels and temporary residence in Germany cannot be reduced to a single purpose or goal, which ranged from tourism to boarding school or family arrangements and professional pursuits.[2] What stood out repeatedly for me among these women, however, were the progressive women writers drawn to Germany, to the German language, and to German social and cultural practices. In turn, their interchanges with Germany generated compelling works as a legacy for their Anglophone readers (and, sometimes through German translations, Germans as well). The ten women on whom I focus in this study – Anna Jameson, Mary Howitt, Anna Mary Howitt, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Jessie Fothergill, Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper), Amy Levy, Elizabeth von Arnim, and Vernon Lee – disclosed a new nineteenth-century Germany to me, not the one imported to England by Thomas Carlyle, musicians in British concert halls, biblical scholars affected by German Higher Criticism, or late-century intellectuals immersed in aesthetic theory. The other Germany that drew progressive women to it was a land where middle-class British women could enjoy greater personal and intellectual freedoms in the 1830s and 1840s than

they could back home; where throughout the years 1833–1908 German stimuli excited women's imaginations and opened new opportunities for women as professional writers. By the late 1870s, college-educated women like Levy and Michael Field were travelling as femes sole, discovering new German authors or cultural resources and extending the translation work of earlier women writers. From the late nineteenth century into the pre-war years of the twentieth, von Arnim and Lee, living as British expatriates, began to develop the complex identities of twentieth-century and contemporary global citizens characterised by financially independent mobility and daily awareness of more than one culture and language.

Unquestionably cosmopolitanism is part of this story, and Anna Jameson's 1834 theorisation of female cosmopolitanism outlined in the Introduction would hold good for most if not all of her successor women writers my narrative examines. But rather than primarily a study of female cosmopolitanism, this book is a history of nineteenth-century progressive British women and how their experiences in Germany expanded their outlooks, mental tableaux, freedoms, and mobility. One of my overriding interests is seeking to understand how deep-seated cultural exchange occurs when it is impelled by German language facility (however great or minimal), openness to difference (hence the inevitable focus on progressive women), and onsite presence in German lands from northern Germany to Austria and the Swiss Bernese Alps – a concatenation of conditions that intensified these writers' awareness of being a woman, often alone, in a foreign land.[3] Expatriates (like their unprivileged compatriots driven to become immigrants or refugees) have no choice but to enter into a foreign culture if they would not remain socially isolated. This entry, however, can also be a chosen path into greater learning – so that elements of this study anticipate women's participation in academic study abroad as well as global mobility. And in modelling open, deliberate cultural exchange with a culture different from their own, these women are potential teachers of readers and scholars today faced with the imperative of negotiating the inseparable elements of citizenship, multiple differences within nations, and global networks and awareness.