Conversing in Verse considers poems of conversation from the late eighteenth into the twentieth centuries – the very period when a more restrictive conception of poetry as the lyric product of the poet’s solitary self-communing became entrenched. With fresh insight, Elizabeth K. Helsinger addresses a range of questions at the core of conversational poetry: When and why do poets turn to conversation to explore poetry’s potential? How do conversation’s forms and intentions shape the figures, rhythms, and prosody of poems to alter the reader’s experience? What are the ethical and political stakes of conversing in verse? Coleridge, Clare, Landor, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne, Michael Field, and Hardy each composed poems that open difficult or impossible conversations with phenomena outside themselves. Helsinger unearths an unfamiliar lyric history that produced some of the most interesting formal experiments of the nineteenth century, including its best known, the dramatic monologue.

Elizabeth K. Helsinger is the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor Emerita in the Departments of English, Art History, and Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. She has chaired both the Department of English and the Department of Visual Arts. She has held fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Humanities Center. In her long and multidisciplinary career, she has published books including Poetry and the Thought of Song (2015), Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts (2008), Rural Scenes and National Representation (1997), and Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder (1982). She is coauthor of The Woman Question: Britain and America, 1837–1883 (1983, 1987) and a coeditor of the journal Critical Inquiry, and has served on the boards of Victorian Studies, Nineteenth-Century Literature, and Nineteenth-Century Prose.
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CONVERSING IN VERSE

Conversation in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry

ELIZABETH K. HELSINGER

University of Chicago
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