Notes on contributor

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Plagiarizing the victorian novel: imitation, parody, aftertext, by Adam Abraham, Cambridge, Cambridge University P, 2019, 298 pp, $99.99 (hardcover), ISBN: 9781108493079

"We are living in the era of *Oliver Twiss,* not *Oliver Twist,*" Adam Abraham quips in the post-script to his much-needed study on Victorian plagiarisms as aftertexts. In Abraham's characteristically playful style, the term aftertext was chosen for texts that not only follow after canonical Victorian novelists but *come after* novelists in terms of impersonation, parody, and correction. The twenty-first century's culture of "sequels and reboots, of remixes and online parodies" makes this moment particularly ripe for critically re-evaluating the aftertexts of the past (Abraham 2019, 185). "In ways that could not be apprehended earlier," Abraham suggests, "aftertexts do not diminish their source-texts but instead participated in their production and reception" (185). Whereas literary critics of the last two centuries have overwhelmingly declared the material Abraham studies as unoriginal or bad, Abraham now recovers such material by arguing that Victorian aftertexts changed the reception and production of the oeuvres of Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and George Eliot. I join Abraham in hoping that our aftextual moment allows us to newly see the contributions of Victorian plagiarisms to literary culture.

Abraham's book is truly groundbreaking, offering precise book history along with a command of biography and clever close reading that makes each chapter uniquely entertaining and useful. Amongst the most consequential theoretical contributions is his grappling with what to call the primary material he engages. After outlining theories of "second-order" literature, Abraham meticulously recounts the etymology of plagiarism and reveals that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Anglo-American culture, plagiarism is "not, strictly speaking, a crime" (7). It was considered an ethical rather than legal transgression. And one thing that one could not copyright was style, the element that Abraham focuses on throughout all the texts he analyzes. After considering and putting aside such terms as Hutcheon's adaptation and Genette's palimpsests, paratexts, and continuations that are proleptic, analeptic, elleptic, and paraleptic, Abraham settles on "aftertext" to draw on textual criticism's distinction between the *work* and the *text*. Abraham focuses on aftertexts as a "countercanon" to the canon, referring to the "*work* as the totality of a literary existence" and the *work* should include "after textual productions: plagiarism, parodies, sequels, and

so on" (19). Thus, the nature of Abraham's contribution to the study of aftertexts is ultimately focused on how the aftertexts shape the canonical texts from which they derive.

Part of what makes Abraham's book valuable to scholars are the meticulous close readings he offers of rare, ephemeral texts that are difficult to access in archives. The first two of five chapters dwell on Dickens's well-known experience with plagiarists, starting with *Pickwick* and ending with Dickens's attempted revenge in *Master Humphrey's Clock.* In chapter one, Abraham divides responses to *Pickwick* into "club texts," that copy the conceit of the club, and "prostheses" that seek to extend the plot of *Pickwick* beyond what Dickens wrote. Club imitations, including *The Wonderful Discovery Club, The Magnum-Fundum Club, and The Cadgers' Club,* include dark interpolated tales and are generally more racist and sexist than Dickens's original, and tend to be targeted at a lower-class audience. The prostheses seek to correct and extend Dickens's text by including more racism, sexism and, interestingly, sexuality more generally. There were also rewritings of character to better satisfy purported audience desires. Abraham identifies Thomas Peckett Prest (Bos) as Dickens's most prolific imitator, but he also includes close readings of George W.M. Reynolds's work. Dickens undertook legal and artistic strategies to frustrate his many imitators. *Master Humphrey's Clock* was his revenge to try to prove he was inimitable by resurrecting Mr. Pickwick himself. However, this didn't go over as planned with reviewers, who thought it was evidence of unoriginality. Few readers seemed to have liked Dickens's new miscellany format either. Dickens's early works often bleed together in their plagiarisms, which sometimes imitate all at once: there were two *Twiss* by Bos and Poz. *Nicklbery* only imitated less than half of Nickelby. *Master Humphrey's Clock* was itself also imitated. Interestingly, Abraham notes that some of the Dickens plagiarisms actually elevate language rather than lowering it, which is significant when considering that many of these aftertexts are marketed within the penny press.

Dickens's aftertexts could consume a whole study, but Abraham shows that aftertexts did not just follow Dickens. Chapters three and four concern Edward Bulwer Lytton as one of the most popular novelists of the Victorian period. His distinctly florid style was parodied in both the Victorian periodical press and in "bad writing" contests of today. Commentators, including William Makepeace Thackeray, frequently parodied Bulwer when criticizing him, and Bulwer developed his theory of the novel in response to these parodies. Bulwer himself found imitation of other styles to be central to his own work and success. With Bulwer Lytton, Abraham shows how parody arises out of a complex mix of imitation, admiration, and scorn. Later, Bulwer Lytton's estranged wife, Rosina Bulwer Lytton (who separated from him after a very unhappy and abusive marriage), imitated Bulwer's style in her own novels, which over time actually seem to embody or occupy the Bulwer style/identity on purpose. Abraham demonstrates that mimicry is not easy but is itself an accomplishment that can lead to an apprenticeship in style after which one can "graduate," as Thackeray did, into one's own unique style.

Abraham's last chapter ambitiously documents George Eliot and her imitators. While Eliot's dense, intellectual style at first seems unlikely to have been imitated in aftertexts, Abraham shows that imitators were also at her heels, especially in her early career. First, the unremarkable Joseph Liggins, who pretended to be George Eliot before Marian Evans revealed that she was behind the pseudonym. Abraham examines two imitations of *Adam Bede*: the "amplifying sequel," *Seth Bede,* and *Adam Bede, Junior. A Sequel* (155). George Eliot, via George Lewes, complained to *The Times* that *Adam Bede, Junior* must be a copyright violation, but, as Abraham has demonstrated, such imitations were legal. Eliot even entertained writing an extension of *Adam Bede* herself in the summer of Liggins but before *Seth Bede* and *Adam Bede, Junior*: "The Poysers at the Seaside," but Blackwood's decided against publishing it (158). After *Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, as her style coalesced around the deep insightfulness for which she is known, the number of imitations seems to

have mostly dropped off, with exceptions for *Daniel Deronda.* Abraham speculates that after-texts may diminish as the century progresses or that aftertexts are written in responses to novels that are *novel* in some way (like a new author's debut). Abraham concludes his heady exploration of style and identity by reading Edith Simcox, devoted fan who both romantically loved and wanted to *be* George Eliot, as a sequel or continuation of Eliot herself—"life as aftertext"—in which, just as Eliot was born in the same year as Queen Victoria, Simcox dies at the end of Victoria's reign.

Abraham's principal methods include book history, stylistic and narrative analysis, and biographical research, relying less on history of reading. I share John Sutherland's disappointment in *The Times Literary Supplement* (December 20/27 2019) that Abraham did not fully pursue the wide-ranging intertextual implications of Victorian aftertexts. Furthermore, Abraham only briefly acknowledges connections to fan culture in his postscript. "The imitative authors discussed in this book were not necessarily the world's most elegant writers," Abraham concedes, "but they were excellent readers" (184). Abraham values these readers for their readings of canonized authors and novels. But, the radical politics of the penny press in which many of these aftertexts were produced point out that a more radical recovery of Victorian aftertexts is possible if we are able to value their work as readers and writers for the culture that they produced at the time rather than for the later-canonized novels to which they appended their labors. Nevertheless, Abraham's critical and bibliographic work is staggering, and his mastery of biography, literary history, and pages and pages of the vast unread provide source material for an entire new generation of scholarship.

Notes on contributor

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Time travelers: victorian encounters with time & history, edited by Adelene Buckland and Sadiah Qureshi, with a forward by Mary Beard, Chicago, University of Chicago P, 2020, 312 pp., $27.50 (paperback), ISBN: 9780226676791

Time travel is a potent imaginative concept – a fruitful place to play, both creatively and intellectually. Hence the enduring popularity of the theme in literature, film, and other genres. The