



A Return to the Common Reader

Beth Palmer, Adelene Buckland

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In 1957, Richard Altick's groundbreaking work "The English Common Reader" transformed the study of book history. Putting readers at the centre of literary culture, Altick anticipated-and helped produce-fifty years of scholarly inquiry into the ways and means by which the Victorians read. Now, "A Return to the Common Reader" asks what Altick's concept of the 'common reader' actually means in the wake of a half-century of research. Digging deep into unusual and eclectic archives and hitherto-overlooked sources, its authors give new understanding to the masses of newly literate readers who picked up books in the Victorian period. They find readers in prisons, in the barracks, and around the world, and they remind us of the power of those forgotten readers to find forbidden texts, shape new markets, and drive the production of new reading material across a century. Inspired and informed by Altick's seminal work, "A Return to the Common Reader" is a cutting-edge collection which dramatically reconfigures our understanding of the ordinary Victorian readers whose efforts and choices changed our literary culture forever.

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