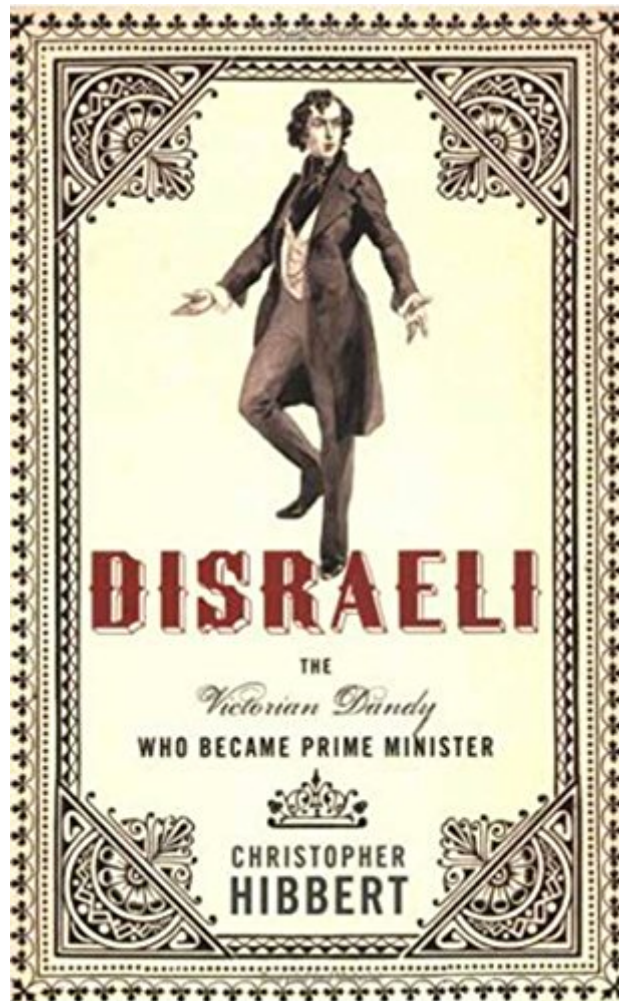




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Disraeli: The Victorian Dandy Who Became Prime Minister



Synopsis

To Thomas Carlyle he was "not worth his weight in cold bacon," but, to Queen Victoria, Benjamin Disraeli was "the kindest Minister" she had ever had and a "dear and devoted friend." In this masterly biography by England's "outstanding popular historian" (A.N. Wilson), Christopher Hibbert reveals the personal life of one of the most fascinating men of the nineteenth century and England's most eccentric Prime Minister. A superb speaker, writer, and wit, Disraeli did not intend to be a politician. Born into a family of Jewish merchants, Disraeli was a conspicuous dandy, constantly in debt, and enjoyed many scandalous affairs until, in 1839, he married an eccentric widow twelve years older than him. As an antidote to his grief at his wife's death in 1872, he threw himself into politics becoming Prime Minister for the second time in 1874, much to the Queen's delight.

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Customer Reviews

I have read other books by Hibbert, but this one gets a little boring with passages from Disraeli's letters saying the same thing over and over. He was definitely an egomaniac.

A well written story about a politician of the 19th century . Disraeli was an interesting person among many average politicians. The book helps to understand Queen Victoria in her later years and the influence he had on her views. A very interesting book.

I only knew Disraeli was a Prime Minister under Queen Victoria. This book is thought provoking as one learns about his entire life and wonders where his great abilities came from. He masked his genius with a foppish exterior. I would recommend this biography to anyone interested in British politics or the 19th century.

A miserably rendered biography of one of the most complex men in British history. Hibbert writes from within his comfortable, unexamined cell of "Britishness." He superficially dismisses Disraeli's Jewish upbringing with a wave of the hand, showing not a whit of insight or interest into how it may have affected Disraeli's adult behavior--his choices of dandyism, novel writing, and even his peculiarly powerful oratory. Hibbert just neatly fits Disraeli into categories he, Hibbert, pulls out of his own experience from within what's normal and usual in British life. Moreover, the book quotes huge, unedited swaths not only of Disraeli's letters and journals (somewhat defensible) but also from other recent biographers. So it reads like the work of an undergraduate. Ultimately, Hibbert is not at all inquisitive about what led this man of many and great parts to find such a singular way to live, and to succeed in what, in the book's only success, we see was a terribly hostile social environment for a Jew (populated by powerful anti-Semites like Carlyle and Dickens, Trollope, etc.). This is poorly done work.

An embarrassing and lazy pastiche of quotes from Disraeli's correspondence woven with an old fashioned snobbish viewpoint. There is no historical context and no discussion of what made Disraeli the important figure he was. Disraeli comes off as a self-serving, superficial and useless fop, lusting after high-class recognition. This book should have been rejected in manuscript. Whatever reputation Mr. Hibbert may have had, it is vitiated by this piece of sophomoric drivel.

Mr. Hibbert strings together quotes from letters written by Disraeli and other sources to tell a social history of this great personality of the age of Queen Victoria. Readers seeking a political biography, or at even some basic historical context for the daily life of this politician/author, will seek in vain. Best for those wanting insights into how the rich and powerful (including the good Queen) of the

time whiled away their insipid days. The saving grace to this book is the many examples--mostly from Disraeli's pen--it provides of that era's beautiful use of the written English language.

This is not so much a biography as an itinerary. Benjamin Disraeli went to a country house in High Bascombe-on-Boring, the seat of Lord Irrelevant Nobody, and his wife, the daughter of Viscount Who Cares? and the cousin of the mistress of the architect of another country house Disraeli visited ten years later. Oh, and he was vain and self-promoting, but gave great speeches. Or so he says, in his letters, which (as noted in the other reviews) appear to be the author's exclusive sources. We don't know what they were about, but, boy, did he ever think they were great! I don't know what the author thought, either, about Disraeli, or why he wrote such a book. What puzzles me, and what I have yet to figure out, is, who is the intended audience? Who would ever want an utterly non-political book about Benjamin Disraeli? His only interest to posterity -- which is substantial yet ignored here -- is as a politician and statesman. Everything else -- and especially his travelogue and endless fetes with foreign dignitaries -- is unworthy of our attention. This is an astonishingly lazy book by a writer who apparently only wanted to add another impressive title to his bibliography. Fine. But leave us out of it.

As those before me have said, DONT BOTHER. It's sad that so great an author as Christopher Hibbert was allowed by his publisher to put out this book which is just a rehash of a book he wrote about Disraeli 30 years ago. Except that mostly it's with a lot of additional material that is only excerpt from letters he wrote and those written to him. Soooo much of the book is wasted on discussions of people who meant nothing to him in his later life and seem like nothing but fill. If this was a student paper it would fail. There is a very good short bio by Edgar Feuchtwanger, and two monstrous volumes (over 700 pages) by Robert Lord Blake, and Stanley Weintraub.

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