



The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, the Individual and Communal Life

By Josephine M. Guy



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This book describes various accounts of the Victorian social-problem novel, examining their strengths and limitations in the light of the historiographical assumptions which underlie them. An alternative historical account is offered, which focuses on the novels' intellectual milieu - specifically on mid-Victorian concepts of 'the social' and of what was understood by the term 'social problem'. In detailed readings of individual works, the book argues that an appreciation of these concepts permits new ways of understanding the contradictions identified in these works together with their apparently 'conservative' politics.



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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

The critical history of Victorian social-problem novels maps many of the changes in the theory and practice of literary history in the second half of the twentieth century. Josephine M. Guy's account of various critical responses to these enduringly popular works examines a range of approaches, particularly those of historicist, new-historicist and Marxist critics. Her own critical account of the sub-genre is built around close readings of such core texts as *Hard Times*, *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Sybil*, *Alton Locke* and *Felix Holt*. By focusing on the intellectual context in which these novels were produced - on the Victorians' debates about 'the social' and their understanding of what is meant by a 'social problem' - she recharacterises an important moment in mid-nineteenth-century literary history.

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