

## BIRDSONG, SPEECH AND POETRY

In the long nineteenth century, scientists discovered striking similarities between how birds learn to sing and how children learn to speak. Tracing the 'science of birdsong' as it developed from the 'ingenious' experiments of Daines Barrington to the evolutionary arguments of Charles Darwin, Francesca Mackenney reveals a legacy of thought which informs, and consequently affords fresh insights into, a canonical group of poems about birdsong in the Romantic and Victorian periods. With a particular focus on the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Wordsworth siblings, John Clare and Thomas Hardy, her book explores how poets responded to an analogy which challenged definitions of language and therefore of what it means to be human. Drawing together responses to birdsong in science, music and poetry, her distinctive interdisciplinary approach challenges many of the long-standing cultural assumptions which have shaped (and continue to shape) how we respond to other creatures in the Anthropocene.

FRANCESCA MACKENNEY is Research and Teaching Fellow in Romanticism at the University of Leeds. Her research and related work in environmental education has been funded by an AHRC Doctoral Award, a BARS/Wordsworth Trust Early Career Fellowship, an award from Creative Scotland and an AHRC International Placement at the Library of Congress.

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BIRDSONG, SPEECH  
AND POETRY

*The Art of Composition in the Long Nineteenth Century*

FRANCESCA MACKENNEY

*University of Leeds*



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*For my mother, Linda*

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