Neo-Victorianism's Queer Potentiality:
Livability and Intersectional Imaginaries

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The body is constituted through perspectives it cannot inhabit; someone else sees our face in a way that we cannot and hears our voice in a way that we cannot. We are in this sense – bodily – always over there, yet here, and this dispossession marks the sociality to which we belong. Even as located beings, we are always elsewhere, constituted in a sociality that exceeds us. This establishes our exposure and our precarity, the ways in which we depend on political and social institutions to persist. (Butler 2015: 97)

When Sarah Waters's first neo-Victorian novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, was published in 1998, it quickly became a sensational success – quite to the surprise of the author herself, who at the time worried about how "lurid" its premise might have initially appeared, "how improbable, above all how niche" (Waters 2018: n.p.). One of the first best-selling lesbian novels,[1] and staging a blatant queering of the very hallmark of British literature, the Victorian novel, *Tipping the Velvet* was hailed as ground-breaking by readers and critics alike. It not only shifted the lesbian novel away from the margins and into the mainstream of popular fiction, but also popularised a literary approach of queer writing-back to heteronormative historiography, illuminating the struggles, vibrancy, and desires of a diverse community operating in the interstices. Followed by Waters's similarly successful neo-Victorian *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002), *Tipping the Velvet* was the first novel to truly attract readers and scholars alike to the idea of imaginatively (re-)inscribing into accounts of 'the Victorians' queer subjectivities, affects, attachments, crises, and ambitions. Retrospectively, the exhilaration triggered by Waters's neo-Victorian trio bespeaks not only the originality and daring of her writing, but also the extent to which LGBTQIA+ readers previously had been denied historical visibility and life-affirming, affective-sensual self-recognition in a 1990s culture still

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heavily invested in understandings of queerness as failure, pathology, and disease.

Waters's writing, growing out of a PhD in gay and lesbian historical fiction, offered many queer-identifying readers a site for positive emotional investment at a time when queer communities were still reeling from the discrimination and harm levelled at them in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. From 1988 onwards, Section 28 of the Local Government Act explicitly barred local authorities from "intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality or publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" and banned schools from "promot[ing] the teaching [...] of the acceptability of homosexuality" (UK Government n.d.: n.p.). Repealed only in 2000 in Scotland and even later, in 2003, in England and Wales, Section 28 remained in place for fifteen years, silencing by law a wide range of LGBTQIA+ professionals and students on matters pertaining to their gender and/or sexual identity. It also endorsed a culture of homophobic bullying, as any form of intervention into hate crimes might be construed as 'promoting' homosexuality. In addition to controversies over Section 28, in the years surrounding the publication of Waters's first novels, Parliament battled over equalising the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual acts, lowering the latter first from 21 to 18 and then to 16 years, i.e. the age of consent for heterosexuals. Moreover, the motion, coming into force with the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 on January 8, 2001, and only after going through several rounds of rejection in both houses, was the first formal definition of an age of consent for lesbian sexual acts, which previously had not been mentioned in the legislation. It is against this background that Waters advanced a kind of lesbian fiction that was "unafraid to be corny, unafraid to be purple" (Waters 2018: n.p.).

Layered with references to iconic queer texts and informed by scholarly approaches to LGBTQIA+ history, Waters's novels have sparked wide-ranging engagement of diverse readerships within academia and the creative industries. In addition to numerous individual articles, research to this day boasts two edited collections, Kaye Mitchell's *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013) and Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan's *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (2016), as well as one monograph, O'Callaghan's *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics* (2017). Amongst other themes, critics have explored at great length the ways in which Waters's neo-Victorian novels self-consciously engage

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with their own agenda of interrogating normative understandings of history and the power structures of historical discourse (see Armitt and Gamble 2006; Boehm 2011). Critics have further investigated how her texts subvert female confinement and configurations of surveillance through spatial practices (see Arias 2009; Pohl 2013); re-appropriate heteronormative notions of family and domesticity from a queer perspective (see Letissier 2011; Yates 2011: 93-107; O'Callaghan 2014); or rewrite conventionally male-authored and male-directed pornography from and for the female (lesbian) gaze (see O'Callaghan 2015); how they envision a queer phenomenology (see Arias 2017); or "frequently exceed existing literary categories and theoretical paradigms" and negotiate tensions between the politics of lesbian feminism and queer theory more generally (O'Callaghan 2017: 2, also see 1-17).[2]

All three of Waters's neo-Victorian novels have been adapted for the screen, and these adaptations, too, have received ample critical attention. Andrew Davies's takes on *Tipping the Velvet* (2002) and *Affinity* (2008), the former produced and marketed "as a racy curiosity" (Waters 2018: n.p.), were well-received by a largely heterosexual audience, but others rightly viewed these screen versions as reproducing ideological conservatism (see Madsen 2010; Primorac 2018: 158-167). Whereas Aisling Walsh's BBC miniseries of *Fingersmith* (2002) proved rather conventional in its period drama aesthetics, the text was more radically transported to 1930s Korea under Japanese occupation in Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016). 2015 also saw the stage premieres of both Alexa Junge's *Fingersmith* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (dir. Bill Rauch) and Laura Wade's music hall-style *Tipping the Velvet* at London's Lyric Hammersmith (dir. Lyndsey Turner) – the latter turning Waters's novel into "one of a select breed of adaptations that, over time, has transferred into the medium that it is ostensibly about" (Poore 2016: 151-152). As indicated by the continuing, cross-genre and cross-cultural proliferation of Watersean adaptations and the rich scholarly discussions sparked by her works, Waters's novels remain a cornerstone of neo-Victorian criticism.

Since the publication of Waters's three neo-Victorian novels, the cultural representation of nineteenth-century queerness has gained considerable momentum. Neo-Victorian scholarship, too, has proliferated in its engagements in a number of directions, including beyond Waters's oeuvre, by exploring feminisms (see Macdonald and Goggin 2013;

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Primorac 2018), non-normative masculinities (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2015), and queer families (see Yates 2011: 93-101, 107-115; Primorac 2018: 133-175). This process has significantly enriched the field and enabled new possibilities for further self-reflection and revision. Even Waters's neo-Victorian works and their adaptations can serve as a case in point: more than twenty years on, it cannot be denied that her white, lesbian protagonists, though diverse in their class backgrounds, still present a fairly limited spectrum of queerness, for instance circumventing issues of race and disability. In particular, screen adaptations have frequently featured a certain kind of exclusive white and femme lesbianism (femme even in drag) that seems designed to render lesbianism palatable to predominantly heterosexual viewers, thus effectively winding back the clock on Waters's originally more gender-queer representations.

        This special issue is the first collective research effort dedicated to neo-Victorian queerness beyond the boundaries of Waters's trailblazing contributions. It seeks to both trace and accelerate the ongoing diversification of queerness in neo-Victorian scholarship, a diversification that we understand must move the field not only beyond Waters but also beyond certain types of normalised homogeneity. At a time when homophobic, transphobic, and also racist hate crimes are on the rise again in the UK and elsewhere (Francis 2020: n.p.), this special issue engages with a diversified and diversifying queer neo-Victorian corpus and critically illuminates various kinds of deployments of queerness and their pitfalls; it foregrounds efforts of centring queerness and calls out those that have sought to re-absorb queerness into heteronormative politics and cis-genderism. The contributions also recognise the need for extending the boundaries of queerness into more intersectional terrain – particularly as regards race, able-bodiedness and neurodiversity, mental health, class, and other factors of uneven entitlement.

        This extension resonates with (white) queer theory's own, gradual re-orientation toward intersectional issues over the last two decades, including, most notably for neo-Victorian studies, Judith Butler's recalibration of her scholarship toward a more diversely positioned "livable life" (Butler 2015: 17). We specifically refer to Butler because *Gender Trouble* (1990) and gender/queer-focused aspects from *Bodies That Matter* (1993) were so influential in scholarship on Waters, and likewise contributed much to the flourishing of neo-Victorian studies as a field of

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critical inquiry (see Gamble 2009: 128; O'Callaghan 2017: 1-17). Following scholars of colour such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, and many others, who have consistently situated queerness as intersectional since the 1980s, Butler's work began to advocate intersectional thinking more systematically with *Bodies That Matter*, acknowledging that "some feminist positions, including my own, have problematically prioritized gender as the identificatory site of political mobilization at the expense of race or sexuality or class or geopolitical positioning/displacement" (Butler 1993: 78). Seeking to remedy these omissions, she inquires:

> How is race lived in the modality of sexuality? How is gender lived in the modality of race? How do colonial and neo-colonial nation-states rehearse gender relations in the consolidation of state power? How have the humiliations of colonial rule been figured as emasculation (in Fanon), or racist violence as sodomization (Jan Mohammed); and where and how is "homosexuality" at once the imputed sexuality of the colonized, and the incipient sign of Western imperialism (Walter Williams)? (Butler 1993: 78)

Neo-Victorian scholarship would be ideally situated to investigate (representations of) at least some of these issues, and yet has been relatively slow to integrate intersectional thinking into its engagements with queerness. Whilst gender performativity continues to be a central concept in queer neo-Victorian studies, Butler, in turn, has long come to a revised concept of performativity. She now explicitly includes a larger and more diverse set of marginalised groups, i.e. "women, queers, transgender people, the poor, the differently abled, and the stateless, but also religious and racial minorities" (Butler 2015: 57). As developed over several publications – most notably *Precarious Life* (2004), *Frames of War* (2009), and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) – Butler's revised understanding of performativity links to collective action and public recognition, coalescing in the signification of a "politically significant event" that "[a]ssert[s] that a group of people is still existing, taking up space and obdurately living" (Butler 2015: 18).[3] In the following, we will use this introduction to work toward a specifically neo-Victorian queer politics of shared livability and viability by, firstly, probing neo-Victorianism's queer-empowering potentiality and queer self-reflexivity,

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and, secondly, by historicising notions of queer 'non-normalcy' and 'deviance'. The latter serves to foreground these notions' problematic and often normalised investments in a racialising colonial discourse; it also serves to challenge neo-Victorianism's own investment in queer whiteness and to pinpoint possible points of diversification in the field. By way of a conclusion and outlook, we present a brief overview of the contributions included in this special issue.

1.   Toward a Politics of Queer Livability and Queer Self-Reflexivity

Given Waters's lasting impact on neo-Victorian criticism and cultural production, and also considering neo-Victorianism's and queer theory's shared investment in queering heteronormative historiography, it is tempting to argue that neo-Victorianism is an intrinsically queer cultural phenomenon. In portraying socially repressed, non-normative, and therefore transgressive desires and sexual practices; in representing his-, her,- and their-stories that challenge heteronormative meta-narratives; in adapting a historical period to a diversity of media old and new – in these respects and others, neo-Victorianism takes liberties that can strike as metaphorically, methodologically, or affectively queer. Particularly when centred on queer concerns, neo-Victorianism has followed a visionary politics of resurrecting forgotten queer lives for the sake of the living. With its illumination of queer Victorian interstices, it has had much to offer to queer individuals, with 'queer' here understood as a self-ascribed marker of gender and/or sexual positionality or identification for LGBTQIA+ persons; all of these form situationally, to varying degrees and in different ways, in either overt or covert resistance to the rigid norms of the heteronormative matrix.

Representing concrete incarnations of LGBTQIA+ experience, neo-Victorian cultural productions has provided its own spaces of negotiating potential frictions between different LGBTQIA+ standpoints, such as between 'queer' and 'lesbian'. Clara Bradbury-Rance observes how "the lesbian's delayed and uneasy path towards visibility has coincided with queer theory's dominance in the academic study of sexuality" (Bradbury-Rance 2019: 1). Surely, Waters's specifically lesbian neo-Victorian novels did much to carry forward 'the lesbian' (albeit specific lesbian types) into a new millennium of cultural production; and yet, lesbian visibility remains an issue. Only recently, public discourse saw dispute regarding the merits and drawbacks of framing Yorkshire diarist and landowner Anne Lister as

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'lesbian', with political importance and ahistoricity being presented as arguments by both sides (see Anon. 2018: n.p.). Neo-Victorianism is, of course, regularly confronted with these kinds of questions and can therefore deepen queer theory's own grappling with terminology. In fact, if "queer is the charge or potential through which lesbianism is enabled to expand its border" (Bradbury-Rance 2019: xi), then debates surrounding labelling, or contrasting twenty-first-century representation with historical conventions, can be similarly energising. They indicate the importance of continually reassessing the pitfalls and empowering potential of identification and positionality, such as in interdisciplinary settings and across periods. In turn, and as yet another instance of queer neo-Victorian cross-fertilisation, since "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 2018: 159) is only one amongst many social norms that police life in Victorian Britain, neo-Victorian approaches to historical queerness can be enriched by queer scholars' rejections of homonormative life-paths modelled on heterosexual marriage and family life (see Butler 2002: 18; Halberstam 2003: 331, 2005, and 2011; Edelman 2004; Ahmed 2006: 154-156). In a similar vein, Holly Furneaux argues that, in a nineteenth-century context, queerness is most productively understood "as that which demonstrates that marriage and reproduction are not the only, or indeed the dominant or preferred, modes of being" (Furneaux 2009: 10). The contributions to this special issue, concerned as they are with Victorian same-sex practices and their adaptation into neo-Victorian cultural formats, remain sensitive to the fluid forms of sexual and/or gender presentation that are at odds with Victorian binarisms, cis-genderism, or hegemonic masculinity. They consider tropes such as the spinster, the madwoman, or 'idiocy', investigating their variously subversive or fraught codings as 'queer', and how these codings tie in with historical and twenty-first-century definitions of a livable life in Butler's terms.

     If neo-Victorianism has thus catered to the needs of queer representation and identification, and reinforced its politics of flexibility, it has also, and perhaps even more frequently, echoed queer theory's broader stipulation of queer as an epistemological mode of "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner 1993: xxvi), a "deviation from normalcy" (Butler 1993: 176), as "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin 1995: 62), or an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" (Sedgwick 2008: 8). More recently, Sarah Ahmed has written:

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> To become straight means that we not only have to turn
> toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual
> culture, but also that we must 'turn away' from objects that
> take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture
> hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant.
> (Ahmed 2006: 21).

The 'turning away' envisaged by Ahmed captures the epistemological and affective shifts, acts of re-orientation or self-denial that are needed for forms of (hetero-)normativity to thrive. The loss of livable life that results from such enforced conforming not only resonates with neo-Victorianism's resurrection of non-conforming lives but is also the political reason why queer theory has often disavowed fixed categorisation and labelling, including where this relates to its own central category. Queer theory has encouraged and practiced a kind of self-reflexivity and critical self-interrogation that is encapsulated in Noreen Giffney's definition of queer theory as a "mode of questioning whilst simultaneously interrogating the structural formation of such questions, at the same time as being self-reflexive about the process of interrogative thinking" (Giffney 2009: 1). This, again, at least partially resembles Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's definition of neo-Victorianism as "*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis), which has become a seminal reference point for efforts of contouring the field.

The extent to which a text needs to be self-reflexive in order to be deemed truly neo-Victorian has provided much room for debate,[4] and the precise mechanisms and targets of such self-reflection have been, and continue to be, contested. Yet neo-Victorian scholars agree that large parts of neo-Victorian cultural production and criticism share an awareness of their double ontological and epistemological status vis-à-vis the nineteenth and twentieth-/twenty-first centuries, and of what is at stake in invoking dominant, i.e. normative, imaginings of 'the Victorians' whilst simultaneously interrogating them. As Kate Mitchell notes, neo-Victorian cultural productions invariably "grapple with the issue of how to package the Victorian past for the tastes and demands of contemporary readers, how to make 'retro' accessible and [...] what it means to fashion the past for

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consumption in the present" (Mitchell 2010: 3). As a result, neo-Victorian re-engagements with normative images of nineteenth-century life offer a broad spectrum ranging from amplifications of non-normative, heterodox (including queer) voices, to re-productions of stereotypical visions. This scope not only documents neo-Victorianism's characteristic drive towards thematic and methodological self-awareness, but also attests to the field's potentially variant politics, ranging from socially progressive to reactionary. On the whole, neo-Victorianism's alignments with notions of 'deviance' or 'non-normalcy' have often had diversifying effects in line with LGBTQIA+ politics; and yet, it is fair to say that "the neo-Victorian project" (Kohlke 2018: 2; Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 1) has not been as consistently engaged as queer theory in linking notions of 'deviance' or 'non-normalcy' back to queer livability, and that it has generally been less invested in queer positionalities and politics. Herein lies yet another potential moment of intervention where queer theory might stretch neo-Victorian studies beyond its current state of politics and concerns.

As already noted, queer theory arose amidst the socio-political upheavals surrounding the AIDS epidemic. Despite its fluidity and boundary-bending, it is therefore firmly grounded not only in a particular time but also in a particular kind of political activism. By virtue of its speaking from and for a particular group (however loosely defined), queer theory has also been attuned to understanding 'difference' as central to perception, experience, and knowledge production. Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss rightly identify an investment in identity politics as one of neo-Victorianism's prime tenets, and therefore propose that neo-Victorian self-reflexive engagement with the nineteenth-century "lends itself particularly well to negotiate 'who we are today'" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 5); Mitchell uses similar language when cautioning "whether we, unavoidably influenced by our own historical moment, can know the past, and if so, whether we can do so through the medium of fiction" (Mitchell 2010: 3). Whilst these statements illustrate neo-Victorian criticism's characteristic interest in meta-discursive debate, fields like queer theory, postcolonial studies, or black studies trouble the confidence of the collective 'we' that is deployed in quotes such as the above. Who are 'we', and does the assumption of such a common standpoint not risk reproducing the kind of silencing that both queer theory and neo-Victorian studies are so committed to countering? Such questions

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of implied speaker and audience are also relevant in light of the "lures of critical presentism" that Marie-Luise Kohlke situates as a noticeably neo-Victorian conundrum (Kohlke 2018: 11). In Louisa Hadley's words, "[p]resentism implicitly validates the idea of universal values that transcend historical boundaries and, therefore, is prone to (mis)appropriation for political ends" (Hadley 2010: 18). As Kohlke argues, neo-Victorianism's deliberately presentist stance is inextricable from its characteristic self-reflexive mode. Cultural productions that are meaningfully discussed under the rubric of neo-Victorianism

> seem obliged to acknowledge both their recycled 19th-century and contemporary contexts and to duly reflect on the present *in tandem with* – rather than *at the expense of* – the past, lest they be accused of disingenuousness or even historical distortion. (Kohlke 2018: 2, original emphasis)

This kind of habitualised self-reflection should be extended to the potential pitfalls of generalising diverse standpoints and experiences with a collective 'we', pitfalls suitably borne out by a heterodox, queer perspective.

Bradbury-Rance raises similar questions in relation to queer and lesbian theorisations of twenty-first-century cinema. Speaking from a queer-feminist perspective, she highlights the importance of finding ways to "maintain critical and political attachments whilst acknowledging their production of ambivalence", to identify apt moments to "mobilise the universal or the particular", and appropriate means to "account for lesbian studies' discursive exclusions and, in particular, its whiteness" (Bradbury-Rance 2019: xi). In neo-Victorian contexts, these concerns have an added historical dimension: how can neo-Victorian scholarship and cultural production avoid trivialising the markedly different realities and challenges of nineteenth-century 'queer' subjectivities? Certainly, streamlining either is at odds with queer theory's (and neo-Victorianism's) pronounced scepticism towards narratives of universal experience. A more systematic dialogue between queer and neo-Victorian studies as envisioned in this special issue can amplify awareness of this double necessity, cautioning that abstract universalism (of which 'deviance' and 'non-normalcy' are suitable examples) needs to be grounded in (historical) specificity, i.e. in specific LGBTQIA+ experiences, positionalities, and subjectivities. The merits of

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flexibility and fluidity notwithstanding, even self-reflexive generalisation can fall victim to the "lure" (to borrow from Kohlke again) of producing images of false and/or trans-historical commonality that might ultimately, or at least occasionally, disrupt the goals of diversification and empowerment shared by queer theory and neo-Victorian studies.

As neo-Victorian scholarship continues to wrestle with the pitfalls of representation, neo-Victorian cultural production's engagement with queerness has developed in multifarious directions. It ranges from progressive queer formats centring on (historically) specific LGBTQIA+ experience to reactionary exoticisations of sexual 'deviance' that do little more than cater to the expectations of white conservative audiences regarding queer obscenity, or overlap with imperial fantasies of racialisation and miscegenation. One post-Waters cultural production that has manifested the empowering queer potential of neo-Victorianism (and shown the capacity of queer-centred cultural production for mass-appeal) is Sally Wainwright's *Gentleman Jack* (BBC/HBO, 2019–), discussed in more detail in Sarah E. Maier and Rachel M. Friars's as well as Claire O'Callaghan's contributions. Inspired by Lister's diaries, *Gentleman Jack* depicts a Lister (Suranne Jones) who confidently pursues her interests and investments – financial, affective, and sexual – whilst also tirelessly trying to mitigate conflicts with heterosexual peers that arise from her clashes with the norms of Victorian gender discourse. The series thus combines the depiction of Lister's unusual, multidirectional, queer-lesbian prowess with an awareness that queer self-actualisation requires a large set of micro and macro socio-political skills as well as self-protection that, though masterly performed by Jones's Lister, cannot entirely move her out of harm's way. Lister's social position is ultimately precarious, her daily labour for acceptance and self-determination revealing not only the improbability of her living the life of "the first modern lesbian" (Mangan 2019: n.p.) at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but also her resilience. Like the real Lister, Jones's character seeks a fairly conventional, 'married' life on her family estate. This underscores the at times complex relationship between normativity and non-normalcy in LGBTQIA+ lives, including the difficulties and rejections endured by queer persons who try to lay claim to precisely these heteronormative scripts of normalcy and conformity. *Gentleman Jack*'s first season finishes just after Lister and her partner, Ann Walker (Sophie Rundle), have secretly exchanged vows during a church ceremony and

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consider themselves married. Concluding the first season with this particular scene prioritises a queer potential for happiness entrenched in stable affective and domestic love relationships between women that is reminiscent of Waters's own representation of female same-sex unions. It also, and perhaps more realistically, emphasises the sense of achievement contained in the pair's challenge of harmful heteronormative ideologies of queer non-viability and disenfranchisement which, as suggested by the series, exacerbates Ann Walker's pathological lack of self-esteem as well as her initial hesitance to brave a life with Lister. In this sense, *Gentleman Jack* paints a nuanced picture of the psychological-affective impacts and costs of having to re-negotiate the norm from a heterodox position, so as to make space for forms of self-identity and attachments positioned as 'deviant'.

Lister's and Walker's continuing struggle with (hetero-)normative scripts is also brought out at the generic and narrative level, where they remain confined by the heteronormative conventions of period drama. Simultaneously, Jones's metaleptical break of the fourth wall and her repeatedly speaking directly into the camera self-reflexively tests the boundaries of these conventions, as well as the viewer's implication in either upholding or dismantling them. Her breaking the fourth wall is a savvy way of flagging the show's self-reflexive presentism, suitably in tune with Lister's – both the fictional and historical character's (see Roulston 2013) – distinctly presentist heralding as a 'modern lesbian'. This audience address gives Lister and her lesbianism another level of (mass-marketable) realness that has not only translated into an amount of queer fandom, indicating a popularity comparable to that of Waters's novels, but it also signals the series' affective identificatory potential for queer- and, particularly, lesbian-identifying viewers. Jones's Lister is also rendered intriguing by her bold self-representation (to her own society and TV audience), which includes her butch power dressing, even when occasionally donning a dress. Whilst still catering to a white audience, the series can thus be considered a milestone of queer empowerment and gender-queer representation, especially given the level of onscreen queer-baiting rather than queer-centring that neo-Victorian cultural production has seen in recent years (see below). Indeed, until the release of *Gentleman Jack*, Waters's three neo-Victorian novels, despite originating in the 1990s, might well have been the most daring neo-Victorian queer productions of mass appeal. *Gentleman Jack* moves the goalposts further, re-engaging with

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historical heteronormativity in ways that extend and further diversify the possibilities of queer-affective investment and self-recognition.

Another recent screen production that has centred a hitherto largely absent form of (neo-)Victorian queerness is Rupert Everett's Oscar Wilde biopic, *The Happy Prince* (2018). Whereas earlier films (e.g. Ken Hughes's 1960 *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* or Brian Gilbert's 1997 *Wilde*) "nervously turn away from" the post-prison Wilde and almost exclusively depict earlier chapters of his life and romantic relationships (Bradshaw 2018: n.p.), Everett covers the period between Wilde's years in exile after being released from prison in 1897 until his death in 1900. Though infused with a good dose of characteristically Wildean campness, the film powerfully deconstructs the romanticised images of amusing *enfant terrible* or flamboyant dandy within which the author is commonly enshrined. This predominant re-imagining downplays Wilde's sufferings from homophobia and the family separation, such as during his imprisonment, just as it makes light of his following decline. Diversifying the image of the dashing socialite, the film shows Wilde (Everett) as a frail, aging man, thus filling a considerable representational void. As Linda Hess succinctly puts it in her study on 'queer aging', "[i]n the second decade of the twenty-first century, *growing old*, *aging*, and *old age* are still principally imagined in heteronormative terms" (Hess 2019: 2, original emphasis). Hess reveals queerness to be typically linked with narratives of adolescence and coming-out, and furthermore illuminates the extent to which ageing queer people are pathologised through stereotypes such as "the predatory old lesbian, the aging queen, and the self-loathing gay man" (Hess 2017: 3). Challenging these stereotypes, *The Happy Prince* highlights the entitlement of an elderly queer person to a fulfilling love relationship and affirms the longevity and resilience of queer attachments. Whilst Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas (Colin Morgan) is portrayed as at least partially exploitative, the film also identifies this abuse as conditioned by a homophobic society that renders queer lives disproportionately precarious. The fact that Bosie's and Wilde's mutual affection nonetheless endures until (or indeed beyond) Wilde's death can therefore cautiously be viewed as a triumph over eminently destructive heterosexist forces that declare queer attachments to be anti-social, egocentric, or pathological. In addition to underscoring Bosie's and Wilde's bond, the film also emphasises how Robbie Ross (Edwin Thomas), despite being cast in the role of the rejected

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lover, supports Wilde emotionally and financially to his death, all the while struggling with his own unrequited feelings. Via the character of Wilde's wife Constance (Emily Watson), the film shows how the criminalisation and pathologisation of Victorian homosexuality take their toll even on Wilde's legal family, banning him from family visits. But even this very family is shown to be partially resilient to homophobic indoctrination, as can be gleaned from Constance's continuing regard, her (if sparse) financial support, and from the overall narrative frame which pictures Wilde reading his fairy tale 'The Happy Prince' (1888) to his sons. Both these directorial decisions centre enduring affection and also imply advocacy of queer claims to a family life with children. Overall, *The Happy Prince* thus throws into relief the detrimental impacts of heterosexist Victorian sexual mores (and twenty-first-century ones by extension) on individuals, families, and entire communities.

Shifting the focus away from same-sex desire and towards gender-queer subjectivities, Barbara Ewing's *The Petticoat Men* (2014) offers a fictionalised account of the 1870 trial of two society ladies, actors, and sex workers: Fanny and Stella (their legal names being Frederick Park and Ernest Boulton). Assigned male at birth, they later increasingly presented as female, both in private and public. Although frequently monitored by the police for soliciting male clients, Fanny and Stella were only arrested and put on trial when they did so in female attire, an intolerable violation of Victorian cis-gender norms and codes of respectability.[5] As Deborah Cohen observes, despite harsh criminal punishment of male same-sex practices under the Labouchere Amendment, "until the early 1950s, a man could have sex with another man without thinking himself in any respect 'abnormal' – as long as he steered clear of the feminine dress or behaviour that marked a so-called pouf or queen" (Cohen 2017: n.p).[6] After a visit to the theatre, Fanny and Stella were put in custody and charged with misdemeanour as well as what was then termed 'conspiracy to commit sodomy'. Since the humiliating examinations by various medical practitioners brought no sufficient proof of 'sodomy', they were acquitted of this charge and sentenced for misdemeanour only (Joyce 2018: 83). Ewing's novel switches between the perspectives of a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalisation and the internal focalisations of Fanny and Stella's landlady, Mrs Stacey, and her daughter Mattie. It describes in great detail the glamourous (though illicit) society balls that Fanny and Stella attend in their elegant costumes,

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and reproduces extensive archival material on the trial, dwelling on their 'scandalous' behaviour. Ewing juxtaposes these public perceptions with the characters' private lives, but, contrary to what is known about the real-life Fanny and Stella, envisions them almost exclusively as male-presenting around Mattie and her mother. Nonetheless, it is in this private sphere where the novel situates resistance against the heteronormative matrix: Mattie suspects that the female clothes in the bedroom of the lodgers she knows as Freddie and Ernest (and consequently addresses as such) are not simply costumes for the stage. Although unable to fully grasp and verbalise why they meet with outrage and rejection, she is remarkably vocal when refusing to accept that their ostensible non-normalcy "could matter in the least" (Ewing 2014: 120). In her view, those guilty of aberrant behaviour are not the defendants, but the "mad people" in the courtroom "who actually believe[] that Freddie and Ernest's private parts should be splashed about for everyone to read" (Ewing 2014: 174). Similar to Mattie's repeated delegitimisation of the trial, her mother, too, is described as fervently supportive of her lodgers. Despite the fact that the court case has alienated other lodgers and therefore harmed her business, she not only testifies in support of Freddie and Ernest but also shields them from the prying press. Thus rejecting Victorian scripts of normalcy and deviance, Mattie and her mother function as sites of identification for those readers prepared to break with the heteronormative grid and/or unlearn discriminatory behaviours. This path, the novel suggests, leads through a valuation of people's attachments and personalities over whatever is presented as the norm or normative perception.

In envisaging queer, potentially transgender, livability and viability in a Victorian setting, *The Petticoat Men* presents a distinctly modern perspective on non-normative gender identities, normalising not only Freddy's and Stella's lives but also channelling solidarity toward its protagonists. Moreover, the novel holds some innovative potential for (neo-)Victorian scholarship: even though one Victorian newspaper referred to the accused using female pronouns (Joyce 2018: 83), most nineteenth-century journalists and commentators viewed them "either as theatrical female impersonators or as gay men – but clearly, either way, *as men*" (Joyce 2018: 84, original emphasis). Whilst Ewing's novel, in its attempt to re-imagine an emergent awareness of non-normative gender identities or subjectivities, necessarily reproduces normative Victorian gender discourse to a certain

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extent, it might be assumed that twenty-first-century scholars discussing the real-life Fanny and Stella would follow the pair's own choice of address (in private letters, the two used 'she/her' and also referred to each other as 'sisters'). However, many critics continue to refer to them by their male birth names, and as gay men or cross-dressers. Neil McKenna's monograph *Fanny and Stella: The Young Men Who Shocked Victorian England*, for instance, as per its title, clearly identifies them as men, whereas Morris B. Kaplan alternates between female names or pronouns and male ones (Kaplan 2002). In this vein, scholarship replicates what in today's terms would be referred to as a misgendering of the two. It is only recently that the lives of Fanny and Stella have been reviewed from a transgender perspective (see Joyce 2018), a paradigmatic shift which aligns with an increasing awareness for such concerns within the fields of Victorian and neo-Victorian studies at large. Lisa Hager, amongst others, has called for Victorian criticism to "fundamentally reconceptualize our understanding of gender to account for the possibility of movement between, across, and among genders" and, as follows, to genuinely "consider the possibilities of trans narratives within the diversity of gender identities represented in Victorian literary culture" (Hager 2018: 37).[7] In neo-Victorian studies, such need to reconceptualise interpretative tools and paradigms has been advocated by Heilmann's recent monograph on the reincarnations of James Miranda Barry, a military surgeon who was assigned female at birth but self-identified as male throughout his life. Heilmann considers the extent to which both Victorian and neo-Victorian texts engage with Barry's "baffling case of ambiguity" (Heilmann 2018: 10) in simplistic terms, illustrating how his life could be more adequately conceptualised through the prism of transgender theory. In addition to impacting the field of neo-Victorian criticism and the ways in which it conceives of gender and sexual identities in conflict with normative nineteenth-century gender discourse, such calls for a turn to transgender subjectivities can help enrich the study of various other neo-Victorian texts dealing with gender non-conforming characters, including, but of course not limited to, Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2006) – examined in O'Callaghan's article in this special issue – or Sandi Toksvig's *Valentine Grey* (2012).

        Next to these queer-empowering portrayals and critical contributions, the last five to ten years have also seen a series of neo-Victorian screen productions that broach the theme of queerness without

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fully embracing it, flirt rather than engage with queerness in minor subplots, or follow in a long tradition of resolving queer campness into heterosexual desire (on the latter, see Phillip Zapkin's contribution to this special issue). Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's recent *Dracula* (BBC One & Netflix, 2020) surely falls into this category, most visibly so in the series' climax in episode 3, which sees a double resolution of the centuries-long attraction between hyper-camp Count Dracula (Claes Bang) and Sister Agatha Van Helsing (Dolly Wells). As Dracula throws off his obsessive vampire habits, embraces his new-found freedom, and bathes in sunlight, this is also the moment in which the pair finally act on their two-fold, shared desire: a series of crosscut images shows Dracula drinking Agatha's lethal blood and then resting atop her, and, as part of an alternative reality, pictures them consuming each other sexually before sleeping entangled in a post-coital position (McGuigan 2020: 1:27:21-1:29:38). Following the somewhat queerer first episode, which positions Jonathan Harker (John Heffernan) as Count Dracula's primary object of desire, the series finale doubles Dracula's liberation from obsession with the consummation of his ultimately supreme-reigning, heterosexual desire for Sister Agatha.

Despite *Dracula*'s considerable queer-baiting efforts, however, the most egregious instance of this practice is thought to be Moffat and Gatiss's *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010–2017), which amplifies the homoerotic subtext of Arthur Conan Doyle's adapted source stories. In contrast to Rohase Piercy's blunt depiction of a mutual love relationship between Holmes and Watson in *My Dearest Holmes* (1988), *Sherlock* merely plays in humorous fashion with Watson's (Martin Freeman) understanding that Sherlock (Benedict Cumberbatch) is gay, and has other characters repeatedly misidentify them as a couple; Sherlock's relationship with Moriarty is similarly presented as homoerotically charged. In neither case is the seeming potential for romance actualised, something that has been seen as symptomatic of the series' larger, ideologically conservative gender politics (see e.g. Lavigne 2012; Greer 2015). The character development of Irene Adler (Lara Pulver) would be another case in point, as her trajectory can be traced from hypersexualised dominatrix to "humiliated, beaten, and prospect-less […] crouching damsel in distress, miraculously saved from death by Holmes himself" (Primorac 2013: 104). This appears as troubling as the 'resolution' of her ostensible queerness: whereas the first thing viewers learn about her in 'A Scandal in Belgravia' is that she features in compromising photos with

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a female member of the Royal family (McGuigan 2012: 0:17:55-0:19:48), her off-screen queerness is later marginalised by her onscreen attraction to Sherlock. Following criticism, Moffat and Gatiss denied allegations of deliberate queer-baiting, suggesting that Sherlock might better be read as asexual (Moffat qtd. in Lavigne 2012: 15; see Botts 2016: 169-179). Amber Botts similarly suggests that Sherlock does allow for more diverse readings, repeatedly offering particularly asexual readers sites of identification. Anja Gröne pushes this further by suggesting that the series can be read as challenging 'amatonormativity',[8] which Elizabeth Brake defines as encapsulating

> the assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types. (Brake 2012: 88-89)

By presenting a Sherlock who exhibits strong attachments to others and yet defies prioritisation of romantic love and/or sexual preferences, Gröne argues, the series emulates Brake's criticism, and offers more diverse sites of identification than might initially appear (Gröne 2019). Whilst it might therefore be premature to dismiss the series entirely, being labelled as queer-baiting is definitely a risk that *Sherlock* takes, not least because of Adler's representation and, of course, because the series stands in a long history of cultural productions in which queer desire and livability are erased, curbed, or pathologised.

At first glance more progressive, ITV's *Victoria* (2016–2019) went so far as including a much fussed-over, gay kiss in Season Two, Episode Seven. The love relationship between Prime Minister Robert Peel's private secretary Edward Drummond (Leo Suter) and Lord Alfred Paget (Jordan Waller) is slowly built up through a number of episodes, seeing the pair engage in longing glances and clumsy flirtation. Yet, not long after the kiss, the creators removed Drummond by letting him die in the Series Two finale, shot by a bullet originally directed at Peel. In a classic reiteration of what popular culture defines as the 'Bury Your Gays' trope (see Hulan 2017), *Victoria* thus eliminates evidence of viable queerness shortly after introducing it to the imaginary world of the series. Thus, like *Sherlock*'s or

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Dracula's engagement with queerness, *Victoria*'s is tentative at best. Adapted and commodified for mainstream (i.e. predominantly heterosexual) TV audiences, queerness is largely relegated to the shadows in these productions; it is disavowed and disowned, its socially disruptive potentiality and seeds for viability and livability consistently harnessed (e.g. by substituting queer endings with heterosexual ones) or even brutally denied (e.g. through killing off one of a queer pair).

These ambivalent, at times contradictory, facets of representation and politics in cultural production reveal neo-Victorian scholarship's crucial role in scrutinising the queer potentiality of various cultural formats. In turn, neo-Victorian criticism can further differentiate its own lenses of inquiry by interrogating some of the tenets of neo-Victorian self-reflexivity, such as in engaging with queerness: to what ends, even unexpected ones, are notions of queer 'deviance' employed? How does positionality factor into self-reflection? Where do scholars engaging with neo-Victorian queerness disband with queerness's political roots in LGBTQIA+ experience, and to what effects or possible repercussions? Surely, queer theory, its politics and methodologies, can enrich neo-Victorian considerations of normativity, non-normalcy, and deviance. Queer theory can stand as a reminder of the crucial role positionality and political anchoring can play in the thickets of a politically diverse cultural landscape that might (re-)use tropes of queerness for purposes that are anything but progressive and/or queer life-affirming. Furthermore – and here we turn our eyes to the next section – the queer potentiality of neo-Victorianism can stimulate explorations of the diversifying effects of other positional forms of identification and their diverse overlaps with neo-Victorian queerness. As Roderick Ferguson notes, sexuality and gender intersect with race and other markers of identity in "disconnected rather than mutually constitutive" and oftentimes "messy, chaotic and heterodox" ways (Ferguson 2005: 66). In the following segment, we seek to amplify awareness of these intersections and their multifarious effects, positing historicity and intersectionality as two additional, central pillars upon which a more self-reflective, potentially queerer neo-Victorianism might rest. This is of special interest as well as urgency because the history of queer deviance and queer-disruptive non-normalcy, indeed the history of transgressive desire as such, has long blended in with the history of empire and colonial politics of race.

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2.   From Racialised 'Deviance' to Queer Intersectionality

As critics have established, neo-Victorianism stands in a long tradition of re-reading transgressive desires that dates back at least as far as the eighteenth-century Gothic. In Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's words, "*neo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic*: resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, […] insisting obsessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, reliving the period's nightmares and traumas" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012b: 4, original emphasis). The Gothic is dubbed inherently queer by scholars such as William Hughes and Andrew Smith (2009) or Ardel Haefele-Thomas (2012), and this shared investment in unearthing queerness as a specific kind of transgressive desire has equally been noted by neo-Victorian critics (see Kohlke and Gutleben 2012b: 41-42; Pulham 2012). This section seeks to enlarge neo-Victorian understanding of the Gothic as central to queerness in two ways: firstly, by extending the focus chronologically through a long-nineteenth-century perspective, and secondly, by centring not so much on neo-Victorianism's queer-Gothic roots as such, as on the Gothic's concomitant self-positioning in a tradition of *racialising* queerness. Adapting exoticised Southern European cultures or locations, and occasionally also colonial spaces such as the Caribbean (e.g. Cuba in M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* [1796]), Gothic novels routinely feature both sexually and racially infused transgressions, composing sexually, culturally, and ethnically 'wild' counter worlds to an ostensibly sober British public. In doing so, Gothic fiction capitalises on the "terror implicit in the increasingly dictatorial reign" of "middle-class values" and their "codification" (Haggerty 2006: 10). Gothic works focus on "the fact of desire itself" (Haggerty 2006: 10), thus presenting an early counter discourse to nascent binary codifications of sexuality and desire which – as Michel Foucault has shown in great detail (Foucault 2020: 63, 118) – were later so fervently inscribed by nineteenth-century sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.[9] Gothic novels negotiate a mix of abject (sexual) violence, uncontrollably and ruthlessly wielded against anyone or anything standing in the way of a protagonist and his or her ambitions, particularly sexual ones. At the same time, they also depict stable homosocial relations between both men and women that frequently carry erotic-affective overtones, as is the case with William and Edmund in Clara Reeves's *The Old English Baron* (1778), Ambrosio and Rosario in *The Monk*, or Ellena and Olivia in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797).

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Considering this variety of treating queer desires, ranging from violently transgressive to consolidating, and their multiple levels of metaphorisation and politicisation, it is not surprising that scholars have designated the Gothic a "testing ground for many unauthorized genders and sexualities" (Haggerty 2006: 2) – and, we might add, sexual and racial ideologies later fine-tuned in nineteenth-century literature more generally.

Building on the eighteenth-century Gothic's organisation of transgressive desires along ethnic and geographical lines, the Victorian Gothic – in line with the proliferating colonial discourse of a rising empire – links such desire with various and oftentimes intersecting incarnations of Otherness along the axes of race, class, gender, and ableism. In Haefele-Thomas's words, it marks "a safe location in which to explore ideas about race, interracial desire, cross-class relations, ethnicity, empire, nation and 'foreignness'" (Haefele-Thomas 2012: 3). Nineteenth-century (Gothic) literature features a plentiful cast of multiply Othered characters: they include Jamaican Creoles like Bertha Mason, racialised foundlings like Heathcliff, vampires, or racialised monsters like Frankenstein's. White characters encounter these beings on colonial terrains such as islands, jungles, and tribal lands; in the Alps; the Arctic; the attic; and at the kitchen table. Despite the dread and disgust commonly evoked by these encounters, they are frequently initiated by the white male: Bertha Mason is brought to England by Rochester, Heathcliff is 'found' by old Earnshaw during one of his trips to Liverpool, and Dracula's removal to England is facilitated by Jonathan Harker. These supernatural, racial(ised) Others can be read as personifications of white, anti-black fantasies, rife with the fear of miscegenation, whilst nineteenth-century Gothic narratives also labour to shield their white characters from potential outrage over their deviant obsessions with these ostensibly hyperviolent, hyperpredatory, and hypersexual creatures.[10] As per these conceptual interpenetrations, sexual and racial deviation become intricately intertwined. As Robert Young argues in *Colonial Desire*,

> [t]he norm/deviation model of race as of sexuality meant that 'perversions' such as homosexuality became associated with the degenerate products of miscegenation. […] The identification of racial with sexual degeneracy was clearly always overdetermined in those whose subversive bronzed

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> bodies bore witness to a transgressive act of perverse desire.
> (Young 1995: 24)

Young's argument aptly shows that *sexually* queer bodies are discursively produced as tainted with *racialised* difference and deviance (miscegenation), and vice versa; simultaneously, they trigger fears of (racial) degeneration that signal the deep-seated ableism of colonial ideology. If the beginning of the nineteenth century sees a fierce codification of racial hierarchies, the latter nineteenth century follows with an intersecting codification of homo- and heterosexualities *as* racialised/racialising entities, suggesting a continuation of earlier racial theories and pseudosciences (such as phrenology) in and through the category of sexuality. As such, racialisation becomes one of the core Othering marks of the homosexual, who requires punishment by law at home and in the colonies alike.

It could be expected that neo-Victorian (re-)imaginings of nineteenth-century queerness would take frequent recourse to this multiply folded, queer-racialised Victorian intimacy that is so central to both imperialism's racial politics of exploitation and oppression and Victorian notions of deviant (homo-)sexualities. Yet neo-Victorian cultural production continues to grapple with the question of how best to engage with these discursive as much as social and political formations of the nineteenth century. As discussed in the previous section, particularly neo-Victorian onscreen depictions of queerness can be tokenistic and therefore dissatisfying from an LGBTQIA+ perspective. However, infinitely more problematic are neo-Victorian representations of queerness that either categorically dissociate Victorian notions of sexual deviance from their investments in the history of empire or, alternatively, uncritically reproduce conflations of queerness with racial deviance, or even draw on such a conflation for the sake of exoticism. An example of the latter can be found in Showtime's *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016), most of whose characters are portrayed as either engaging in same-sex activities and/or as 'deviant' in the sense of their being monsters or otherwise 'non-human'. Whilst offering progressive takes on queer family-making, as Antonija Primorac has suggested (Primorac 2018: 147-157), and whilst also subversively adapting nineteenth-century texts and characters, the show's queer politics are often convoluted (see Phillips 2015: n.p.), intersecting with discourses of

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Victorian freakery, Gothicism and Orientalism. These converge most notably in the character of the heavily queer-coded Ferdinand Lyle (Simon Russell Beale), a flamboyant Egyptologist and linguist specialising in extinct languages who works at the British Museum. Sir Malcolm Murray (Timothy Dalton) and Vanessa Ives (Eva Green) call upon Lyle in the first episode to decipher hieroglyphs they have found on a dead vampire. Later, he also assists in Vanessa's exorcism, functioning as a translator when she unexpectedly starts speaking the 'verbis diablo'. Thus, even on the plot level alone, Lyle (like most characters in the series) is associated with death and exoticised monstrosity. It is a depiction that strongly resonates with Kohlke's description of neo-Victorianism as "the new Orientalism, a significant mode of imagining sexuality in our hedonistic, consumerist, sex-surfeited age" (Kohlke 2008: 67) – in other words, an imaginative mode in which sexuality, rather than ethnicity, is rendered 'exotic'. In *Penny Dreadful*'s depiction of Lyle, however, such imagery of exotic sexual Otherness is definitely layered with Orientalist projections in the original, Saidean sense of the term.[11] Tracing how the series self-reflexively engages with "the western fantasy of the queer and dangerous Oriental Other", Jamil Mustafa suggests that it "at once enacts and undermines late-Victorian attitudes toward queer Orientalism" (Mustafa 2020: 8). As he concludes, "it is difficult to determine the extent to which [Lyle], and the overarching East-versus-West plot in which he plays a part, demonstrate our own values, those of the late Victorians, or a blend of both" (Mustafa 2020: 8).[12] Either way, there is a strong sense of continuity between the ominous Victorian blend of racialisation/exoticisation/freakery – serving such paradoxical ends as causing thrill and fear over manifold transgressions and simultaneously consolidating imperial hierarchies – and neo-Victorian cultural productions' own imaginative blendings that are often uncannily similar.

As already implied, *Penny Dreadful* is only one of many screen productions that engage in visual politics of this kind. Similar conflations of queerness and racialised Otherness can be found in David Kajganich's *The Terror* (2018), Echevarria and Travis Beacham's *Carnival Row* (2019–), or Steven Knight, Tom Hardy, and Chips Hardy's *Taboo* (2017), all of which associate themes of sexual deviance with colonialism or slavery. *The Terror* and *Carnival Row* – albeit in different ways and to different effects – firmly tie their engagements with empire and/or normative whiteness to characters whose sexuality or non-normative gender performance is explicitly

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presented as queer. *Taboo* converges discourses of transgressive desire and racial deviance in the racialised protagonist James Delaney (Tom Hardy) and in his incestuous desire for his sister Zilpha Geary (Oona Chaplin). As Felipe Espinoza Garrido illustrates in his contribution to this issue, although these shows' mechanisms of (self-)reflection and critique are more complex, this relative complexity does not prevent them from reiterating Victorian miscegenation fantasies. The series routinely suspends boundaries of human being, packing their plots with images of colonial violence and transgressive sexuality alongside hum-animals, fairies, werewolves, vampires, zombies, or other supernatural creatures and forces, often the product of dark magic or witchcraft. As a result, these shows both aesthetically and ideologically situate colonialism in the realm of the fantastic, and risk reaffirming sensationalist notions of queerness as conterminous with monstrosity or freakery.[13] Whilst these productions could be understood as visualising, via the nineteenth-century Gothic, Victorian fears and obsessions with exotic Otherness, what they concurrently encourage is a noir fascination with intersecting and multi-directional, multi-relational deviance – a kind of fascination that effectively replicates the power hierarchies of hetero-patriarchal imperial Othering. In this way, they can appear to re-appropriate queerness into Victorian notions of Otherness only to add a little 'spice' to plotlines and visual aesthetics. Such 'palatable' freakish depiction of colonial times and crimes can blend almost seamlessly, sometimes unevenly or paradoxically, with depictions of 'benign' imperialism such as that in Stephen Frears's 2017 *Victoria & Abdul* (see Clini 2020: 707-712). At yet another level, there is a notable tendency toward absorbing even the violence of appropriation into a normalised catering to white needs. Thrill and excitement, triggered by deviance and violence, afford a consolidation of whiteness through a cathartic 'cleansing' of white bodies from Otherness; alternatively, imperial violence entirely disappears behind screens of mutual regard between coloniser and colonised.

One text which marks a key intervention into neo-Victorianism's normalised investment in whiteness – a whiteness that is 'neutral' and exists outside of racialised power relations – is Sara Collins's *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (2019). Infusing the neo-Victorian slave narrative with a queer love story, the novel exposes the amount of silencing and violence that has been essential to establishing both heterosexuality and whiteness as normative – in colonial discourse and occasionally, one might add, neo-

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Victorianism. Collins re-imagines a time in which slavery is still in place, and plantation owners 'breed' their own enslaved workers in the absence of the steady supplies of the slave trade, abolished in 1807. She renders overt the absurdity and cruelty of a colonial discourse that situates one 'race' as naturally inferior, that is, as justifiably and legitimately enslaved, brutalised, raped, or robbed of their children. She makes legible the perfidy of a discourse that positions black people as either deserving, tolerating, or even actively desiring such white transgressions. The titular character – a black, enslaved woman from Jamaica who travels to England with her enslaver (and father), Langton – overhears the following conversation between Langton and an acquaintance: "'they do anything and let *you* do anything … it means as much to them as sneezing, doesn't it? But don't it make us animals?' […]. 'No more than administering a whipping to a dog makes you a dog'" (Collins 2019: 74, original emphasis and ellipsis). Collins here challenges colonial depictions of hypersexual black women who freely consent to sexual exploitation, whereas Frannie's love relationship with Madame, wife to her second enslaver, John Benham, functions as an affective counterpoint against such ruthlessly racist, heteropatriarchal treatment and thinking. Frannie's "marginality" thus emerges as what hooks names "a location of radical openness and possibility", the "position and place of resistance" to hegemonic discourse and exploitation (hooks 1989: 23, 36). And yet, it also acknowledges the tensions and double oppression, the dependency and instances of renewed silencing, with which a black servant-lover will necessarily struggle in any amorous connection with a white superior. Frannie, though moving into Madame's chambers and sharing private companionship, remains under Madame's direction, is forbidden to speak up in public and forced to leave when Madame tires of her (Collins 2019: 245). Madame also turns Frannie into a temporary Laudanum addict (like herself), having received the drug from her husband to calm her nerves. This chain of dependence and oppression via the drug, handed down from Benham to Madame and from Madame to Frannie, metaphorises intersecting gender and racial inequality. Frannie is clearly Madame's subject, yet Madame is similarly unfree in a heteropatriarchal system. Madame will eventually die from the combined impact of the drug and a miscarriage, following another extramarital affair with a black abolitionist,[14] and despite Frannie returning to nurse her. Frannie herself winds up a convicted prisoner, sentenced for hanging after she has killed

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Bentham, only just managing to escape being sentenced for a second murder that she did not commit: that of her lover.

Steering clear of romanticising and celebrating queerness as overcoming racial, gender, and class hierarchies, and instead carving out the psychological damage and brutality systemic to a heteropatriarchal imperial society, *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* challenges those neo-Victorian productions that merge images of sexual and racial 'difference' primarily for purposes of exoticisation. It brings to its readers' attention the historical malleability of transgressive desire toward different ends, whilst also reminding them of the intersectional, structural dependencies and forms of disenfranchisement that go beyond, yet also directly involve, queer desire. Collins thus depicts white-centric queer re-imaginations of the nineteenth century as resulting from a racial privilege that enables eclecticism and historical gainsaying. Moreover, she drives home the extent to which any severing of nineteenth-century queerness from the colonial discourses of racialisation and miscegenation risks erasing some of the cornerstones that allowed notions of sexual transgression and sexual deviance to form in the first place. Ultimately, *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* forces an understanding that 'deviance' and 'non-normalcy' – so central to both queer theory and neo-Victorianism – are unthinkable without the machinations and intersecting histories of nationalism and empire. Fully absorbing the historical genealogy of intersecting sexual and racial 'deviance' is an urgent matter in deepening neo-Victorian politics of self-reflexivity and the field's envisaged amplification of marginalised experience; this is a rich opportunity for gaining a still deeper understanding of historical concepts of sexual transgressiveness, their investments in power relations, and their legacies and reinscriptions in current neo-Victorian production. Of course, this history is as crucial to neo-Victorian as it is to Victorian studies, as recent debates surrounding the re-surging Black Lives Matter movements and possible ways of further decolonising or "undisciplining" Victorian studies clearly reveal (Chatterjee, Christoff and Wong 2020: n.p.). As this section's references to critics such as Young, Said, and hooks show, a diverse set of scholars have already laid the foundations for such an endeavour, and their works await further engagement by neo-Victorian scholars.

Another striking queer, neo-Victorian intervention into normalised whiteness that makes legible – and, in a second step, also challenges – these

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racialised, gendered, and sexualised power relations can be found in Sonia Boyce's *Six Acts* (2018), a now-permanent video and wallpaper installation at the Manchester Art Gallery (MAG), resulting from the museum's ongoing Gallery Takeover programme (see Espinoza Garrido and Mendes 2020).[15] Scholars have amply identified museums as sites "supporting 'heteronormative' narratives that consolidate heterosexuality as a norm within social and cultural life" (Steorn 2012: 355). Boyce's installation explores this reality and practice through an intersectional lens, probing how museum spaces continue to perpetuate whitewashed and heteronormative notions of 'the Victorians'. *Six Acts* consists of six individual, yet interrelated, interactive responses to select Victorian paintings, including John Roddam Spencer Stanhope's *Eve Tempted* (1877) and James Northcote's *Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1826), a portrait of African American Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge. The performances were filmed during Boyce's takeover evening and later edited into a video that positions them in dialogue with one another via their simultaneous replaying on six smaller screens that make up one larger monitor. All of the artworks involved in Boyce's installation form part of Room 10 of the museum, where they are hung in a near-recreation of what the room looked like in 1835. For Boyce's project, the room was aptly renamed 'Whose Power on Display?', highlighting not only the highly selective image of Victorian art conveyed but also the various power structures underpinning museal constructions of 'the Victorians'. One of the acts had Cheddar Gorgeous, member of the Manchester-based drag family The Family Gorgeous, portray Stanhope's Eve as part human, part unicorn. Gorgeous constantly ate from a basket of apples whilst conversing with onlookers, thus not only queering Stanhope's Victorian painting but also its underlying biblical iconography (which Stanhope in turn helped further) (see Espinoza Garrido and Mendes 2020). Another of Boyce's acts, entitled 'Lasana Shabazz as Ira Aldridge as God Save the Queen – Abolitionist version Whiteface Minstrel as Football Hooligan', cast the black, non-binary performer Lasana Shabazz as Aldridge in the role of Othello, reciting the character's dying monologue in which they lament their experience of racist abuse and ostracisation from Venetian society. In this case, the imaginative queering of Victorian (art) history rested upon Shabazz's own positionality as a non-binary performer. Whilst only Shabazz's performance immediately combined queerness *and* blackness, the various acts' joint performances in the same room, as well as

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their later dialogical editing and acoustic overlapping, (re-)frame queerness and blackness as contingent upon one another – particularly so in the hetero-patriarchal, white space of the (neo-)Victorian museum.

Other museums, too, have begun to acknowledge these intersections through hosting interventions by black, queer artists. In 2018, Patience Agbabi held the position of the Brontë Parsonage Museum's writer, ushering in the re-inscription of black, queer presences into the annals of historically white, non-queer institutions. Of the works produced during Agbabi's tenure, her poems 'Catherine' (2019) and 'Heathcliff' (2019) signal the productivity of her re-imagining the pair's relationship. Both are overtly presentist re-interpretations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), mixing the novel's own indication of Heathcliff's racialisation, Catherine's unruliness, and the pair's intimate entanglement with a critique of current immigration discourses, normative Othering as well as transgender (in-)visibility. Whilst 'Heathcliff' voices an immigrant's plea for recognition and relation – the poem being framed by the lines "I'm no other" and "I'm no *Other*" – 'Catherine' elaborates Catherine's famous declaration "I am Heathcliff" (Brontë 2009: 73) with such lines as "I'm a boy/ trapped in a girl's body" (Agbabi 2019a: l. 4-5). Riffing on Heathcliff and Catherine's paradoxical love-hate relationship, the poems underline the close proximity of "love" and "hate", indicating that attachments are poisoned by Othering and/or precarity (Agbabi 2019b: l. 11). The speakers interweave this with the vexed topic of mutual appropriation, even exploitation: "Asian, mixed-race, white, no-one wanted him:/ everyone wanted to label him./ I *became* him:/ he slipped on my skin to make himself decent" (Agbabi 2019a: ll. 10-14, original emphasis). Agbabi's centring of the pair's struggle for recognition, self-identity, and for understanding how one might meaningfully relate to another without replicating imperial logics is an urgent reminder of the complex and pain-ridden, yet also rich potentiality of intersectional queerness in the current neo-Victorian imagination.

For many decades now, scholars from fields such as black studies or postcolonial studies have continued to provide empire- and race-critical perspectives on both Victorian and, though slightly deferred, neo-Victorian literature and culture. These contributions range from resurrecting black lives from the oppressive and distorting accounts of white historiography, to re-reading seminal texts for their imperialist, jingoistic, or anti-black

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endorsements of both monetary and symbolic economies that normalise the exploitation of black(ened) bodies for the sake of white comfort and affluence.[16] In relation to Victorian studies, much of this scholarly work was carried out in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a timeline which visualises the almost simultaneous rise of postcolonial and race-critical perspectives such as black studies, on the one hand, and queer studies, on the other. Both academic schools saw a decided acceleration in the course of the 1990s in which they pushed for equal cultural and political rights and participation. Whereas Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Vol 1* was published in 1976, the first significant bulk of queer theory was written in the 1990s and early 2000s with works by Laurent Berlant, Butler, Lee Edelman, Gayatri Gopinath, Jack Halberstam, Rinaldo Walcott, and others. Intersectional research that takes seriously both sexuality and race as diversifying factors of representation and positionality is central to the field of postcolonial studies, with Edward Said prominently deploying Foucauldian discourse analysis to debunk white Western perceptions of Others and the hypersexualisation of the 'Orient' in white colonial discourse (Said 1994: 103).

Though decidedly Foucauldian, this line of anti-colonial inquiry long remained absent from discourses on sexuality – including Foucault's own work, which has played such a central role in (neo-)Victorian studies. Ann Stoler in particular has criticised Foucault for "short-circuiting empire" which, similar to race, finds no mention in *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1* (Stoler 1995: 7). Perhaps this early lack of disciplinary cross-fertilisation can partially explain queer neo-Victorianism's normalised investment in whiteness. Surely, the exchange between postcolonial scholars and queer scholars has picked up in recent years, yet postcolonial scholarship and/or black studies approaches have found comparatively few prominent footholds in neo-Victorian studies.[17] However, they do find a foothold in this special issue, though unevenly and at times only tentatively so. Accordingly, this special issue might most accurately be understood as a documentation as well as a symptom of the fact that the road from Sarah Waters's white, queer neo-Victorian oeuvre to such texts as *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* is a long and winding one, one upon which neo-Victorian scholars are only beginning to tread. As editors, we hope that our deliberations in this introduction contribute to moving queer neo-Victorian scholarship further along this road.

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3.   Queering Neo-Victorianism Beyond Sarah Waters

Our eight contributors chart directions of queer neo-Victorianism beyond Sarah Waters whilst also repeatedly returning to her works; they explore how queerness continues to inform and transform neo-Victorian creativity and reception in a paradoxically more liberal but in some ways more backward-looking world. In the opening contribution, '"An Unusual, Trusting Sort of Girl": Queering Compulsory Able-Mindedness in Neo-Victorian Fiction', Helen Davies re-visits two well-known neo-Victorian texts with a view to previously understudied queer characters and themes. Her nuanced discussion of Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Victoria Thomson's *Murder on Lenox Hill* (2006) explores how the characters Gracie Milne and Grace Linton are presented as 'Others' to the two novels' larger depictions of normative able-bodiedness, converging discourses of queerness and intellectual disability. In particular, Davies foregrounds these discourses' overlaps with a language that echoes Victorian notions of 'idiocy' and eugenics, both of which are often racialised. Davies furthermore sheds light on the ways in which neo-Victorian criticism tends to perpetuate normative able-bodiedness and might suitably be enriched and queered by a more thorough engagement with disability studies.

Claire O'Callaghan's '"Pronouns are problematic": The Trans* Body and Gender Theory; Or, Revisiting the Neo-Victorian Wo/Man' offers another re-reading of a neo-Victorian staple. Whilst Stace's *Misfortune* has so far mainly been considered through the lens of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (and, to a lesser extent, her subsequent *Bodies That Matter*), O'Callaghan suggests the novel can be more productively understood as restaging transgender studies' critiques of Butler's earlier works. In her reading of *Misfortune*, O'Callaghan also makes a compelling case for a more systematic disciplinary dialogue between transgender studies and neo-Victorian criticism, in which transgender subjectivities and scholarly approaches still remain a relative blind spot.

Barbara Braid's article, 'Mad, Bad and Dangerous: Queering Lizzie Borden in *Lizzie* (2018)', then turns to neo-Victorian biofictions, namely the various reincarnations of Lizzie Borden, the nineteenth-century New Englander tried for (but eventually acquitted of) the murder of her parents. After considering a number of earlier adaptations of the historical Borden and the murders, Braid specifically focuses on how the 2018 film *Lizzie*, directed by Craig Macneill and written by Bryce Kass, engages with

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Borden's assumed queerness. As Braid persuasively shows, Borden's queerness as depicted in the film is not simply signalled by her lesbian relationship with the housemaid Bridget. Rather, the film envisions her as queerly disrupting a whole range of intersecting Victorian norms concerning gender, sexuality, class, and criminality, thus reflecting upon how Victorian, female (lesbian) murderers are depicted and discussed in the twenty-first century.

In 'Stoically Sapphic: Gentlemanly Encryption and Disruptive Legibility in Adapting Anne Lister', Sarah E. Maier and Rachel M. Friars discuss the filmic afterlives of Lister, another neo-Victorian favourite. In their insightful analyses of Jane English and James Kent's *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (2010) on the one hand and Wainwright's *Gentleman Jack* on the other, they examine how both adaptations turn Lister's originally private writings into public documents accessible for twenty-first-century audiences. Specifically, Maier and Friars are concerned with the adaptations' portrayal of Lister's lived experience as a nineteenth-century lesbian *avant la lettre*, and how this distinct historical subjectivity is made legible within a neo-Victorian framework relating to both nineteenth- and twenty-first-century contexts.

Felicitas Sophie van Laak's 'Becoming "Better Monsters": Queer Body Horror in *InSEXts*' extends the lens of queer neo-Victorian scholarship toward the comic genre. Focussing on Marguerite Bennett and Ariela Kristantina's *InSEXts: Year One* (2018), van Laak combines an analysis of *InSEXts*'s queer-feminist empowerment strategies with meta-discursive thinking on the relationship between the comic's deconstructive form and neo-Victorianism's politics of self-reflexivity and historiography. Merging queer theory and monster theory, van Laak explores *InSEXts*'s critical re-appropriation of Victorian discourses of sexual Otherness and revengeful reversals of patriarchal anxieties about female bodies, as epitomised by the vagina dentata. Finally, the article situates the monstrous embodiments of *InSEXts*'s antagonists as manifestations of internalised misogyny, also discussing issues related to neo-Victorian agency and reader complicity.

With Phillip Zapkin's 'Disciplining Feminine Performing Bodies in Stephen Norrington's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003)', the special issue moves to a graphic novel's adaptation with imperial masculinities as one of its central themes. As Zapkin illuminates, Stephen

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Norrington's film punishes characters acting in non-binary ways, in particular when they transgress into non-cis-gender territory. Zapkin discusses this in relation to Mina Harker and Dorian Gray – who are presented as abominable versions of camp and female masculinity – and in relation to the eroticised homosocial relationship between Allan Quatermain and Tom Sawyer, which is presented positively. Though dealing with a different genre and a queerphobic, rather than a queer-valorising, text, Zapkin draws a conclusion similar to van Laak's: that the film reveals neo-Victorianism's continuing need to critically self-reflect on its own reproductions of Victorian binaries and hierarchies that energise patriarchal and heteronormative repression even now.

Felipe Espinoza Garrido's 'Queer in the Neo-Victorian Empire: Deflection and Resistance in *Carnival Row* and *The Terror*' explores the combined politics of visual, gender-queer, and imperial representation of two neo-Victorian TV series. Scrutinising both programmes' investments in debunking heteronormative, masculinist, as well as racist-imperial ideologies, Espinoza Garrido's contrasting analysis reveals, particularly, *Carnival Row*'s limitations, whilst breaking down the different layers of (neo-Victorian) imperial spectacle that he ultimately sees dismantled in *The Terror* through the series' inherently queer critical mode. He comes to a position where visualisation both of neo-Victorian Empire critique and queer representation fall short unless they are themselves invested in a critical queer mode that throws viewers back onto themselves, their own misplaced investments in imperial (gender) norms, and their (unknown) liaisons with aesthetic forms of empire.

The final article of this special issue, 'Gaily Ever After: Neo-Victorian M/M Genre Romance for the Twenty-First Century' by Caroline Duvezin-Caubet approaches the romance genre, including fan fiction, with a focus on M/M (gay) fiction. Whilst the previous articles discuss cultural productions in which male queer relationships are largely thwarted, those considered by Duvezin-Caubet focus on fulfilment and livability. Covering a corpus of 2017 to 2018 novels as well as shorter works by the authors K. J. Charles and Cat Sebastian, Duvezin-Caubet engages with texts that are rooted in the legacy of Georgette Heyer's Regency romances and the publishing history of M/M romance to explore ways in which these texts rewrite the past to create a happy queer 'archive'. She also investigates moments of marginalisation relating to gender, sexual, and racial identities,

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to arrive at a nuanced picture of a passionate community of romance readers and writers whose engagement with the nineteenth century is truly neo-Victorian.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. Earlier best-selling lesbian novels certainly include Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), which proved similarly successful amongst readers and critics. Going back even further, Radclyffe Hall's initially banned *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) is now hailed as a classic of lesbian fiction, although it frames same-sex desire in terms of 'inversion'. Though less commercially successful and less widely discussed as these examples, Patience Miller's neo-Victorian *Patience and Sarah* (1969) also deserves a mention in this context, not least because Waters has named it an inspiration to her own writing, alongside Ellen Galford's *Moll Cutpurse* (1984), Chris Hunt's *Street Lavender* (1986), and *N for Narcissus* (1990) (Waters 2018: n.p.).
2. Although historically connected fields, and in spite of their shared political and thematic concerns, lesbian feminism and queer studies have long co-existed in tension. Amongst other issues, such frictions pertain to different ways of conceptualising gender and sexual identity. For a more thorough discussion of this debate see Williams 1997 and O'Callaghan 2017: 4-9.

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3. On this shift in Butler's oeuvre, with special emphasis on *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, also see Koegler 2017.

4. For a succinct overview of this conceptual debate, see Cox 2017: 109-112.

5. It should be noted that Fanny and Stella might well have identified as transgender, genderqueer, or non-binary persons *avant la lettre*, and yet it would be problematic to fixate their identity as either of these – not only for lack of a corresponding discourse and available terminology, but also because such presentist attributions would risk prioritising twenty-first-century vocabulary and concepts over nineteenth-century lived experiences.

6. All same-sex practices between men, both in public and private, were prohibited under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, also known as the Labouchere Amendment (Dryden n.d: n.p.). Compared to this harsh anti-gay legislation, lesbian sexual practices remained untouched and hence rendered invisible in legal terms (Dryded n.d.: n.p.).

7. In addition to the individual essays by Hager and Joyce, also see the *Trans Victorians* special issue of *Victorian Review* in its entirety (Haefele-Thomas 2018).

8. Gröne makes this argument in her MA thesis, *"Not Really My Area": (Re-) Negotiating Amatonormativity and Relationships in BBC's* Sherlock (University of Münster, 2019).

9. Unlike Krafft-Ebing, who first used the term 'homosexual' in 1868 and as an expression of pathologisation, Ellis's deliberations on what he deemed 'sexual inversion' conceived of same-sex desires as a biological phenomenon in rather neutral terms (see Beccalossi 2011: 172-201). In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores the "endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century" that has come to dominate twentieth-century Western epistemological and cultural discourses (Sedgwick 2008: 1). With reference to Foucault, she wonders why designations such as "zoophiles, zooerasts, auto-monosexualists […] have entirely lost [their] diacritical potential for specifying a particular kind of person, an identity" and why, instead, "of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another […] precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged […] as the dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation'" (Sedgwick 2008: 9, 8).

10. Specifically, this is frequently achieved by staging white characters as suffering victims, as declining in health and fitness, or as unjustly robbed of their futures, properties and genealogies in a white colonial "fantasy of

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violation" (Ahmed 2015: 46; also see Koegler 2021). That said, nineteenth-century Gothic texts likewise occasionally subvert the colonial dynamics of violence, affect, and desire, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1823), which turns on its head the colonial politics of non-relation by subversively locating monstrosity in Frankenstein himself – and white supremacist society/ideology by extension – positing them as the original perpetrators of injury (Koegler 2020).

11. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said uses Foucauldian discourse analysis to illustrate how colonial discourse constructed colonial spaces (such as Asia, Africa, and Arabia in particular) through an Orientalist lens, meaning that these spaces and its peoples were framed as, for example, racially different, hypersexual, and/or sexually available to white men, as primitive, exotic, seductive, dangerous, etc. This framing was so pervasive that entire sciences, travellers, and so forth would continue to 'identify' these frequently paradoxical characteristics over a period of several centuries, egged on by their own prejudices in a circular, self-perpetuating economy of referencing (Said 1978).

12. On how this sending of conflicting messages may be taken as characteristic of *Penny Dreadful*'s larger gender and sexual politics, see Kohlke 2018.

13. For a thorough discussion of how neo-Victorian cultural production has engaged with racialised notions of freakery more generally – for instance through (re-)imaginings of nineteenth-century 'freak show' performers like Joseph Carey Merrick or Sarah Baartman – see Davies 2015.

14. The novel also points to the omission of black women's voices in the abolitionist context. After listening to a speech by one Olaudah Cambridge, an anti-slavery agitator following in the footsteps of Olaudah Equiano, she thinks to herself: "It is impossible to be both black *and* a woman. Did you know that? No one was asking me to give any lectures. They allow some blacks to impress them. Men like Sancho, Equiano… Yet I fail to see what was so impressive about them. They wrote, yes. But *thousands* could, if someone would bother to teach them" (Collins 2019: 205, original emphasis and ellipses).

15. Whilst Boyce has consistently explored black, female intersectionality since the 1980s, a number of her works have interrogated whitewashed artistic representations of the nineteenth century. As Espinoza Garrido and Mendes suggest, earlier examples that could rightfully be termed 'neo-Victorian' include Boyce's re-appropriation of Victorian arts and crafts patterns as deployed in *Lay Back, Keep Quiet and Think of What Made Britain So Great* (1986) or her collage *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born "Native"*

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Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction (1987). The same is true for Isaac Julien's short film *The Attendant* (1993), which includes a black, queer re-imagining and reclaiming of François-Auguste Biard's painting *The Slave Trade (Slaves on the West Coast of Africa)* (1833) (Espinoza Garrido and Mendes 2020). On Boyce's artworks, also see Noel 2014 and Dalal-Clayton 2019.

16. This critical corpus includes, but is of course not limited to, Brantlinger 1988; Brody 1998; Gerzina 2003; Meyer 1996; Parry 1988; Perera 1991; Said 1994; Spivak 1985. For a more extensive overview of how black studies perspectives in particular, but also postcolonial studies, have enriched and, in many ways, even anticipated neo-Victorian studies in its methods and objects of inquiry, see Espinoza Garrido, Tronicke and Wacker 2021b.

17. Such more extensive deployments of postcolonial or black studies approaches towards neo-Victorianism include Ho 2012, Ho 2019, as well as Espinoza-Garrido, Tronicke and Wacker 2021a.

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