***Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*, ed. by Benjamin Poore**
(Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2017)

In Adaptation Studies, there can be a tendency to focus on the one-to-one relationship between source material and product(s), commonly referred to as the 'fidelity theory'.[1] Benjamin Poore's edited collection *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*, published as part of the Neo-Victorian Series from Brill, instead aims to trace the archetype of the (Neo-)Victorian villain and its representations in modern fiction. Offering a range of essays dedicated to specific case studies and figures such as Jack the Ripper, Dracula, and Edward Hyde, it takes an intriguing approach, drawing attention to the idea of transformation as well as more direct adaptation. Alongside examinations of the aforementioned fidelity argument and the ways in which classic Victorian characters are depicted in contemporary media, the collection also explores the ways in which these icons have been reimagined and, in many cases, reinvented to fit their Neo-Victorian context.

The other characteristic that makes this volume stand out is the subject matter of the chapters and the breadth of ground covered by the individual authors. Divided into four sections, Poore's collection leads with 'Theatrical Transformations', charting the move of the villain across media and foregrounding research into the performing arts, which is rare in gothic and Neo-Victorian scholarship, and which helps to highlight the theatrical roots of many of these antagonists. This section is followed by essays that examine the re-interpretation and reinvention of villains whose origins cannot be traced to a clear singular source text ('Transitional and Liminal Figures'), while the third section features readings that focus on aspects and representations of sexuality within these narratives ('Neo-Victorian Sexuality and "Sexsation"'). The final section, 'Literary Villains Reimagined', brings the work full circle by returning to some of the classic works of Victorian fiction, and those who inhabit it, with essays on Svengali, Dracula, and Dorian Gray.

Poore's introductory essay comes in at a substantial fifty pages (as opposed to the fifteen to twenty pages of the essays that follow). Setting out the themes of the collection, Poore puts forward a model he calls the 'villain-effect', 'the sleights-of-hand of emplotment

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[1] The following works provide an introduction to the issues of fidelity in adaptation: *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jørgen Bruhm, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013); Thomas M. Leitch, 'Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory', *Criticism*, 45.2 (2003), 149-71; and Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in *Film Adaptation*, ed. by James Naremore (London: Athlone, 2000), pp. 54-76.

and performance that create the aura of a villain, yet which leave him or her tantalisingly out of reach (and hence, reuseable)' (p. 2). For Poore, (Neo-)Victorian texts therefore tend to revolve around a performative villain whose villainy is conveyed primarily through the distance between the audience and this shadowy figure.

Poore starts his investigation by sketching the context of the representations of (Neo-) Victorian villains, drawing attention to the often-limiting set of associations that modern audiences tend to attach to the Victorian period. He notes that the common perception of a unity of supposed Victorian morality and values is more problematic than many assume, a thread which can be followed into the fiction of the era. While a twenty-first-century reader may expect black-and-white divisions between hero and villain in Victorian fiction, the reality was often more complex, and included the introduction of the 'fallible hero' and the 'divided hero-villain' (p. 3). These conflicted figures can be found throughout Victorian fiction and across media, particularly within the traditions of gothic plays and melodramas. It also finds its way into the moral grey areas of many contemporary Neo-Victorian fictions, which include seemingly sympathetic villains and morally ambiguous antiheroes. Next to this historical context, Poore explains, exists 'the long and complex history of the Victorians' pirating, pastiching, parodying and burlesquing of each other's work' (p. 4), which aligns both with the current trend of reinventing these characters, and the aims of the volume in examining the adaptations and transformations undergone by various villains and their (Neo-) Victorian contexts.

It is here that Poore's essay becomes unmoored: although it offers interesting insights regarding the different forms the villain has taken across these past centuries, the structure of the chapter prohibits the construction of the clear framework proposed in its introduction. Poore covers a range of concerns, signposting current trends of moral ambiguity in both heroic and villainous characters, the representation of the psychopath and the introduction of pathology, as well as the stereotypical traits of melodramatic characters, although the order in which these cases are presented does not aid the clarity of his argument. The apparent conclusion of his framework appears midway through the chapter, when he links the notion of villain theory to Jeffrey Cohen's 'Monster Culture: Seven Theses' (1996).[2] In this context, the villain is a figure who cannot be categorised, who is an empty vessel into which society can channel perceptions of wickedness and evil. Poore explains that 'in twenty-first-century culture, a narratological model of the villain, where the villain is an archetype fulfilling a

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[2] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture: Seven Theses', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25.

particular story-function, no longer suffices' (p. 39), leading to a need for reinventions and (re)appropriations that highlight other facets of the narrative. However, the villain's defining factor remains an issue of categorisation; Poore argues that 'the villain *refuses to know his or her place*' (p. 40, emphasis in original), a place which can be defined culturally, but also historically, with classic villains being dragged into new eras and across franchises. What becomes problematic here is that, in framing the villain as a figure who cannot be captured or categorised, a definition of both the villain and the villain-effect is all but avoided. Several examples are offered to illustrate this theory, but their discussion is too brief to be convincing. Slippage between categories leads to a seemingly endless list of potential villain types across a variety of media and reimaginings. Although this chapter, and the collection as a whole, opens up new lines of inquiry into this largely unexplored archetype of the (Neo-) Victorian villain, there is room for additional work to produce a more robust definition and theoretical frame.

The volume contains a total of sixteen chapters, covering, among other things, Orientalist stereotypes; ventriloquists and dummies; spiritualist mediums; ghosts, haunting, and doubles; *X-Men*'s Mister Sinister; Edward Hyde reimagined as a superhero (dubbed 'Super-Hyde'); the intertextuality of Dracula adaptations; and adaptations of transgressive sexualities. I wish to highlight a couple of chapters, the discussion of which is presented as they appear within the collection. Mark Jones' 'Jack the Representation: The Ripper in Culture' provides a compelling overview of the facts and fictions which have surrounded the Ripper case since 1888, offering useful insights into the variety of representations and projections that have become attached to the character. This and Richard Hand's essay '"A Perfect Demon": Michael Eaton's *Charlie Peace: His Amazing Life and Astounding Legend*' can be seen as a set, exploring concerns of biofiction and fictional representations of (and, in the case of the Ripper, explanations for) real-life crimes.

A similar connection is present between two chapters, by Helen Davies and Claire O'Callaghan, in the 'Neo-Victorian Sex and "Sexsation"' section. The authors focus on different texts and different villains as their case studies (Jekyll and Hyde for Davies; Dorian Gray for O'Callaghan), yet both signal how adaptations of these sources have altered the sexuality, and indeed the sexual mores, underpinning the original texts, removing the themes of homosexuality which can be found in the source works by Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde. Davies's study shows how the villainous Hyde is seemingly domesticated within a heteronormative frame in Valerie Martin's 1990 novel *Mary Reilly* and the 2007

BBC series *Jekyll*.[3] Similarly, O'Callaghan's reading of the 2009 movie *Dorian Gray* (dir. by Oliver Parker) links its representation of the titular character not only to a context of heterosexuality, but specifically, to so-called 'lad culture'. A final mention is reserved for Jonathan Buckmaster's essay on John Jasper, the villain from Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870).[4] Buckmaster confidently contextualises Dickens's novel and Jasper's role within it, before examining three case studies (the 1935 Universal film (dir. by Stuart Walker), the 1993 film (dir. by Timothy Forder), and the 2012 BBC series), to discuss how each recasts and effectively constructs its unfinished villain. Each of the chapters highlighted here uses its (Neo-) Victorian sources to examine particular readings and incarnations of its villains. In doing so, the historical mode is used to reflect on modern adaptations and concerns, thus highlighting the malleability of these figures. This brings full circle Poore's observations in the Introduction, and, in part, legitimises Poore's difficulty in pinning down the exact nature of these villains, their actions and motivations into a rigorous academic framework.

Ultimately, the volume is an excellent contribution that taps into a range of fields. The links with adaptation and Neo-Victorian studies are obvious, but scholars of the Gothic, and of literature more widely, will surely benefit from the material presented. The range of media discussed, in particular the chapters on theatre and comics, further extends the appeal of the collection and provides important contributions to the study of these topics.

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[3] Valerie Martin, *Mary Reilly* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and *Jekyll*, BBC One (16 June-28 July 2007).
[4] Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870). The work is Dickens's final novel and was published in unfinished form.