(Re-)Writing Nineteenth-Century Lives: Review of Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, *Neo-Victorian Biofiction: Reimagining Nineteenth-Century Historical Subjects*

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> Already visitors come to our house, pushing their noses at the windows […]. People send me their poetry to read. They want to intrude on my private life in a most unseemly manner. […] Even in death I will not be safe. For there is a fashion for writing lives of poets. (Lynne Truss 1996: 140)

In the metafictional aside of the epigraph, the eponymous protagonist of Lynne Truss's comical novel *Tennyson's Gift* (1996) demonstrates an imagined moral outrage at contemporary writers' intrusions into the personal lives of dead (and not yet dead) Victorian poets. In so doing, the text, which takes as its fictional impetus the lives of real nineteenth-century figures, rejects the actual poet's renowned aversion to the cultural trappings of fame, and self-reflexively positions itself as one of the culprits in the "fashion for writing lives of poets" that Truss's Tennyson so abhors. This fashion for (re-)writing nineteenth-century subjectivities extends beyond poets to encompass all historical figures in neo-Victorian 'biofiction'. Previously defined by Marie-Luise Kohlke as "the literary, dramatic, or filmic re-imaginings of the lives of actual individuals who lived during the nineteenth century" (Kohlke 2013: 4), this subset of historical life-writing sits at the uneasy juncture between fact and fiction, authenticity and fabrication. At once harnessed to historicity, yet inherently playful in its return to and

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reassessment of past figures, biofiction calls into question the issue of narrative ethics. As Truss's Tennyson says of certain writers: "such scoundrels might tell the world that a man was mad, or dirty, or worse! And he has no defence!" (Truss 1996: 140-141). His remark self-consciously acknowledges the creative license that biofictional authors, like Truss, take with past lives and thus amplifies the novel's ambiguous approach to actual Victorian figures. It is around such conflicts and contradictions that Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's latest edited collection revolves.

Neo-Victorian Biofiction: Reimagining Nineteenth-Century Historical Subjects ruminates on the processes, practices, and problematics of the biofictional enterprise. The volume represents the first full-length study to advance a sustained critical examination of this subgenre of fictional life-writing focussing specifically on real-life protagonists of the Long Nineteenth Century. It follows in the wake of several recent monographs dedicated to more circumscribed engagements with the topic, including Helen Davies's *Neo-Victorian Freakery: The Cultural Afterlife of the Victorian Freak Show* (2015) and Ann Heilmann's *Neo-/Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry: A Study in Transgender and Transgenre* (2018), as well as a number of book chapters and articles, such as Cora Kaplan's 'Biographilia' in *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), Kohlke's 'Neo-Victorian Biofiction and the Special/Spectral Case of Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus*' (2013), and Lena Steveker's '"Eminent Victorians" and Neo-Victorian Fictional Biography' (2014), among others. In spite of this recent scholarly attention, however, the editors rightly assert that their study is the first to position "neo-Victorian biofiction as a distinct subset" of fictional life-writing and to "delineate its typical narrative and ideological practices" (p. 3). As such, Kohlke and Gutleben's volume complicates and enriches previous scholarship on biofiction more generally and neo-Victorian biofiction in particular. Crucially, the volume also reveals, as outlined above, the inherent ethical paradoxes at play within biofiction, which

> range from the simultaneous pursuit and breaching of intersubjective intimacy, the coincidence of empathic commemoration and exploitative revelation, the ease with which adaptive practice slips into dubious appropriation, and the asserted epistemological value of recreated life-stories through the subversion of historical truth claims, to the

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> short-circuiting of historical lives into commodities for profit and consumption. (p. 3)

Unified by an engagement with biofiction's ethics, the essays in *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* debate historical life-writing's responsibility both to the historical subjects it creatively reimagines and to the contemporary readers it seeks to entertain, appall, or enlighten.

The collection comprises twelve scholarly essays authored by Victorian and neo-Victorian specialists and prefaced by the editors' detailed and eloquent introduction. Each of the chapters engage with biofictional material that ostensibly operates within the parameters outlined by Kohlke in her important 2013 essay on neo-Victorian biofictional modes. Identifying three main creative streams of fictional nineteenth-century life-writing, Kohlke notes that the most prevalent of these modes is "celebrity biofiction", which "speculates about the inner lives, secret desires, traumas, and illicit pursuits of high-profile public figures, most often writers, poets, and artists" (Kohlke 2013: 7). Foregrounding famous cultural personas such as Lewis Carroll, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Sir Richard Francis Burton, and Lizzie Borden, most of the contributions in *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* respond to this particular area. Some of the biofictions under study also intrude into the area of "glossed biofiction"; this specific subset "relies on supposedly non-referential, made-up characters and plots, which are nonetheless extensively modelled on famous historical subjects, their lives, writings and/or art, often with little or no attempt at any effective disguise" (Kohlke 2013: 11). Examples of this can be seen in Stacey L. Kikendall's excellent essay on the Amelia Peabody Emerson series, the main protagonist of which is closely modelled on the novelist and Egyptologist Amelia B. Edwards, and Lucy Smith's chapter on Helen Humphreys's *Afterimage* (2001) and David Rocklin's *The Luminist* (2011), which employ 'semi-fictional' characters based on Julia Margaret Cameron. The final category of neo-Victorian biofiction, according to Kohlke, is "neo-Victorian biofiction of marginalised subjects" (Kohlke 2013: 9), which appears to intersect most closely with the neo-Victorian tendency to, as Christian Gutleben has argued elsewhere, "restitute […] forgotten voices of the past" (Gutleben 2001: 16). Focusing on Joseph Merrick, a figure marginalised in his own cultural era because of his disability, Helen Davies's chapter thus considers the politics of providing Merrick with a narrative voice and agency in contemporary children's books.

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Catherine Lanone also considers subjects that history has typically disregarded; her essay examines Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) which, as Lanone points out, "mingles biofiction of celebrity figures (John Franklin, his wife Lady Janes, and Charles Dickens) with the biofiction of historically marginalised individuals (Mathinna, the Aboriginal girl whom the Franklins adopted and abandoned when they left Tasmania)" (p. 232).

Aside from these shared biofictional strands, another common thread that links many of the texts under study in *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* is their exploration of the mechanics of writing. In line with Andrea Kirchknopf's assertion that "genres of biofiction and literary criticism interact in their engagement with the writing process" (Kirchknopf 2013: 73), most of the contributions in the volume openly acknowledge the importance of writing, the fragility of the written record that is open to destruction and loss, and the simultaneously recuperative and subversive creative potential of re-writing. Consequently, letters, journals, and diaries, whether real or fictious, abound in the neo-Victorian biofictions under study, proving right Kym Brindle's claim in *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Diaries and Letters* (2013) that neo-Victorian "epistolary devices engage some form of biographical speculation that exposes the 'elastic boundaries' and 'porous genres' of history and fiction" (Brindle 2013: 9).

Kohlke and Gutleben's introductory essay, entitled 'Taking Biofictional Liberties: Tactical Games and Gambits with Nineteenth-Century Lives', sets the theoretical stage for the proceeding discussions. It begins by situating biofiction in relation to notions of referentiality, before underlining the prevalence of the nineteenth century in fictional life-writing. Whilst biofiction covers many other historical periods, it is the nineteenth century that is most often mined for its historic figures. As the editors note, this is most likely due to the period's relative nearness to our own time and its role as an early progenitor of inventive life-writing practices (see p. 10). The subsequent sections of the introduction address the following topics: the manifold strategies of 're-voicing' that biofictional texts undertake in an attempt to access real-life subjects; the apparently contradictory desires of biofiction to engage in hagiography and, simultaneously, to irreverently refute posthumous identities and reputations; neo-Victorian biofiction's complex relationship with postmodernism; the search for truth but the distrust of master-narratives; and the ethical consequences and considerations involved in (re-)writing nineteenth-century lives. Kohlke and Gutleben

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conclude their insightful introduction by underscoring the importance of neo-Victorian biofiction in relation to the wider conceptual concerns of the neo-Victorian phenomenon. They argue that fictional life-writing that focuses on nineteenth-century figures partakes of the following established preoccupations of neo-Victorian literature and culture more widely:

> cultural memory and its ideologically inflected remediation; histories of trauma and violence; gender, queer, and sexual politics; family dynamics and adult-child relations; imperialism and postcolonial concerns; disability and ableism; the ethical and post-ethical debate; intermediality and genre blurring; spectrality and the Gothic; and modes of humour ranging from gentle irony to virulent black parody. (p. 46)

Intersecting with the above areas of interest, the essays that follow are divided across three thematic sections: 'Truths and Post-Truths', 'Forms of Otherness and (Re-)Othering', and 'After-Lives of Fame and Infamy'.

In the first of these, Charlotte Boyce's illuminating essay, entitled '"Who in the world am I?": Truth, Identity and Desire in Biofictional Representations of Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell', opens up discussions around issues of identity and epistemological truth. Focusing on the photographer and writer Lewis Carroll/Charles Dodgson and his girl-muse Alice Liddell, who famously inspired the fictional Alice in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), Boyce considers how the pair's controversial relationship has been perceived by biographers and critics as either entirely innocuous or troublingly erotic. Turning her attention to Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me* (2001) and Gaynor Arnold's *After Such Kindness* (2012), both of which participate in the same "seemingly endless quest for the 'true' essence of the Alice-Carroll relationship", Boyce argues that these texts are implicated in a biofictional "creative-recuperative agenda, promising revelatory insight into the hidden consciousnesses and unspoken desires of Carroll and Alice" (pp. 58 and 59). In spite of their shared agendas, however, Boyce underscores the different modes and methods of interpretation that each novel employs. Whilst Roiphe names the characters outright, Arnold adopts a distancing strategy (or , in Kohlke's terms "glossed" approach) wherein she renames Alice and Carroll as Margaret 'Daisy' Baxter

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and John Jameson. For Boyce, the renaming strategy utilised by Arnold does not preclude the text's inclusion in the category of biographical novel. Rather, it allows the author "more creative license in what she does with and how she reinterprets Alice and Carroll's relationship" (p. 60). The different strategies employed by each author in rewriting and reimagining Alice and Carroll forms the basis for the ensuing analyses in the chapter. Comparing and contrasting the (re)framing of the Alice-Carroll relationship in these two biofictional novels, Boyce concludes by noting that it is readerly "desire for desire" – that is, "our wish for further stories and speculation, and the continuation of the mystery that envelops" these individuals – as much as our "desire for 'truth'" that mobilises Carrollian biofiction (p. 74).

Chapter 2, 'Fakery and Historical Figures in the Flashman Papers' by Matthew Crofts, explores the way in which George Macdonald Fraser's novel *Flashman* (1969) and its sequels utilise historical figures to think through issues of honesty, authenticity, gendered stereotypes, and hypocrisy. The text's main protagonist, Harry Flashman, is entirely fictional, which complicates the categories of biofiction outlined by Kohlke. Yet, the text adopts biofictional inflections in that historical figures make frequent cameos in the text. Crofts suggests, then, that Flashman's cynical "comments on his contemporaries" are "in accord with 'celebrity biofiction'" (p. 82). The use of a fictional and flawed main character is significant, the author argues, because it enables a biofictional account of historical figures that "render the Victorians 'no better than us' (and 'a lot worse than us'), challenging their status and, by speculating about their secret selves, exposing them as hypocritical fakes" (p. 83). The historical figures that Crofts draws into his discussion include Abraham Lincoln, whom Flashman encounters in *Flash for Freedom!* (1971), James Brudenell, the seventh Earl of Cardigan who features in *Flashman*, and the Rani of Jhansi, Lakshmibai who appears in *Flashman and the Great Game* (1975). Crofts takes each of these figures as a separate case study and considers their portrayals in light of authenticity and honesty, hypocrisy, and sex and feminism, respectively. He effectively draws these seemingly disparate strands together in the conclusion by noting that whilst these figures' portrayals are rooted in *some* kind of notional truth, each of the Flashman novels functions as a tool through which Macdonald Fraser can reassess historical reality and the constructedness of past truths (see p. 101).

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Roberta Gefter Wondrich is likewise concerned with truth and authenticity in 'Biofictional Author Figures and Post-authentic Truths'. Examining A. S. Byatt's 'The Conjugial Angel' (1992), Adam Foulds's *The Quickening Maze* (2009), and Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George* (2005) Gefter Wondrich shifts the focus from resurrected political figures to biofictions of writers and artists. Such fictions, she suggests, "engage with the cultural problem and ideological issue of authorship and authority, and, finally, of authenticity" (p. 110). Introducing the empiric concept of 'post-authenticity', Gefter Wondrich argues that reading biofiction through this "perspective may afford a more comprehensive critical appraisal of the aesthetic strengths and ethical inflections" of biofiction (p. 104). In particular, she advances a detailed discussion of Barnes's neo-Victorian biofiction, which engages with the notion of authenticity in relation to authorship.

An author figure is similarly foregrounded in Laura Savu Walker's essay on George Eliot, examining Rebecca Mead's memoir *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014) and Patricia Duncker's biofiction *Sophie and the Sybil* (2015). Like Boyce, Savu Walker is concerned with tracing the "different, yet mutually enriching perspectives" that the two texts adopt in their approach to the same celebrity author (p. 135). Taking this autobiography and celebrity biofiction together and enacting a comparative analysis enables Savu Walker to productively probe the similar processes of resurrection encapsulated within these very different forms of life-writing. She argues that whilst neither of these texts is able to reveal the true essence of Eliot's real, "inner self", both are, nevertheless, able to "foster a deepening of appreciation for Elliot's enduring legacy" (p. 162).

Part II of *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* opens with Helen Davies's previously mentioned chapter, 'Us and Them? Joseph Merrick in Neo-Victorian Children's Fiction'. It offers an insightful exploration of the figure of Merrick, born with "extensive facial disfigurement and bodily deformities" (p. 169) and exhibited in late-Victorian England as 'The Elephant Man', and his portrayal in three children's books published in the 1980s, all entitled *The Elephant Man*, respectively authored by Michael Howell and Peter Ford (1983), Frederick Drimmer (1985) and Tim Vicary (1989). Considering the parallels that exist between the display and exhibition of 'Othered' bodies in Victorian culture and neo-Victorian biofiction's adoption of a similar, though more textualised practice, Davies asks how children's books about Merrick can "(re)imagine ethical and empathetic possibilities of agency for their

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subjects" (p. 169). Drawing upon and extending her previous research into ventriloquism in neo-Victorian fiction (see Davies 2012), Davies thus meditates upon the extent to which the three novels attempt to amplify or, more problematically, assume the voice of Merrick for, implicitly, predominantly able-bodied young readers. Though each of the three children's authors attempts to "deploy Merrick's life as a way of promoting understanding and acceptance of bodily diversity", Davies posits that their progressive agendas are undermined by the fact that at least two of the texts (Vicary and Drimmer's novels) reinscribe Merrick's inherent 'Otherness' (p. 184).

Jeanne Ellis's 'The Vivisectionist's Tale: Auto/Biographical Voice and the Queer Fictions of Empire in Ann Harries's *Manly Pursuits*' likewise raises ethical questions in its focus on the exposure of secrets and scandals in biofictional texts. Like the *Flashman* novels examined by Crofts, *Manly Pursuits* (1999) is focalised through the perspective of an entirely fictional character, that of the vivisectionist Francis Wills. Ellis draws interesting parallels between the fictional character's occupation and the biofictional enterprise:

> Defined by the *OED Online* as "[t]he action of cutting or dissecting some part of a living organism" […] the word 'vivisection' from the Latin *vīvus* (living) and *sectio* (cutting) uncannily mirrors the Greek *bios* (life) and *graphein* (to write) of the compound term 'biography'. (p. 190, original emphasis)

The somewhat sinister image of the vivisectionist is harnessed by Harries in this biofictional novel, Ellis argues, and proves "definitive of neo-Victorian biofiction, which, while it flays its subjects, exposing the inner workings of the heart and the mind, its secret desires, sins, and eccentricities", at the same time grants "the subject a new lease of life, fleshes it out, and reinvigorates it" (p. 193). The historical figures that *Manly Pursuits* attempts to both (re)cast and also cut open, through their fraught interactions with the fictional Wills, are Oscar Wilde and Cecil John Rhodes. For Ellis, the creative endeavour of this book is thus caught up in navigating "the biofictional poles of parodic debunking and instructive edutainment, of conscientious exposure and salacious voyeurism" (p. 206).

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Stacey L. Kikendall's highly original chapter on 'Biofiction and Différance: Tracing Threads of (Neo-)Victorian Women Travellers in the Amelia Peabody Emerson Series' comes next. Utilising Derridean theory as a framework for examining the interwoven strands of the overwritten traces of past and present, historicity and fabrication in neo-Victorian biofiction, Kikendall argues that

> [t]he ways in which Derrida refers to différance as a weaving that creates a fabric of difference is particularly appropriate for exploring neo-Victorian biofiction, because while the real subjects existed in history, the fictional subjects could be viewed as threads of history rewoven in a different pattern, resulting in a new fabric of meaning. (p. 213)

The chapter traces the exploits of the archaeologist-detective figure Amelia Peabody Emerson in Elizabeth Peters's *Crocodile on the Sandbank* (1975). The quasi-fictional Amelia is, as Kikendall argues, an interesting "assemblage" (p. 220) of a number of Victorian women explorers (including, and most specifically, the novelist and adventurer, Amelia B. Edwards). Kikendall's subsequent analyses of the novel and the semi-historical figure build the argument that this biofiction, often relegated to the margins of serious biofictional enquiry, offers readers the opportunity of engaging with women's history and of scrutinising important reimaginings of race and gender.

In her already mentioned chapter, 'Biofiction Goes Global: Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, Dickens, and the Lost Child', Catherine Lanone is similarly concerned with neo-Victorian biofiction's "recurrent intersection with postcolonialism and, more recently, cosmopolitanism" (p. 233). Focusing on the celebrity figures of Dickens and Lady Franklin, alongside the historically marginalised individual, the Aboriginal girl, Mathinna, Lanone argues that in *Wanting*, Flanagan addresses the "global logic of the Victorian Empire", at the same time as he "engages with contemporary events such as the 2008 Australian debate about compensation for the children of the Lost Generation" (p. 233). Her discussion moves through a catalogue of visual items, from Mathinna's red dress to her clogs and, later, her bare feet, which Lanone terms "the visual archive" (p. 236). These objects and other visual signs are emotionally and culturally significant because they enable Flanagan

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to explore "enforced acculturation" and the dubious "'benefits' of Britain's self-appointed civilising mission" (p. 239).

The final section of the volume opens with Sylvia Mieszkowski's 'Polymath Revisited: Cross-lighting R.F. Burton between Cultural Passing and Steampunk Action', which examines Sir Richard Francis Burton and the way in which he is resurrected and critically examined in two neo-Victorian biofictions. She focuses on two distinct texts that employ contrary versions of Burton: as assimilationist, alienated from Britain, cum exploiter of other cultures in Ilya Troyanov's *The Collector of Worlds* (2009), in which Burton is 'Othered' by non-white narrators' recounting of his exploits, and as "un-estranged action hero" (p. 265 and *passim*) and secret agent of Empire in Mark Hodder's *The Strange Affair of Spring-Heeled Jack* (2010). Borrowing the term 'cross-lighting' from film and photographic production, the author argues for a way of reading the texts as two different sources of light that each casts spotlights and "'ideological' shadows" (p. 267 and *passim*) upon the other and, of course, on its historical protagonist. Like Kikendall and Lanone's chapter, this essay too touches upon postcolonial criticism and its relationship with biofiction.

The next enlightening chapter by Sonia Villegas-López, '(Re)Tracing Charlotte Brontë's Steps: Biofiction as Memory Text in Michèle Roberts's *The Mistressclass*', considers a biofictional account of the Brontës in light of Annette Kuhn's critical notion of the 'memory text'. Villegas-López examines a miscellany of biographies and novels about the Brontës, before turning her attention to Roberts's 2003 biofiction on Charlotte and Emily. Noting the limitations of the several biographies on Charlotte especially, Villegas-López proposes that biofiction is capable of an altogether more radical act of rewriting past figures as they 'really' were. Whilst biography is tempered by societal conventions and is often constrained by the censoring or destruction of personal letters, biofiction fills in the gaps and, in the case of *The Mistressclass*, provides an alternative picture of the historical sisters, their relationships with one another, and their relations with others. By drawing on, supplementing, and subversively rewriting Charlotte Brontë's extant letters and last reminisces, Villegas-López argues that *The Mistressclass* is a memory text that "'performs' memory" (p. 318). The final part of the chapter turns to the materiality of writing and the domestic spaces which Roberts conjures in the texts; for Villegas-López it is the process of

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writing and the fictional spaces and objects associated with the sisters that most deeply enliven memory in this biofictional novel.

A corresponding interest in materiality is evident in Lucy Smith's earlier referenced, beautifully illustrated chapter, 'Julia Margaret Cameron and Archival imagination: Materiality and Subjectivity in Biofictions of a Victorian Photographer', which shifts attention to Cameron and neo-Victorian biofictions that have attempted to re-envision both her life and her photographic works. Smith asks how "the visual work" of an artist can be "faithfully rendered" (p. 323) in textual biofictions of Victorian visual artists, and looks to Humphreys's *Afterimage* and Rocklin's *The Luminist* for answers. Both of the novels are based on the life and art of Cameron, the "pioneering Victorian photographer" who 'worked from the centre of the Freshwater Circle on the Isle of Wight in the 1860s and 1870s" (p. 324). Noting the biographical and creative impulses that drove Cameron's own artworks, and the odd mix of fictionality and creativity that similarly drives biofiction, Smith puts forward the concept of an "archival imagination" (p. 325). Her chapter argues that each of the glossed biofictions under study draw upon this "archival imagination", especially via ekphrasis, in their separate treatments of Cameron, her works, and the lives of her family and other creative collaborators. Both texts also adapt Cameron's narrative to serve their own contemporary feminist and postcolonial agendas (see pp. 328 and 338). The author concludes by positing that these biofictions "produce new commentaries on Cameron's representation of female icons and colonised persons, by enacting their narratives *through* the visual archive" (p. 350, original emphasis).

The final essay in the collection moves beyond neo-Victorian biofictions that foreground materiality and visuality in print, and instead looks to performance. In 'Musical Madness: Biofictional Performances of the Lizzie Borden Murders', Marc Napolitano focuses on performative renderings of the Lizzie Borden story in a ballet, an opera, and a rock musical/concept album. He posits that each of these creative outlets returns to the Borden tragedy and uses "music and dance to reframe the criminal case as a story of psychological trauma" (p. 355). Curiously, each of these biofictional returns acknowledges Borden's guilt, despite her real-life acquittal. The psychological trauma supposedly experienced by Borden and addressed and emphasised in the different performative media, continuously and repeatedly draws attention to interiority, to the exclusion of "the larger

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social issues that might facilitate the psychological damage that defines the protagonist" (p. 356). This results in what Napolitano calls "clichés" of the "madwoman and victim-turned-criminal narratives" that prevent more nuanced discussions of Borden and the late-nineteenth century setting that might have influenced her (p. 381). Placed at the end of the volume, this interesting chapter, with its focus on musical and visual re-enactments of the past, offers a useful complement to the other more textually-focused essays.

Indeed, whilst the editors define neo-Victorian biofiction in its broadest terms, as encompassing textual, filmic, and other multi-media reincarnations of Victorian figures (p. 3), the collective focus of the volume lies primarily in textual returns to past subjects (with the obvious exception of Napolitano's chapter). Given the number of recent biopics of nineteenth-century individuals – including the ITV series *Victoria* (2016-2019) and the 2018 biographical drama *The Happy Prince*, for instance – the focus might have been widened to include contributions that consider other, more visual forms of biofictional engagement. To my mind, visual resurrections of past figures proffer especially innovative and interesting ways of thinking about how historic lives are offered up to contemporary audiences. In this, *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* offers a strong foundation from which other studies might spring. For example, in 2020, a fascination with visualising historical 'Others' surfaced in regards to the ancestry website, My Heritage, and its new 'Deep Nostalgia' app. Utilising re-enactment technology, the 'Deep Nostalgia' app affords individuals the opportunity of reanimating images of their ancestors. Across Twitter, a subsequent trend for applying this technology to photographs and portraits of well-known historical figures has emerged. Victorian subjects loom large in this practice: Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, and Frederick Douglass have been among the most popular nineteenth-century figures (re)animated in this way. The digital resurrection of such figures in full colour and apparently moving of their own accord offers a tantalising glimpse into the past; the My Heritage platform thus proffers the playful promise of seeing a Victorian person as they *really* were. Thus, the 'Deep Nostalgia' technology is seemingly congruent with neo-Victorian biofiction's resurrectionist desire to conjure subjects that are "long since dead" so that they may "live, love, suffer, and dance anew for the intellectual and affective pleasures afforded present-day audiences", as the editors remark (p. 2). Yet, as with fictional life-writing, the unnatural and awkwardly mechanical movements of these visual re-animations reveal the artificiality

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and impossibility of such a task. As *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* carefully reminds us, there are complex epistemological difficulties inherent in understanding, re-envisioning, or ever really *knowing* past subjects (see p. 33).

What each of the chapters in *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* reiterates, then, is the deep-rooted, yet somewhat problematic, fascination that this type of fiction has with recalling and reimagining the lives, narratives, and bodies of historic figures. Providing rigorous critical insight into neo-Victorian biofiction, this volume proffers an important and thought-provoking addition to Brill|Rodopi's Neo-Victorian Series. It is essential reading for anyone interested in neo-Victorian, biographical, and biofictional studies and represents a timely and significant intervention in the aforementioned scholarly fields.

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