As we began the daunting task of surveying this year’s published books in nineteenth-century literature and culture, we wondered whether we would see evidence of the “crisis in publishing” so much talked about in the last decade. We did receive slightly fewer books than have those before us, but this was nevertheless a robust year for nineteenth-century studies. Although some of the most prestigious university presses are publishing fewer books in literary criticism, other presses have identified nineteenth-century studies as a preferred field: Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge, Virginia, Ohio University, Ohio State, and Ashgate, for example, produced a large number of this year’s monographs. Meanwhile, Cambridge, Princeton, Chicago, Oxford, Stanford, Hopkins, and a few other elite presses published a handful of nineteenth-century books each. Trends in the field continue in already-defined ways: interdisciplinary studies provide rich materials from other human sciences with which to interpret literature and culture; the desire to historicize remains widespread but not nearly as imperative as it was a decade ago; and areas such as empire, national, and


transnational studies continue to create strong interest. Most striking, perhaps, is that nineteenth-century scholarship tends largely to be topic driven rather than inspired by methodological innovations, debates, or crusades. With a few notable exceptions, authors marshal the conceptual tools appropriate to their projects in a businesslike way, without having to trumpet the fact that cross-disciplinary work is now the norm. Notably, too, very few books make urgent political gestures. While the range and variety of nineteenth-century work remains extremely rich, its metacritical temperature has cooled significantly.

We begin this review, then, with interdisciplinary books, including studies that read literary texts alongside or with the discourses of science, technology, anthropology, medicine, psychology and sexology, arts and aesthetics, commodification, politics, religion, and book history. We then survey literary histories, studies of the British Empire, nationhood, the Atlantic or European community, and transatlanticism. We treat genre studies of fiction and poetry; thematic studies of Romantic subjectivity, Romanticism as field or canon, nineteenth-century afterlives, and single-author projects. We conclude with biographies, overviews, and reference texts. Having chosen to treat the century qua century rather than as two discrete periods, we have not categorically separated Romantic and Victorian books, as have reviewers in the past, even though we have grouped together certain books with a specific concentration on Romantic topics.

I

The largest group of interdisciplinary books this year centered on the discourses of science, especially those of medicine and the body and technology. Perhaps the most important is William A. Cohen’s ambitious new book, Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses, which reads Victorian writers as decentering coherent notions of the self by drawing from and contributing to an ongoing debate about scientific bodily materialism. Cohen proposes that the fictional, poetic, and journalistic nineteenth-century body—a permeable sensory body always in process, “located in the juncture between the psychic and the physiological”—anticipates theories of writers such as Maurice Merleau Ponty, Georges Bataille, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (p. 133). Although Cohen views this Victorian structure as locatable in emergent discourses of physiological psychology and evolutionary biology, he resists viewing authors as “appropriat[ing] scientific models” and
sees literary and scientific discourses, instead, as “convergen[t]” writings about ideas of embodiment. Cohen organizes a series of elegant, even brilliant, close readings of little-read texts by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins around the physiological senses that mediate self and world—the eye, skin, face; the soul—and he largely convinces us of the Victorian writer’s protomodernism, or postmodernism, his or her anticipation of posthumanism. Cohen’s exemplary chapter on Trollope’s serialized tale of imperial tactility and degradation, “The Banks of the Jordan,” historicizes the text alongside the Thames’s Great Stink and the Sepoy rebellion, as he articulates literary text, historical situation, poststructural reading, and critical theory with astonishing aplomb.

Two of the nineteenth century’s most able and prolific scholars published important volumes on the discourses of science and culture this year, one retrospective and summative, the other highly innovative. Realism, Ethics, and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science reprints George Levine’s revised and updated essays and previously unpublished material. Together, he says, these chapters “constitute a set of related explorations” into Victorian epistemological inquiry about scientific objectivity and a religiously informed morality, about the possibility of knowing and sympathizing, about realistic fiction’s dedication to “truth-telling,” to secularization, and to ethical understanding of the world (pp. ix, viii). Eschewing postmodern critical modes of negative hermeneutics, Levine reads nineteenth-century fiction and science with an almost Victorian earnestness. He begins with George Eliot’s and George Henry Lewes’s efforts to implicate scientific empiricism and literary realism so as to assume the “ultimate unreality” of discontinuity and tentatively to affirm an “intuited but largely verifiable reality” that is ideal, ethical, and moral (p. 32). His section on Victorian scientific debates about religion, naturalistic explanation, and the existence of God by thinkers as diverse as Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, John Tyndall, W. K. Clifford, T. H. Huxley, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin revisits half a century of humanistic inquiry about science; the section on ethics and secularism, on realism in William Makepeace Thackeray’s fiction, and on agency in Dickens’s asks us to admit and then put aside poststructural demystifications so as to reencounter realism’s power and conceptual usefulness. Despite one curmudgeonly and several slight chapters, this magisterial book pays fitting tribute to the career of a leading scholar of Victorian literature, science, and culture.