

Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction

Also by Rosario Arias

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE FICTIONAL
WORK OF LESSING, ATWOOD AND MANTEL

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN PSYCHOANALYTIC
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Also by Patricia Pulham

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VERNON LEE'S SUPERNATURAL TALES

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(edited with Catherine Maxwell)

VERNON LEE: DECADENCE, ETHICS, AESTHETICS
(edited with Catherine Maxwell)

Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction

Possessing the Past

Edited by

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and

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Introduction

Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham

The spectral presence of the Victorian past is all around us: it exists in the municipal buildings of our major cities; it is visible in our education system; it informs the legacy of immigration; it underpins cultural tourism; it is ever-present in popular culture in fashion, film and television adaptations, and is evident in the 'Classics' section of every bookshop in the country where major novels by Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy are always to be found. In her recent book, *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticisms* (2007), Cora Kaplan offers 'Victoriana' as a collective noun that 'might usefully embrace the whole phenomenon, the astonishing range of representations and reproductions for which the Victorian – whether as the origin of late twentieth century modernity, its antithesis, or both at once – is the common referent' (2007, p. 3). She suggests that any examination might benefit 'by asking whether the proliferation of Victoriana is more than nostalgia – a longing for a past that never was – and more too than a symptom of the now familiar, if much debated, view that the passage from modernity to postmodernity has been marked by the profound loss of a sense of history' (Kaplan, 2007, p. 3). This collection of essays, the first to focus on the neo-Victorian novel against the backdrop of the master trope of spectrality and haunting, participates in such debates and offers an alternative way in which to view this fascinating subgenre of historiographic metafiction, a term which is itself ripe for reconsideration.¹ Since Linda Hutcheon coined the term in her seminal work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), historiographic metafiction has become increasingly the subject of

serious critical scrutiny. Used to describe 'well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5), the genre contributes to a postmodern engagement with history which, according to Fredric Jameson, results in 'a new depthlessness' and 'a consequent weakening of historicity' (1991, p. 6). In naming such interactions with the past a form of 'nostalgia', Jameson introduces a question which is considered in Dana Shiller's essay 'The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel' (1997), and discussed at length in Christian Gutleben's *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001).² The difficulties inherent in the debate are already implicit in the terms applied to literature that specifically appropriate a Victorian past. In her 1997 essay, Shiller calls such works 'neo-Victorian' while Sally Shuttleworth (1998) refers to such novels as 'retro-Victorian'; Shiller's term implies reinvention, while Shuttleworth's suggests a return to and/or retrieval of the past. Jameson's own comments on nostalgia highlight its inadequacy to explain our postmodern engagement with history. Referring to postmodern architecture's cannibalization of past styles to create new 'overstimulating ensembles', he writes: '[n]ostalgia does not strike one as an altogether satisfactory word for such fascination' (Jameson, 1991, p. 19). He is similarly unhappy in applying the term to '[n]ostalgia films' which are not concerned with 'some old-fashioned "representation" of historical content', but approach the past 'through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of the image, and "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" by the attributes of fashion', making 'postmodernist "nostalgia" art language' incompatible with 'genuine historicity' (Jameson, 1991, p. 19). As Dana Shiller observes:

What appears to disturb Jameson most about postmodern representations of the past, be they fictional, filmic, or architectural, is that they strip away its specific political content to focus on its aesthetics. Instead of respecting the radical difference of bygone eras, postmodernism projects onto them contemporary culture, fabricating a "privatized", or subjective, history denuded of its specific cultural resonance.

(1997, p. 539)

While she acknowledges the validity of Jameson's unease from his own Marxist perspective, Shiller suggests that 'neo-Victorian fiction addresses many of Jameson's concerns by presenting a historicity that is indeed concerned with recuperating the substance of bygone eras, and not merely their styles' (1997, p. 540). She argues that such historical novels 'take a revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from postmodern historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative' and shows how they 'are also indebted to earlier cultural attitudes toward history' (Shiller, 1997, pp. 539–40). In order to do so, she turns to a Victorian historical novel, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–2), to demonstrate how Eliot's own concept of history – that 'there is no "universal" past, but a past that continually changes shape based on individual perspective' (Shiller, 1997, p. 542) – informs the neo-Victorian novel, and how it is possible 'to recapture the past in ways that evoke its spirit and do honor to the dead and silenced' (Shiller, 1997, p. 546).

We suggest that the Victorians' own engagements with the past, or perhaps more accurately critical evaluations of such interactions, inform contemporary debates on postmodern modes of nostalgia. As Raymond Chapman points out, '[n]ostalgia is a recurrent feature of Victorian literature [itself], ranging from a general assertion that things are not as they used to be in the old days, to attempts to enter deeply into a lost world and recover its treasures' (1986, p. 4). John Rosenberg argues that '[t]he Victorians who speak to us most urgently today thought of themselves as living not in an age of peace or progress but, in John Stuart Mill's phrase, in "an age of transition," caught between a vanishing past and an uncertain future' (2005, p. 1). In their introduction to *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (1989), Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw identify three key conditions for the emergence of nostalgia: 'a secular and linear sense of time; an apprehension of the failings of the present; and the availability of evidences of the past' (1989, p. 4), all of which seemingly existed – if not unproblematically – in the Victorian period, contributing to their 'nostalgic yearning' for 'a simple and stable past as a refuge from the turbulent and chaotic present' (Lowenthal, 1989, p. 21). The return to classical, medieval, and renaissance pasts is evident in the works of nineteenth-century writers and poets ranging from Sir Walter Scott to Oscar Wilde. However, the deployment of the past in such writings is not always simply nostalgic. Chapman argues

that the Victorians' own awareness of the past was accompanied by a consciousness of the future: '[o]ne concern of the Victorians was how their own time would appear in years to come. Looking back to the past, either in nostalgia or complacency, they knew they too would eventually be available for inspection' (Chapman, 1986, p. 7). In this context, the Victorians become not merely spirits of the past, but agents of the future. This is perhaps evidenced most clearly in our critical deciphering of encoded political, sexual, and racial messages in Victorian literature.

In his conclusion to *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, Gutleben argues that 'retro-Victorian fiction displays signs of nostalgia in its very principle, namely the revival of a bygone tradition, in the conservatism of certain Victorian aesthetic precepts and the imitation of a language of the past' (2001, p. 193), and that '[i]f retro-Victorian fiction reverts to the past, it is then, at least partially because the present is deemed inadequate, wanting, deficient' (2001, p. 195). In doing so, Gutleben posits a more simplistic – 'Victorian' if you will – sense of 'nostalgia'. But, as David Lowenthal observes, our contemporary interpretation of the nostalgia is complicated by its perceived association with 'commercialisation' and 'inauthenticity'; by its 'pervasion of the media, with its attendant sense of unreality'; and by its 'reactionary slant' which glosses over 'the past's iniquities and indignities' (1989, pp. 21–2). The key conditions for the emergence of a 'traditional' form of nostalgia, discussed by Gutleben, and Chase and Shaw have, as Lowenthal points out, been replaced by a mistrust of nostalgia. In critical terms, we no longer subscribe to 'a secular and linear sense of time', we are conscious of theories that posit a multiplicity of 'times', and undermine a singular linear, authoritative history. We no longer seek in the past a refuge from the present; instead we excavate the past to expose its 'iniquities and indignities' (Lowenthal, 1989, p. 22). Our own twenty-first century sense of nostalgia is therefore far more complex than Gutleben's thesis suggests and, arguably, the root of that complexity lies in the word's etymology. If we set aside the conventional definition of nostalgia as a 'wistful yearning for a past or earlier time' (Chase and Shaw, 1989, p. 1), and consider its original meaning: that is, homesickness (often manifested in physical symptoms) formed from the Greek words *nostos* meaning 'homecoming' and *algos*, meaning pain, grief or distress (Banhart, 2006, p. 710), we disclose the significance of the 'home' or the return 'home' in the neo-Victorian engagement with the past.

In his discussion of E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), Fredric Jameson argues that the book, in which well-known historical figures interact with 'a fictive family, simply designated as Father, Mother, Older Brother, and so forth [...] operates powerfully and systematically to reify all these characters' and makes it impossible 'to receive their representation without the prior interception of already acquired knowledge or doxa' (1991, p. 31). He suggests that this 'lends the text an extraordinary sense of déjà vu and a peculiar familiarity one is tempted to associate with Freud's "return of the repressed" in "The Uncanny" rather than with any solid historiographic formation on the reader's part' (Jameson, 1991, pp. 23–4). In the case of neo-Victorian fiction, it is even more common to experience a 'sense of déjà vu' and the desire to examine the phenomenon as an example of Freud's 'return of the repressed' is decidedly more tempting.

In his 1919 essay, Freud refers to what he describes as the 'joking saying' that 'Love is a home-sickness', which suggests that 'whenever a man dreams of a place or country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: "this place is familiar to me, I've been here before", we may interpret the place as being his mother's [...] body' (1955, p. 245). If we recall the feminized description of the Victorian age in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857) as a 'full-veined' and 'double-breasted Age' (1993, p. 201, V. l. 216), the nostalgic return to the Victorian 'maternal' body implied by neo-Victorian fiction underlines a simultaneous longing and anxiety that manifests itself in a series of recognizable features which Freud describes as uncanny. Freud's list of psychological triggers for uncanny sensations include the double; repetition; the animation of the seemingly dead or, conversely, the death-like nature of the seemingly animate; ghosts or spirits; and the familiar made strange. If we consider these in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, its uncanny nature proves clear: it often represents a 'double' of the Victorian text mimicking its language, style and plot; it plays with the conscious repetition of tropes, characters, and historical events; it reanimates Victorian genres, for example, the realist text, sensation fiction, the Victorian ghost story and, in doing so, seemingly calls the contemporary novel's 'life' into question; it defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society; and it functions as a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present.

It is precisely this last version of the uncanny – Victorianism understood as a revenant or a ghostly visitor from the past – that

is explored in this collection. Utilizing the trope of haunting and spectrality, the essays in this volume demonstrate the validity of this approach in contemporary engagements with the Victorian past, and lay bare the pervasive presence of the Victorians through their textual/spectral traces in popular culture. Acknowledged as showing full potential for the analysis of the dialogue between the historical past and the present (Morrison, 2003, pp. 24–5), this trope has come to occupy a central position in contemporary criticism. Colin Davis (2007), who has undertaken a full-length study on the ‘return of the dead’ from a deconstructive and psychoanalytic point of view, identifies two closely connected critical sources of haunting and spectrality: on the one hand, Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994), and on the other, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s works, *The Wolf’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (1976) and *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987), which condense the main tenets of their theories.

For Derrida, ‘hauntology’ (Derrida, 1994, pp. 10, 51, 161) consists of ‘the logic of haunting’ (1994, p. 10) that characterizes the ghost of Marxism in Europe which, in an acknowledgement of the ‘haunted’ nature of literature itself, is discussed alongside one of Shakespeare’s most famous ghosts, that of Hamlet’s father. Derrida notes that, significantly, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) opens with a reference to spectrality: “[a] spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism” (quoted in Derrida, 1994, p. 4). This spectre is, in fact, a revenant, an apparition which returns and disrupts temporal linearity. As Peter Buse and Andrew Stott affirm: ‘[t]he question of the *revenant* neatly encapsulates deconstructive concerns about the impossibility of conceptually solidifying the past’ (1999, p. 11; original emphasis). Derrida favours this notion of the spectre as revenant to deconstruct ‘all historicisms that are grounded in a rigid sense of chronology’ (Buse and Stott, 1999, p. 11). In this sense, ‘[h]aunting would mark the very existence of Europe’ (Derrida, 1994, p. 4), and hegemony, despite its efforts, cannot dispel the spectral presence of Marxism in the Western world, an idea which Derrida develops later in his essay (1994, p. 37). The link between Derrida’s hauntology and Sigmund Freud’s uncanny is made explicit in the concluding passages of his study where Derrida claims that he could have replaced the title *Specters of Marx* with “‘Marx – *das Unheimliche*” (1994, p. 174), thus associating Freud’s ideas about the

'unhomely' (Freud, 1955, p. 219, n. 1) with his own concept of the ghost. Derrida's ghost is a liminal presence, out of time, dislocated, and characterized by 'temporal disjoining' (1994, p. 19). Therefore, his ghost is neither present nor absent; instead it is 'a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate' (Davis, 2007, p. 11).

If Derrida's spectre or ghost, that encourages us to speak with the dead, opens up possibilities or alternatives for meanings in a still-unrealized future (Derrida, 1994, p. 176), Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's phantom is founded on the wounded past of individuals or communities, and shows no interest in the future. Published prior to Derrida's theorization, Abraham and Torok's work is now receiving renewed critical interest. There are few common aspects in these two theories of haunting and spectrality. Although Derrida himself knew their work well (he wrote a foreword to *The Wolf's Magic Word*, 'Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok' (1977)), and Abraham shared with Derrida a fascination with *Hamlet's* ghost (Davis, 2007, p. 76), Abraham and Torok's phantom has little to do with Derrida's spectre. The concept of the phantom stems directly from their reassessment of Freud's case 'The Wolf Man',³ and might be defined as an unspeakable secret which is lodged inside the subject, who is haunted by the gaps and silences of others; those silences and secrets that are unconsciously transmitted to later generations in, what they call, 'transgenerational haunting': '[t]he phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other' (Abraham and Torok, 1994, p. 175; original emphasis). It remains clear that the only shared characteristics between the Derridean spectre and the phantom are their capacity to return and their permeable boundaries, since there is no distinction between past and present, inside and outside in a haunted subject, or in a haunted text.

There are also crucial differences in how both concepts are developed and explored. For Derrida, 'what is vital is to remain open to an encounter with the unstable, unassimilated spectre because it is through such an encounter that something previously unheard of might occur'; for Abraham and Torok, the main objective is 'to exorcise the ghost by putting its unspeakable secrets into words, and thereby to bring the ghost back to the order of knowledge' (Davis, 2007, pp. 84, 87). To put it simply, Derrida underscores what

the spectre has to reveal, thus inducing us to listen to what it may say in the future, while Abraham and Torok's phantom is concerned with a traumatized past, which has to be disclosed, exorcized and, finally, dispelled. Similarly relevant to Abraham and Torok's notion of the phantom is their concept of the crypt, which gives its name to their interpretive method for reading the encrypted symptoms that are hidden in that concealed psychic space: 'cryptonymy'. The crypt, a locked topographical space, 'is neither the dynamic unconscious nor the ego of introjections. Rather, it is an enclave between the two, a kind of artificial unconscious' (Abraham and Torok, 1994, p. 159). Their theories provide ample space to interpret how outside influences, transmitted from one generation or community to the next, have important bearings not only on one's subjectivity, but also, more generally, on culture itself; they are not simply 'descriptive of individual neurosis, as in the Wolf Man's pathology, but interpretive of cultural encryption, of the magic words a culture does *not* say to itself' (Lloyd Smith, 1992, p. 306; original emphasis).

Although differently structured and defined, these two distinct sources of the trope of haunting and spectrality have spawned a substantial number of critical studies which have contributed to the dissemination of ideas about the spectral, the uncanny, the double and the ghostly in literary contexts. That the figure of the ghost remains of considerable importance in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century contemporary criticism is exemplified by the publication of two special issues of *Mosaic* on reappraisals of 'the uncanny' and 'haunting' in 2001 and 2002, followed by Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny*, a one-volume study solely devoted to this concept, published in 2003.⁴ More recently, the Spring 2006 issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* has specifically considered whether the trope of haunting and spectrality might be especially useful in the analysis of Canadian cultural artefacts given that 'contemporary Canadian authors, artists, and filmmakers are obsessed with ghosts and haunting' (Goldman and Saul, 2006, p. 645). Although several critics have approached literary and non-literary texts from this point of view, it is Julian Wolfreys's in-depth studies on the spectral traces of the past that have been most influential in neo-Victorianism. Not only has his *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (2002) decisively contributed to the propagation and dissemination of Derrida's theorization, but also it has demonstrated the value of the trope of haunting and

spectrality as a powerful metaphor for a 'transgenerational' return of the dead and the repressed in literary texts. As he affirms: '[t]here can be no narrative [...] which is not always already disturbed and yet made possible from within its form or structure by a ghostly movement' (Wolfreys, 2002, p. 3).

In other words, literature is permanently haunted by ghosts, revenants and spirits which travel across time and make an appearance in the form of textual/spectral traces. Wolfreys takes up the notion that the gothic, although defunct as genre, is spectralized and invoked as a series of apparitional traces in several writings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He goes on to suggest that the spectralization of the gothic 'manifests itself as both a subversive force and a spectral mechanism through which social and political critique may become available and articulable, as we come to apprehend material realities, political discourses and epistemological frameworks from other invisible places' (Wolfreys, 2002, p. 11).⁵ Similarly, one might argue that the Victorian age is spectralized and appears as a ghostly apparition in contemporary literature; in returning as a revenant, it opens up multiple possibilities for re-enactment, reimagining, and reinterpretation.

The spectral motif is also significant in the context of the Victorian supernatural and the occult, which has attracted considerable attention in cultural histories of the Victorian period, as well as emerging as a key theme in neo-Victorianism. Important work in this field has been performed by cultural historians and feminist critics such as Alex Owen, Janet Oppenheim, Judith Walkowitz, Alison Winter, Diana Barsham, and Marlene Tromp, who have undertaken the archaeological project of resurrecting the Victorian dead, thus disclosing the gaps and silences left by the encrypted stories of women who did not comply with Victorian constructions of femininity, namely, the criminal, the hysteric and the spiritualist medium.⁶ In particular, they have focused on the relevance of women in the Spiritualist movement, and in doing so they have resurrected the Victorian passion for Spiritualism. However, the Victorians' belief in the other world cannot be divorced from their ambivalent responses to nineteenth-century technological advances experienced from the 1840s onwards, beginning with the inception of photography and other related technologies, or from the rise of Darwinism and the subsequent crisis in conventional religious faith.

In *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004), Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell examine the pivotal role played by the supernatural in the Victorian age, in relation not only to cultural productions such as the ghost story, but also associated with scientific and medical discourses of the period. Neo-Victorian literature recurrently engages with the haunting presence of Spiritualism and the occult: 'mediums, spirit guides, séances, possessions, and dark circles abound, together with the paraphernalia of accompanying trickery and possible misrepresentation' (Kohlke, 2008, p. 9). Neo-Victorian writers resurrect and talk with the Victorian dead, a process which has been defined as 'ghostwriting' (Schor, 2000, p. 247), both in regard to the channelling of Spiritualist beliefs and the reanimation of Victorian genres. What is at stake here is the way in which the Victorian past and the contemporary age establish a dialogue, a two-way process, a dual relationship by means of which the Victorians come to life in neo-Victorianism, and contemporary revisions of the Victorian past offer productive and nuanced ways of unlocking occluded secrets, silences and mysteries which return and reappear in a series of spectral/textual traces. Bearing in mind the transformative potential of the disembodied figure of the ghost, the essays in this volume explore how haunting and spectrality, as a unifying principle, offer a model via which to examine the interplay between the following binaries: absence/presence, incorporeal/corporeal, spiritual/material, the Victorian past and the present.

The first essay in the collection, by Francis O'Gorman, analyses the presence of the Victorians in contemporary fiction through an examination of Salley Vickers's *Miss Garnet's Angel* (2000). This novel is not, properly speaking, neo-Victorian as it is entirely set in the contemporary period, but the Victorians' ideas are felt in the enduring presence of John Ruskin's reading of Venice in Vickers's novel. In addition, it is the image and Apocryphal story of the angel Raphael (a redemptive pattern) which comes to signify the Victorian past's disruption of the present. Vickers's novel actively engages with the nineteenth century and shows the ways in which the intervention of the Victorian past in the present can be full of life-affirming possibilities in the Biblical pattern of redemption and the metaphor of restoration. O'Gorman's essay ponders on the serviceability of the Victorians and that of Ruskin's vision of a redeeming city in contemporary culture. He concludes by alluding to the nature of

fiction itself which permits the reader to have access to (or, rather, to feel and sense) the nineteenth century and the links between the Victorian age and the present: 'narrative fiction sometimes also offers a persuasive, perhaps dangerously, but also enthralling convincing sense, a belief in, the continuing vibrancy, the living ambiance, of the past'.

In Mark Llewellyn's essay, the metaphor of restoration is also at play, not only in terms of the reconstruction of the past, but also in a religious sense. The neo-Victorian novels under study, Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999), Charles Palliser's *The Unburied* (1999), Jem Poster's *Courting Shadows* (2002), and John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004) and *The Séance* (2008), address key issues concerning our contemporary attitude to Victorian crises of faith and belief. The glass motif provides him with an apt metaphor to explore how spectrality in these novels reflects and refracts nineteenth-century crises and the question of secularity. In doing so, Llewellyn underlines the inherent tensions found in 'the relationship between the spectral, the scriptural (in both religious and authorial senses) and the spiritual' in neo-Victorian novels featuring ghosts, spectres and the return of the dead. Another common feature between these two essays is their shared conviction that the reading of the (neo-Victorian) novel is based on sensed experience, and on the desire to make a connection with the past through the narrative text, so much so that 'the sense of being haunted is frequently re-enacted at a textual level'. Llewellyn compellingly argues that there is a metafictional element in the overwhelming invocation of spiritualists, spectral presences and séances in the neo-Victorian novel, and that this provides a commentary on our own contradictory response to nineteenth-century spectrality and s(p)ecularity.

The next chapter in the collection addresses a contemporary revision of the story of the spiritualist medium Florence Cook, and her supposed liaison with William Crookes, well-known nineteenth-century scientist and discoverer of the thallium element, as deployed in Michèle Roberts's *In the Red Kitchen* (1990). Agnieszka Golda-Derejczk sheds light on Roberts's novel by focusing on nineteenth-century spiritualism and haunting as 'useful tool[s] to problematize the question of women as subjects *in* and *of* history' (original emphasis). Past and present in this novel fuse together in the mingling of different female voices which speak across temporal

and geographical boundaries (Ancient Egypt, Victorian London, and the twentieth century), but it is the Victorian voice, of Flora Milk, that brings together all the women's experiences of sexual abuse, incest, discrimination, and, also, self-inscription. Golda-Derejczk considers Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay 'Women's Time' and observes that eternity and repetition, 'the cyclical and monumental modalities of time', can be discussed in juxtaposition with the history of women in Roberts's novel. Spiritualism, mediumship and self-writing in the novel suggest a textual/spectral/historical continuity, where women are presented as sharing experiences across time and space. Victorian Spiritualism, according to Golda-Derejczk, serves two related purposes: first, it provides a spiritual dimension to the connections between writing, repetition, communication (often defective), and eternity; second, it illustrates the challenges posed by the female spiritualist to Victorian normalcy, a subject already examined by feminist historians such as Alex Owen.

Like Golda Derejczk's, Esther Saxey's chapter foregrounds the question of female sexuality and self-representation in the context of Victorian sexual mores and examines the following novels: Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990). The unifying element is the supernatural, which allows the female protagonists to release their own repressed and/or displaced desires. Both novels are representative of what Saxey calls the 'plot of repression and liberation [that] derives its pleasure from surprize and contrast'. In this context, she examines the supernatural as a means to transgress class distinctions in the novels under consideration, since both protagonists are Victorian maids. Hannah Cullwick (1833–1909), whose uncanny figure haunts both *Alias Grace* and *Mary Reilly*, is also discussed in terms of social and sexual transgression. Saxey comments on this uncanny double, which informs both novels, as a starting point to examine further instances of duplication and repetition. She concludes with a discussion of the 'speaking maid', and problematizes questions of self-representation and self-inscription in the protagonists' use of the first person to record their experiences. The supernatural, lastly, intervenes to destabilize the notion that self-representation equates with liberation, as 'Atwood and Martin employ the ghost and the monster to toy with the idea of liberation, but then to undermine it'.

A somewhat different approach to the uncanny, haunting presences, and spectrality is taken by Silvana Colella in her chapter

on Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002). She addresses the spectral pervasiveness of (neo-) Victorian odours in an essay which juxtaposes the cultural history of smell with recent critical theory about the hauntedness of the Victorian past to persuasively argue that 'olfactory hauntings create a sense of the unfamiliar within the familiar conventions of narrative realism'. As in O'Gorman's and Llewellyn's essays, Colella's analysis of Faber's novel underlines how the reader is invited to access the past via sensorial experience – this is particularly true in a novel where the reader is urged to 'sense' the past through the quality and quantity of smells. Colella brings together the trope of haunting and olfactory experience through the ghostly characteristics of odours which 'have an intangible and spectral quality that defies the power of language to represent reality'. Paradoxically enough, this sense contributes to a more 'material' apprehension of reality, according to Colella, who argues that smells are liminal entities, 'both material and immaterial'. Colella's essay further investigates the duality implicit in smells and considers it an apt tool to analyse neo-Victorianism since olfactory experience functions as a mediator between past and present. Finally, Colella affirms that Faber's novel 'neither mourns nor derides the legacy of Victorian fiction', thus inhabiting a liminal position akin to that of the ghost.

Ann Heilmann's essay returns to a more traditional example of haunting – the Victorian ghost story. Heilmann explores the spectral presence of Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) in several revisions and re-imaginings: Joyce Carol Oates's 'Accursed Inhabitants of the House of Bly' (1994), A. N. Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost* (2005), Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999) and Alejandro Amenábar's 2001 film *The Others*. Heilmann considers how these texts prove imagination's enabling capacity to create veritable simulacra, following Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'hyperreal'. Moreover, the texts under analysis 'are all structured around six categories in crisis or transformation at the turn of the century: social architecture, the family, the question of (narrative) authority, femininity, sexuality, and identity'. While Oates, Wilson, and Waters, to a greater or lesser degree, shift the narrative focus and give predominance in their retellings to the ghosts of the novella, the disturbed mind of the protagonist, and Peter Quint's 'deviant libidinality' respectively, it is Amenábar's *The Others* which is particularly concerned with blurring

the boundaries of reality and fantasy, point of view and identity; this is accomplished using the cinematic medium, which further reinforces the dissolution of frontiers between reality and imagination. Heilmann ultimately identifies the spectral motif in James's novella, not only in the portrayal of the governess and the representation of doubles, echoes, and unreliable narrative perspectives, but also in the rewritings and revisions, which prove the cultural endurance of James's text in the contemporary imagination.

The final two chapters in the collection focus on the spectral traces of the Victorian past in neo-Victorian novels that are set in London. Rosario Arias examines the haunted nature of Victorian London in neo-Victorianism through the reappearance of the River Thames and the mid-nineteenth-century sanitation movement in Matthew Kneale's *Sweet Thames* (1992) and Clare Clark's *The Great Stink* (2005). The master trope of haunting and spectrality, more specifically Derrida's 'hauntology' and his concept of the 'specter', as well as Abraham and Torok's notions of the 'phantom', the 'secret' and the 'crypt', provide models for the analysis of three interconnected aspects in these novels: first, the Great Stink and the subsequent reform undertaken by Joseph Bazalgette, a Victorian civil engineer; second, the sewer as a haunted/haunting space; and last, the leaky body in relation to the sanitary mapping of the period. This notion of fluidity resonates with the image of the river Thames and the flowing nature of Victorian London, a city permanently in flux whose spatial boundaries are dissolved in the interdependence of street and underground levels, the surface, and the verticalized space of the sewer. In addition, mid-Victorian London appears to be haunted by encrypted traces of cultural and individual pasts. Therefore, the fluidity of the river further contributes to the dissolution of temporal boundaries, thus creating the image of a 'spectralized' city/body/self. Arias's essay finally affirms that '[i]n rereading and reimagining the topography of the mid-Victorian city, and in unearthing the encrypted traces of a spectral past, these neo-Victorian writers attempt to add a new layer to our own interpretation of Victorian London, thus rebuilding [...] the Victorian urban landscape'.

While Patricia Pulham shares with Arias an interest in the encryption of the past in London's cultural heritage, her essay considers the importance of detection and Jewish history in Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987) and Peter Ackroyd's

Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem (1994), and examines the spectral motif through the subtext of the Golem myth which features in both texts. Pulham argues that despite the novels' ostensible concern with two key events in nineteenth-century history – the Ratcliffe Highway murders of 1811, and the Jack the Ripper killings of 1888 – Ackroyd and Sinclair's works encrypt spectral traces of Jewish history in the mythical figure of the Golem, which also functions as a form of unrepresentable 'truth'. Activated by language, moulded from the history-laden strata of London clay, and embodying a disruptive potential, the Golems in these works bring together temporal, spatial, and narrative concerns that inform and problematize the neo-Victorian novel's engagement with, and recreation of, the past.

In conclusion, the essays in this volume demonstrate that the impact of the Victorian age on contemporary culture can be interpreted as a form of haunting and spectrality. The ghost's liminal existence, neither present nor absent, functions as a powerful metaphor for the dynamic relationship maintained between Victorianism and neo-Victorianism. As Judith Johnston and Catherine Waters acknowledge in their introduction to *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns*, duality and doubling are significant aspects of neo-Victorian fiction (2008, p. 10). The essays in this collection significantly underscore the relevance of such doublings, which consist of looking backwards to the Victorian period while simultaneously exploring uncharted territories in contemporary fiction, providing nuanced readings and interpretations of the Victorian age and our own contemporary period. This volume represents our own attempt to open a channel of communication between the spirits of the past and the critical field of neo-Victorian studies which, we are certain, will continue to listen to what the Victorian ghost has to say.

Notes

1. In identifying the neo-Victorian novel and the metahistorical romance as subgenres of historiographic metafiction, Dana Shiller (1997) and Amy Elias (2001) respectively demonstrate the need for a reconsideration of Hutcheon's umbrella term in the light of recent developments in the historical novel genre.
2. The significance of 'nostalgia' as an adequate term for postmodern culture's engagement with the Victorian past also dominated discussions of neo-Victorianism at the first major conference on the topic,

- 'Neo-Victorianism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Appropriation' held at the University of Exeter, September 2007.
3. The 'Wolf Man' was a Russian patient of Freud, Sergei Pankejeff, who suffered from depression and was unable to complete a bowel movement without the help of an enema. Pankejeff told Freud of a childhood dream of white wolves which bore foxes' tails. Freud interpreted this as a primal scene witnessed by Pankejeff and, through analysis, reputedly cured him. He wrote of the case in 'From the History of Infantile Neurosis' (1918) where he used the name 'Wolf Man' to protect Pankejeff's identity.
 4. For critical studies which are informed by Derrida's hauntology, see Peter Buse and Andrew Stott's 'Introduction: a Future for Haunting' (Buse and Stott, 1999, pp. 1–20), and Slavoj Žižek's 'Introduction: the Spectre of Ideology' (Žižek, 1994, pp. 1–33). Derrida himself has contributed an essay, 'Marx and Sons' (1999, pp. 213–69) to a volume dedicated to the relevance of his *Specters of Marx* in contemporary criticism. Esther Raskin is, in turn, concerned with Abraham and Torok's ideas about the phantom, the secret, and the crypt in *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (1992).
 5. Terry Castle makes a similar case for lesbian identity in her *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993). Most interestingly, Wolfreys 'returns' to the haunting presence of the past in the topography of the city of London in *Writing London: Volume Two: Materiality, Memory, Spectrality* (2004) and in *Writing London: Volume Three: Inventions of the City* (2007). The trope of spectrality is also significant in relation to postcolonial theory (Goldman and Saul, 2006, p. 649), and trauma theory (Kohlke, 2008, p. 7).
 6. Alex Owen's groundbreaking *The Darkened Room: Women and Spiritualism* (1989) is an oft-quoted critical text in any account of Victorian Spiritualism and women's cultural position in the Victorian period. Similarly, Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World* (1988) also deals with the Spiritualist movement in connection with women. Diana Barsham (1992) explicitly connects the occult to the emergence of the Women's Rights' Movement, and Alison Winter (1998) pays particular attention to mesmerism and hypnotism in relation to women. Marlene Tromp has recently discussed the stories of several mediums, and has interpreted the séance as a potential in-between space, a site of transgression and subversion (2006, pp. 21–46). Interestingly, she considers how questions of race, class and sexual dynamics interplay in the dark room (2006, pp. 75–96). In turn, Judith Walkowitz is tangentially concerned with Spiritualism in a chapter of *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), where she addresses the story of unconventional women who were wrongfully confined in asylums (2000, pp. 171–83).