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978-1-107-02337-6 - The Poetry of Victorian Scientists: Style, Science and Nonsense

Daniel Brown

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## THE POETRY OF VICTORIAN SCIENTISTS

A surprising number of Victorian scientists wrote poetry. Many came to science as children through such games and toys as the spinning-top, soap-bubbles, and mathematical puzzles, and this playfulness carried through to both their professional work and writing of lyrical and satirical verse. This is the first study of an oddly neglected body of work that offers a unique record of the nature and cultures of Victorian science. Such figures as the physicist James Clerk Maxwell toy with ideas of nonsense, as through their poetry they strive to delineate the boundaries of the new professional science and discover the nature of scientific creativity. Also considering Edward Lear, Daniel Brown finds the Victorian renaissances in research science and nonsense literature to be curiously interrelated. Whereas science and literature studies have focused mostly upon canonical literary figures, this original and important book conversely explores the uses to which literature was put by eminent Victorian scientists.

DANIEL BROWN is Professor of English at the University of Southampton.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organisation, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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