Miss Ives and ISIS:
The Cult(ure) of Collaboration in Neo-Victorian Adaptations

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Abstract:
This article discusses the films *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003) and *Van Helsing* (2004), as well as the television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), as neo-Victorian adaptations, particularly in terms of how these works adapt characters from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The ways in which those texts and characters are reworked reveal Victorian – as well as more recent – ideas of isolation and collaboration, Gothicism, visuality, science and technology, and morality. Such revelations appear to argue that the darker, more isolated 'evil' apparent in these Victorian Gothic source texts is quite capable of openly building its own collaborative network, consistent with Nazism, Fascism, and even ISIS. Similar to ISIS, these contemporary Gothic and neo-Victorian adaptations use science, technology, and hypervisuality in significant ways, often complicating the perception of 'good' and 'evil'. This form of complication has consistently been fundamental to the Gothic, particularly in relation to recent neo-Victorian Gothic adaptations.

Keywords: adaptation, collaboration, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, Gothic, ISIS, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Penny Dreadful*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, terrorism, *Van Helsing*.

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The films *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003) and *Van Helsing* (2004), as well as the recent television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), adapt characters from multiple Victorian texts, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and also a pre-Victorian text, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), first published one year before Queen Victoria's birth and revised by Mary Shelley in 1831. These three post-2000 neo-Victorian adaptations merit

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discussion not just *as* adaptations of characters from those four source texts, but also in terms of the ways in which those adaptations provide revealing commentary on Victorian and contemporary concepts of isolation and collaboration, the Gothic, visuality, science and technology, and prevailing perceptions of 'good' and 'evil'.

While these three adaptations pick up on a culture of collaboration that is a prominent theme in the literary texts they adapt, it is also clear that they very well might be taking, as Robert Stam suggests, "an activist stance toward their source novels, inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism" (Stam 2000: 64). Stam also argues, using the terminology of conversation, that an "adaptation, in this sense, is less an attempted resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process" (Stam 2000: 64). With Stam's arguments in mind, it becomes clear that these three neo-Victorian adaptations contribute to a dialogue that shows consistencies with their Victorian source material as well as an "activist stance" towards them. It also becomes evident that adaptations between different media – book, film, television, video games – create a complex network of intertwined adaptive relationships, leading Stam to discuss these relationships as a group conversation in which potentially multiple adaptations might be responding to and conversing with multiple originaries and/or prior adaptations. Stam discusses this intertextual dialogism as a collection of "infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated" (Stam 2000: 64).

This is indeed a prodigious network of influence, and for that reason, it is quite often rather difficult to accurately map such influences and intertextual dialogues. Stam comments that these adapted consistencies reach a "text not only through recognisable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination" (Stam 2000: 64). For example, the film *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is an adaptation of a comic book series of the same name, written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Kevin O'Neill, that began publication in 1999. As a work of neo-Victorianism, the series combines contemporary references with a Victorian world made up of a collaboration of multiple characters from Victorian fiction. As adaptations inevitably do, the film makes multiple changes to the comic book characters. Yet, complicating things even further, the film not only selects a

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smaller number of characters for adaptive purposes, but it also *adds* characters – including Dorian Gray, one of the main characters discussed in this article. Therefore, while meticulously tracing the elements of adapted characters in relation to the comic book series and the novels might be interesting, the actual dissemination of adapted consistencies might prove too subtle to make such an exercise worthwhile. With that in mind, the primary focus of this article will be placed on those characters as originary and filmic/television bookends, rather than on a more in-depth discussion of the comic book series and other source material in between.

1.   Collaboration in Adaptation

While collaboration is a prominent theme in the film *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, the other two neo-Victorian adaptations in this discussion likewise pick up on a culture of collaboration in the Victorian texts, either by constructing collections of 'good' characters that collaborate against an 'evil' entity, or by constructing a clear criticism of isolation that privileges collaboration and human fellowship over social or intellectual isolation. However, the adaptations also construct complex networks that complicate and challenge such a binary model.[1] Almost to a person, the characters in these adaptations are haunted by their respective pasts, regardless of their 'good' or 'evil' affiliation. Therefore, the message appears to be that evil is no longer viewed as a dark and isolated entity, but rather could exist anywhere, and it is quite capable of operating out in the open in order to build and recruit its collaborative network, potentially alluding to Nazism, Fascism, and more recently, ISIS. Considering the unique relationship that the Gothic has with adaptation in general, as well as with this particular network of sources and adaptations, it is also evident that science, technology, and the concept of visuality play prominent roles in that relationship.

          In terms of some of the more recognisable character fidelities and consistencies between the three post-2000 adaptations and the four source texts, the cult of collaboration is crucial. *Penny Dreadful* adapts that theme from *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* in its collaborative combination/conflation of the explorer Sir Malcolm Murray (Timothy Dalton) and the Allan Quatermain (Sean Connery) figure. Sir Malcolm is reminiscent not only of Allan Quatermain from the earlier film, but also of Moore's prior interpretation of the Allan Quatermain character – a character

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likewise adapted from the H. Rider Haggard novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Haggard's multiple Allan-Quatermain-based sequels. The team in *Penny Dreadful* revolves around Vanessa Ives (Eva Green), who is reminiscent of Mina Harker from the film and comic book *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Peta Wilson in the film), as well as from Stoker's *Dracula*. However, Sir Malcolm Murray's daughter in *Penny Dreadful* is also named Mina (Olivia Llewellyn). *Penny Dreadful*'s cast of characters further includes Dr Victor Frankenstein (Harry Treadaway), a werewolf named Ethan Chandler (Josh Hartnett), a character presumably of Saharan African origin, Sembene (Danny Sapani), as well as an openly gay character, Ferdinand Lyle (Simon Russell Beale). Other than Sir Malcolm and Sembene – who acts as something along the lines of a personal servant, friend, and bodyguard to Sir Malcolm – the characters in *Penny Dreadful* are mostly isolated figures who only band together in the first season for the purpose of the discovery and infiltration of a syndicate of vampires with the goal of rescuing Sir Malcolm's daughter from their control. Miss Ives has a former connection with the Murray family, but she is not a direct relation and has been estranged (and therefore isolated) from the family for some time before the timeline of the first season begins. Similarly, in *Van Helsing*, the title character (Hugh Jackman) – obviously an adaptation of the character by the same name from Stoker's *Dracula* – works alone, like Victor Frankenstein from Shelley's *Frankenstein* and also Stevenson's Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde.[2] However, eventually, if reluctantly, Van Helsing collaborates with a monk named Carl (David Wenham), and later the two of them likewise join forces with Anna Valerious (Kate Beckinsale) in their pursuit of the destruction of Count Vladislaus[3] Dracula (Richard Roxburgh) near the end of the film.

Penny Dreadful* and *Van Helsing* depict isolated protagonists banding together in order to combat networks of supernatural antagonists. However, the antagonist group in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is less a supernatural force than it is an actual terrorist organization (with a few preternatural elements thrown in, of course). In a classic conspiracy twist, Dorian Gray (Stuart Townsend) turns on his collaborators and steals scientific samples of their powers for the purpose of mass reproduction in order to aid The Phantom a.k.a. M a.k.a. Moriarty (Richard Roxburgh of Dracula fame in *Van Helsing*) – with obvious reference to the master

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criminal from Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories – in building a terrorist army enhanced by those supernatural powers.

All of the major characters in these neo-Victorian adaptations are haunted by their respective pasts. This is a theme that not only unites them as adaptations, but that also becomes very much a part of the modern Gothic – and, by extension, the modern Gothic adaptation. Imelda Whelehan calls for an investigation of "the extent to which an idea of the past is what a classic adaptation seeks to capture, and how that idea of the past coalesces with the period in which the adaptation is made" (Whelehan 1999: 14). Such an investigation would uncover one of the fundamental debates of adaptation studies over the issue of fidelity. Consistent with this debate, Thomas Leitch discusses adaptation as a process of change, but also as a process that will surely involve at least some consistency between an adaptation and its sources. For Leitch, "the primary lesson of film adaptation" is "that texts remain alive only to the extent that they can be rewritten and that to experience a text in all its power requires each reader to rewrite it" (Leitch 2007: 12-13). Therefore, at least some element of fidelity – or rewriting – is at stake between an adaptation and its source material, otherwise an adaptation would cease to qualify as an adaptation. Fidelity and a relationship with the past is fundamental to the existence and survival of adaptation. Again, the link between adaptation and contemporary Gothic is reinforced, as Joanne Watkiss observes of the Gothic that in "modern and contemporary culture, this tendency to rewrite and recycle other texts has remained a consistent feature of the form" (Watkiss 2014: 465). Like Watkiss, Gary R. Bartolotti and Linda Hutcheon also acknowledge at least some element of fidelity in adaptation:

> Like the idea of the meme, a story too can be thought of as a fundamental unit of cultural transmission [...]. As our culture has added new media and new means of mass diffusion to our communications repertoire, we have needed (or desired) more stories. What we have in fact often done, however, is to retell the same stories, over and over again – on film and television, in video games and theme parks. (Bartolotti and Hutcheon 2007: 447)

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Consistent with the evolutionary connotations of adaptation, Bartolotti and Hutcheon address the cultural as well as the biological, as they point out that, "[l]ike genes, narratives are 'replicators,' […]. Replication is about survival over time. High survival […] depends on obvious things like longevity and fecundity" (Bartolotti and Hutcheon 2007: 447). Whether it is the Gothic, character collaboration, the concept of monstrosity, society's worst threats and deepest fears, biological transmission, or simply the art of storytelling, these concepts are recognisable but continually reshaped in each generation, as seen in the source texts from which characters in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Van Helsing*, and *Penny Dreadful* are adapted.

For example, in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one of Victor's many moral and ethical mistakes is based on the fact that, as a scientist, he fails to collaborate with others in his field in order to develop, refine, revise, and perhaps even ultimately reject his discovery of "so astonishing a secret": his possession of "the capacity of bestowing animation" on an assembled collection of lifeless human body parts (Shelley 1994: 31, 32). In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the titular doctor commits scientific transgressions of isolation and a lack of collaboration, similar to Victor Frankenstein. Jekyll's own backfired experiment surely would have been censured, at the very least, by his friend and colleague, Dr Lanyon, who laments to Mr Utterson that "'it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me'" due to Jekyll's controversial experiments that Lanyon terms "'unscientific balderdash'" (Stevenson 1991: 7). Furthermore, in 'The Last Night' section of the story, Utterson and Jekyll's house staff band together to force their way into Jekyll's cabinet and confront Hyde. Likewise, the assembly of voices, testimonies, personal accounts, and letters that make up the text of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* all constitute one monstrous, multifarious narrative of collaboration.

Wilde's Dorian Gray also isolates himself in his legal and moral transgressions, only to be exposed, at the end of the story, by the collaboration of his own servants – reminiscent of the collaboration of house staff that Utterson assembles against Hyde – who find him dead, "[l]ying on the floor […] in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was" (Wilde 2007: 184).[4] In life, of course, the horrific visual record of Dorian's age and sins, in the form of his

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portrait, was kept in an isolated and locked room, out of sight and inaccessible to anyone but himself.

In *Dracula* it is the collaboration of what Christopher Craft would later term the "crew of light" (Craft 1984:109) that eventually foils and destroys the vampire. The Count, however, creates a small collaborative network of his own. Even beyond the three vampire women that evidently live with him in his castle in Transylvania, as well as the other Transylvanians under his control, Dracula appears to be attempting to build a collaborative network in London, with his infection of and subsequent power over Mr Renfield, Lucy Westenra, and for a time, Mina Harker. But despite these attempts, the Count remains very much an isolated creature in the novel, secluded in his walled castle in an extremely remote region of Transylvania. Even Carfax, the twenty-acre estate that Dracula purchases near London, is surrounded by a solid stone wall and has many trees on it, "'which make it in places gloomy'" (Stoker 2000: 19). The Count admits that "'I love the shade and the shadow, and would be alone with my thoughts when I may'" (Stoker 2000: 20). Yet Dracula's Gothic hermitage is still no match for the collaborative network that defeats him.

2.   Gothicism and Neo-Victorianism

Like the vampire, Gothicism is a shapeshifter, with seemingly eternal life. Gothicism can appear in multiple forms, existing in a constant state of reanimation. Gothicism is a network that runs through centuries, disciplines, and media, constantly evolving on the basis of adaptive changes, yet always staying true to its fundamental traits of darkness, fear in general, fear of the other, and the subsequent phenomena of duality and doubleness that othering inevitably creates. Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Donna Lee Brien observe that, as

> both a critical and a metaphorical entity, the term 'Gothic' has indeed evolved into an area of enquiry having highly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary connotations. Once entangled solely with the domain of literature, the Gothic has recently found fertile ground in other mediums of representation. (Piatti-Farnell and Lee Brien 2015b: 1)

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As the Gothic adapted and survived by acquiring multimedia and multidisciplinary traits – consistent with its quintessential, multifarious othering and doubling – its relationship not only with the past in general, but also with its own past, likewise became fundamental to Gothicism. According to Andrew Smith's observations on Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's edited collection *Neo-Victorian Gothic* (2012), neo-Victorian studies aligns particularly well with the Gothic. Smith cites the editors' claim that

> *neo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic*: resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries, insisting obsessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, reliving the period's nightmares and traumas. (Kohlke and Gutleben qtd. in Smith 2013: 171, original emphasis)

However, Smith points out that the editors juxtapose neo-Victorianism's retrospective inclination with a simultaneous urgent focus on the present: "neo-Victorianism also tries to understand the nineteenth century as the contemporary self's uncanny *Doppelgänger*, exploring the uncertain limits between what is vanished (dead) and surviving (still living)" (Kohlke and Gutleben qtd. in Smith 2013: 171, original italics).

Due to the long history of the Gothic, and its continuous reinvention of itself, the genre, like neo-Victorianism, is one that is simultaneously archaic and contemporary. Catherine Spooner begins to reconcile that oxymoronic combination of the old and the new in the Gothic by observing that, "considering the genre's preoccupation with all kinds of revenants and returns from the dead, Gothic has throughout its history taken the form of a series of revivals" (Spooner 2006: 10). As a result, "contemporary Gothic discourses can be viewed as relating to an earlier Gothic tradition while expressing at times an entirely different range of cultural agendas" (Spooner 2006: 12). This interdisciplinary, multimedia, archaic contemporaneity of the Gothic is what lends itself so well to adaptation, as well as to neo-Victorianism.

Therefore, even though the Gothic has typically symbolised the past – Roman-era barbaric tribes, perceived architectural archaism during the middle ages, anti-progressive cultural backwardness – its versatility instead

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creates a fertile ground for innovation amidst the Gothic decay. Such a metaphor is consistent with Anya Heise-von der Lippe's classification of the Gothic as a "highly innovative hybrid genre" that "specifically lends itself to this kind of structurally complex, experimental textuality, reflecting the terror of monstrosity as well as the pleasure of unearthing the repressed secrets of the past" (Heise-von der Lippe 2015: 117). One gets the best of both worlds with the Gothic, as it is both nostalgic and progressive, comforting and unnerving, familiar and monstrous. It is no wonder that it has become so ingrained in popular culture through the vehicle of film and television adaptation, particularly in revivals of the four classic source texts.

Significantly, all these classic Victorian Gothic texts reconcile the stereotypical archaism of the Gothic with the more progressive contemporaneous elements of science and technology, and the three neo-Victorian adaptations continue this reconciliation. While all clearly employ elements of the Gothic, science and technology, and visuality, further analysis of these themes reiterates the ways in which these twenty-first-century adaptations themselves act as collaborations. As a result, it becomes apparent that it is precisely through this methodology and these themes that the neo-Victorian adaptations seek to recruit an audience that is far more responsive to hypervisuality, pop-cultural appropriations, and revisionist modernity. Furthermore, through science and technology, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Van Helsing*, and *Penny Dreadful* expose malevolent networks – reminiscent of modern terrorist groups – that have become increasingly prominent in contemporary neo-Victorian Gothic adaptations. Consistent with the scientific and technological themes in the four source texts, these neo-Victorian villainous networks are formed, empowered, and rendered a threat in a hypervisual manner.[5]

3.   Visuality and Hypervisuality

While the association with science and technology in *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* are obvious, those elements also play a significant role in *Dracula* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, if more obliquely. Scientific references in Wilde's text are found in Lord Henry Wotton having "been always enthralled by the methods of natural science", as well as in Alan Campbell's "scientific experiment" in the disposal of Basil Hallward's corpse after Dorian murders him (Wilde 2007: 51, 141). Also, it is made clear in the novel that "Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a

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book" (Wilde 2007: 123), which was sent to him by Lord Henry. This "yellow book" (Wilde 2007: 103) – a reference to Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884) – fascinated Dorian, as the "hero, the wonderful young Parisian in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself" (Wilde 2007: 105).[6]

As for *Dracula*, such connections might seem odd, due to the fact that the vampire is more often associated with superstition and the supernatural than it is with science and technology, but Van Helsing reveals to the rest of the "crew of light" that the Count himself

> 'was in life a most wonderful man. Soldier, statesman, and alchemist – which latter was the highest development of the science-knowledge of his time. He had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare, and a heart that knew no fear and no remorse.' (Stoker 2000: 259)

Stoker seems to be drawing a parallel between Dracula and Dr Faustus, if not also alluding to Victor Frankenstein. As a vampire, Dracula is indeed a supernatural monster, but as a mortal, Dracula was a man of intellect and science. Van Helsing himself is immersed in the pursuit of a monster of legend and superstition, but that pursuit is frequently quite scientific in method, particularly with the use of blood transfusion – blood also being a highly visual device in the novel, as even the sight of it puts the Count into a "demoniac fury" – to attempt to fight off the effects of the vampire infection in Lucy Westenra, and also "for sheer want of blood to keep the heart's action as it should be", insisting that "[t]here must be transfusion of blood at once" (Stoker 2000: 21, 104). Mina plays an important role in the novel in relation to technology, as well. Alison Case argues that Mina is an active collaborative force in the novel, as she reveals herself to be more than capable as "the active force behind the accumulation and organization of documents in the case" against the Count (Case 1993: 230). Through this accumulation and organisation, Mina is coordinating the use of what Leanne Page terms "three high performance technologies": shorthand, the phonograph, and the typewriter (Page 2011: 97).

Applied to the three adaptations, the scientific connections resurface, particularly in *Van Helsing*, as seen in the immense machine powered by

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Victor Frankenstein's technology, as well as in Victor's own monster,
which enables Dracula to reanimate his thousands of stillborn vampire
children, birthed by his three vampire brides. Likewise, in *The League of
Extraordinary Gentlemen*, technology and science fiction play prominent
roles, particularly with the incorporation of Captain Nemo (Naseeruddin
Shah) into the film.[7] Especially in the third season of *Penny Dreadful*,
technology and science fiction come into play when Doctors Frankenstein
and his old school friend Henry Jekyll (Shazad Latif) collaborate on
attempting to find a miracle cure for insanity that combines elements of
chemistry and electricity. Additionally, in what might be read as a well-
crafted reference to Stoker's Dracula as a man of intellect and science, the
Dracula character from the third season of *Penny Dreadful* (Christian
Camargo) goes by the alias Dr Alexander Sweet, a scientific naturalist at the
Natural History Museum. In season one, Victor also creates a second
monster, Proteus (Alex Price), but the creature is subsequently murdered by
Victor's first creation, the self-named John Clare (Rory Kinnear). Victor
also creates a third and female monster in the first season of *Penny
Dreadful*, when he resurrects the tubercular prostitute Brona Croft as Lily
(Billie Piper), perhaps compensating for the female creature that Victor
destroys before it even gets a chance to live in Shelley's novel.

These examples, and Moriarty's plan to create a supernatural army
in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, display combinations of
science, technology, and visuality, while also demonstrating some rather
prodigious leaps from the source material. Dracula's mass reanimation of
his vampire children, the elaborate steampunk modernisations of neo-
Victorian machinery in Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* submarine, Moriarty's
scheme, and the collaboration of Doctors Frankenstein and Jekyll are all
facilitated by the rich adaptive history of the source texts. Granted, the
Victorian novels themselves abound with incredible, sensational leaps.[8]
However, the still more science- and technology-based deviations in these
adaptations seem to take things into noticeably new directions.

In general, these works are consistent not with the source texts but
with the Gothic film tradition founded in *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and
House of Dracula (1945), similar to the way in which Chris Louttit
discusses the Victorian city element of 'Horror London': "composite,
mashed-up forms […] breathing new life into familiar forms of
representation" (Louttit 2016: 12). Working within this framework of

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familiarity and cooperation, Sinan Akilli and Seda Öz focus more on the layers "of confluence in *Penny Dreadful*" (Akilli and Öz 2016: 16). This "confluence" applies equally to the characters of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Van Helsing* who converge upon each other like rivers of popular cultural representations, collected over the decades and centuries. In a similar vein, Benjamin Poore describes the collection of characters in both *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Penny Dreadful* as a "fractured, unconventional family" (Poore 2016: 67). While the extremely complicated genealogy of these families would certainly classify them as such, one might also add 'dysfunctional' into the mix, as even though family is a prominent theme in at least *Van Helsing* and *Penny Dreadful*, all three adaptations make it clear that their respective 'families', conventional or not, are frequently at odds with each other. Such fracture and dysfunctionality complicates and problematises collaboration, adding a new charge to classic Gothic characterisation. However, according to Dragoş Manea,

> when we think about them, no matter how diffuse or layered their image is in our memory, we nevertheless conceive a familiar figure, with certain character traits we assume to be essential, and based most likely on at least one visual representation. (Manea 2016: 40)

Accordingly, Manea points to "easily recognizable staples of popular culture, grounded perhaps in an original text, but given shape in our collective memory through countless retellings, remakes, and reimaginings" (Manea 2016: 40). As these characters have been so ubiquitous via visual representations for decades, they are indeed multimedia, international Gothic icons, and the adaptive methodology of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Van Helsing*, and *Penny Dreadful* seeks to exploit that visuality, particularly through the use of science and technology.

The fluid nature of visual icons is especially pertinent here, for "[v]ampires, werewolves, monsters of all shapes and sizes carry with them a media history" (Manea 2016: 40). Like all media, such representations are prone to adaptation, manipulation, distortion, and often for a purpose, consistent with Manea's concept of "simultaneous character adaptation and appropriation" (Manea 2016: 41). More often than not, the purpose of an

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adaptation would be to – or at least attempt to – improve upon the source material. However, film and television adaptations are inevitably affected by the aim of making money and gaining an audience. Using *Penny Dreadful* as an example, Alison Lee and Frederick D. King argue that the series transforms "classic texts into contemporary cultural iconography" and "reminds us that all texts exist within a web of historical and cultural associations and that these include an active viewing public" (Lee and King 2015: 3). Lee and King also claim that *Penny Dreadful*'s

> practice of adaptation disrupts linearity and undermines notions of the authority and priority of an originating text. The original is contaminated by a history of adaptations that have transformed [the show's source material] into vehicles of cultural transmission: memes that have come to redefine history as a myth of modernity. (Lee and King 2015: 2)

This process of cultural transformation represents a clear deviation from the Gothic source material, embedding the original novels in a contemporary, hypervisual context and network.

Visuality has long been associated with the Gothic, so these adaptations are certainly adapting that tradition to their own purposes. Justin D. Edwards observes that the "Gothic is often considered a visual mode" (Edwards 2015: 12). In terms of adaptation, Whelehan argues that the "attempt to inspire the visual responses of the reading audience is therefore held up as the key link between late realist and modernist novelists and the film-maker" (Whelehan 1999: 4). Yet, this visuality in neo-Victorian Gothic adaptations goes well beyond even the rich tradition of the visual in the Gothic, as these more modern adaptations are indicative of a hypervisuality that reflects the highly visual, technological, consumer-driven, social interconnectivity of contemporary culture. Fred Botting has noted that "[h]orror, it seems, has moved out of the realms of Gothic fiction and film and into the hyperrealism of everyday occurrence" as "endless objects are presented to arouse the visual consumer" (Botting 2008: 168). Not surprisingly, the role of media violence is often the scapegoat for such hypervisual, "everyday" horrors and anxieties, and Andrew L. Cooper admits that "violent fiction might not necessarily produce the real-life effect of violence by itself, but in conjunction with other forces, it might make a

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significant contribution to the effect's emergence" (Cooper 2010: 167). Fiction is, of course, *fiction*, but these "other forces" that Cooper refers to could certainly be interpreted as the everyday real-world violence that inevitably finds its way into the news coverage of the overall violent reality in which we live. Furthermore, while these horrors and visualities are rooted in reality, they still maintain some marked consistencies with the fictionality of the Gothic, leading Jerrold E. Hogle to ask:

> Faced with more overtly visible traumas over the last several decades than at any time in history – televised images of war's front lines or bodies cut open for surgery, public convictions for child abuse backed by released photographs, school shootings or public assassinations and the vast human destruction that occurred on September 11, 2001 (now abbreviated '9/11') – how can the 'Gothic sublime' not tilt its balance of tendencies toward the graphic depiction of horror and give up its fantastic heightenings that keep the Real removed from immediacy? Would not going that far make the Gothic cease to be what it is? Or can the Gothic still have the power to help us deal with larger cultural traumas when the horrific nature of their most visible symptoms must be the starting points for fictional representations? (Hogle 2014: 75)

Granted, the fictional Gothic in our modern world certainly highlights – and renders hypervisual – some of the cultural horrors and anxieties rooted in reality. Hogle notes: "the best of the post-9/11 uses of Gothic in fiction achieve that purpose for attentive readers by using the conflicted un-naturalness basic to the Gothic itself" – with "unnaturalness" implicitly equated with inhumanity – so as to better "help us concurrently grasp and conceal how profoundly conflicted we are about the most immediate and pervasive cultural 'woundings' of our western world as it has come to be" (Hogle 2014: 75). But really, when has the Gothic *not* done this? However, with such a technologically-based, hypervisual, modern society, the frequency of – and ease of access to – visual representations of *real*, nonfictional horrors, has increased exponentially since the advent of Gothic literature.

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4.   Adaptation and Terrorism

When Hogle cites the "post-9/11" uses of the Gothic, such terminology unavoidably calls up images of modern terrorism – arguably the most anxiety-inducing visual horror that haunts not only the modern Gothic but also modern human society. Stuart Croft and Cerwyn Moore claim that

> [o]ur fear of terrorism is cultural – we see it in television series (*Spooks*), in stage plays (Alice Bartlett's *Not in My Name*), obliquely in novels (J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*). Pinning down what this terrorist threat is might be as much about reading our own fears as about understanding the plans of the enemy. (Croft and Moore 2010: 835).

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, *Van Helsing*, and *Penny Dreadful* could certainly be added to that list as adaptations that reflect Gothic representations of terrorism. Using the vampire as a metaphor for a terrorist group, perhaps Professor Abraham Van Helsing in *Penny Dreadful* (David Warner) says it best when cluing Victor in on the vampiric threat they must confront: "They move in a pack like wolves. Never staying long in the same place for fear of discovery. When we come close, they're gone." When Victor asks "To what end?", Van Helsing responds "Their goal? I don't know. What is any animal's goal? Survival, propagation, conquest. (Logan 2014: Season 1, Episode 6, 35:34-35:56). The supernatural network of vampires in *Penny Dreadful* and *Van Helsing* acts as a terrorist collective, while Moriarty's collaborative network in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* commits a blatant act of terrorism in its attempted destruction of the city of Venice through the use of explosives, threatening the innocent lives of those gathered in the Piazza San Marco. Clearly, in terms of modern terrorism, art imitates life – or more appropriately perhaps art imitates terrorism.

The extent to which terrorism haunts contemporary culture and society truly does parallel more fictional fears based on supernatural Gothic monsters. As Heise-von der Lippe argues, "[m]onsters change with the cultural anxieties they reflect" (Heise-von der Lippe 2015: 117), and according to Scott Helfstein and Dominick Wright, the "concept of networks has become synonymous with terrorism in recent years" (Helfstein

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and Wright 2011: 785). Naturally, William O. Jenkins's article 'Collaboration over Adaptation' is relevant to this discussion of collaboration and adaptation. Further solidifying a connection between these concepts and modern terrorism, Jenkins argues that the "critical function of assuring homeland security and disaster preparedness cannot depend on the uncertain trajectory of adaptive response" (Jenkins 2006: 319). For Jenkins, "the single greatest barrier to addressing the decades-old problems of interoperable communications is the lack of effective, collaborative, interdisciplinary, and intergovernmental planning" (Jenkins 2006: 321). Therefore, even in the fight against terrorism on the home front, interdisciplinary and intergovernmental collaboration and adaptation is challenging but necessary, similar to the collaborations and adaptations that exist in the texts that have so far been discussed.

While *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Van Helsing* might reflect the neo-Victorian Gothic of the early post-9/11 era, *Penny Dreadful*'s original broadcast coincided with the rise of one the most recognisable terrorist networks in contemporary society. Discussing the "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)", James P. Farwell explains that

> [t]he group's principal tool for expanding its influence had been brute force, but as it has attempted to build credibility and establish legitimacy, it has shown a deftness for propaganda, using social media and cyber technology to recruit fighters and intimidate enemies. (Farwell 2014: 49)

Much like the modern Gothic, ISIS has been utilising new technologies to great effect. With a dual purpose reminiscent of the Gothic double, ISIS uses a hypervisuality in order to inspire terror, but also to promote itself and attract new members. As Farwell observes, violent visuality is fundamental to these purposes, as "[i]mages of gore, beheadings and executions are intended to intimidate opponents" (Farwell 2014: 50). Furthermore, Haroro J. Ingram points out the network's emphasis on "slick production design and graphic violence – two traits of IS communiqués that are regularly identified as crucial to its seemingly magnetic appeal for supporters" (Ingram 2015: 730). Using specifically visual terminology, Ingram depicts these efforts by ISIS "as a 'lens' to fundamentally shape audience perceptions" (Ingram 2015: 730). Like the vampires of *Penny Dreadful*, the intent of ISIS is not

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just survival and propagation, but also global conquest. Collaboration is, of course, fundamental to this intent, and isolationism is counterproductive. With this in mind, Ingram observes that

> IS communiqués rarely appeal to pragmatic or perceptual factors in isolation. Rather, these appeals are woven together into narratives that are reinforced by emotive imagery and powerful symbolism. This approach imbues IS messaging with a greater potential to resonate with the broadest spectrum of potential supporters. (Ingram 2015: 736)

Although the audience is not privy to the specific recruitment tactics, such a drive to build a wide network of members and supporters is similarly at stake in Moriarty's ranks of henchmen in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, the animation of the vampire children in *Van Helsing*, and the building of terroristic vampire cells in *Penny Dreadful*.

While ISIS naturally seeks to cast as wide of a net as possible to simultaneously intimidate and recruit, those efforts are likewise as graphically violent and hypervisual as possible. For example, Ingram discusses an ISIS intimidation and recruitment video, 'Although the Disbelievers Dislike It', which he describes as

> a highly graphic video featuring a mass beheading and confirmation of another American hostage's beheading. Almost sixteen minutes in length, it is easy to focus on the video's brutality and miss the significance of its structure and use of symbols: establishing context by outlining IS's various organisational, name and leadership transitions; establishing crisis with historical narrative and contemporary footage of the bloody aftermath of airstrikes; footage then follows of an ethnically diverse assembly of IS members beheading captured pilots and military officers. The phrase 'although the disbelievers dislike it' is used to transition between scenes, perhaps to juxtapose an expected post hoc outcry against the beheading of a Westerner but little abhorrence for the footage of children killed in airstrikes. (Ingram 2014: 6)

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'Although the Disbelievers Dislike It' is as violent and gory as any imagery coming out of the discussed four source texts and three post-2000 adaptations. Beyond its dual purpose of intimidation and recruitment through violent hypervisuality, however, one can discern an ethos focused on a perceived hypocrisy of the West.

Embracing the role of the Gothic other that evokes fear, but that is also a taboo object of desire, ISIS is likewise othering the West, revealing the 'evil' of *that* other. With this paradox in mind, Shana Kushner Gadarian argues that

> the features of the media after 9/11, particularly the media's emphasis on threatening information and evocative imagery, increased the public's probability of supporting the hawkish policies advocated by political leaders, principally the president. To the extent that the media reinforces feelings of threat and political elites advocate a dominant set of principles, the public is apt to support those policies. (Gadarian 2010: 469)

Such an argument conjures up a hypervisuality of covert fear and intimidation reminiscent of the more overt efforts of ISIS itself. Gadarian puts even more of the onus on a perceived agenda of hypervisuality in the media, claiming that

> in a competitive media environment, journalists and editors have incentives to use emotionally powerful visuals and storylines to gain and maintain ever-shrinking news audiences, and these elements of news coverage can strengthen the public's sense of threat. (Gadarian 2010: 469)

Keeping in mind the aforementioned act of terror in Venice executed by Moriarty's network in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and the terroristic attacks on villagers by the vampires in *Van Helsing*, *Penny Dreadful* likewise employs amplified visual tactics and violence, reminiscent of real-world terrorism. For example, at the very beginning of the first season, viewers are exposed to a bloodbath in a tenement, with the focus very much on a maimed woman and child killed by the yet-unseen

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werewolf. The scene magnifies the horror of the attack through its visual encoding of the defencelessness of the impoverished victims, coincidentally paralleling the post-airstrike footage of 'Although the Disbelievers Dislike It'. Yet the visual emphasis of the scene could just as well reference the aftermath of a terrorist attack on innocent women and children.

It is indeed the *visuality* of all of this that makes a difference – whether it be disseminated in the Western media, in the Gothic, or in ISIS propaganda. Gadarian makes the case that "television news significantly increased support for hawkish policies whereas newspaper reading did not, suggesting that emotional coverage mattered more than information on its own" (Gadarian 2010: 473). This argument implies that the increased visuality of television news creates a higher intensity of emotion than newspapers, and it appears that the hypervisuality of the collaborative propaganda of ISIS is just as useful in provoking collaboration *against* ISIS in the West. The element of surprise in 'good' and 'evil' is consistent with Lisa Hopkins's depiction of the Gothic, in which,

> [o]nce again, the Gothic proves to be a visitor which surfaces when least expected […] as we might have expected from this most haunted and contradictory of modes, that the Gothic is never identical with itself. Most absent when most conspicuously present, it is also most present only when most conspicuously absent. (Hopkins 2005: 150)

The elusive nature of the Gothic proves an exemplary match for the slippery nature of good and evil, and indeed for current politics and popular culture.

5.   The Adaptation of Good and Evil
Such complicating and problematising of 'good' and 'evil' has been fundamental to the evolution of the Gothic, as it has increasingly abandoned its tendency towards more straightforward melodrama that existed in some of its earlier literary forms. After all, *Frankenstein* is a novel about a brilliant young scientist who accomplishes the impossible in bestowing life on dead human body parts, but he commits quite horrific acts before, during, and after that impressive feat. His creature itself is an ugly abomination according to his creator, but the monster's account of himself in the novel reveals some truly human goodness that complicates his murderous and

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devious actions. Both Dr Jekyll and Dorian Gray, by appearances, seem utterly incapable of the atrocities that they enact, and the "crew of light" in *Dracula* commit their own horrific acts, which they justify in pursuit of their destruction of what they deem an 'evil' creature.

These relative concepts of 'good' and 'evil' are only complicated further in the Gothic hypervisuality of *Van Helsing*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and *Penny Dreadful*. Towards the end of *Van Helsing*, Dracula says to the recently werewolf-infected Van Helsing, "We are both part of the same great game, Gabriel.[9] But we need not find ourselves on opposite sides of the board" (Sommers 2004: 1:51:39-1:51:47). This game board metaphor aptly illustrates the relative nature of 'good' and 'evil' in these adaptations. Van Helsing, from the beginning of the film, is questionable in terms of his alliance with 'good' or 'evil', as the first image of him on screen is his likeness on an 'AVIS DE RECHERCHE: MORT OU VIF' or 'WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE' poster (Sommers 2004: 8:12). It is also revealed early on in the film that Van Helsing has a rather dysfunctional relationship with the Catholic Church, even though he performs clandestine work under its official commands. It is no surprise, then, that Dracula feels confident in asking Van Helsing to merely flip sides on the game board. 'Good' and 'evil' are likely not so clearly defined from Van Helsing's perspective.

Throughout much of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, it is not quite clear where 'evil' ends and 'good' begins, even when considering the members of the League itself. In terms of visuality, Dorian Gray warns of his portrait, "I dare not look upon it myself. The magic of the painting would be undone" (Norrington 2003: 49:19-49:25).[10] However, if the League were to look upon *themselves* a little more closely, then the bond of the League might be undone, as some serious questions would arise for each of its members in terms of where he or she falls on the spectrum of 'good' and 'evil'. The same questions could also be posed to the collaborating protagonists in *Penny Dreadful*. Sir Malcolm's recruitment of Doctor Frankenstein to the team emphasises the visuality of their undertaking rather than any moralistic ideology: "Join me, Doctor. With me you will behold terrible wonders" (Logan 2014: Season 1, Episode 1, 39:19-39:26). In the scene where their collaboration is solemnised, Vanessa acknowledges to Sir Malcolm, Victor, Ethan, and Sembene that "We here have been brutalised with loss. It has made us brutal in return" (Logan 2014: Season 1, Episode

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3, 42:10-42:17). Glossing over their questionable pasts and equally questionable 'goodness', Sir Malcolm emphasises the primacy of their solidarity over any other factors: "If we are to proceed, we proceed as one. Without hesitation. And with fealty to each other alone" (Logan 2014: Season 1, Episode 3, 42:25-42:35), in effect discounting any responsibilities to the rest of humanity. Yet, prior to this pact, Ethan challenges the morality of their pursuit and the extent of the atrocities and horrors that they are willing to commit, as earlier in the first season he asks outright, "How far do we go?" (Logan 2014: Season 1, Episode 4, 28:04-28:06). Though outside of his rational control, Ethan's own homicidal actions as a werewolf perfectly illustrate how attempts to divide these teams into purely good or evil characters are fundamentally problematic.

Moriarty ominously warns us in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* that "There'll be others like me, Quatermain! You can't kill the future!" (Norrington 2003: 1:37:05-1:37:10). This seems like a warning of the inevitability of future neo-Victorian Gothic adaptations that will seek to "iconoclastically demolish" (Whelehan 1999: 16) and take an activist stance against their source texts. It is also likely a predictive warning of future villains, like Adolf Hitler, that will seek to form massive collaborations of evil out in the open, rather than in isolation. More frightening in Moriarty's warning, though, is the foreshadowed kind of villainy existing in ISIS, and also in the fictional film adaptations of Marvel comic books depicting the terrorist HYDRA organisation. Such networks of evil seek to use innovative forms of hypervisual horrors to form and sustain their collaborations, and they also reveal how the new Gothic monstrosity assumes the form of terrorist networks that resist being defined and represented by a single figurehead.

These adaptations no longer perpetuate the myth of 'evil' as merely transgressive in its isolation, existing as lone dark entities that might be thwarted by 'good' wholesome collaboration. Granted, this culture of 'good' banding together in order to triumph over 'evil' is still somewhat at stake in more modern adaptations of Victorian Gothic texts, but unlike their source novels – which consistently reveal evil, darkness, and immorality as side effects symptomatic of lone-wolf figures – these adaptations depict their antagonists and protagonists as equally capable of teamwork, with the latter just as prone to 'evil'. While it is unsurprising that groups form for both 'good' and 'evil' purposes, due to our natural human drive to interact

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socially and form collective bonds, what makes these collaborations significant is how they are formed, particularly on the basis of science, technology, and hypervisuality. As these methodologies evolve from nineteenth-century novels to neo-Victorian Gothic adaptations, the points of connection between those sources and their adaptations seem to become more and more tenuous – particularly in terms of Victorianism – as seen in the spectrum of recent television shows including *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015-present), *Jekyll & Hyde* (2015), and *Van Helsing* (2016-present). However, according to Whelehan, this is part of the fun, as "perhaps there are pleasures to be found in first encountering a 'version' which appears to iconoclastically demolish the 'literary' shaping of its original" (Whelehan 1999: 16). The pleasures of mapping the adaptive changes and re-shapings between versions is truly a game in itself, but in line with Vladislaus Dracula's game board metaphor from *Van Helsing*, it is often difficult to determine on which side of the board to place particular characters.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. Granted, classifying these characters as 'good' or 'evil' might seem a little simplistic, but it must also be acknowledged that morality is indeed a spectrum, so these characters are merely discussed in terms of a *tendency* toward one end of that spectrum or the other.
2. Coincidentally, in *Van Helsing*, Victor Frankenstein is killed in a windmill fire in the opening black-and-white sequence of the film – clearly in ironic reference to the climax of James Whale's 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, in which Dr Frankenstein lives on. However, in the earlier film, it is the monster that perishes in the burning windmill, while the monster survives the fire in *Van Helsing*. Furthermore, in the opening full-colour scene of *Van Helsing*, Van Helsing also kills off Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde. The Van Helsing character likewise

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appears in the first season of *Penny Dreadful*, but as a much older man (David Warner), in contrast to Jackman's version of the character. It might also be pointed out that many subsequent film adaptations of *Frankenstein* include an angry mob of villagers in pursuit of the isolated monster – essentially, a monstrous collaboration of people chasing a monstrous collaboration of parts of people – beginning with Whale's *Frankenstein*, and also including the opening black-and-white sequence in Sommers's *Van Helsing*.

3. Incidentally, the given name of the fictional character, Count Dracula, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, was never revealed in that text. However, the given name of Vladislaus in *Van Helsing* (2004) perhaps alludes to the rich network of source material that Stoker actually or supposedly used for his title character from that novel – which may or may not have included the fifteenth-century historical figure 'Vlad the Impaler', for example.

4. Coincidentally, this same final scene in Albert Lewin's film adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) further involved the collaboration of one of Dorian's servants with Lord Henry Wotton (George Sanders), along with Basil Hallward's niece, Gladys (Donna Reed) and another added character, David Stone (Peter Lawford).

5. It must be acknowledged that the use of CGI (computer-generated imagery) – mainly in the two film adaptations, but occasionally in *Penny Dreadful* as well – adds an enhanced element of visuality on the basis of science and technology. Yet even beyond the seemingly mandatory use of such visual technology in contemporary 'blockbuster' films and television series, the three post-2000 adaptations also use visuality as an adaptive methodology.

6. While the "yellow book" merely serves as a metaphorical 'poison' in Wilde's novel, arguably destroying Dorian's moral integrity, for today's audiences coming new to the story, the trope may also evoke more recent cultural anxieties surrounding terrorist attacks, whether of Novichok nerve agents ('killed by a perfume'), or even anthrax, ricin, and letter bombs sent through the post.

7. Captain Nemo is another character adapted from the comic book series, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and likewise adapted from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *The Mysterious Island* (1874).

8. Most prominently these include the reanimation of dead tissue, the physical manifestation of a man's evil nature as a separate being, the projection of sin and age from a man onto a painted portrait, and a man's development of

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immortality, psychic abilities, shapeshifting, and various other supernatural powers, sustained by an exclusive diet of human blood.

9.   The given name of the fictional character Van Helsing, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, was actually Abraham.

10. This, of course, is an adaptive change from Wilde's novel, in which Dorian would "stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass" (Wilde 2007: 106).

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