

**Brush and Quill, Painting and Prose:  
Victorian Impressions on Neo-Victorian Surfaces:  
Review of Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell (eds.),  
*Drawing on the Victorians:  
The Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts***

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**Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell (eds.), *Drawing on the Victorians:  
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**A**Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell open their collection *Drawing on the Victorians: The Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts* by observing:

The neo-Victorian boom encompasses all manner of media: numerous Man Booker prize short-listers, such as Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), and Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George* (2005); video games like *American McGee's Alice* (2000) and *American McGee's Alice: Madness Returns* (2011); film and television reboots such as *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), both directed by Guy Ritchie, and the BBC's runaway hit series *Sherlock* (2010–). (p. 6)

Although historical documentary series like *24 Hours in the Past* (2015) and *The Victorian Slum* (2016), science fiction-fantasy shows such as *Sanctuary*

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(2008-2011), and horror series like *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) could be included in Jones and Mitchell's list, it is evident that novel and television adaptations are the dominant focus among proponents of neo-Victorianism. But what is the connection between Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts? Building on Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010) and Janzen Kooistra's *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture* (2011), Jones and Mitchell's innovative and pioneering collection will establish new areas of scholarly debate. Moreover, its focus on "stories and poems, books and periodicals, comics, cartoons, and other ephemera" (p. 11) will enrich discussions on the interplay between the production and reception of Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts and textual images.

Adopting the concept of the palimpsest as the theoretical guide for this volume, Jones and Mitchell begin by exploring both the textual and visual similarities and differences between Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), and John Tenniel's accompanying illustrations. Concentrating on the 'Alice with Hatta and the White King' and the 'Mad Tea Party' scenes, Jones and Mitchell observe:

Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* both gratifies and thwarts the reader's desire for a return to the "original." Likewise, Tenniel's illustrations create tension, both with Carroll's text and with one another, thus highlighting the complexity of image-textual interactions. Taken in toto, Carroll and Tenniel's collaboration in the *Alice* books troubles any assumption of the priority of the written word over graphic representation. (p. 2)

In this discussion of the *Alice* books, Jones and Mitchell provide a reading that moves beyond all too familiar examinations and challenges perceptions regarding the traditional privileging of "the written word over graphic representation". Following this, the editors lay the foundation for the entire collection by stating that

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as works like *Alice in Wonderland* demonstrate, Victorian graphic texts were already doing the layered [...] self-referential, metatextual, and image-textual work that has become the signature of “the neo-Victorian” in our contemporary moment. (pp. 2-4).

As such, this study provides very welcome contributions to research on a variety of Victorian and neo-Victorian written and visual arts, which in neo-Victorian criticism and theory as yet remains comparatively underrepresented.

Accompanied by an informative overview of contemporary definitions and discussions on neo-Victorianism as manifest in art, film, history and literature, this collection is divided into five sections arranged in thematic “pairings” (p. 24) and invites “palimpsestuous readings” (p. 22). In section I: ‘Adaptations’, Brian Maidment and Monika Pietrzak-Franger explore the process of “adapting texts and images across different mediums and across national and linguistic boundaries” (p. 24), and problematise the connection between adaption and source. Focusing on the use of iconography of scientific theory and Spiritualist doctrines, the second pairing of chapters, ‘Picturing the “Cosmic Egg”: The Divine Economy of a Hollow Earth’ and Olivia Plender’s ‘A Stellar Key to the Summerland and the Afterlife of Spiritualist Visual Culture’ and ‘Mixed Media: Olivia Plender’s A Stellar Key to the Summerland and the Afterlife of Spiritualist Visual Culture’, examine the application of illustration ‘to educate or persuade readers’ (p. 25). Following this, the essays in section III; ‘Refiguring Ideologies’, Heidi Kaufman’s ‘A New Order: Reading through Pasts in Will Eisner’s Neo-Victorian Graphic Novel, *Fagin the Jew*’ and Jessica Straley’s ‘The Undying Joke about the Dying Girl: Charles Dickens to Roman Dirge’, discuss the significant role played by graphic texts in challenging and shaping hegemonic social categories by exploring the visual representations of the Jew and the child; figures who “(continue to carry) enormous sociocultural freight” (p. 26). In section IV, ‘Temporal Images’, Linda K. Hughes and Rebecca N. Mitchell consider “graphic presentations of historical progress and of the passage of time” (p. 24). Lastly, ‘Reading Victorian Valentines: Working-Class Women, Courtship, and the Penny Post in *Bow Bells Magazine*’ by Jennifer Phegley and ‘Picturing “Girls Who Read”: Victorian Governesses and Neo-Victorian Shōjo Manga’ by

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Anna Maria Jones, investigate the manner in which Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts were marketed at specific audiences to articulate “theories of readership to their reader” (p. 27). The pairings visible in each section convey an attempt to blur the boundaries between various disciplines, to challenge the negative perceptions of graphic texts, and to reach national and international audiences. Among the chapters presented, ‘The Explicated Image: Graphic “Texts” in Early Victorian Print Culture’ by Maidment and ‘Prefiguring Future Pasta: Imagined Histories in Victorian Poetic-Graphic Texts, 1860-1910’ by Hughes are particularly worthy of mention.

Maidment’s chapter explores the post-Hogarthian heritage of graphic texts. Examining Robert Seymour’s *Sketches* (1831-1834) and Kenny Meadow’s *Heads of the People* (1841), he argues, with an authoritative attention to detail, that Charles Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837) is indebted to Seymour’s *Sketches* and that Meadow’s illustrations were produced as extra-textual illustrations for *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Throughout his discussion, Maidment problematises the relationship between source, adaptation and the narrative developments of image-to-text variations. By considering a number of ways in which the early Victorian “devotion to words” (p. 41) led to a silencing, or smothering, of the emergence of visual narratives in commercial industries, he presents an analysis of a relatively neglected aspect of Victorian publishing trends. As Maidment notes:

Simply put, by the 1830s, the illustrator had already been situated in a less prestigious place in an aesthetic and cultural hierarchy than a novelist, and such differences clearly must have influenced the ways in which illustrations and texts were read and consumed. (p. 42)

Hughes, meanwhile, focuses on examples of illustrated poems that appeared in periodicals from the 1860s to the present-day. In this remarkable chapter, Hughes illustrates that while authors and illustrators of twentieth and twenty first-century comics and graphic novels may not be aware of, or directly inspired by, Victorian poetic graphic texts, the array of similarities between these texts are palimpsestuous. (This point is underlined by Hughes’s chapter being placed alongside Mitchell’s ‘Before and After: *Punch*,

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Steampunk, and Victorian Graphic Narrativity’ in Section IV: Temporal Images.) Offering a cursory survey of *Good Words*, *Once a Week*, *Leisure Hour*, *London Society* and *Magazine of Art*, to name only a few, Hughes reveals a series of complex Victorian representations of gender and sexuality that likewise preoccupy both neo-Victorian practices and modern comic book conventions. Much of the insight and pleasure of the essays in this section stems from the solid and thorough research presented, which is matched by exemplary illustrations.

Peter W. Sinnema’s ‘Picturing the “Comic Egg”: The Divine Economy of a Hollow Earth’ is another incisive chapter, which focuses on the use of graphic representations of metaphysical concepts as a way of encouraging readers to explore differing worldviews. Discussing the “verbal and visual strategies employed to represent radically alternative, cosmological paradigms” (p. 93), Sinnema explores “how the heterodoxy of hollow-earth belief was conceived and championed at the interstice between fanciful imagery and abstruse language [...] by examining three moments in the history of hollow-earth thought” (pp. 93-94). Of the three moments Sinnema examines – namely the formation of “The Koreshan Cosmogony, Edmond Halley’s proposal that the earth’s ‘External Parts [...] may well be reckoned as the Shell, and the Internal as a Nucleus or inner Globe included within” (Halley 1692: 568), and the publication of Captain Adam Seaborn’s *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820) – his analysis of *Symzonia* is exemplary. Highlighting the significance of the front piece of *Symzonia*, Sinnema writes:

It must therefore be interpreted through the double lens of the fictional narrative it prefaces and the cosmological theory it illustrates. First, it is in part a readers’ guide to the novel’s topography, a cartographic supplement to Seaborn’s written accounts. [...] Second, with its clearly demarcated polar openings pierced by invigorating solar and lunar rays, the picture also stands as a prototype for myriad “classic” hollow-earth schemes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These embraced as cosmological doctrine a universe composed of planetary bodies. (p. 108)

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Various interconnected factors contributed to the distribution of Hollow Earth theories, but as Sinnema illustrates, renderings, coupled with literary, metaphysical and pseudo-scientific writings, were used to validate, or support, such fictional narratives. Given the limits of space and the scope of this chapter, the brevity of some areas of discussion is understandable. However, Sinnema's examination may have benefited from a discussion or mention of more well-known texts and illustrations, such as Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864).

Despite the positive aspects of this informative collection there are a number of minor quibbles that detract somewhat from the otherwise insightful series of discussions. Occasionally, due to the volume's "multilayered rather than unified vision" (p. 28), as well as the "methodological multiplicity" (p. 28), the connection between the essays positioned as thematic pairings seems rather tenuous. The collection also employs a concerted level of academic jargon and theoretical terminology, which, at times, makes it appear (too) dense. Given its specialised nature, this is understandable, but while attesting to the level of research conducted by the contributors, it does tend to restrict the volume to a more specialist readership. Given the focus on literary and visual trends, and on the connections between graphics, illustrations and texts, this collection will likely appeal most to students and scholars with an interest in media, visual history and cultural studies. These issues aside, the coupling of textual materials with a varied and interesting array of illustrations and pictures adds to the richness of this volume. Hence scholars with more general interests in Victorianism and neo-Victorianism will also find several original and well-conceived essays in this often thought-provoking collection.

### **Bibliography**

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