Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel: Imitation, Parody, Aftertext, by Adam Abraham; pp. v + 282. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, £75.00, £22.99 paper, $99.99, $29.00 paper, $24.00 ebook.

"This book offers a new kind of reception history," promises Adam Abraham in his prologue to *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel: Imitation, Parody, Aftertext*—a promise he fulfills in the five illuminating chapters that follow (19). That said, the book's title is a bit misleading, since Abraham is not that interested in plagiarism itself. The book's subtitle is a more accurate description of its topic. Here Abraham identifies two familiar subgenres and a third that he invents. Acknowledging Gérard Genette's earlier use of "after-text" (*Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky [University of Lincoln Press, 1997], 399), Abraham loses the hyphen and widens the term's meaning to take in not just authorial versions/revisions, but also the varieties he specifically names in the title and subtitle (18). Moreover, Abraham renames the original-text-plus-aftertext(s) as the "work" which encompasses "the totality of a literary existence" (19). Rather than sideline what many see as mere rip-offs of an original text, Abraham argues that scholars should recognize aftertexts as significant "source[s] of literary knowledge" (20). Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and George Eliot are the novelists around whom Abraham situates the aftertexts. The authors of the decidedly noncanonical productions are either anonymous or long forgotten, with the exception of William Makepeace Thackeray (a premier Bulwer Lytton parodist), along with the somewhat less exceptional Rosina Bulwer Lytton, and Edith Simcox, George Eliot's longtime devotee. Although I have reservations about Abraham's new definition of the so-called work, his analysis constitutes a significant contribution to reception history and to a deeper understanding of the marginal texts that circulated around the canonical originals.

Like the Victorian period itself, Abraham begins with Dickens's *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836–7), a text which launched a thousand aftertexts, not to mention Pickwick cigars, breeches, and chintzes. Focusing on Pickwick imitations, Abraham examines two varieties: club imitations and prostheses (plagiaristic extensions of original characters and plots). While current Pickwick readers might have little or no interest in the club part of Pickwick (Dickens himself lost interest in it), the club imitators made it their raison d'etre. Abraham exhumes three such imitations and gives an engaging account of the ways each imagines club scenes that they believe Dickens "was going to write, meant to write, advertised in the prospectus, or neglected to write" (30). It is not that Abraham thinks these imitations give the real Pickwick a run for his money (he does not), but rather that in them we witness how another group of Dickens's readers actually read the book; in short, they become an untapped resource for reception studies.

Not surprisingly, these aftertextual authors try their hands at Dickensian hyperbole, dialect, and interpolated stories, and Abraham takes them seriously—but not too seriously. Instead of trying to elevate these imitations, Abraham helps us to see Dickens through their eyes and to consider (more specifically) how they tune in to the undercurrents of racism, anti-Semitism, and sexuality that later critics have identified in the novel. So, for instance, examining the more anti-Semitic outgrowths, Abraham argues that they are derived "from the repressed Jewish origins of Samuel Pickwick"; Abraham supports his argument by adducing convincing evidence (his own and that gleaned from

other critical works) of the novel's anti-Semitic impulses (48). Perhaps Abraham's most provocative speculation concerns moments in the *Pickwick* aftertexts that evoke Warren's Blacking well before information about Dickens's past would have been publicly known. Were Dickens's imitators picking up on the references that he could not help but drop into his novels? Giving appropriate credit to Rosemarie Bodenheimer for the work she does in *Knowing Dickens* (2010), Abraham reads these aftertexts carefully to illuminate what Dickens's contemporary readers might have registered themselves.

If Abraham's work were only a new resource for reception studies, that would be contribution enough, but he goes further and considers how Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Eliot were themselves influenced not only by imitations but also by the copyright pirates and, in Eliot's case, an imposter who, not content with imitation, took credit for her original texts. In "Being George Eliot," Abraham rehearses the sad fortunes of Joseph Liggins, the man who claimed authorship for Eliot's two earliest novels and forced Marian Evans to out herself. After a slightly too-long recounting of the Liggins Saga (much of which is a drawing together of bits from Eliot biographies), Abraham mounts a persuasive case that the idea of Liggins shaped Eliot's art more than others have recognized. Abraham's nuanced reading of "The Wasp Credited with the Honeycomb"—a chapter from her *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879)—makes good on his claim that her last published work "contains one of [her] fiercest statements on the Liggins affair, twenty years after the fact" (165). That Eliot returned to Liggins at the end of her career is all the more compelling because, as with Dickens (and also Bulwer Lytton—the subject of chapters 3 and 4), the imitation industry that had dogged her dried up during the middle and late periods of her writing life. Wisely, Abraham does not overplay his hand here by arguing that Liggins defined Eliot's art. At the same time, recognizing these other influences gives a richer sense of how that art came to be.

While I genuinely admire *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel*, I cannot say that Abraham has convinced me that we should rethink what constitutes the literary work along the lines he suggests in his prologue. What would it mean for scholars (or readers) to keep redefining what constitutes the work called *Daniel Deronda*? If, as Abraham proposes, we start defining the work as "the totality of a literary existence" that includes aftertexts, scholars are in trouble (19). Aftertexts proliferate, as Abraham demonstrates in his own analyses. Indeed, Abraham himself describes them in an appropriately open-ended way as "plagiarisms, parodies, sequels, and so on" (19). In our multimedia world, it is the "and so on" that might give us pause. In Abraham's brief postscript, he ventures into our more familiar world of adaptations, revisions, and sequels. Would the work take up into itself not only the BBC's ever increasing catalog of neo-Victorian offerings but also every piece of internet fanfiction? Would every parody of *Jane Eyre* (1847) on YouTube become part of the work? And every *Wuthering Heights* (1847) parodic meme, tweet, or TikTok video? The mind boggles.

And yet, while the aftertexts proliferate, Abraham's own text demonstrates its admirable economy. Clocking in at 185 pages (without its wonderfully detailed notes and complete bibliography), the book makes for pleasurable reading. Abraham's prose is clear, witty, jargon-free, and the work he has done on these aftertexts, including his concise summaries, will provide future scholars with rich new material for years to come.

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