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# OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR: ON THE NATURE OF FICTIONAL RETURNS TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to explore the recent boom of neo-Victorian narratives in today's literary and mass culture production and to analyse the nature of these fictional returns to the nineteenth century. The paper comments on the global nature of the trend, which seems to transcend the British context and resonate within the wider postmodern cultural framework. The approaches taken by neo-Victorian texts have been very diverse, as have critical reactions to them, ranging from revisionary narratives seeking to unearth marginal voices previously absent from the Victorian text to playful reinventions of well-known figures or tropes highlighting their own artificiality. What most of them share is the desire to revisit and reassess the predominant notions of the Victorian held today and to investigate the potential investment of contemporary cultural discourse in the continuation or discontinuation of such representations.*

**Key words:** *neo-Victorian, Victorian, postmodernism, mirror, adaptation, intertextuality*

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The last two decades have been marked by a resurgence of interest in the nineteenth century, its literature and literary figures, its tropes and recurrent themes, its cultural values and practices and the questions of its enduring influence on the present. Even though literary returns to the Victorian era are far from new, since the beginning of the 1990s the sheer volume of literary and film revisions and rewritings has inspired critical discussions on the nature and source of this fascination. Sarah Waters' trilogy on lesbian love in the Victorian age which has met with roaring public interest and critical acclaim, novels by Michel Faber and A. S. Byatt, the various literary afterlives of *Jane Eyre* and even the controversial Dickens World theme park in Chatham, UK all pose notable examples. The phenomenon has inspired the rise of neo-Victorian studies as an academic field in its own right, and in 2008 a journal of the same name was launched in order to provide a forum for the debate on the ways the nineteenth century is reworked and refracted through various contemporary lenses. In addition, Rodopi started a series of volumes theorising different aspects of the neo-Victorian in 2010, with three volumes out so far and another one due.

The fascination of the contemporary mind with the nineteenth century goes beyond the scope of literary or theoretical exploration. In fact, it is in popular culture as much as in critical debates that the Victorian has been reimagined and recast, if not more. Some of the key literary works of the nineteenth century, not necessarily from the British literary context, have been adapted for the cinema or featured in TV productions. Film producers have also focussed on representing major Victorian figures, fictional or biographical, or simply employing Victorian settings or tropes. Since the turn of the millennium, audiences worldwide have enjoyed *Dorian Gray*, the screen version of Wilde's novel (dir. Oliver Parker, 2009), two Sherlock Holmes movies (dir. Guy Ritchie, 2009 and 2011), *From Hell* (dir. Albert and Allen Hughes, 2001), inspired by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's 1999 graphic novel dealing with Jack the Ripper, *Sweeney Todd: Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (dir. Tim Burton, 2007), based on a murderer figure from Victorian penny narratives and adapted from a Broadway musical, *The Prestige* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2006) and *The Illusionist* (dir. Neil Burger, 2006), both relying on the tropes of illusion and stage magic, and the list just goes on. The Queen herself was made the protagonist of one such production in *Young Victoria* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2009). Most of these productions have been hugely successful on a global scale.

The popularity of the neo-Victorian can be seen as part of a wider proliferation of historical fiction set in other periods,

where notable examples include Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell novels and their double Booker scoop, or the long line of films centring on the life of Queen Elizabeth I, to name but a few from the British context. Nevertheless, we rarely speak of the neo-Tudor genre, while the neo-Victorian has been widely terminologically and critically theorized. It is also important to stress the relatively recent nature of this boom. Even though the direct precursors of the trend date back to the sixties with Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), and, more broadly speaking, the earliest engagements with the Victorian legacy can be found within modernist reactions to such legacy, only recently did the neo-Victorian rise to prominence in such a manner as to merit entire conferences and university courses devoted to it, as well as the publications previously mentioned.

This lengthy outline of different manifestations of the neo-Victorian and the interest they have provoked is meant to call attention to its special status and its peculiar nature. One of the key questions raised by critics theorizing the neo-Victorian is why this period in particular holds such an attraction for the contemporary. Why is there a need to return to the Victorian in the first place and what is the precise nature of this return? After modernist reactions against Victorian belief in linear progress, positivism and rationalism, after the substitution of Victorian optimism for modernist despair, and with postmodernist emphasis on narrative dissolution, the loss of the real and the relative nature of all experience and truth, it might strike one as odd that authors and readers alike should turn to the "loose baggy monsters", in Henry James' phrase, and their seemingly retrograde narrative styles and treatment of reality. Neo-Victorian novels frequently reproduce the Victorian model in terms of length, structure and narrative conventions, spanning over hundreds of pages divided into books and chapters, and the time investment necessary might seem a potential deterrent to today's audiences. In addition, such fascination with the (allegedly) prim Victorians and their problematic notions about sexuality and gender or views of race and empire might seem unlikely and at odds with today's (allegedly) liberal position on these issues. On the other hand, it might also seem that the appeal of the neo-Victorian lies precisely in the fact that it provides a return to clear-cut categories questioned in postmodern narratives and a break from postmodernist relativism in favour of earlier, more traditional narrative modes, presumably to be used as a kind of anchor in an increasingly destabilized turn-of-the-millennium world. If this were the case, the neo-Victorian would provide little more than an outlet for nostalgia and would also potentially indicate tacit agreement with the potentially problematic aspects

of the Victorian world view – its attitudes to gender, sexuality, class, race and empire – for the sake of period fetishism. Indeed, reproducing the period only at the level of easily marketable kitsch aesthetic has come under attack more than once.<sup>1</sup>

Most critics agree, however, that the neo-Victorian genre amounts to more than an appreciation of the Victorian aesthetic or disinterested historical exploration. They also emphasise the difficulty in determining the boundaries of the genre or offering a viable definition for it. As Marie-Louise Kohlke states in the inaugural issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies*,<sup>2</sup> the term is understood in the broadest possible sense to extend beyond the immediate temporal or national scope of Victoria's reign (1837-1901) and include the whole of nineteenth century as well as other national contexts. Critics like Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010) emphasise, however, that not all texts set in the Victorian period are necessarily neo-Victorian, excluding those that do not *critically engage* with the idea of “the Victorian” and which simply recycle stereotypical assumptions about the period.<sup>3</sup> As opposed to such narratives, neo-Victorian fiction is markedly self-conscious and engages in the processes of adaptation and appropriation with the view to exploiting their subversive potential. Such fiction repeatedly challenges received (and potentially erroneous) notions about the Victorian age and values, disrupting the primacy of existing narratives and the objectivity of their representations. This is particularly significant since “Victorian” has entered the everyday English lexicon, becoming somewhat of a buzzword meant to suggest, mostly derisively, certain attitudes typically associated with the period, such as prudishness, high morality or excessive conventionality.<sup>4</sup> The question is how to determine which attitudes can be *typically* associated with the period and therefore included in this sense of the word, and the neo-Victorian project is insistent on asking it.

The subversive potential of the neo-Victorian as well as its relationship to postmodernism have proven to be a bone of

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1 Critic Mark Llewellyn cites Kate Flint, “Why Victorian?: Response” as an apt example.

2 Kohlke M. L., Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1, 2008, pp. 1-18, p. 2. 30 January 2013. E-journal, available at: [www.neovictorianstudies.com/past\\_issues/Autumn2008/NVS%201-1%20M-Kohlke.pdf](http://www.neovictorianstudies.com/past_issues/Autumn2008/NVS%201-1%20M-Kohlke.pdf).

3 Heilmann A. and Llewellyn M., *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*, Basingstoke 2010, p. 4.

4 The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives the following definition of the Victorian in this sense: “[r]esembling or typified by the attitudes attributed to the Victorian era; esp. prudish, morally strict; old-fashioned, outdated.” *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Sixth edition, Volume 2, Oxford 2007, p. 3528.

contention among the critics, who have both criticised the genre as derivative, predictable and indulgent in cheap nostalgic allure, and praised its revisionary practices that open up new spaces for the marginalised, question the authority of the Victorian original and deconstruct its values. The genre has been interpreted both as an example of postmodern subversion of master narratives and a neo-conservative return to those narratives. The relationship with the Victorian literary and cultural heritage has also been the subject of heated debate. The neo-Victorian is said both to pay homage to its grand Victorian ancestry and rebel against it. Christian Gutleben has been particularly critical of the genre, dismissing it as “redundant” and arguing that the radical potential of representing non-normative protagonists has been blunted through overuse and is therefore no longer radical.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that neo-Victorian writing runs the risk of descending into clichéd representations (both visually and ideologically) and that certain tropes have been repeatedly recast and reimagined since the genre’s inception (such as the fallen woman), it has also been observed that it provides representational spaces hitherto unavailable. Samantha Carroll praises the neo-Victorian for its focus on the previously invisible members of the Victorian (and our own?) society and sees it as invaluable in securing positive representative models for the marginalised and therefore a potential source of social change. Kohlke also contends that the genre “may yet prove instrumental in interrogating, perhaps even changing, current attitudes and influencing historical consciousness in the future”.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the best of neo-Victorian fiction seeks to actively engage with the contentious issues of the period rather than simply reproduce them. Quite tellingly, Jean Rhys’ novel, which is seen as one of the urtexts of the neo-Victorian genre, is also a seminal text of postcolonial fiction. Much like postcolonial writing, neo-Victorian fiction is often concerned with writing back to the nineteenth century and bringing the previously socially marginalised, the invisible and the oppressed to the fore. Victorian ideas on gender, family and sexuality have proven a fertile ground for literary revision, and the neo-Victorian mode has been particularly of interest to women writers who wish to reclaim the female experience or write women back into history. Alternative histories that aim to include queer voices also make

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5 Gutleben, qtd. in Carroll S., Putting the ‘Neo’ Back into Neo-Victorian: The Neo-Victorian Novel as Postmodern Revisionist Fiction, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 3:2, 2010, pp. 172-205, 192. 30 January 2013. E-journal, available at [www.neovictorianstudies.com/past\\_issues/3-2%202010/NVS%203-2-8%20S-Carroll.pdf](http://www.neovictorianstudies.com/past_issues/3-2%202010/NVS%203-2-8%20S-Carroll.pdf).

6 Kohlke M. L., op. cit., pp. 10.

up a significant portion of the genre and Sarah Waters' writing is a case in point, not only by including the lesbian experience, but making it central to the story. However, attempts to redress historical wrongs, give voice to the voiceless or recreate the lives of othered Victorians cannot fully account for the widespread interest in the genre, or in this particular period for that matter. What is more, not all neo-Victorian texts seem interested in illuminating the inequalities or social injustices of the nineteenth century. The drive of the neo-Victorian does not simply lie in the desire to "correct" the nineteenth century, and while many of the texts written in the genre are indeed revisionary in this sense, not all of them are.

The status of fictional returns to the nineteenth century is further complicated by the fact that they often unearth disturbing similarities with the present moment. There is in these narratives an ambivalent sense of continuity as well as discontinuity with the Victorian period, and it is precisely this tension that is explored in much of the creative and critical work in the field. The idea that there is an ancestral link between the Victorian and the contemporary age is at the forefront of such explorations and might explain why the Victorian *Bildungsroman* proves so attractive for much of neo-Victorian exploration. For similar reasons, neo-Victorian fiction often explores the themes of ancestry and heritage, family histories and generational shifts, traumas from the past that continue to plague the present, indicating that this link exists on the personal as well as the social level. The neo-Victorian is seen as an act of cultural memory, all the while highlighting the unreliable nature of memory and its susceptibility to misinterpretation and distortion. Haunting and spectrality also appear as recurrent tropes, where personal and cultural ghosts of the past come to haunt the contemporary. In the words of Simon Joyce, "[i]t is tempting to infer from [various comparisons of the Victorian age with the present] a kind of Victorian vampire that has suddenly reawakened to haunt Britain after a century's rest – except that such positings of an essential and unbroken connection with the past appeared throughout the twentieth century as well."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, since Victoria's death in 1901, or since December 1910, when "human character changed", in the words of Virginia Woolf, and Britain shifted to modernism, Victorian cultural practices and social policies have been repeatedly under examination and have regularly appeared in public discourse, not only in literature or art, but also in politics and the social arena. In 1980s, differing attitudes toward "Victorian values" served to

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7 Joyce S., *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, Athens 2007, p. 3.

define the opposing politics of Margaret Thatcher and Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock. Extolled by Thatcher as a model of progress and prosperity, they were disparaged by Kinnock as synonymous with poverty, misery and social inequality.<sup>8</sup> These opposing representations indicate that the interpretation of the Victorian will inevitably depend on the agenda of the interpreter. As a result, many critics have observed that the nature of the neo-Victorian reveals as much about the time it is created in as the period it seeks to reimagine, and that its primary role lies in exploring how various received notions about “the Victorian” illuminate present-day issues.

It has been further argued that the turn of the millennium brought about a slew of transitional anxieties which have much in common with issues plaguing the Victorians, especially in the *fin de siècle* period. It is also true that these issues are of global nature and transcend British national borders. Re-inscription of centre and margin contrasted with neo-colonialism witnessed at the turn of the twentieth century, much of it entailing British/Western military involvement, major shifts in gender roles and the dissolution of stable gender and sexual identities, countered by ever louder anti-reproductive rights proponents, a troubled relationship towards the Orient refracted as War on Terror, ongoing debates over intelligent design and Darwinian evolution, increasing wealth disparity, a technological and digital revolution mirroring the industrial revolution of the Victorian age and the accompanying concerns: all of these point to a troubled historical and socio-political moment that reiterates much of Victorian unresolved anxieties. This implies that an understanding of Victorian concerns and the ways they were attempted to deal with might be a means of coping with similar concerns in the present. As Alexia Bowler and Jessica Cox have suggested, one of the attractions of the neo-Victorian is that it provides an arena where these insecurities can be explored and potentially resolved from a safe distance.<sup>9</sup> The tendency of the genre to focus on trauma and to represent the nineteenth century as essentially traumatic can therefore be said to stem from the perception of the present as such, and to be engendered by the transitional nature of the period we live in.

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8 More recently, the “Big Society” voluntary services scheme proposed by PM David Cameron’s administration has been variously attacked and defended as reminiscent both of Victorian policies and of Thatcher.

9 Bowler A. and Cox J., Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century: Revisiting, Revising and Rewriting the Past, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 2:2, 2009/2010, pp. 1-17, p. 10. 30 January 2013. E-journal, available at: [www.neovictorianstudies.com/past\\_issues/Winter2009-2010/NVS%202-2-1%20A-Bowler%20&%20J-Cox.pdf](http://www.neovictorianstudies.com/past_issues/Winter2009-2010/NVS%202-2-1%20A-Bowler%20&%20J-Cox.pdf).

These critical discussions frequently employ the metaphor of the looking glass or speak of neo-Victorian novels as “reflections” or “refractions” of the Victorian, where the neo-Victorian is conceived as a kind of textual mirror, which continually plays on the ideas of similarity and difference between the past and the present, and in which “our own experiences, *though necessarily distorted*, are nevertheless reflected” (my emphasis).<sup>10</sup> Joyce also discusses the mirror metaphor and even uses it in the title of his study, *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, explaining that “we never really encounter “the Victorians” themselves but a mediated image like the one we get when we glance into our rearview mirrors while driving. The image usefully condenses the paradoxical sense of looking forward to see what is behind us, which is the opposite of what we do when we read history in order to figure out the future. It also suggests something of the inevitable distortion that accompanies any mirror image, whether we see it as resulting from the effect of political ideology, deliberate misreading, exaggeration, or the understandable simplification of a complex past.”<sup>11</sup>

The mirror is also a telling metaphor from a Lacanian perspective, indicating that the neo-Victorian phenomenon is perceived as a watershed moment for the present time and for the formation of its identity and its cultural values. What is more, the neo-Victorian mirror might reflect not only present-day anxieties, but project present-day fantasies and unlicensed desires as well. Kohlke has noted that the genre “demonstrates a prurient penchant for revelling in indecency and salaciousness, as well as exposing past iniquities.”<sup>12</sup> She calls this elsewhere “literary striptease”<sup>13</sup>, “sexsation”<sup>14</sup> and “wet dream of the Victorian age”<sup>15</sup>, to represent how these narratives frequently deliberately tease the reader and promise a peek at the secret history of Victorian sexuality. These are not meant simply to offer a corrected version of the Victorians, but to provide an uncensored and presumably more “authentic” rendition of the age, one that reveals its dark underside. The Victorian is seen as possessed of a dark, sensational secret, hence the neo-Victorian fascination

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10 Ibid., p. 3.

11 Joyce S., op. cit., p. 4.

12 Kohlke M. L., op. cit., p. 5.

13 Kohlke M. L., *The Neo-Victorian Sexsation: Literary Excursions into the Nineteenth Century Erotic*, in: *Probing the Problematics: Sex and Sexuality*, eds. Kohlke M. L. and Orza L., Oxford 2008, pp. 345-356, 345. 30 January 2013. Available at: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/publishing-files/idp/eBooks/ptp%202.2.pdf>.

14 Ibid., passim.

15 Ibid., p. 352.

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with representing the criminal, sexual and otherwise sensational in the Victorian and its frequent flirting with gothic, detective or sensation narrative modes. However, the raunchy nature of much of neo-Victorian rewritings and their interest in the themes of pornography, prostitution, sexual trafficking or incest is not simply a rediscovery of illicit Victorian sexual practices; the over-sexualisation of the neo-Victorian can be seen as ironic commentary on the increasing sexualisation of contemporary Western culture. Kohlke argues that “our fascination with the Victorian erotic seems to derive largely from depictions of such practices as child prostitution and sexual slavery, or of the paradox of unchecked libertinism and wilfully maintained sexual ignorance. We extract politically incorrect pleasure from what now appears comic, perverse, or ethically unimaginable as a focus of desire. We enjoy neo-Victorian fiction in part to feel debased or outraged, to revel in degradation, reading for defilement. By projecting illicit and unmentionable desires onto the past, we conveniently reassert our own supposedly enlightened stance towards sexuality and social progress.”<sup>16</sup>

In other words, neo-Victorian insistence on sex plays up to and thus exposes the reader’s voyeuristic expectations. For instance, in the opening pages of Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) the reader is invited into the world of Victorian prostitution and introduced to the character of Sugar, known for her readiness to fulfil *any* desire, however perverse or degrading, and thereby becomes aligned with Sugar’s customers. Kohlke also notes that the Victorian era is constructed as the site of projected sexual fantasies of excess, much like the Orient was constructed as the Victorian’s mysterious, seductive Other.<sup>17</sup>

The mirror metaphor also alludes to the self-awareness and self-referentiality often exhibited in neo-Victorian texts, to their rich intertextuality, palimpsestuous nature and diverse adaptive practices, and their frequent self-ironic stance. Neo-Victorian adaptations frequently openly advertise themselves as such, comment on the original text and the differences in the two versions, or address the reader and warn against their own unreliable nature (“Watch your step”, the catchphrase of *The Crimson Petal* is meant primarily as a word of caution to the reader). Despite adopting many of the Victorian narrative styles, neo-Victorian narratives greatly rely on the play of meaning between the original text and its contemporary re-telling, much of it stemming from subtle or striking alterations in the adopted plots, characters or narrative conventions. Intertextuality here

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16 Ibid., p. 346.

17 Ibid., p. 352.

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is understood in its broadest terms, and intertextual allusions extend beyond the literary and include cultural practices, like the late-Victorian interest in mesmerism and stage magic, significant locations, such as Millbank prison in Waters' *Affinity*, or the historic street of Cheyne Walk, some-time home to an array of prominent Victorian figures, real-life Victorian figures recast as fictional characters, such as the protagonist of Michèle Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen*, based on the historical figure of Victorian medium Florence Cook, or Nikola Tesla in Nolan's *The Prestige*, or aesthetic movements of the period, such as the inclusion of pre-Raphaelite motifs. Not only do these references anchor the text in familiar period detail, but they also raise questions about the selection of detail to be included and its interpretation, about the need for such anchorage and whether it adds to the text's authenticity or points to its constructed nature.

A potentially more truthful, complete version of the Victorian, the neo-Victorian has also been dismissed as a Baudrillardian fake which attracts its readers with a promise of the "real" Victorian experience, but delivers only a construct based on the repetition and accumulation of essentially empty signifiers of the Victorian raised to the status of the real. The endless adaptations and reconfigurations are seemingly meant to add another, previously absent layer to the representation of the Victorian, which would finally help us arrive at the ultimate truth about the Victorians and a complete understanding of them (and, by extension, us). Instead, the arrival at this truth is continually deferred and remains forever elusive, hidden in the dense network of adaptations. The multiplicity of perspectives and versions of the past, where any is as reliable as the other, probes the epistemological boundaries of the Victorian glimpsed in the texts of the nineteenth century as well as those created at the turn of the twentieth century. The "real" Victorian experience, promised by some of the neo-Victorian narratives (or their marketing departments) remains as potentially diverse as the texts produced about it, and ultimately beyond reach.

The search for truth and the fascination with the sensational are also reflected in the fact that detective fiction has been particularly appealing to writers working in the neo-Victorian mode and can be said to mirror our wider cultural fascination with the figure of the detective and its many reconfigurations in popular culture (seen in the abundance of popular detective shows, forensic, scientific or otherwise). Famous detectives and famous murderers alike have been repeatedly creatively engaged with. Particularly interesting are those narratives in which some of the period's great authors re-emerge as sleuths delving into the Victorian criminal underworld. Gyles Brandreth's series

featuring Oscar Wilde as a detective solving murder mysteries, and Dan Simmons' *Drood* which recasts Dickens and Wilkie Collins as Holmes and his sidekick seem to suggest that the search for truth signified by the detective quest is inextricably bound with literature and the process of writing. Furthermore, these novels are detective stories-cum-biographies, as they occasionally step away from the criminal case at hand and slip into biographical narratives, providing anecdotal detail from the author's life or casual commentary on various social issues of the time (such as the reference to the Rational Dress Society campaigning against body-deforming Victorian fashion in *Oscar Wilde and A Game Called Murder*), or exploring serious issues such as Dickens' lifelong affair with Ellen Ternan. The authors of these narratives play detectives as much as their literary protagonists, trying to pry into the secret life of well-known figures and unearth contrasting or otherwise shocking aspects of their personas. The fantastical adventure of Dickens in the London underworld is given credence by the sharp contrast between his public persona and the reality of his marriage and his affair. Reversely, it suggests that the public persona is as artificial as Dickens the detective.

Another result of such narrative play is interesting blending of different fictional characters and identities. For instance, Dickens in *Drood* and Wilde in the Brandreth novels both necessarily invoke Sherlock Holmes as the archetypal Victorian literary detective, and Wilde's companion in his detective games is no other than Arthur Conan Doyle, thus becoming Wilde's own Dr Watson. In turn, Guy Ritchie's Holmes, played by Robert Downey Jr., provides an alternative to Jeremy Brett's portrayal from Granada's best-loved TV series, and blends the figure of the detective with that of the action hero. Other, more extreme examples of such fictional blending include *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman*, Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's graphic novel from 1999 (further adapted for the screen by dir. Stephen Norrington, 2003), which appropriates a number of figures from Victorian literature, including Mina Harker, Dorian Gray, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hide, and recasts them as superheroes, or *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (dir. Timur Bekmambetov, 2012, also based on a novel) which postulates a secret identity not only for Lincoln as vampire killer, but also for vampires as Confederate soldiers. Such appropriations and imaginative leaps create hybrid works that destabilise the original they reproduce and can be seen as a manifestation of specifically postmodern pastiche practices.

Whether as revisionary texts that recover Victorian lost voices, or playful applications of postmodern literary sampling, neo-

Victorian narratives make powerful statements about the current cultural moment. They reveal an uneasy relationship to the past, which is seen as the site of trauma and violent discrimination, sexual repression or hypocritical morality, as well as the potential source of modern-day cultural practices and identity. These narratives attempt to resolve such tensions and equally rely on selecting and foregrounding elements from the Victorian tradition as on postmodern textual play and polyphony. It is yet to be seen where the Game Called Neo-Victorian will head in the following years or how it will be judged by future generations, but currently it shows no signs of abating and provides a valuable space of creative and critical exploration.

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ПРЕДМЕТИ У ОГЛЕДАЛУ СУ БЛИЖЕ НЕГО  
ШТО ИЗГЛЕДА: ФИКЦИОНАЛНИ ПОВРАТАК У  
ДЕВЕТНАЕСТИ ВЕК

Сажетак

Циљ овог рада јесте да се позабави популарношћу неовикторијанског жанра у савременој књижевности и масовној култури, те да истражи природу таквог фикционалног преиспитивања деветнаестог века. Рад се бави глобалним размерама овог књижевног и културног феномена, будући да он превазилази британске националне оквире и фигурира у ширем културном контексту постмодернизма. Неовикторијански текстови теже да преиспитају владајуће представе о викторијанској епохи и култури, те да истраже у којој се мери савремене друштвене и културне појаве могу тумачити као прихватање или одбацивање викторијанских вредности. Начини на које ови текстови приступају деветнаестом веку разноврсни су колико и реакције на њих и крећу се од ревизионарских нарација, које теже да прикажу гласове маргиналних група одсутне у канонским викторијанским текстовима, до поигравања конвенцијама и поновног осмишљања познатих заплета или ликова, уз наглашавање сопствене непоуздане или конструисане природе. Они нуде нове родне, расне или класне перспективе, те на нов начин приказују женске ликове, хомосексуалне везе или свет криминала. Рад указује на честу употребу метафоре огледала у критичким и креативним текстовима који се баве неовикторијанским жанром, не би ли се показало да тај жанр није проста репродукција ранијих традиција и конвенција, већ и одраз савремених друштвених и културних тензија и дилема, те да су те тензије и дилеме изненађујуће сродне онима које су присутне у викторијанском историјском и културном контексту. Коначно, рад се бави интертекстуалном природом неовикторијанских књижевних и филмских творевина, процесима адаптације викторијанске грађе и поигравања постојећим текстовима или ликовима, те исходима тих процеса.

**Кључне речи:** *неовикторијанско, викторијанско, постмодернизам, огледало, адаптација, интертекстуалност*