



# Victorian Interpretation

*Suzy Anger*

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## **Victorian Interpretation** Suzy Anger

Suzy Anger investigates the relationship of Victorian interpretation to the ways in which literary criticism is practiced today. Her primary focus is literary interpretation, but she also considers fields such as legal theory, psychology, history, and the natural sciences in order to establish the pervasiveness of hermeneutic thought in Victorian culture. Anger's book demonstrates that much current thought on interpretation has its antecedents in the Victorians, who were already deeply engaged with the problems of interpretation that concern literary theorists today.

Anger traces the development and transformation of interpretive theory from a religious to a secular (and particularly literary) context. She argues that even as hermeneutic theory was secularized in literary interpretation it carried in its practice some of the religious implications with which the tradition began. She further maintains that, for the Victorians, theories of interpretation are often connected to ethical principles and suggests that all theories of interpretation may ultimately be grounded in ethical theories.

Beginning with an examination of Victorian biblical exegesis, in the work of figures such as Benjamin Jowett, John Henry Newman, and Matthew Arnold, the book moves to studies of Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and Oscar Wilde. Emphasizing the extent to which these important writers are preoccupied with hermeneutics, Anger also shows that consideration of their thought brings to light questions and qualifications of some of the assumptions of contemporary criticism.

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