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Daniel Hack. *The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel*. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005. Pp. xi+226. \ \$39.50 (cloth).

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a discussion of the political trilogy, *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*, followed by a reading of Disraeli's biography, *Lord George Bentinck*. This section argues that novels from this intermediary stage of his career helped Disraeli to imagine and articulate his Young England philosophy. The final section, "The Elder Statesman," offers a cogent analysis of Disraeli's final novels, *Lothair* and *Endymion*, as well as his unfinished *Falconet*. This final section is particularly noteworthy for providing a much-needed discussion of this final stage of Disraeli's writing career. Chapter 3 also places these late novels, especially *Lothair*, within the longer trajectory of Disraeli's novel writing, especially with regard to *Tancred*. Each chapter contains a subsection in which Flavin offers a plot synopsis of Disraeli's published works and an explanation of the ways in which that philosophy, as charted in the novels, changed over time.

Flavin's study will be tremendously useful for readers who seek a fuller knowledge of Disraeli's literary activity and its influence on his political life. Flavin assumes that readers may know nothing of these fictional works, which seems wise given that many have been out of print for well over thirty years. He is also strong in discussions of the Young England movement and in readings of Disraeli's later fiction. One of the traps of such a well-focused study, however, is that Flavin's analysis is at times not far reaching enough. For example, Flavin traces Disraeli's evolution from an early idealistic interest in Byron and Shelley (as witnessed in *Venetia*) to a more mature belief in the socially ameliorative potential of the aristocracy. While it may be true that Disraeli outgrew Byron, Flavin neglects to mention that everyone else did as well. In reading Disraeli's fiction as a cloaked autobiography, Flavin's analysis tends to overstate Disraeli's development by taking it out of the arena of Disraeli's culture or the history of the novel. In another example, while discussing Disraeli's biography of Lord George Bentinck, Flavin maintains, "While Bentinck frequently functions as a cipher in the text, behind which lies the presentation of Disraeli's own politics and strategies in Parliament in the 1840's, his adversary, Sir Robert Peel, is a rounded character whose voice is ostensibly his own" (138). In moments like this it is clear that Flavin approaches Disraeli's writing with an eye for literary purity. As such, he believes that the biographer writes someone else's life transparently, without inculcating any of the biographer's own thoughts, opinions, or perspectives. If it were possible for authors to write without a trace of self-interest, perhaps we would have witnessed the death of literary studies rather than the death of the author.

Despite these small pitfalls, Flavin's study is helpful, insightful, and important. He does a wonderful job of making Disraeli seem real through the pages of his fiction. While conventional readings of Disraeli and his work tend to emphasize the divisions between Disraeli the author and Disraeli the politician, Flavin offers a new way of reading the intersections of these two fields. In charting the development of one of the most important figures in the nineteenth century, Flavin also invites us to consider new relationships between fact and fiction, politics and romance, and the myriad faces of public figures.

Heidi Kaufman, University of Delaware

DANIEL HACK. *The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel*. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005. Pp. xi+226. \$39.50 (cloth).

For decades now literary critics and literary historians have turned to the "materiality" of the texts they study—be that materiality represented by the physicality of print, the economics of the literary marketplace, or even the corporeality of the writing act—as a way to generate a sense of scandal. The implicit gesture behind such work is intended to function as a rousing act of demythologizing. Look here (so the critic's gesture signifies): the canonical authors

of the past had grossly material things—money, print design, their own bodies—on their minds; they were not as innocent or as exalted as they seem. As a reaction to poststructuralist abstraction such a critical maneuver was often welcome and productive, but the predictability of such a call upon our sense of shock at the materiality of past literary work may have more to say about our need to imagine ourselves uncovering what the past occluded than any actual occlusions in the past. So, at least, runs the essential argument of Daniel Hack's brilliantly nuanced *Material Interests of the Victorian Novel*. Hack's canny argument depends not on "reading against the grain" to find a materiality Victorian novelists sought to hide but instead on reading with the Victorians to demonstrate the ways in which our own thinking about materiality is anticipated and at least in part determined by their complex engagements with various forms of the materiality of writing. In the broadest sense, Hack's book reminds us that the materiality of canonical texts is no scandal.

Much of the book's work, which involves sustained readings of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, Dickens's *Bleak House*, Collins's *No Name*, and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, is devoted to both demarcating the boundaries between different kinds of materiality and then demonstrating how, in Victorian fiction, those different kinds are often mutually implicated. The four registers of materiality Hack describes—the socioeconomic (the text's presence in a market), the corporeal (the physical act of writing), the textual (the bibliographic conventions of the day), and the linguistic (the workings of signification)—have, he argues, never been as separable in actual literary practice as they have in critical theory, where, for instance, book historians, poststructuralists, and sociologists of literature have been able to successfully ignore each other's work by taking their own brand of materiality as the essential one. Each one of Hack's readings demonstrates how a fuller understanding of "the material" in a given novel depends upon marshaling at least two of those modalities of the material. The exemplary reading of *Bleak House*, for instance, blends both a book history methodology, via an interest in the novel's copious advertisements, and a sociological methodology, in that Hack reads the controversy over Dickens's use of spontaneous combustion as an instance of a novelist claiming expert status because of what Hack calls the "meaningful materiality of texts," which for Dickens could carry the same epistemic charge as actual bodies. Such careful work thoroughly substantiates the overall argument that "the material" in literature must be studied through multiple methodological lenses.

If the word "material" is amply illuminated by Hack, the other key word in his title—"interest"—receives equal attention, if more implicitly. The book insists upon the cultural stakes for Victorian novelists in the materiality of their work, arguing that novelists resisted the "virtuality" of text in order to maintain cultural authority and agency. The centerpiece of Hack's investigation of the "interest" of Victorian novelists is a crucial diptych of chapters that look at the phenomenon of begging-letter writing in the mid-Victorian period, as a site where writing-as-labor and writing-as-parasitical-activity battle it out. Even treating the begging letter as a cultural text worth studying is an innovative, revealing move; Hack's readings of actual letters sent to the Royal Literary Fund, including one by Henry Mayhew, demonstrate the striking complicity between such an abjected genre and the appeals for readerly sympathy made by respectable realist fiction. In these chapters, perhaps the book's most nuanced and complex section, Hack reveals the narrow, switchback path Victorian novelists had to tread in order to avoid the abject materialism of the begging letter and yet still claim to be doing real, "material" work in the world. The labor of novelistic writing had to employ the same rhetorical gestures as the begging letter while disavowing the real-world effects sought by the begging letter. The outcome, as Hack states with understatement, is a reading practice associated with realist fiction, one that "allows for affective indulgence by making it an end in itself, detached from the question of action (which is to say, the question of ethics)" (120).

As much as possible within the material confines of a five-chapter literary-critical monograph, Hack's book shows what might be gained by breaking down the boundaries between

the competing, and usually isolationist, versions of materiality now current in literary studies. A book historian would be gratified by Hack's attention to *Bleak House's* advertisements and *Henry Esmond's* antique typography; a sociologist of literature would find plenty to ponder in Hack's discussion of the status of literary labor in Carlyle's "The Hero as Man of Letters"; the cultural historian will feel drawn to the begging-letter narratives that Hack reveals; and the poststructuralist critic, if any still exist, will be fed by the elegant and sinuous close readings here, particularly the demonstration, in *Daniel Deronda*, of Eliot's ambivalences about the material bases of any cultural practice, from religion to novel writing. But more than most current literary-critical monographs, the most compelling interest here is in the methodological mixtures being attempted. Hack invites us to imagine a critical practice that would not simply be tolerant of different approaches in a "to each his own" manner but that would continually bounce different versions of materiality off each other, seeking always the mutual implication of bibliographic, sociological, and linguistic realities. This is clearly a strenuous program, but, at least in Hack's book, nonetheless attractive for its potential rigors.

Nicholas Dames, Columbia University

JUDITH WILT. *Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Arnold Ward*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005. Pp. 242. \$39.50 (cloth).

Niece of Matthew Arnold, wife of Oxford Classics don and *Times* art critic Humphry Ward, counting Henry James and Leslie Stephen as friends, Mary Arnold Ward (1851–1920) was a mother of three, a pioneering education activist for women and poor and handicapped children, and England's bestselling novelist from 1890 to 1905. Born in Tasmania, Mary Arnold arrived in England in 1856 and encountered her family's distinguished connections among its intellectual aristocracy. As a child she weathered her father's Catholic conversion, reversion, and reconversion, in violation of a prenuptial promise; his wife marked one of these occasions by hurling a brick through a window. From 1867 Mary lived at Oxford, where she helped found Somerville College and began work on a history of Spain. On moving to London in 1885, she abandoned scholarship and in 1888 published *Robert Elsmere*, about a clergyman's crisis of faith at a moment when mystical and miraculous orthodoxies were yielding to a modernized Christian progressive social activism (thence "Elsmerism"). Its success catapulted "Mrs. Humphry Ward" to fame, wealth, and a long career that produced twenty-four more novels, an autobiography, and three books of war journalism, one commissioned by Theodore Roosevelt.

Despite *Robert Elsmere's* huge popular reception as a serious novel by an author heralded as George Eliot's successor, "the Great Mary" (as Henry James dubbed her) had severe critics from the start. *Robert Elsmere* "is ridiculous and antiquated," Oscar Wilde remarked in "The Decay of Lying" (1891), what with "its unfortunate hero gravely heralding a dawn that rose long ago, and so completely missing its true significance that he proposes to carry on the business of the old firm under a new name"; "It is simply Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* with the literature left out." Agreeing that Ward practiced the novel as popular social polemic not art, Judith Wilt deftly positions her "behind her times" in a double sense: Ward's novels register Britain's slow transformation from a Victorian congeries of "multiple and mongrel religio-ethnic and national identities" into a tolerant, secular, singular national modernity, even as they follow after or even resist every breaking wave of change, from the Higher Criticism to suffrage (5).

Author of a book on Scott's novels and of *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction: The Armageddon of Maternal Choice*, Wilt offers in *Behind Her Times* a rare and historically