



Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible (Victorian Literature and Culture Series)

Charles LaPorte

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Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible charts the impact of post-Enlightenment biblical criticism on English literary culture. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a widespread reevaluation of biblical inspiration, in which the Bible's poetic nature came to be seen as an integral part of its religious significance. Understandably, then, many poets who followed this interpretative revolution—including Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning—came to reconceive their highest vocational ambitions: if the Bible is essentially poetry, then modern poetry might perform a cultural role akin to that of scripture. This context equally illuminates the aims and achievements of famous Victorian unbelievers such as Arthur Hugh Clough and George Eliot, who also responded enthusiastically to the poetic ideal of an inspired text.

Building upon a recent and ongoing reevaluation of religion as a vital aspect of Victorian culture, Charles LaPorte shows the enduring relevance of religion in a period usually associated with its decline. In doing so, he helps to delineate the midcentury shape of a literary dynamic that is generally better understood in Romantic poetry of the earlier part of the century. The poets he examines all wrestled with modern findings about the Bible's fortuitous historical composition, yet they owed much of their extraordinary literary success to their ability to capitalize upon the progress of avant-garde biblical interpretation.

This book's revisionary and provocative thesis speaks not only to the course of English poetics but also to the logic of nineteenth-century literary hierarchies and to the continuing evolution of religion in the modern era.

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