



Secret Selves: Confession and Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Autobiography

Oliver S. Buckton

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Focusing on the representation of same-sex desire in Victorian autobiographical writing, Oliver Buckton offers significant new readings of works by some of the most influential figures in late-nineteenth-century literature and culture. Combining original research, careful historical analysis, and contemporary theories of autobiography, gender, and sexual identity, he provides nuanced studies of confessional narratives by Edward Carpenter, John Henry Newman, John Addington Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and, in an epilogue, E. M. Forster.

By examining the "confessional" elements of these writings, Buckton brings "secrecy" into focus as a central and productive component of autobiographical discourse. He challenges the conventional view of secrecy as the suppression of information, instead using the term to suggest an oscillation between authorial self-disclosure and silence or reserve--a strategy for arousing the reader's interest and establishing a relation based on shared knowledge while deferring or displacing the revelation of potentially incriminating and scandalous desires. Though their disclosures of same-sex desire jeopardized the cultural privilege granted these writers by Victorian codes of authorship and masculinity, their use of secrecy, Buckton shows, allowed them to protect themselves from Victorian stigma and to challenge prevailing constructions of sexual identity.

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