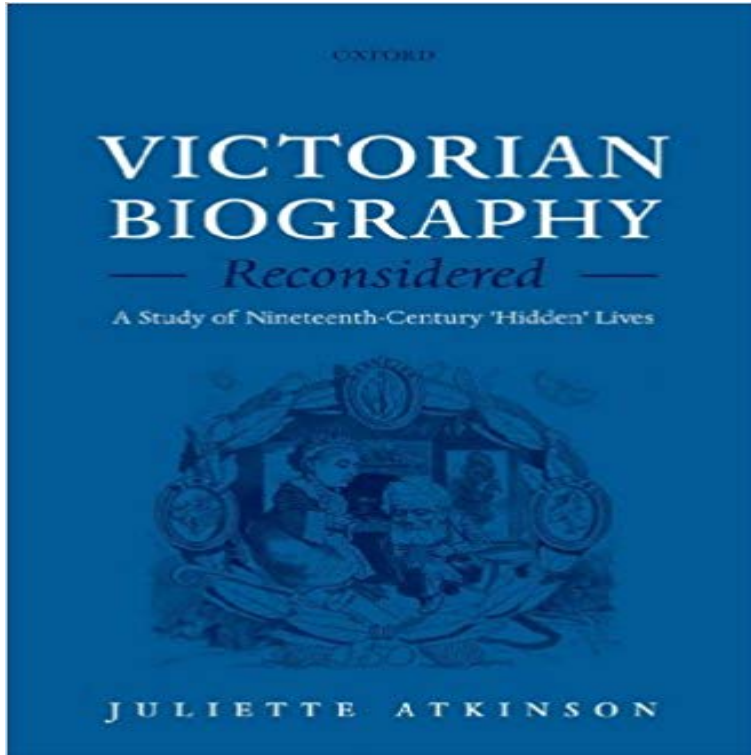


Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Hidden Lives



In 1939, Virginia Woolf called for a more inclusive form of biography, which would include the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious. She did so in part as a reaction against Victorian biography, deemed to have been overly preoccupied with Great Men. Yet a significant number of Victorians had already broken ranks to write the lives of humble, unsuccessful, or neglected men and women. *Victorian Biography Reconsidered* seeks to uncover and assess this trend. The book begins with an overview of Victorian biography followed by a reflection on how the bagginess of nineteenth-century hero-worship enabled new subjects to emerge. Biographies of hidden lives are then scrutinized through chapters on the lives of humble naturalists, failed destinies, minor women writers, neglected Romantic poets rescued by Victorian biographers, and, finally, the Dictionary of National Biography. In its conclusion, the book briefly discusses how Virginia Woolf absorbed earlier biographical trends before redirecting the representation of hidden lives. *Victorian Biography Reconsidered* argues that, often paradoxically, nineteenth-century biographers regarded the public sphere with intense wariness. At a time of instability for men of letters, biographers embraced the role of mediators in a manner that asserted their own cultural authority. Frequently, they showed little interest in vouchsafing immortality for their unknown or forgotten subjects, but strove instead to provoke amongst their readers a feeling of gratitude for the hidden labour that sustained the nation and an appreciation for the writers who had brought it to their attention.

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