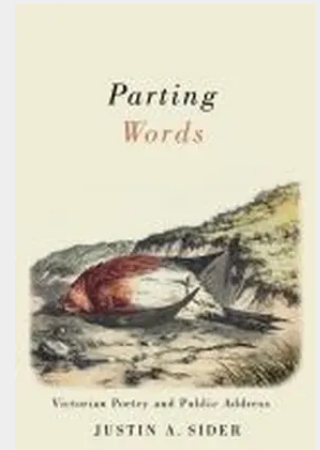


Parting Words: Victorian Poetry and Public Address

Valedictory addresses offer a way to conceptualize the relation of self to others, private to public, ephemeral to eternal. Whether deathbed pronouncements, political capitulations, or seafaring farewells, "parting words" played a crucial role in the social imagination of Victorian writing. In this compelling new book, Justin Sider traces these public addresses across a wide range of works, from poems by Byron, Tennyson, and Browning, to essays by Twain and Wilde, to novels by Dickens and Eliot. Ironically, while the Victorian era saw the loss of faith in a unitary national public, it asked poetry to address just such a public. Attending to the form, rather than the discursive content, of poets' engagement with public culture, *Parting Words* explains how the valedictory allowed Victorian poets to explore the ways their poems might be received by distant and anonymous readers in an emergent mass culture. Using a wide array of materials such as letters and reviews to describe the rapidly changing print culture in which poets were intervening, Sider shows how the growing diversification and destabilization of the Victorian reading public was countered by the demand for a public poetry. Characteristically, the speakers of Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna" imagine their farewells as simultaneous entrances into a public space where they and their readers, however distant, might yet meet. This new consciousness anticipated modernist poetry, which in turn used the valedictory to underscore the futility and alienation of such hopes.



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