



Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain

(Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture)

Simon Dentith

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In the nineteenth century, epic poetry in the Homeric style was widely seen as an ancient and anachronistic genre, yet Victorian authors worked to recreate it for the modern world. Simon Dentith explores the relationship between epic and the evolution of Britain's national identity in the nineteenth century up to the apparent demise of all notions of heroic warfare in the catastrophe of the First World War. Paradoxically, writers found equivalents of the societies which produced Homeric or Northern epics not in Europe, but on the margins of empire and among its subject peoples. Dentith considers the implications of the status of epic for a range of nineteenth-century writers, including Walter Scott, Matthew Arnold, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Morris and Rudyard Kipling. He also considers the relationship between epic poetry and the novel and discusses late nineteenth-century adventure novels, concluding with a brief survey of epic in the twentieth century.



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