

ADAM ABRAHAM, *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel: Imitation, Parody, Aftertext*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. ISBN 9781108493079. £75.

Adam Abraham's *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel: Imitation, Parody, Aftertext*, is a remarkable achievement. He provides a new perspective on central and familiar works of Victorian fiction, and moreover a perspective that has been hiding in plain sight – the vast corpus of their imitations, parodies, and what he terms their 'aftertexts'. He buttresses his case with impeccable scholarship and presents it in clear, pithy writing.

Abraham begins with a Prologue about plagiarism in general and with particular focus on the Victorian era. He notes our uncertain names for literary borrowing, asking, 'why is allusion noble and plagiarism a fault[?]' When one considers other related terms – copy, imitation, adaptation, parody, pastiche, burlesque, sequel, prequel, etc. – it becomes clear that what the plagiarisers provide for us is a hitherto unappreciated window displaying what contemporary readers found original and characteristic in Dickens's (and others') writings. Even if Abraham never quite answers his question about allusion and plagiarism, he demonstrates persuasively that by studying the copies, we develop a surer sense of the original.

Dickens himself had a complex relationship with the pirates. He was a target for imitators and literary thieves from the very start of his career but for the most part he had no choice other than to tolerate it – indeed, early on Chapman and Hall had filed suit to stop one of the *Pickwick* plagiarists, and lost. He continued to champion authors' rights in his Quixotic advocacy for international copyright during his first American tour in 1842. And he took on the pirates, or at least one of them, directly over *A Christmas Carol*, winning the suit but unable to collect damages from the publisher who promptly declared bankruptcy.

Of Abraham's five chapters, two are centred on Dickens (the others are on Bulwer Lytton, Thackeray and Rosina Wheeler Lytton, and George Eliot). The first of the two Dickens chapters focuses on the imitators of *Pickwick*, and what Abraham finds opens a fresh perspective on contemporary readers' responses. Of course, as Abraham notes, Dickens himself was a great borrower in *Pickwick*, drawing freely from the work of (among others) Pierce Egan, Theodore Hook, and R. S. Surtees. He also notes that the whole *Pickwickian* enterprise is in theory plagiarism, as Dickens presents himself as the editor of papers that presumably others have compiled.

Abraham has dug up scores of these hastily produced texts, and what he unearths is fascinating indeed. For example, later critics have tended

to regard the machinery of the Pickwick Club as rather inconsequential and quickly abandoned by Dickens. Yet to contemporaries it seemed far more important and it spawned many imitations. Perhaps the strangest of Abraham's discoveries comes from a piratical club paper that lasted all of one number – a slew of references to Warren's blacking in the otherwise forgettable *Droll Discussions and Queer Proceedings of the Magnum-Fundam Club* (1838). Did the anonymous author somehow know of Dickens's childhood experiences?

Why, then, did *Pickwick* spawn so many sequels and prequels? Abraham speculates that the episodic nature of the original and the characters' seemingly goal-less wandering almost invited others to continue the story. Why did one pirate have Mr Pickwick go off to America? The correct answer would appear to be, why not?

In his chapter on what he terms the 'pseudo-Dickens industry', Abraham examines the Dickens imitators who proliferated after *Pickwick*. In effect, their efforts continued to define what was Dickensian by demonstrating what it was not. He also argues that in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Dickens sought revenge against the plagiarists by demonstrating that he could recapture the *Pickwick* magic. Less convincingly, Abraham argues that in the wake of his fruitless Chancery action, Dickens cast the villainous Pecksniff as a consummate plagiarist.

The chapters on Bulwer Lytton, Thackeray and Rosina Lytton, and George Eliot are perhaps of less interest to readers of this journal, but they are equally well researched and cogently argued. If nothing else, they demonstrate the ubiquity of Victorian plagiarism, and make it quite clear that it was a universal, and not solely a Dickensian, plague. Abraham is particularly effective examining the paradox that was Bulwer Lytton – fabulously popular and at the same time ruthlessly (and so very easily) parodied. Two of the parodists, Thackeray and Bulwer Lytton's estranged wife, receive closer scrutiny; both used their parodic imitations to launch their own writing careers.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on George Eliot and explores vexed questions about identity, hers and that of two strange figures – Joseph Liggins, who was for a year or so pretending to be and by many believed to be George Eliot (though Dickens was certain 'he' was a woman), and Edith Simcox, a much younger admirer who fell deeply in love with her. Eliot herself added to the complexity surrounding her own identity: was she Marian Evans, George Eliot, or (as she later preferred) Mrs Lewes? (As it happens, legally speaking she was none of the above.) The book closes with a brief Postscript that touches upon later aftertexts of Victorian novels which have persisted into the present time.

A book like Abraham's that views all things through a single lens risks finding its subject everywhere. While Abraham does fall prey to this failing from time to time, his claim that these explorations in 'the byways of Victorian literature' help us appreciate the achievement of the canonical works on which the plagiarists, parodists and imitators fed is amply justified.

FRED SCHWARZBACH

SUSAN E. COOK, *Victorian Negatives: Literary Culture and the Dark Side of Photography in the Nineteenth Century*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781438475370 (hardcover). £67.75, \$95.00.

Dickens was well aware of the importance of photography to the cultivation of celebrity. His image was captured by well-known practitioners, including Beard, Claudet, Mayall, the Watkins brothers, Mason, Naudin, Maze and Gurney. Surviving letters give some idea of his relations with these operators, and in several instances he expressed anxiety about sitting for photographic sessions, on account of what he considered the unsatisfactoriness of the outcome. This disquiet about reproduction of the self is the starting point for this fascinating study, which considers Dickens alongside Conan Doyle, Hornung, Bennett, Stevenson, Hardy, Wilde and Stoker, in the context of the photographic negative, to argue that both technical and metaphorical appreciations of the image are fundamental to understanding how Victorian photography came to be embedded and expressed in a selection of literary works of the period.

Susan Cook is especially well placed to carry out this research, given that she has a background in photography – not only in digital image manipulation, but also in film processing. A familiarity with such chemicals as developer, stop bath and fixer brings her closer than many of us to wet-plate collodion photography and albumen printing, which were the mainstream techniques used for the capture and wide distribution of most of the existing images of Dickens. She writes confidently about the negative – an often ignored, but essential element of the photographic process, which facilitates image reproduction by way of inversion – and argues that this particular technology impacted the development of the novel and literary celebrity culture, as authors grappled with the concept of inversion and reproduction in their lives and works.

In connection with Dickens, Cook first provides a brief overview of the author's engagement with photographic technology, and emphasises