

Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism by Cora Kaplan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. 264 p.

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The turn towards the Victorian period by authors, literary critics and readers has since the 1990s manifested itself in a rapidly increasing amount of publications dedicated to the period. The proliferation of neo-Victorian fiction, contemporary literature set in the nineteenth century, has recently awakened the interest in this new genre among literary critics and scholars. Cora Kaplan, who prefers to apply the term *Victoriana* for this new field of study, offers a panoramic view of the themes and issues this genre encompasses in her book *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007). She also considers the various aspects of the neo-Victorian novel and the different theoretical approaches to the field since the twentieth century. In four essays she examines a wide range of fields covering from biographies to cinematic adaptations. Kaplan discusses the new twentieth and twenty-first century approaches to Victorian literature and offers the reader an insight into what neo-Victorian studies, or Victoriana, deals with. Therefore, this work will be of great interest to investigation of both the Victorian period and neo-Victorian studies.

In the twentieth century a prevailing interest for the Victorians manifested itself in many different forms, from collecting material items to reading and writing about its literature, and Cora Kaplan uses the term coined by Anthony Maloney denominating it 'Victoriana'. This interest has later paved its way into fiction and created a new subgenre which the author of this book recognizes to "...[include] the self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire, as well as challenges to the conventional understandings of the historical itself..." (Kaplan, 2007: 3). Kaplan expands the term Victoriana to this subgenre of contemporary fiction set in the Victorian era, more widely accepted as neo-Victorian literature today thanks to scholars as Dana Shiller and M. L. Kohlke. In her book she offers four essays examining what pleasure and difficulties it implies to deal with narrative forms, histories and belief systems of the nineteenth century.

In the first chapter entitled "Heroines, Hysteria and History: *Jane Eyre* and her Critics" we are offered an overview of the different approaches to *Jane Eyre* (1847) by literary critics in the twentieth century. Cora Kaplan parts from Sigmund Freud's *Five Lectures in Psychoanalysis* (1910) and his idea of hysteria related to an obsession and a longing for the past not being able to forget. She then links this to the modern interest of the Victorian period and the collecting of objects and recycling of material from this period and continues with the interest of *Jane Eyre* in literary criticism and how it has taken different forms during the last century. The early critics, such as Virginia Woolf and Raymond Williams, both analyse the novel from a Eurocentric perspective addressing a readership that share a common ground with the novel's author and heroine. According to Virginia Woolf, *Jane Eyre*'s anger was a reflection of Charlotte Brontë's frustration as a woman suffering from contemporary female repression,

something that would interfere with the quality of her writing. However, in the 1970s the American feminists would offer a reinterpretation of Jane Eyre's anger as something positive and the works of Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are mentioned. These critics read the ending of the novel as a forerunner to what the second wave feminism fought for: the equality between the sexes in marriage. From this approach Kaplan moves further to the revisionist criticism since 1985 and their challenge of what Spivak calls "the Eurocentric liberal humanist feminism" (qtd. in Kaplan, 2007: 28) and the feminist post imperialist criticism which turns more global reading the novel in its historical context taking into account the empire at home and abroad.

The second chapter "Biographilia" is dedicated to the interest in the lives of Victorian authors and how it has resulted in both massive publications of biographies and a new hybrid genre called biofiction. Cora Kaplan starts with considering A. S. Byatt's novels *The Biographer's Tale* (2001) and *Possession* (1990) to explore the difficulties of writing a biography. The first is a comic novel satirizing the limitations and frustrations that a biographer suffers as he tries to write about his subject. On the other hand, *Possession* focuses more on the different turn biography has taken since the modernist movement. Under the heading "Secrets and Lies – The Psychopathologies of Biography: *Life of Johnson*" the author proceeds to discuss the complex relationship between the biographer and the biographee parting from what may be the most acclaimed biographer of all times, James Boswell. She highlights how in Boswell's case Samuel Johnson's biography not only established him as a literary icon and attributed him with fame but also did the same for the biographer, and points out that there exists "...a symbiotic relationship between the biographer and his male subject..." (Kaplan, 2007: 49). Nevertheless, if the author and subject are distanced in time the historical gap between their worlds may create many problems and the biographer might end up not being able to complete his task. Peter Ackroyd's biography *Dickens* (1990) and David Lodge's biofictional novel *Author, Author* (2004), which blends biography and fiction, are examples of how authors reinvent part of their subjects's lives and give them a new perspective. Cora Kaplan labels Ackroyd's novel "formally experimental" and "postmodern" (2007: 50), yet she criticises it for being too protective over its subject and not leaving room for a more social, cultural or political approach. The last part of the essay is dedicated to the special interest in Henry James both in literature and in literary criticism, also known as Jamesiana. Kaplan explores different approaches to the author in three contemporary writers and their works: Cólom Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), David Lodge's *Author, Author* and *The Line of Beauty* (2004) by Alan Hollinghurst. The first two works share the common ground of James's intention to make a career in theatre and the disastrous outcoming of his play *Guy Domville* on its premiere in London in 1895. But whereas *The Master* moves forward and backwards in James's life and treats his vague relationships to men, women, family and friends, *Author, Author* focuses on his attempts with drama and his obsession with reputation. James's sexuality does not escape attention and all of the three authors give their personal interpretation of it. Yet, Alan Hollinghurst's novel takes a more political turn

and uses the theme of sexuality to reflect over the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Instead of being set in the nineteenth century as the two previous novels, *The Line of Beauty* is set in the twentieth century and tells us about Nick Guest's struggles with writing his PhD dissertation on Henry James. The novel both reaffirms and questions James's relevance for our own times by analysing the persistence and fragility of the author's legacy in the present. The chapter concludes with the argument that the renaissance of Victorian literary biography has made writers into heroes and provided them durability in a time when print culture is facing the threat of modern technology.

The third chapter "Historical Fictions – Pastiche, Politics and Pleasure" opens up with the explanation of what "Victorian" meant for the young generations in the 1960s and 70s. Kaplan explains that in the decades of sexual revolution and liberty all Victorian represented the opposite: the old and repression. "These conflicting attitudes towards the Victorian had unexpected, and positive, cultural affects. The postwar drive to complete the de-Victorianisation of Western societies, exemplified by the call for freedom of expression, liberated our ways of knowing the nineteenth century" (Kaplan, 2007: 85). Nevertheless, Stephen Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1964) would prove that there also existed another side of the Victorians that had been hidden. This has engaged writers to look back into the Victorian period with a different view and paved the way for an innovative historical fiction, which Kaplan denominates Victoriana. In this chapter she analyzes how contemporary fiction has applied Victorian fictional styles and used this historical ground for political reasons or simply for pleasure. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) not only showed that there existed an interest for the Victorian period in the reading public but also prepared the terrain for other writers to explore this setting. However, the revival of the Victorian period in modern fiction owes much to the feminist scholars that were struggling for a revision of the literary canon and social history around the same time as the novel's publications. A. S. Byatt's *Possession* plays with a wide variety of Victorian literary styles and destabilizes the balance between history and truth, Sarah Waters's trilogy *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) highlights themes of lesbian sexuality and music halls, incarceration and spiritualism. *Possession* is described as a novel that is a "web of parodies and pastiche" (Kaplan, 2007: 106) and Byatt's discussion of the pleasures of reading might be seen as a dialogue with Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988) takes a more political turn and is written in the industrial style of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855). In his novel Lodge criticises Margaret Thatcher's politics for higher education in the 1980s and revises the magical endings of the fiction of the 1840s.

In the last chapter "Returning *The Piano*" we are offered a view of an adaptation of neo-Victorianism to the screen through Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). Kaplan points out that a variety of Victorian literary genres such as gothic, sensation, domestic fiction and melodrama, have been used to make the film. Furthermore, the film is heavily loaded with nineteenth century literary sources that the author claims to be "network of literary and historical citations" spun into a web (Kaplan, 2007: 124). However, these intertexts "...do not remain inert or static within it – often acting on the

contrary as a catalyst for its revisionist aims” (Kaplan, 2007: 133), i.e. they function as a tool of revision of Victorian values and embark on issues like femininity, race and empire. In this chapter we are shown how nothing escapes the colonial gaze represented through Ada’s muteness, George’s illiteracy and the Maori race. The three of them were all infantilised in the view of their Victorian contemporaries, and the author discusses Ada’s femininity and disability in relation to her musical instrument and Kaplan uses Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Structural Anthropology* (1958) and Julia Kristeva’s essay “Women’s Time” (1979) to explore how it partly works as Ada’s language.

This book offers a panoramic view of how the Victorian period still marks its presence in our times and how the interest for the period continues growing, both inside and outside literary circles. It discusses how the influence of the Victorians has taken different shapes in literature and even made its way in the film industry. However, I would have liked to see a clearer distinction between neo-Victorian literature and everything else related to the Victorian period. And I also miss a more profound approach to the revisionist aims in literature behind this subgenre. Although the book focuses on twentieth century literature I would recommend it not only to scholars or students of the neo-Victorian field but also for those dedicated to Victorian literature, as neo-Victorian literature is a dialogue between the past and the present in many aspects.

The Language of Architecture and Civil Engineering by Ana Roldán-Riejos, Joaquín Santiago López and Paloma Úbeda Mansilla. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambrige Scholars Publishing, 2011. 100 p.

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The book under consideration provides in-depth and relevant information to understand the *language of Architecture and Civil Engineering* in English (henceforth ACE). It is also a very practical book designed to appeal not only to students but also professionals who need to improve their linguistic skills in order to be able to effectively communicate in academic and professional contexts. The book is grounded upon a socio-cognitive dimension of disciplinary communication, which means that ACE members form a *discourse community*, that is, it is a group that has shared set of communicative purposes, and uses communication to achieve certain goals. ACE speakers and writers create and shape their own discursive norms and thus create a *genre* as defined by Swales (1990:46).

Apart from the chapters themselves, the book includes a foreword by a recognized expert on metaphor in the academic environment, Jeanette Littlemore and a preface written by a Spanish architect, Alberto Campo Baeza. It also has an up-dated bibliography on publications related to the language of architecture, civil engineering, cognitive linguistics and genre analysis. The bio-data of the authors -Ana M^a Roldán Riejos, Joaquín Santiago López and Paloma Úbeda Mansilla from the Technical University of Madrid- is also included. They are recognized experts in the linguistics of

Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 45. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. 13. A large body of criticism has developed around neo-Victorian fiction. Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana: Histories, Fiction, Criticism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007); CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also the e-journal, *Neo-Victorian Studies* (www.neovictorianstudies.com) and the *Neo-Victorian Series* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi), co-edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. 14.