Abdelrahman Morshed

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The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism, edited by Brenda Ayres and Sarah E. Maier, is a comprehensive and ambitious contribution to the field of Neo-Victorian studies. Comprising 27 chapters, the volume could be organized thematically into seven core groups that reflect the multi-disciplinary and increasingly global nature of the field. These categories are Hauntology and Spectral Narratives; Media, Adaptation, and Visual Culture; Postcolonialism and Globalization; Biofiction and Literary Reinterpretation; Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Studies; Material Culture and Environmental Perspectives; and Poetry and Neo-Victorian Poetics. This diversity in topics highlights both the thematic coherence and the intellectual range of the collection.

Hauntology, as theorized by Jacques Derrida, permeates several chapters in the handbook, particularly those by Brenda Ayres. In Chapter 2, Ayres addresses the use of spectral motifs in Neo-Victorian ghost stories, arguing that such stories are not simply horror tales, but complex metaphorical engagements with the instability of historical knowledge. For example, she interprets Elizabeth Brooks's *The Whispering House* (2021) as a layered narrative that utilizes the haunted house as a structural and symbolic site of "epistemological decay and recovery" (19). Rather than offering a clear path to truth, the novel embraces ambiguity, allowing the past to "whisper" rather than speak, which challenges the linearity of historical narrative. Riley Sager's *Home Before Dark* (2020), another of Ayres's case studies, furthers this point by offering alternating timelines, revealing how memory, narrative, and trauma intersect to construct a haunted reality, where the "truth remains ever just out of reach" (21).

Ayres deepens her exploration in Chapter 21 through a cinematic case study: Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015). Here, hauntology manifests not only in the ghosts that haunt the film's decaying mansion but in the entire environment, which is described as "visually decomposing under the weight of its own history" (394). The film's narrative circularity in which it begins and ends in the same traumatic space, emphasizes how the past refuses to die, returning in spectral form to claim the present. By invoking Derrida's formulation that "the specter begins by coming back," Ayres suggests that Neo-Victorianism is always already haunted by the unresolved ethical and ideological tensions of the nineteenth century.

Neo-Victorianism thrives in visual media, a point richly explored across five chapters. In Chapter 3, Rachel M. Friars and Connor E. R. DeMerchant dissect representations of Queen Victoria on screen, such as in *The Young Victoria* (2009) and *Victoria & Abdul* (2017). They argue that these portrayals offer more than biographical insight as they also reflect contemporary anxieties about monarchy, gender, and postcolonial memory. In *Victoria & Abdul*, for instance, the exoticization of Abdul serves to critique British imperial nostalgia even as the film remains complicit in certain orientalist tropes. The film's deliberate focus on intimacy and emotion

contrasts sharply with the political aloofness traditionally associated with Queen Victoria, thus engaging in what the authors call "emotional revisionism" (41).

Antonija Primorac's Chapter 4 offers a compelling argument for the legitimacy of screen adaptations as sites of scholarly analysis. She focuses on the 2018 TV series *The Terror*, adapted from Dan Simmons's *The Terror* (2007), which reimagines the doomed Franklin Expedition as a metaphor for imperial pride. Primorac emphasizes how the visual language of the show with its emphasis on desolate landscapes, bodily decay, and eerie silence, highlights themes of racial and ecological exploitation. The series "remediates history through horror," challenging viewers to rethink the colonial narratives embedded in Victorian exploration literature (60) .

Chapter 16, by Anna Maria Jones, turns to graphic novels, including Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999) and Bryan Talbot's *Alice in Sunderland* (2007). Jones highlights how these texts "unmaster the archive" by juxtaposing canonical Victorian figures with countercultural, fantastical, and postmodern narratives. Such works embody a "visual palimpsest" that not only reinterprets history but questions its very legibility (298). The multiplicity of panels, timelines, and genres in these texts mirrors the fragmented and multifaceted nature of Neo-Victorian memory work.

The third thematic group offers a pointed critique of Neo-Victorianism's often Eurocentric tendencies by introducing rigorous postcolonial frameworks. Felipe Espinoza Garrido's Chapter 6 leads this intervention by arguing that many Neo-Victorian texts, while seemingly critical of colonialism, frequently re-center white British perspectives. He uses Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a distinguished text in postcolonial Neo-Victorianism, as an example of a work that successfully challenges the racialized foundations of canonical literature. Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette Cosway not only rewrites Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), but reveals how British literature often erased or exoticized colonial subjects. Garrido critiques the field for embracing this novel as an isolated example while largely ignoring non-Western Neo-Victorian perspectives. He calls for a "methodological decolonization" of the field that prioritizes narratives by, for, and about the formerly colonized (91).

Sutirtho Roy's Chapter 11 complements this critique by examining the subgenre of prehistoric adventure fiction, particularly through works such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Roy explores how modern reinterpretations of these texts, like Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships*, invert colonial tropes, turning imperial exploration into an allegory of ethical failure and mental violence. In contrast to Doyle's original, where dinosaurs and indigenous peoples are "discovered" and categorized, Baxter's narrative presents time and history as fractured and vague, undermining the Victorian urge to classify and control (195).

Martin Danahay's Chapter 26 tackles steampunk, asking whether it should even be considered part of Neo-Victorianism. Danahay argues that while steampunk often fetishizes Victorian technology and style as in *The Difference Engine* (1990) by Gibson and Sterling,

it still engages in serious speculative critiques of history. He proposes a globalized model of steampunk that includes works from Brazil, Japan, and India, offering a more inclusive and critical framework. This thematic group collectively urges Neo-Victorian scholars to expand their geographical and epistemological scope.

The genre of biofiction, explored across several chapters, reflects Neo-Victorianism's fascination with literary celebrity, authorial myth, and historical revisionism. In Chapter 17, Barbara Braid defines biofiction as "the deliberate fictionalization of historical figures with the aim of exposing narrative gaps and ideological distortions in the historical record" (317). She discusses texts such as Emma Tennant's *Heathcliff's Tale* (2005) and James Tully's *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* (1999), noting how these works blur the boundary between biography and invention, often casting well-known authors in sensational or psychologically rich narratives.

Braid's reading of *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* is particularly compelling. She shows how the novel casts Charlotte not only as a writer but also as a potential murderess, reframing her authorship through gothic tropes that reflect Victorian anxieties about female creativity and moral agency. The novel becomes a metafictional commentary on the Brontës' legacy, interrogating how their lives have been canonized and commodified.

In Chapter 8, Brenda Ayres examines Neo-Victorian representations of childhood, focusing on Dickensian tropes. She compares adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *David Copperfield* (1850), arguing that contemporary retellings shift from moral instruction to psychological exploration. For instance, in Armando Iannucci's 2019 film adaptation of *David Copperfield*, the diverse casting and emphasis on humor and resilience reframe Dickens's narrative as one of "cultural plurality rather than social determinism" (137).

Anne-Marie Beller and Claire O'Callaghan's Chapter 13 investigates the afterlives of Elizabeth Siddal, using texts like *Desperate Romantics* (BBC, 2009) and Fiona Mountain's novel *Pale as the Dead* (2002). They argue that Siddal's posthumous identity has become a site of "feminist recuperation and commodification, reflecting ongoing tensions between muse and maker, objectification and authorship" (241).

Neo-Victorianism's commitment to recovering marginalized voices is particularly visible in its treatment of gender and sexuality. In Chapter 24, Rachel M. Friars analyzes lesbian identity and representation through a range of texts including Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and Emma Donoghue's *Frog Music* (2014). Friars underscores how these narratives use Victorian settings to interrogate performative femininity, same-sex desire, and the limits of archival recovery. *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, centers on cross-dressing and theatricality, destabilizing binary gender categories while reasserting the importance of lesbian history. Friars writes, "the performative becomes the political," emphasizing how historical costume and stagecraft create spaces of queer resistance (451).

Chapter 19, by Brooke Cameron, focuses on Peter Ackroyd's *The Limehouse Golem*, where female agency is enacted through violence and mystery. The narrative's central character, Lizzie Cree, becomes a symbol of Victorian anxieties around female sexuality, literacy, and criminality. Cameron argues that Lizzie's final transformation from accused criminal to theatrical figure illustrates how Neo-Victorian texts explore the intersection of "spectacle, gender, and justice" (359).

Sophie Franklin, in Chapter 18, shifts the focus to racialized bodies in narratives such as Sara Collins' *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (2019). Franklin's analysis highlights how depictions of slavery, violence, and bodily autonomy challenge romanticized visions of the Victorian era. The protagonist, a Jamaican-born servant accused of murder, narrates her own story, destabilizing both the legal and historical record. Franklin concludes that such narratives enact a "counter-archive" that emphasizes trauma and testimony over institutional authority (341).

Neo-Victorianism's attention to material culture and its symbolic significance is central to the sixth thematic group. In Chapter 20, Eckart Voigts addresses Neo-Victorian representations of dirt, waste, and filth, examining their historical and metaphorical resonance. Voigts argues that Victorian anxieties about hygiene were deeply classed and gendered, reflecting societal concerns about order, decay, and purity. He reads Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) as an influential Neo-Victorian text that revisits these themes with brutal specificity. The novel's protagonist, Sugar, operates in a world filled with sensory excess such as fog, grime, and bodily fluids. These substances, Voigts contends, are not incidental details but ideological tools: "Faber's filth articulates a cultural memory of Victorianism as a space of repression, rupture, and contamination" (377).

In Chapter 14, Brenda Ayres examines the symbolism of gloves in Victorian and Neo-Victorian narratives. In Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), gloves serve as markers of class division and sexual tension. Ayres argues that gloves are figurative, representing not only touch but also concealment as in what is socially acceptable to touch, who may be touched, and under what circumstances. The glove, she writes, "embodies the paradox of exposure and protection, intimacy and inhibition" (255). This reading transforms a seemingly mundane object into a site of contested cultural meaning.

The engagement with material culture extends to settings and architecture as well. Neo-Victorian texts often emphasize interior spaces such as drawing rooms, parlors, and asylums, not merely as backdrops but as narrative agents. These interiors are imbued with historical trauma and psychic resonance. In Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015), for example, the house bleeds literal red clay from its walls, materializing the rot of aristocratic lineage and the horrors of inheritance. Thus, material culture in the Neo-Victorian mode is not static decor but active and ideological.

Though often underrepresented in Neo-Victorian criticism, poetry offers a unique lens for engaging with Victorian legacies. In Chapter 15, John Morton addresses this scholarly oversight by examining how contemporary poets rework Victorian forms, figures, and themes. He argues that Neo-Victorian poetry constitutes a crucial site of intertextual and ideological dialogue, where historical voice is not only echoed but actively reconfigured. Morton defines the form as "verse that revisits Victorian themes, forms, and figures, but through the lens of contemporary ethics and aesthetics" (275).

He analyzes Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999) as a quintessential Neo-Victorian poetic intervention. In poems such as "Mrs. Darwin" and "Anne Hathaway," Duffy reframes male-dominated histories through the voices of women sidelined in traditional narratives. By adopting dramatic monologue and ironic parody, techniques rooted in Victorian poetry, Duffy gives voice to female perspectives historically marginalized. Morton describes this method as "archival in method but subversive in purpose," where Duffy retrieves and repurposes the cultural past to critique patriarchal historiography (278).

Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) is another key text Morton evaluates, particularly for its engagement with settler colonialism and female subjectivity. Atwood's fragmented verse mimics Moodie's nineteenth-century prose, only to break it apart and expose its ideological gaps. Morton argues that Atwood's poetry performs a "textual haunting," where Victorian discourses re-emerge to be interrogated, revised, or undone through poetic form (278). This reflexive mode of poetry, he suggests, enables a powerful condensation of historical critique.

By incorporating poetic voices and expanding genre boundaries, Morton's chapter urges Neo-Victorian scholars to take poetry seriously as a form that both preserves and dismantles the Victorian archive. His contribution opens the door to interdisciplinary conversations between literary history and poetic innovation.

The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism is an informative and multifaceted contribution to the field, both in breadth and depth. One of the handbook's greatest strengths lies in its methodological diversity. Contributors employ a range of critical lenses, including hauntology, adaptation theory, postcolonialism, feminism, queer theory, and ecocriticism to demonstrate that Neo-Victorianism is not a monolith but a heterogeneous field. In addition, The integration of textual analysis, media critique, and cultural theory ensures that the volume is equally valuable for literary scholars, cultural historians, and interdisciplinary researchers.

Equally important is the volume's attention to previously marginalized genres and voices. The inclusion of poetry, graphic novels, and global perspectives marks a significant move toward inclusivity, both in content and methodology. Chapters like those by Garrido, Morton, and Braid expand the field's horizons, reminding readers that the Victorian past continues to shape and be shaped by present cultural imperatives.