



The Victorian Novel of Adulthood: Plot and Purgatory in Fictions of Maturity (Series in Victorian Studies)

Rebecca Rainof

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In *The Victorian Novel of Adulthood*, Rebecca Rainof confronts the conventional deference accorded the bildungsroman as the ultimate plot model and quintessential expression of Victorian nation building. The novel of maturity, she contends, is no less important to our understanding of narrative, Victorian culture, and the possibilities of fiction.

Reading works by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, John Henry Newman, and Virginia Woolf, Rainof exposes the little-discussed theological underpinnings of plot and situates the novel of maturity in intellectual and religious history, notably the Oxford Movement. Purgatory, a subject hotly debated in the period, becomes a guiding metaphor for midlife adventure in secular fiction. Rainof discusses theological models of gradual maturation, thus directing readers' attention away from evolutionary theory and geology, and offers a new historical framework for understanding Victorian interest in slow and deliberate change.

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