

Doctor Who and the Neo-Victorian Christmas Serial Tradition

Lindsay Lawrence

(University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Arkansas, USA)

Abstract:

Christmas stories are a tradition in British serial literature, be it the annuals and special weekly and monthly magazines published in the nineteenth century or the Christmas-themed episodes of popular television serials today. Festival literature produces an ‘eerie’ sense of past, present, and future, and many of these productions evoke past traumas for narrative impact. For example, Christmas editions of Charles Dickens’s *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* provided readers with specially commissioned stories that explored past traumas in order to enable their characters to morally improve, to the betterment of themselves and society. The rebooted *Doctor Who*, in ‘The Next Doctor’ (2008), ‘A Christmas Carol’ (25 December 2010), and ‘The Snowmen’ (2012), has reinvented the Victorian Christmas serial both via narrative echoes and explicit use of neo-Victorian and steampunk visual designs. In so doing, these neo-Victorian TV specials critique some of the same social problems as Dickens did, commenting on greed and the concept of ‘Victorian values’ while also remediating the affective nature of Christmas stories to help people come to terms with past traumas.

Keywords: *All the Year Round*, Christmas serials, Christmas specials, Russell T. Davies, Charles Dickens, *Doctor Who*, *Household Words*, Steven Moffat, *Sherlock*.

In the first new *Doctor Who* Christmas special, Rose Tyler (Billie Piper) explains to her much put-upon boyfriend, Mickey Smith (Noel Clarke), “You just forget about Christmas and things in the TARDIS. They don’t exist. You get sort of timeless” (Hawes and Davies 2005: 6:14-6:18). How does a television serial about the consequences of travelling through time and space and the influence of the Doctor, who takes his companions on this journey – one often informed by the interplay between trauma and nostalgia – produce a Christmas special? Yet, since its reboot in 2005, *Doctor Who* has been part of BBC One’s slate of Christmas Day programming, premiering in a coveted prime-time viewing slot and commanding sizable

Neo-Victorian Studies

11:1 (2018)

pp. 174-206



audiences. The worldwide popularity of *Doctor Who* has led to the Christmas special being aired on BBC America on Christmas Day as well, allowing American audiences to satiate their viewing appetites.

Doctor Who's status as a "loyalty programme" (Malewski 2014: 173) and the series' continued popularity since its reboot does make it a smart selection for the BBC to produce as part of its Christmas-week programming, which is designed to maximise viewership during a time when other programming pauses.¹ However, unlike BBC television serials such as *The Vicar of Dibley* (1994-2015), *EastEnders* (1985-present), *Call the Midwife* (2012-present), or even the ITV series *Downton Abbey* (2010-2016) – all of which tell linear stories linked to everyday life – *Doctor Who*'s narrative structure does not lend itself easily to the cultural work of a festival text. Moreover, the uncanny traumatological storylines of *Doctor Who* makes it a seemingly odd choice for BBC One's Christmas Day programming, which tends to emphasise the more festive, publicly ceremonial aspects of the Christmas season.² According to Mike Storry and Peter Childs, "[a] traditional British Christmas has been characterised through images of the family, ranging across three generations, sitting in front of the television after Christmas dinner, watching the Queen's Speech at 3 pm" (Storry and Childs 2007: 152), and then tuning into family friendly watching. Ostensibly a family friendly show, *Doctor Who* is anything but feel good viewing, however, especially in its Christmas episodes, which often focus on loss and trauma.

Christmas as a cultural product, of course, is a palimpsest of traditions. The Christian religious festival is layered over a wide variety of other pagan festival traditions, which include Saturnalia, the Winter Solstice, and St Stephen's Day. While former Dickens Museum curator, David Parker, cautions that Charles Dickens and the Victorians did not in fact invent Christmas, the nineteenth-century trappings of the season – carols, decorative excess, and family gatherings and rituals – inform much of the visual and narrative culture of the holiday today.³ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn thus argue that "[i]t is a long-standing trope that Dickens equates to the Victorian and that much of the mainstream public perception of the nineteenth century is, in fact, rooted in a Dickensian sense of the period" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 214). For most viewers, Dickens, Victoriana, and Christmas are bound up inextricably with each other, each informing an iterative, intertextual narrative that re-establishes its tropes

every Christmas season. A Dickensian Christmas story is still Victorian for contemporary audiences, no matter how far removed from the nineteenth century or how many aliens from outer space or lizard peoples from before the dawn of human time populate the cast. As a palimpsest, festival literature also “is constantly assimilating new works of popular culture into its traditions” (Budgen 2014: 93), allowing for narratives like *Doctor Who* to reinvent the Dickensian Christmas into a space for commenting on the lingering effects of ‘Victorian values’ and the emotional catharsis Dickens envisioned in his Christmas stories.

Moreover, Dickens did establish the patterns of specialised Christmas textual production that *Doctor Who* participates in today. For Dickens, Christmas was a time for ghostly stories around the fire, narratives designed to titillate readers with only some mention of the Christian festival that provides the impetus for the story.⁴ As Derek Johnston documents in *Haunted Seasons*, ghost stories – Christmas themed or otherwise – continue to make up a large part of the seasonal rituals. Contemporary Christmas television specials, such as the thirteen thus far produced for *Doctor Who*, have their origins in this Victorian print culture tradition, specifically the literary annual and gift book market that emerged in the 1820s, the five 1840s Christmas books written and published by Dickens, and the eighteen special issues of the two magazines edited by Dickens, *Household Words* (1850-1859, hereafter *HW*) and *All the Year Round* (1859-1895, hereafter *ATYR*). Russell T. Davies and Steven Moffat reinvent the nineteenth-century Christmas in the three neo-Victorian Christmas specials for *Doctor Who*. The pattern of Christmas special production established by Dickens is featured in Christmas serial production today: entertaining stories inspired by the season but that take place in the near past, ghostly stories meant to be experienced as part of communal festivities, and introspective narratives that look backwards and forwards. Both Davies and Moffat explore the ways the Christmas stories use the uncanny and the traumatological in ‘The Next Doctor’ (2008), ‘A Christmas Carol’ (2010), and ‘The Snowmen’ (2012). These Christmas specials reinvent the Victorian Christmas serial using intertextual referencing and neo-Victorian material culture. In so doing, these neo-Victorian TV specials problematise the concept of ‘Victorian values’, while also presenting deliberately nostalgic, pleasurable episodes.

1. Neo-Victorian Christmas Production

Television has long been the medium in which contemporary audiences encounter adaptations, metafiction, and remediations of nineteenth-century culture and of Victorian and neo-Victorian texts. The BBC and ITV in the UK and Masterpiece Theatre in the US have produced television film and mini-series adaptations of canonical nineteenth-century novels and serials as part of their regular prestige fare since the late 1960s. ITV and Masterpiece Theatre's *Victoria* (2016-present), for instance, is the latest such series to remediate the nineteenth century for contemporary audiences. More recently, cable television networks have also begun producing and airing neo-Victorian remediations of nineteenth-century literature and culture such as BBC's *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), BBC America's *Copper* (2012-2013), *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) co-produced for both the US network Showtime and the UK network Sky, and TNT's *The Alienist* (2017), itself an adaptation of Caleb Carr's Sherlock Holmes-esque neo-Victorian novel.⁵ The Canadian Broadcasting Company is following suit with creatively darker adaptations, such as the series *Anne with an E* (2017-present), which is an adaptation of the beloved Canadian novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), and the limited series *Alias Grace* (2017). Both of these are available streaming on Netflix in the US. Concurrently, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's hugely successful *Sherlock* (2010-present) and the more modest CBS series *Elementary* (2012-present) have both reimagined the Victorian detective for the present day.

As the Introduction of this Special Issue explains in further detail, the proliferation of nineteenth-century metafiction and remediations on the small screen has not gone unnoticed by Victorian and neo-Victorian scholars. Several articles in *Neo-Victorian Studies*, notably Catriona Mills on Victorian theatricality in the old and new series of *Doctor Who*, explore the ways that television series remediate, adapt, and extend Victorian and neo-Victorian texts.⁶ Recent special issues of *RAVON: Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* (April 2013) and *Victoriographies* (February 2016) focus on adaptations and metafiction as well as the patterns of serial production inherited from the Victorians. Iris Kleinecke-Bates's *Victorians on Screen: The Nineteenth Century on British Television, 1994-2005* also interrogates neo-Victorian productions on the small screen. While much of this work explores adaptation, more and more attention is being brought to the intertextual qualities of neo-Victorian television, particularly the ways in

which these narratives function to help audiences problematise the present. As Kleinecke-Bates suggests, the nineteenth century is too close to the present to be wholly relegated to the realms of the purely nostalgic. Series like *Doctor Who*, which is deliberately intertextual as it assembles its Christmas neo-Victorian narratives, offer audiences a safely nostalgic viewing experience, yet these episodes problematise both the nineteenth century and interpretations of the period as they focus on the impacts of trauma and greed.

Drawing from work in neo-Victorian studies, literary studies, and television and media studies on intertextuality, transmedia storytelling, and work from periodical studies on the serial, I suggest that a closer study of these neo-Victorian Christmas specials of *Doctor Who*, both in terms of their mode of production and their remediations of the Victorians, complicates our understanding of how neo-Victorian texts operate within contemporary cultural consumption. Several scholars of neo-Victorian studies have called for as broad a definition as possible of neo-Victorianism, specifically including all historical fiction, film, or television series set in the nineteenth century as well as series such as *Doctor Who*, which sets episodes in the nineteenth century and uses nineteenth century iconography in episodes not set in that time period.⁷ Neo-Victorian scholars are interested in texts that are “*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). Moreover, Marie-Luise Kohlke advocates for exploring the “‘doubling’ aspects between Victorian and neo-Victorian fictions’ publication and advertising processes, as well as their intended markets and target audiences” (Kohlke 2014: 35). Exploring neo-Victorian Christmas specials allows for a closer inspection of this doubling of textual production.

Such work also intersects with current scholarship in new media studies on intertextuality, remediation, and transmedia storytelling practices.⁸ Neo-Victorian scholars have long been interested in “the dense intertextuality of neo-Victorian fiction” (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 3). The “palimpsestuous nature of adaptation” means that as neo-Victorian texts adapt the Victorians, they are inherently layering texts in dialogue with each other (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 33). Julia Kristeva positions intertextuality as “an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings” (Kristeva 1966: 36).

Similarly, Peter Brooker, in his work on adaptation and film, argues that current adaptations within the new media culture are even “more intensively palimpsestic, ironic, and self-reflexive” (Brooker 2007:110). An intertextual approach explores how *Doctor Who*’s Victorian adaptation reimagines the source material, but also critiques and engages with both the Victorians and present-day culture. Christmas adaptations, in particular, place *Doctor Who* within a contradictory ritualised discourse of celebration and memorialisation. Dickens’s Christmas stories, for instance, are often a meditation on mourning and loss, using the rituals of the season as a mechanism for coming to terms with grief. In this way, they are uncanny meditations on how Christmas refigures the home, ameliorating the griefs of the year. Furthermore, Scott D. Banville argues that

[r]emediation helps us see the extent to which previous cultural forms are taken up and reworked by later generations in ways that do not hinge on the idea of origin, but rather that hinge on the idea that all cultural forms and the media through which they are transmitted appropriate and supplement a vast range of other cultural forms. (Banville 2011: 17)

Remediation allows for an exploration of the structure of Christmas specials and how this structure works within seriality. While a Christmas television special is different in medium than a Christmas book or a special Christmas issue of a nineteenth-century periodical, both are informed by the season and the storytelling rituals present in festival literature, and both utilise a seriality of specialness. In an interview about the first Christmas special, Russell T. Davies proclaimed, “I hate those specials where it’s Christmas but they bugger off to Spain or Prague or Fuengirola, without a sprig of holly to be seen. Honestly, it’s not rocket science – a Christmas Special should be both Christmassy, and special” (Davies qtd. in Budgen 2014: 91). In the interview, Davies defines the core ingredients of festival literature: the tension between ritual and narrative. The Christmas specials are now worldwide televisual events that remediate Victorian Christmas tropes into narratives about alien invasions, monsters lurking in the snow, or averting space disasters.⁹ In so doing, these specials rework the central tensions of Dickens’s Christmas stories as they blend rejoicing tempered with sorrow.

Doctor Who has long remediated the Victorians.¹⁰ Marcus K. Harmes's work on *Doctor Who* and adaptation traces how from the start the series has adapted literary and historical sources, including H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), literary science fiction, and "American pulp science fiction" (Harmes 2014: 5). Christopher Marlow also explores early BBC documentation that highlights how the show's origins developed from a script idea about "a time patrol, 'set up to stop anyone from tampering with the past'" (Marlow 2009: 47). As much as *Doctor Who* has been about space travel and encounters with peoples from other planets, it has also been about experiencing Earth's past. This duality stems from the show's educational remit to explore both science and history. The new series of *Doctor Who* has travelled to Elizabethan London, Renaissance Venice, Pompeii, and 1960s America, among other time periods.¹¹

As Catriona Mills argues, "no time in Earth history fascinates the Doctor more than the long Victorian era" (Mills 2013: 148). Mills calculates that as of 2012, 4% of *Doctor Who* (the old and the new series) have the long nineteenth century or its themes as part of the stories' settings. This number is not as slight as it seems, for Mills goes on to note that "the 88 episodes that make up the program's 26 Dalek stories represent only 11% of the total episodes" (Mills 2013: 149). Of the new series, including the seasons from 2012-2017 and the Christmas specials, 12% of the episodes are refashioning elements of the long nineteenth century.¹²

Many of these elements are Gothic ones. James Chapman, in his history of the old *Doctor Who*, argues that the series "acquired a distinctive style based on a pastiche of Gothic horror and classic adventure stories" (Chapman 2006: 98). Indeed, script editor Robert Holmes and producer Peter Hinchcliffe, both working on the show in the mid-1970s, deliberately adapted nineteenth-century action adventure stories and *fin-de-siècle* Imperial Gothic narratives in order to separate the series from American science fiction. According to Chapman, these Victorian remediations

can be seen as a conscious attempt to reposition *Doctor Who* in relation to the tradition of 'scientific romance' that preceded science fiction. This strategy serves to locate *Doctor Who* within a distinctively British lineage of imaginative fiction, inspired by writers such as [H.] Rider

Haggard, Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, Edgar Wallace and Sax Rohmer. (Chapman 2006: 107)

According to Mills, these episodes are “actually a pastiche of elements from genre fiction, particularly seminal works of fantasy, science-fiction, horror, and mystery” (Mills 2013: 153). Two of the Victorian or neo-Victorian episodes of *Doctor Who* specifically remediate Victorian Gothic elements. ‘The Next Doctor’ and ‘The Snowmen’ both feature alien invasions that initially present themselves as murders and hauntings. ‘A Christmas Carol’ positions the Doctor himself as an uncanny, ghostly, haunting Kazran Sardick (Michael Gambon). In blending these elements, the three episodes follow a pattern in neo-Victorian fiction identified by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. They argue 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 2012: 4)

In other words, *Doctor Who* consistently returns to late Victorian Gothic fiction as an inspiration for its own remediations of the Victorian because, as a science fiction series, it is invested in exploring those things that are unexplainable.¹³ Late nineteenth-century novels such as Haggard’s *She* (1887), Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and popular mysteries such as Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories are invested in exploring the inexplicable while also teasing out the traumas of Empire.¹⁴

Outside of the Victorian or neo-Victorian Christmas specials, Davies and Moffat have each written one additional Victorian-set episode of the series. Davies wrote ‘Tooth and Claw’ (2006), which is set in a Scottish manor house beset by werewolves. The episode establishes the Victorian origins for *Torchwood* (2006-2011), setting up critical plot points for later in Season 2. Moffat wrote ‘Deep Breath’ (2014), which introduces Missy (Michelle Gomez), the new neo-Victorian regeneration of the Master. She retains her loosely late nineteenth-century, Mary Poppins style costume in every appearance in the series. This episode also deliberately plumbs *Doctor Who*’s own canon, intratextually referencing his episode ‘The Girl in the

Fireplace’ (2006), and densely remediating Sherlock Holmes and incorporating steampunk elements.¹⁵ In addition, Moffat’s ‘A Good Man Goes to War’ (2011), while not a neo-Victorian episode per se, introduces the neo-Victorian characters of Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh), “a lizard woman from the dawn of time” (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 35:19-22) awoken by an 1880s extension of the London underground, her companion Jenny Flint (Catrin Stewart), and their Sontaran butler Strax (Dan Starkey). The so-called Paternoster gang reappears on several occasions, including in ‘Deep Breath’ (2014) and ‘The Snowmen’ (2012).

Other writers on the show have also set episodes in the long nineteenth century. Sarah Dollard’s ‘Thin Ice’ (2017) is set in 1814 at a Thames Frost Fair. Mark Gatiss is perhaps the most prolific contributor of Victoriana to the series, under both Davies and Moffat, writing three episodes: ‘The Unquiet Dead’ (2005), ‘The Crimson Horror’ (2013), and ‘The Empress of Mars’ (2017).¹⁶ ‘The Unquiet Dead’ is the most notable of the three as it was the third episode of the new *Doctor Who* and the first historical episode of the new series. As such, it gave the series needed cultural capital. Ironically, the script is widely considered a missed opportunity for a Christmas special as it features Charles Dickens giving a reading in Cardiff on Christmas Eve in 1869. The episode blends ghostly elements, as the recently deceased are reanimated as their bodies are inhabited by the Gelf, a species trying to invade Earth through a time rift.

2. The Seriality of Christmas Specials

The *Doctor Who* neo-Victorian Christmas specials are able to utilise this intertextuality in part because of the rhythms of serial production. Much of the theorisation about the serial as a narrative form has occurred in the fields of Victorian and modernist periodicals studies, although neo-Victorian studies has also begun to address the intersections of seriality, Victorianism, adaptation, and remediation.¹⁷ Serial literature no matter the medium – textual, auditory, or visual – employs narrative structures that are designed to mimic the rhythms of daily life. James Mussell explains that “[s]eriality was part of the way these publications slotted into the lives of readers, coming to hand at convenient moments while also helping provide the rhythms that structured everyday life” (Mussell qtd. in Hammill, Hjartarson, and McGregor 2015: 8). Yet, Christmas specials generally function outside the normative seriality of literary miscellanies like *HW* or *ATYR* and the

television series. Instead, they operate within a temporal mode that allows for instalments, stories, or episodes to emphasise “self-conscious textual moments” (Hills 2008: 25). Christmas specials are standalone stories designed to work within a different rhythm of seriality, that of the annual versus weekly or monthly instalment, and as such, this type of serial disrupts the established flow of both the periodical and the serial narrative. They should be read as part of the narrative flow, but also as separate productions working within different forms of time.

Audiences have been trained since the nineteenth century to expect this interruption in serial production. First and foremost, audiences associate festivals, such as Christmas, with textual production. According to Parker, “[f]estivals demand forms of celebration: ritual, feasting, games, spectacle, and every kind of artistic activity, not the least the production of literary texts” (Parker 2005: 14). Dickens’s Christmas novels and the later special Christmas issues of the magazines he edited are part of a larger Victorian commercial landscape for Christmas entertainment in the form of purchasable commodities – gift books and cards – and the special theatricals of the season in the form of the Christmas pantomime.¹⁸ According to Jeffrey Richards, “Christmas became the family festival *par excellence* and the exclusive association of the pantomime with the Christmas season became part of the elaboration of that festival” (Richards 2015: 41). Secondly, nineteenth-century audiences were the first to become accustomed to texts shaping their experience of time through the rhythms of periodical production. As Mark W. Turner argues, while “the media provides the rhythm of modernity in everyday life, there is no single rhythm” (Turner 2002: 188). The cacophony of periodical time allows for audiences to learn and expect “temporal symmetry, [...] with readers interacting with the media at roughly the same time” and “temporal *asymmetry*”, where there are “competing, overlapping cycles of time” (Turner 2002: 188). Ritualising periodical time such as Magazine Day, when all the monthly magazines were published and special, seasonal issues, was one way publishers helped audiences make sense of the differing rhythms of publication.

For instance, the special Christmas issues Dickens produced of *HW* and *ATYR* were in addition to the regular weekly instalments of both magazines.¹⁹ Bound copies of the two journals place the Christmas special at the end of the volume. None of the stories contained in these special

issues are a continuation of narratives found in the other issues published in the weeks before or after the special issue. The Christmas special issues consist entirely of short stories or essays, with the early issues specifically courting contributions from authors of note such as Elizabeth Gaskell and George Augustus Sala. Instead of relying on the seriality of weekly continuity to entice readers, Dickens trained his regular and casual readers to expect a high-quality, special fiction issue of each magazine in addition to the regular fare provided by *HW* and *ATYR*.

Specifically, he trained his readers to expect uncanny fare in these special issues. According to Angela Carter, “[t]he Christmas ghost-story, the Christmas spine-chiller, horror for Christmas – somehow it’s become part and parcel of the whole Dickensy seasonal myth” (Carter qtd. in Wheatley 2006: 47). The 1852 special Christmas issue ‘A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire’ includes Gaskell’s ghost story ‘The Old Nurse’s Story’ as well as Dickens’s own haunting piece ‘The Child’s Story’ about a traveller who acquires and then loses companions in his journeys. At the end of the tale, the traveller encounters an old man who asks him to sit and “remember with me” (Dickens 1852: 579). The traveller does so and “all his friends came softly back and stood around him. The beautiful child, the handsome boy, the young man in love, the father, mother, and children: every one of them was there and he had lost nothing” (Dickens 1852: 579). In other words, these uncanny tales “reveal a wider concern with the supernatural forces of good and evil, death and rebirth at Christmas” (Wheatley 2006: 48). As they highlight the ways the domestic is disrupted, these Christmas ghost stories reassert familial bonds in the end. They are able to do so because they are part of ritualistic storytelling apparatus dedicated to marking the passing of time. Even the *Doctor Who* Christmas specials note this temporality. In the opening narration of ‘A Christmas Carol’, Kazran intones:

On every world wherever people are, in the deepest part of the winter, at the exact midpoint, everybody stops and turns and hugs. As if to say, “Well done! Well done, everyone! We’re halfway out of the dark”. Back on Earth, we call this Christmas, or the winter solstice. On this world, the first settlers called it the Crystal Feast. (Haynes and Moffat 2010: 2:54-3:04)

In the episode, this opening narration serves to position the episode within the flow of the holiday season, reminding viewers that what will unfold will mark the changing seasons.

British television production today manages this disruption in the scheduled programming in much the same way as Dickens did by establishing continuity of Christmas special production and careful selection, marketing, and production of the Christmas special to attract fans and casual viewers. According to David Budgen, “[f]or a fortnight in December, regular viewing is overturned in favour of new dramas, classic adaptations, special individual episodes of new programmes. [...] It is [...] a fertile space for special televisual ‘treats’” (Budgen 2014: 90). Popular shows are selected by the BBC and ITV to produce Christmas specials, with both networks developing competing Christmas week programming designed to attract as many viewers as possible. There is also an established expectation for popular shows to depict and reference Victorian Christmas tropes, including the uncanny.

As Heilmann and Llewellyn remark, “Advent could easily be rechristened ‘The Adaptation Season’” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 226), given the proliferation of televisual Victoriana offered in this time period. The contemporary Christmas season has seen numerous Victorian and neo-Victorian adaptations, both as specials and as series or mini-series beginning and ending in this time frame. Mini-series adaptations constitute the bulk of Christmas Victoriana with finales of many of these adaptations ending right before Christmas, including: *Wives and Daughters* (1999), *The Way We Live Now* (2001), *Daniel Deronda* (2002), *North and South* (2004), *Bleak House* (2005), *Oliver Twist* (2007), *Cranford* (2007). Series such as *Ripper Street*, a neo-Victorian procedural, which began airing its first series in the UK on 30 December 2012, trade on the Victorian evocations of the Christmas season, as does the 31 December 2015 Christmas special of *Sherlock*, ‘The Abominable Bride’. Television serials selected to produce Christmas specials deploy a variety of strategies to entice casual viewers as well as dedicated fans, including casting notable guest stars, crafting relatively standalone plots, and evoking the Christmas season, often with an explicitly Victorian gloss.

3. *Doctor Who's Neo-Victorianisms*

The Christmas specials add another layer of Dickensian Christmas coding to the Victorian intertextual elements *Doctor Who* already draws from. According to Chapman, the intertextual “[p]astiche in *Doctor Who* works on two levels, importing both/visual iconographic and structural/ideological references” (Chapman 2006: 107). The historical episodes rely on familiar visual cues to establish time period, such as dress and buildings. These episodes also tend to use literary figures, such as the first historical episode of season 1, ‘The Unquiet Dead’ (2005), which features Charles Dickens as a character. Visually, these three Christmas specials replicate expected Victorian Christmas intertextual elements. All three feature early montage sequences that highlight the Victorian setting and costuming, although Davies and Moffat have different stylistic elements that they emphasise. Set in 1851 London, ‘The Next Doctor’ opens with a gleeful Tenth Doctor (David Tennant) stepping out of the TARDIS into a swirl of light snow and a bustling, colourful outdoor marketplace, as if he stepped into a Victorian Covent Garden populated with a highly sanitised version of Henry Mayhew’s costermongers. Davies’s Victorian setting is hyper-pigmented, with bright tans, deep reds; the Tenth Doctor’s tan overcoat and slim-cut brown pinstripe suit blend well with the fitted mid-nineteenth-century costuming for Jackson Lake (David Morrissey). Mills notes that “the BBC, with its history of extravagant costume dramas, had a ready supply of nineteenth-century costumes and sets” (Mills 2013: 149), and the reuse of apparel for the large supporting cast is readily apparent in this Christmas special, where most of the supporting cast appear to have come directly from a stage adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* or *Oliver Twist*.

The Moffat Christmas specials utilise a darker colour palette both in terms of set design and costuming. For instance, ‘A Christmas Carol’ also makes use of Dickensian costumes, carriages, and gaslights, but the effect is grittier and darker, with most of the characters’ costumes being in a brown or white colour palette and the set being mostly limited to Kazran Sardick’s darkened home. The planet itself is shrouded in shark-infested mists, a stand in for the London fogs of the nineteenth century. ‘The Snowmen’ too is less bright and cheerful than ‘The Next Doctor’, as it takes the audience through snow-dusted, gas-lit streets replete with carriages and other iconography of the late nineteenth century, including female versions of Sherlock Holmes and Watson in Madame Vastra and Jenny Flint. The late-nineteenth-century

costumes, even for the Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith), who normally retains his usual dress, are also in a more sombre, rich colour palette of blacks, greys, dark reds, and purples, a colour saturation more reminiscent of the two Guy Ritchie Sherlock Holmes films than of BBC Victorian fare.

Narratively, all three episodes follow a structure similar to Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, even as they borrow from other nineteenth-century and neo-Victorian literary sources and delve into *Doctor Who*'s own canon. All three evoke the readily recognisable elements of Victorian capitalism: the workhouse, factories, orphans, even a cryogenic version of debtor's prison. In so doing, they present narratives that rework the central theme of Dickens's Christmas books: "the ongoing tussle between greed and goodness" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2006: 8-9).

They also feature an egocentric, miserly character who invariably must learn the errors of unbridled capitalistic greed, although each episode problematises this Dickensian characterisation and narrative pattern. Unlike *A Christmas Carol*'s proffered possibility of redemption, a happy ending is not given to any of these figures. Of the three, 'A Christmas Carol' is the closest to redeeming the central character, perhaps because Kazran Sardick is more directly an Ebenezer Scrooge descendant. 'A Christmas Carol' is a more intimate look at Kazran's life, and as such, the narrative only gestures at a critique of the capitalist system that shapes Kazran's life and puts him in the position of power that allows him to jeopardise the spaceship Amy and Rory are on. Both Miss Mercy Hartigan (Dervla Kirwin) and Dr Walter Simeon (Richard E. Grant) have clearly been shaped by their positions as outsiders to their respective London-based Victorian societies, so that they fall victim to the megalomania-inducing alien technologies that they come into contact with.

In 'The Next Doctor', Miss Hartigan, the intelligent and embittered workhouse matron who initially uses the Cybermen to take revenge on the wealthy men who ignore her, is ultimately made into the head of a CyberKing, a giant robot vessel whose chest contains "a Cyberfactory, ready to convert millions" of humans into robots (Goddard and Davies 2008: 47:58-48:00). Here Davies elects to delve back into *Doctor Who*'s own canon of villains rather than addressing the appalling conditions of the nineteenth-century factory and workhouse systems. The Cybermen's rapacious need to convert humanity into automatons substitutes for a closer engagement with nineteenth-century capitalism or the ways that factory

workers were dehumanised as ‘hands’ in the 1850s. While Davies has Miss Hartigan realise the odious greed of the men she works for, her hatred of the upper-class men around her is never fully explained. The children she takes from the workhouses to make the CyberKing operational are a clear Dickensian echo, referencing the orphaned and lost children who populate so many of his texts. Yet, aside from providing a dramatic rescue sequence, their plight is also not addressed by the end of the episode. They are too-clean orphan props, useful for a romp through Dickens’s London. Throughout the episode, Davies’s focus is more on the Doctor finding a makeshift family in time for Christmas dinner than on exploring the motivations of Miss Hartigan.

In ‘The Snowmen’, Moffat is more explicit in his critique of Victorian values and capitalism, which seems to stem from the fact that he elects to draw on Sherlock Holmes and the late nineteenth century in this episode rather than using Dickens as his source material. Dickens turned his hardest Christmas critiques into happy, family-oriented endings, limiting narratives that intertextually reference his work to this narrative pattern. By remediating Doyle, Moffat is setting up the Doctor as an investigator, a crucial role the Doctor needs to play in the rest of this particular season. As Dan Martin argues, “it was the first special since *The Christmas Invasion* to feel properly part of the [*Doctor Who*] canon” (Martin 2012: n.p.), because like that Christmas special, the episode is more closely tied to the ongoing storyline. Indeed, this Christmas special is the only one to occur in the middle of a season, as it serves as the bridge in Season 7 between the deaths of Amy and Rory and the introduction of the new companion Clara. ‘The Snowmen’ is one more iteration of the Doctor meeting a version of Clara Oswald, first introduced as Oswin Osgood at the start of Season 7. It sets up the story arc for the back half of Season 7: who is Clara, the impossible girl who dies twice in her encounters with the Doctor? The conceit of the impossible girl is that Clara enters the timestream in ‘The Name of the Doctor’ (2013), making it possible for different variants of herself to save the Doctor at different points in time. Setting one in the Victorian era period allows Moffat to craft a Christmas special that does an enormous amount of narrative foreshadowing for the end of the season.

Simeon, the villain of ‘The Snowmen’ (2012), has a Scrooge-like origin as an isolated child who falls prey to the alien snow, although in this instance his alienation is of his own making. The Paternoster gang of

Madame Vastra, Jenny Flint, and Strax, introduced in ‘A Good Man Goes to War’ (2011) and featured in the three prequel mini episodes for this Christmas special, are clever remediations of Holmesian elements that also incorporate the queering of the Victorian period often found in neo-Victorian texts such as Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) or *Fingersmith* (2002), although Madame Vastra and Jenny’s romantic pairing is used more for comic relief.²⁰ Clara also better fits a neo-Victorian interpretation of feminine roles, since she is both a barmaid and a governess, a balancing act of positions that gives Clara a great deal of social mobility.

The capitalist critique here is more direct than in ‘The Next Doctor’, even if it too is not sustained. Early in the episode, the Doctor is investigating the snow with Strax. The Doctor facetiously asks Strax: “This snow is new. And possibly alien. When you find something brand-new in the world, something you’ve never seen before, what’s the next thing you look for? [...] A profit. That’s Victorian values for you” (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 9:15-9:35). For Moffat, Victorian values substitute for a range of notions about greed and capitalist structures. This point is returned to at the end of the episode when the Doctor confronts Simeon. The Doctor reveals that the snow is mirroring Simeon’s arrested emotional development. The Doctor explains that the Great Intelligence is

a parasite feeding on the loneliness of a child and the sickness of an old man. Carnivorous snow meets Victorian values and something terrible is born. [...] A world full of living ice people. Oh, dear me. How very Victorian of you. (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 50:00-50:29).

Simeon spits back at him “What’s wrong with Victorian values?” (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 50:30-50:31), but the episode leaves this question unanswered.

For Davies and Moffat, Victorian values act as a kind of code for the greed of capitalism. Indeed, Moffat uses the phrase “Victorian values” several times in the second half of Season 7, always as a satiric reference to corporate greed. The two neo-Victorian episodes written by Gatiss under Moffat’s tenure as showrunner also pick up this theme in a more direct fashion. The relevance of a phrase like ‘Victorian values’ in contemporary culture stems from the ways in which the Victorians have been utilised by

various politicians and social critics as shorthand for conservative cultural positions. According to Simon Joyce, “Margaret Thatcher’s call for a return to ‘Victorian values’, encoded in a 1983 speech [...] listed hard work, self-reliance, thrift, national pride, and cleanliness among the ‘perennial values’ inherited from her Victorian grandmother” (Joyce 2007: 4). Joyce goes on to note how Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour party at the time “responded that ‘[t]he Victorian Values’ that ruled were ‘cruelty, misery, drudgery, squalor and ignorance’” (Joyce 2007: 5). This binary thus “serves as a condensation of contrary tendencies”, causing “the Victorian” to become “a kind of style” easily referenced without contextualisation (Joyce 2007: 5). For Moffat, Victorian values seem to represent greed, excess, and hubristic overreaching, all values antithetical to the Doctor’s focus on the importance of the individual and on companionship.

4. Surviving Traumas: Christmas’s Ritual Healing

Doctor Who episodes tend to have two story-lines: one focused on the problem of the week and one linking back to continuing themes of the series, particularly loss. Each new companion presents a fresh humanising experience for the Doctor, as he comes to grips with both his need for connection and the reality that the glittering universe he offers to his human companions is one that will irrevocably unmoor them from their own world. The Christmas specials, as self-contained stories within the larger narrative apparatus, are well-suited pauses that allow for the writers to work out some of the implications of the traumas suffered during the prior season.

Indeed, most of the Christmas specials end with the Doctor gaining a renewed sense of hope about his journeys, a necessary step given how much these episodes function to enable narrative arcs in the rest of the series. While most of the Christmas specials are standalone episodes, with storylines unrelated to the story arc of the previous season and only hinting at the themes of the next season of the television series, they do crucial work in rejuvenating the Doctor, quite literally at times. With ‘The Christmas Invasion’, Davies “wielded the safe and comfortable Christmas format to shape the greatest challenges to *Doctor Who* as a programme and a franchise: the replacement of the Doctor and a change in companion” (Brabazon 2008: 161). In at least five of the Christmas specials, the Doctor either begins the process of regeneration or is experiencing its after effects.²¹ Five of the Christmas specials also feature the Doctor struggling through the

loss of his companions, and three others show the Doctor deliberately choosing to be companionless.²² Two of these episodes depict more complicated narrative departures of characters and cast from the series. ‘The Husbands of River Song’ (2015) is the last adventure with the character of River Song (Alex Kingston) before her death. The end of the episode depicts the romantic dinner between River and the Doctor mentioned in the two episodes that saw her introduction and death, ‘Silence in the Library’ (2008) and ‘Forest of the Dead’ (2008). In ‘Last Christmas’ (2013), it is Clara who must come to terms with the death of her fiancé Danny. In choosing to move on from her grief, Clara also restarts her journeys with the Doctor. The Christmas specials serve as spectacle driven episodes showcasing one vision of the Doctor as one showrunner ends his tenure before a new creative team takes over behind the scenes. Davies and Moffat both have ended their tenures as *Doctor Who* showrunners on the Christmas special.²³

The special and spectacular nature of the Christmas specials allows both Davies and Moffat to use the Victorian period as an emotional intertext, allowing them to explore grief and trauma within a narrative mode and seriality that since the nineteenth century has been used for exploring such affect. In other words, the *Doctor Who* Christmas specials seem to be meditations on loss and renewal, making them of a piece with the narrative focus of Christmas serials and special issues since the Victorian period. In his Christmas stories and special issues, Dickens explores the emotional elements that make up the season, particularly grief. Parker argues that Christmas “offered [Dickens] an opportunity to explore conduct, emotion, memory, redemption, and a host of related themes” (Parker 2005: 109). In ‘A Christmas Tree’ (1850), Dickens meditates on the intersection of ghost stories with the other pleasures of the season. His narrator describes the “smell of roasted chestnuts and other good comfortable things all the time, for we are telling Winter Stories – Ghost Stories, or more shame for us – round the Christmas fire” (Dickens 1850: 293). Mostly, Dickens explores the effects of loss in his Christmas meditations and stories. According to Parker, “in [Dickens’s] imagination, Christmas was closely associated with the death of loved ones, especially children” (Parker 2005: 128). Scrooge is Scrooge in part because of his sad, traumatic, and lonely childhood after the death of his mother, a facet of his past that adaptations often gloss over. Scrooge’s Christmas past journey, however, requires him to remember the

death of his mother and sister. In ‘What Christmas is, as we Grow Older’ (1851), the leader for the first official special Christmas issue of *HW*, Dickens meditates on loss, arguing that grief should not be “shut out” at Christmas, but tempered (Dickens 1851: 2). He proclaims:

Lost friend, lost child, lost parent, sister, brother, husband,
 wife, we will not so discard you! You shall hold your
 cherished places in our Christmas hearts, and by our
 Christmas fires; and in the season of immortal hope, and on
 the birthday of immortal mercy, we will shut out Nothing!
 (Dickens 1851: 2)

While the overriding emotion of festival literature is joy, sorrow and grief are both an indelible part of the season’s emotional tapestry. Indeed, the purpose of festival literature is to knit the present with the past in such a way that it also projects into the future.

Written into the ritual of Christmas literature is a longing for past experiences and a memorialisation of the affect of these experiences. The intertextual nostalgia of the Christmas specials allows them to explore the Doctor’s griefs. Of the three episodes, Davies’s ‘The Next Doctor’ utilises its Victorian trappings the least for its meditation on grief. The episode moves between the sinister plot of Miss Hartigan and a more light-hearted tale as the Tenth Doctor tries to figure out if Jackson Lake is a future regeneration of himself. This plot line turns darker after the Doctor discovers an infostamp, a memory disk that gives the Cybermen the information they need to function in Victorian England. As the bells chime midnight, and Rosita reminds the audience that the bells signal the arrival of Christmas Day, the Doctor uses the infostamp to reveal the truth. The Cybermen attacked Lake’s family, killed his wife, and took his son; the infostamp replaced his memories with information about the Doctor. Yet for most of the episode, Lake is a mad-cap version of the Doctor in a mid-Victorian frock coat with a brightly coloured hot air balloon for a TARDIS.

Jackson Lake’s condition and struggle to cope with his loss serves as a substitute for the Doctor’s own losses at the end of Season 4, where he loses Rose again in the parallel universe, and Donna must be made to forget him entirely in order to save her mind. Jackson confronts him at the end of the episode, “All those facts and figures I saw of the Doctor’s life, you were

never alone. All those bright and shining companions. But not anymore?” (Goddard and Davies 2008:58:39-58:47). The Doctor explains to Jackson that his companions leave or forget him: “I suppose in the end they break my heart” (Goddard and Davies 2008: 59:07-59:11). Jackson then insists that the Doctor join him for Christmas dinner, which the Doctor agrees to as a balm to the traumas of the episode. The intertextual elements do not contribute to this storyline beyond the happy gathering at the end and the determination to shut no emotions or temporary companions out.

Moffat’s two Christmas specials, however, explicitly use Victorian narratives and visual elements in their narrative subplots of grief and trauma. The phrase “time can be rewritten” echoes throughout Moffat’s run of *Doctor Who* (Haynes and Moffat 2010: 47:21), injecting a longing to undo traumatic pasts not present in the series under Davies. Rewriting time, however, is not a straightforward proposition. The rules of time travel within the new *Doctor Who* as established by Davies – that there are fixed points in time, that time and memory operate on different continuums, and that travelling backwards in a person’s personal time line is either impossible or destructively complicated – means that rewriting events has consequences. Nonetheless, the impulse to fix or erase traumas remains a theme Moffat returns to frequently.

In ‘A Christmas Carol’, Moffat uses the familiar Dickens narrative to explore what happens when a person’s history is rewritten. The BBC America trailer for the episode actually has the tag line “Christmastime can be rewritten”, directly referencing the active rewriting of Dickens’s story occurring in the episode (Haynes 2010b: 0:18-0:19). The Eleventh Doctor must convince Kazran Sardick to open up a path in the cloud cover of the alien planet in order for the space shuttle with Amy, Rory, and 4001 other people to land safely. The Doctor plays the Ghost of Christmas Past, deliberately haunting Kazran as an adolescent and a young adult in a desperate attempt to save the ship. In so doing, the Doctor succeeds in humanising Kazran in a similar manner to the Dickens original, but he does so at an emotional cost to Kazran. The Doctor and the young Kazran (Laurence Belcher) awaken one of the cryogenically frozen people Kazran’s father keeps as payment for loans. The woman they awaken, Abigail, is terminally ill. As the Doctor and Kazran visit Abigail over and over again, the grown-up Kazran (Danny Horn) falls in love with a dying woman. The old Kazran, given these new memories of love and impending loss, is

enraged at what the Doctor has both given and taken from him. He sits in his spacious drawing room, surrounded by a box of old photographs, and new/old memories of eight Christmas Eves with Abigail. Kazran must confront his loss all at once; memory provides no muting distance, since all of his memories are rewritten at once. The visual unfolding of delights ends with Kazran alone and miserable.

When Amy appears to him as a holographic Ghost of Christmas Present, she tells him “Time can be rewritten” (Haynes and Moffat 2010: 47:21). Amy knows intimately the ways that time can be bent, rearranged, and altered to suit the Doctor’s needs, but Kazran’s reaction gives her pause. He yells at her in his grief, “You tell the Doctor! You tell him from me: people can’t” (Haynes and Moffat 2010: 47:22-47:25). He goes on to say, “I’d never have known [Abigail] if the Doctor hadn’t changed the course of my whole life to suit himself” (Haynes and Moffat 2010: 47:36-47:41). When the Doctor begins to change Kazran’s past, his intention is two-fold: to save the space ship and to save Kazran from the traumatic influence of his domineering father. Yet, rewriting Kazran’s past does not erase or ease these traumas, as the recognition of past wrongs and the promise of future good does for Scrooge.

Kazran has become an emotional miser, storing up his one last day with Abigail, unsure of how and when to grieve his lost love, an intertextual reference to the ways that Dickens equates hoarding wealth with emotional distance. While the original Scrooge/Kazran made the choice of money over love, spending his life closing down his emotional connections, the new Kazran is bereaved and angry over the loss he has always been contemplating. Opening himself up emotionally, however, makes it possible to convince him to release Abigail, who then sings and saves the ship. Kazran’s trauma is subsumed into the joy of seeing Abigail again for one last time, as they drive off in a Victorian carriage pulled by a flying shark into the Christmas night sky, a neat Dickensian ending that also frees Kazran from his fear of grief.

In ‘The Snowmen’, it is the Eleventh Doctor who grieves, suffering from the death of the Ponds. He is hiding in Victorian London, trying to avoid engaging with the world and yet unable to leave Earth behind. As Madame Vastra tells Clara, “he suffered losses which hurt him. Now he prefers isolation to the possibility of pain’s return” (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 24:28-24:49; 24:56-25:24). Despite this sorrow, much of the episode

has the same romp feel as Davies's 'The Next Doctor'. While the Doctor is suffering, he also stays close to Madame Vastra, Jenny, and Strax, who function as a kind of Victorian family for him. Ross Ruediger argues that this episode is "one of the least Christmas-y Christmas specials yet, with only a couple throwaway lines referencing the season" (Ruediger 2012). The lack of direct seasonal referencing can perhaps be attributed to this episode being more part of the narrative canon versus a standalone episode separated from the overarching narrative arc of the series. Yet, the episode's late nineteenth-century setting, evil Victorian capitalist enabling the alien invasion, and intertextual nostalgic visuals still make it feel seasonally appropriate.

The fuller fleshing out of the Patenoster gang as the inspiration for the Sherlock Holmesque stories in the prequel mini episodes, including the Doctor as one of the group before his self-imposed exile, also lends the story a familiar narrative pacing and intertextual referencing. The prequel mini episode 'Madame Vastra Investigates' (2012) establishes the Paternoster gang's Sherlockian origins and the fact that working with Jenny and Strax is how Madame Vastra herself copes with the loss of her own peoples, still slumbering beneath the surface of the Earth.

The plot moves forward at a rapid pace, blending the mystery of the alien snow with a more complete introduction to Clara, the new companion for the second half of Season 7. Clara's insatiable curiosity, rapid-fire wit, and considerable charm, combined with the deadly alien snow, coax the Doctor out of his grief. He opens up to her immediately, almost unable to help himself. While the Doctor usually picks his companions quickly, with Clara, he is offering her the key to the TARDIS less than a minute after she enters it, excitedly telling her "I never know why. I only know who [...] Remember this. Remember this right now. All of it. Because this is the day. This is the day. This is the day everything begins!" (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 42:35-42:38; 43:07-43:20). The Doctor's glee quickly turns to sorrow as the ice governess chasing them grabs Clara, and they both tumble out of the cloud platform the TARDIS is resting on.

The Doctor tries everything he can to save the injured Clara, distraught that once again someone in his care has been harmed. Madame Vastra confronts him over his manic actions:

MADAME VASTRA: So then Doctor, saving the world again. Might I ask why? Are you making a bargain with the universe? You'll save the world to let her live?

THE DOCTOR: Yes, and don't you think that after all time and everything that I have ever done that I am owed this one.

MADAME VASTRA: I don't think the universe makes bargains.

THE DOCTOR: It was my fault.

MADAME VASTRA: Well, then, better save the world.
(Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 47:56-48:13)

The Doctor does so, seeming quickly to defeat Simeon and the alien snow, which he hopes will heal Clara. However, erasing Simeon's memories does not defeat the Great Intelligence, who takes over Simeon's body and tries to finish the alien invasion. All seems lost, and the Doctor is close to being consumed by the Simeon/Great Intelligence hybrid when all the snowmen melt. The Doctor realizes that the "The only force that could drown the snow" – which mirrors the strongest emotions in its vicinity – is "a whole family crying on Christmas Eve" (Metzstein and Moffat 2012a: 54:36-54:39). Clara's death and the grief the children she teaches feel in fact save the world. She dies as the bells ring for Christmas Day at midnight.

Yet, the episode does not end with the Doctor traumatised by his inability to save her. In many ways, it is the Doctor himself in these episodes who is truly intertextually referencing the Victorians. As C. B. Harvey argues, the characterisation of the Doctor "borrowed most obviously from H. G. Wells and the idea of the Victorian explorer" (Harvey 2012: 122), but in the 1970s, the Doctor emerged as a cross between a reimagining of Sherlock Holmes and a Victorian music hall performer. The prequel mini episode 'The Great Detective' (2012) claims that the Doctor is the fourth, shadowy member of Madame Vastra's Paternoster gang, but the title of the prequel mini episode and the ways that Madame Vastra and Jenny try to appeal to the Doctor, by offering him various cases to solve, clearly implies that the Doctor himself is the great detective. The Doctor is both detective and magician, uncovering the trick of the conundrum facing him while also typically saving the impressive heroics for the last act. Of the new regenerations of the Doctor, Matt Smith's Eleventh Doctor most embodies these Victorian intertextual elements, from his anachronistic dress, which

becomes more Victorian during this incarnation, to his insatiability for solving puzzles and mysteries, and his penchant for display and performance.²⁴ At Clara's funeral, for instance, the Doctor sees her full name on the gravestone, recognising for the first time that Clara was somehow also Oswin Oswald, the soufflé girl turned into a Dalek in the Season 7 opening episode, who was able to save him and the Ponds. The potential of finding Clara again, the lure of the impossible, and the future promise of rebirth – a prominent Christmas theme – set the Doctor back on his journey of exploration.

5. Conclusion

These intertextual references to nineteenth-century material culture and literary texts such as *A Christmas Carol* and the Sherlock Holmes canon allow the *Doctor Who* Christmas specials to recreate nostalgically a shared sense of a universal British identity embedded within the Christmas special televisual experience. In effect, Christmas specials produce cultural nostalgia as much as they participate within a system of nostalgic appropriations or what Kate Flint terms “period fetishism” (Flint 2005: 230). As neo-Victorian studies further explores intertextuality and the way contemporary television series remediate Victorian and neo-Victorian tropes, exploring the doubling of Victorian modes of textual production that have been adopted by television complicates our understanding of how these intertextual texts provide both nostalgic programming and narratives that embody the Dickensian idea of not shutting out traumatic emotions. As neo-Victorian texts and remediations continue to proliferate in contemporary culture, scholars should also look at how a television series such as *Doctor Who* uses the nineteenth century as an affective intertext. As Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss argue, “cultural products appealing to the emotions, the senses, or a desire to re-inhabit the past should not be marginalised prematurely” by neo-Victorian scholars (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014b: 3). While these episodes do not necessarily problematise the Victorians, they do complicate the iterative nature of remediations of Victorian Christmas storytelling, suggesting that festival literature's nostalgic functionality is not merely sentimental.

The ends of these neo-Victorian episodes thus function to bring past, present, and future together. In true Christmas fashion, the possibilities of the future temper present griefs. Christmas narratives are not meant to shut

out grief; instead, they are designed to offer an affective viewing experience that ends in hope. While the outward trappings of the Victorian Christmas, from the iconography of the season to the narratives of good vanquishing greed, shape these narratives, it is the theme of grief and hope that lies at the core of neo-Victorian Christmas stories. The *Doctor Who* Christmas specials are no exception, as they participate in a doubling of narrative production and seriality designed to turn audience attention to this theme. The nostalgia these narratives evoke is not just meant to provide bland comfort. Instead, Christmas narratives of trauma are about surviving and triumphing over loss; the intertextual rituals of these stories serve to provide established narrative patterns that allow Davies and Moffat to work through emotional issues while also producing nostalgic Christmas fare.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Dr Ann-Gee Lee for reading a version of this draft. Much gratitude also to the anonymous reviewers for the special issue and *Neo-Victorian Studies* for thoughtful and substantive commentary.

Notes

1. Generally speaking, the Christmas episodes of *Doctor Who* have been ratings successes for BBC One, with an average of 10.68 million UK viewers tuning in each year. The most watched Christmas special was ‘The Voyage of the Damned’ (2007) at 13.31 million UK viewers, which featured pop star Kylie Minogue. The three neo-Victorian Christmas specials have each garnered good UK live viewer ratings with ‘The Next Doctor’ (2008) being the second most watched Christmas special at 13.10 million viewers. Stephen Moffat’s two neo-Victorian Christmas specials have had smaller live audiences; ‘A Christmas Carol’ (2010) and ‘The Snowmen’ (2012) attracted 12.11 million and 9.87 million viewers respectively. See ‘Ratings Guide’ on the *Doctor Who Guide* for more information.
2. Traumatological or traumatic narratives focus on “individual identity and a sense of one’s fractious personal history, often retrieving lost memories or addressing feelings of intense alienation” (Tew 2007: 192). See Charles 2011; Chen 2008; and Gibbs 2013 for more work on *Doctor Who* and trauma. See Kohlke and Gutleben 2010 for work on trauma studies and neo-Victorianism.

3. David Parker traces the origins of the concept that Dickens invented Christmas to a 1903 article by F. G. Kitton (see Parker 2005: 16).
4. Derek Johnston traces the seasonal ghost story in Britain and American literary and televisual culture (see Johnston 2015).
5. *The Alienist* (1994) is the first of a two-book series featuring Dr Laszlo Kreizler and set in 1860s New York. Carr also wrote a Sherlock Holmes pastiche novel called *The Italian Secretary* (2005).
6. For further studies of neo-Victorian television in this journal, see Byrne 2009/2010 and Lepine 2008/2009.
7. Various critics have written on neo-Victorian studies in relation to television and adaptations (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010; Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014b; Kleinecke-Bates 2014; Kohlke 2014).
8. For more on remediation, see Bolter and Grusin 1999; for transmedia storytelling see Jenkins 2006; Jenkins 2011; and Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; for transmedia storytelling, specifically in *Doctor Who*, see Perryman 2009; for more on intertextuality see Kristeva 1966 and Brooker 2007.
9. The Christmas specials now air in the US, Canada, and Australia on Christmas Day or on Boxing Day, 26th December. As Brabazon notes, however, DVR and DVD viewing allows viewers to time shift their consumption of the special (Brabazon 2008: 153).
10. See Chapman 2006; Harmes 2014; and Mills 2013 for the ways *Doctor Who* has remediated and adapted the Victorians throughout its history.
11. See Harmes 2014 and Hobden 2009 for more on how *Doctor Who* remediates history in general.
12. I used the same parameters as Mills, including episodes set in the long nineteenth century, such as 'Thin Ice' set in 1814 and 'The Unicorn and the Wasp' set in 1920, as well as those set in contemporary, future or alternative times but employing neo-Victorian elements, such as 'A Town Called Mercy', 'A Christmas Carol', and 'The Empress of Mars'.
13. For more on the Gothic, television, and *Doctor Who*, see Armitt 2011; Chapman 2006; Wheatley 2006.
14. For more on race in *Doctor Who*, see Orthia 2013.
15. Moffat's pre-show-runner writing for *Doctor Who* blended science fiction elements with the historical. The two-part episodes 'The Empty Child' (2005) and 'The Doctor Dances' (2005) involve an alien medical ship run amok in 1940s war-torn London, and 'The Girl in the Fireplace' (2006) has the Doctor moving between a space ship and Madame Pompadour's bedroom at various stages in her life. Moffat also wrote the six episodes of the series *Jekyll* (2007), a contemporary take on Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case*

of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Moffat became showrunner for both *Doctor Who* and the BBC series *Sherlock* in 2010.

16. In addition to his writing for the BBC series *Sherlock*, Gatiss has also written a three-book series, the Lucifer Box trilogy (2004-2008), set in the early twentieth century, about a bisexual spy working for the British secret service. Gatiss is also a contributor to *A Ghost Story for Christmas* (2005-2013). All the instalments are based on M. R. James short stories, with Gatiss writing the most recent instalment *The Tractate Middoth* (2013).
17. For work on the serial, see Hagedorn 1988; Hayward 1997; Hammill, Hjartarson, and McGregor 2015; Hughes and Lund 1991; Plotz 2013.
18. On Victorian Christmas rituals, see Parker 2005; Dodd 2008; and Richards 2015.
19. Both *HW* and *ATYR* were literary miscellanies, mixing instalments of serial novels and short serials (the dominant prose fiction in *HW*) with non-fictional articles and verse. There is almost no continuity between the special issues, except for the Christmas 1852 and 1853 special issues in *HW*, 'A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire' and 'Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire' and the Christmas 1863 and 1864 special issues in *ATYR*, 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings' and 'Mrs Lirriper's Legacy'.
20. The three prequel mini episodes are the Children in Need special 'The Great Detective' (2012), 'Vastra Investigates: A Christmas Prequel' (2012), and 'The Battle of Demon's Run – Two Days Later' (2013).
21. The episodes are 'The Christmas Invasion' (2005), 'The End of Time: Part One' (2009), 'The End of Time: Part Two' (2010), 'The Time of the Doctor' (2013), and 'Twice Upon a Time' (2017).
22. The episodes where the Doctor struggles through the loss of his companions are 'The Runaway Bride' (2006), 'Voyage of the Damned' (2007), 'The Next Doctor' (2008), 'The Snowmen' (2012), and 'The Return of Doctor Mysterio' (2016). The Doctor chooses to travel without his series companions in 'The End of Time: Part One' (2009), 'The End of Time: Part Two' (2010), and 'The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe' (2011).
23. 'The End of Time: Part One' (2009) and 'The End of Time: Part Two' (2010) were the last under Russell T. Davies as showrunner and the last with David Tennant's Doctor, although he did return for the fifty-year anniversary special, 'The Day of the Doctor' (2013). The 2017 Christmas special, 'Twice Upon a Time', also reset the lead of the creative team behind the franchise, with new show runner Chris Chibnall taking over for the eleventh season of the new series. The end of episode introduced Jodie Whittaker's Thirteenth Doctor, the first incarnation to be a woman.

24. For a discussion of the old and new Doctor's dress resembling that of a Victorian gentleman, see Harmes 2014: 90.

Bibliography

- Armitt, Lucie. 2011. *History of the Gothic: Twentieth-Century Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Banville, Scott D. 2011. "A Bookkeeper, Not An Accountant": Representing the Lower Middle Class from Victorian Novels and Music-Hall Songs to Television Sitcoms', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 44:1, 16-36.
- Boehm-Schnitker, Nadine and Susanne Gruss (eds.). 2014a. *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2014b. 'Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions'. In Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss (2014): 1-17.
- Bolter, David Jay and Richard Grusin. 1999. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Brabazon, Tara. 2008. 'Christmas and the Media'. In Whiteley (2008): 149-164.
- Brooker, Peter. 2007. 'Postmodern Adaptation: Pastiche, Intertextuality and Re-Functioning', in Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 107-120.
- Budgen, David. 2014. "Halfway Out of the Dark": Steven Moffat's *Doctor Who* Christmas Specials', in O'Day, Andrew (ed.), *Doctor Who: The Eleventh Hour: A Critical Celebration of the Matt Smith and Steven Moffat Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 89-105.
- Byrne, Katherine. 2009/2010. "Such a fine, close weave": Gender, Community and the Body in *Cranford* (2007)', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 2:2, Special Issue: *Adapting the Nineteenth Century: Revisiting, Revising and Rewriting the Past*, 43-64.
- Charles, Alec. 2011. 'The Crack of Doom: The Uncanny Echoes of Steven Moffat's *Doctor Who*', *Science Fiction Film and Television*, 4:1, 1-24.
- Chapman, James. 2006. *The Worlds of Doctor Who: A Cultural History*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Chen, Ken. 2008. 'The Lovely Smallness of Doctor Who', *Film International*, 6:2, 52-59.
- Dickens, Charles. 1852. 'The Child's Story', *Household Words*, 6 (25 December), 577-579.
- . 1850. 'A Christmas Tree', *Household Words*, 1 (21 December), 289-295.

-
- . 1851. 'What Christmas is, as we Grow Older', *Household Words*, 4 (25 December), Special Issue: *Christmas, 1851*, 1-3.
- Dodd, Sara M. 2008. 'Conspicuous Consumption and Festive Follies: Victorian Images of Christmas'. In Whiteley (2008): 32-49.
- Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. 2006. 'Introduction', in Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7-19.
- Gibbs, Alan. 2013. "'Maybe that's what happens if you touch the Doctor, even for a second": Trauma in *Doctor Who*', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 46:5, 950-972.
- Flint, Kate. 2005. 'Why Victorian?: Response', *Victorian Studies*, 47:2, 230-239.
- Hagedorn, Roger. 1988. 'Technology and Economic Exploitation: The Serial as a Form of Narrative Presentation', *Wide Angle*, 10:4, 4-12.
- Hammill, Faye, Paul Hjartarson and Hannah McGregor. 2015. 'Introducing Magazines and/as Media: The Aesthetics and Politics of Serial Form', *English Studies in Canada*, 41:1 (March), 1-18.
- Harmes, Marcus K. 2014. *Doctor Who and the Art of Adaptation: Fifty Years of Storytelling*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Harvey, C.B. 2012. 'Sherlock's Webs: What the Detective Remembered from the Doctor about Transmediality', in Stein, Louisa Ellen and Kristina Busse (eds.), *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom: Essays on the BBC Series*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 118-132.
- Hayward, Jennifer Poole. 1997. *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Operas*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. 2010. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hills, Matt. 2008. 'The Dispersible Television Text: Theorising Moments of the New *Doctor Who*', *Science Fiction Film and Television*, 1:1, 25-44.
- . *The Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010.
- Hobden, Fiona. 2009. 'History Meets Fiction in *Doctor Who*, "The Fires of Pompeii": A BBC Reception of Ancient Rome on Screen and Online', *Greece & Rome*, 56:2, 147-163.
- Hughes, Linda L. and Michael Lund. 1991. *The Victorian Serial*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- . 2011. 'Transmedia 202: Further Reflections', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, n.p.,

http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html

(accessed 25 May 2017).

- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johnston, Derek. 2015. *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Joyce, Simon. 2007. *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Kleinecke-Bates, Iris. 2014. *Victorians on Screen: The Nineteenth Century on British Television, 1994-2005*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise. 2014. 'Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein: Prospecting for Gold, Buried Treasure and Uncertain Metal'. In Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss (2014a): 21-37.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise and Christian Gutleben. 2010. 'Introduction: Bearing After-Witness to the Nineteenth Century', in Kohlke, Marie-Luise and Christian Gutleben (eds.), *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to the Nineteenth Century*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 1-34.
- . 2012. 'The (Mis)Shapes of Neo-Victorian Gothic: Continuations, Adaptations, Transformation', in Kohlke, Marie-Luise and Christian Gutleben (eds.), *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence, and Degeneration in the Re-imagined Nineteenth Century*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 1-48.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1966. 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in Moi, Toril (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 34-62.
- Lepine, Anna. 2008/2009. 'Hyde and Seek in an Age of Surveillance: Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the BBC's *Jekyll*', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 2:1, Special Issue: "Swing Your Razor Wide...": *Sweeney Todd and Other (Neo)Victorian Criminalities*, 78-102.
- Malewski, Anne. 2014. "'Second to the Right and Straight on till Gallifrey": The Uses of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in Steven Moffat's *Doctor Who*', in Carrington, Bridget and Jennifer Harding (eds.), *Beyond the Book: Transforming Children's Literature*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 172-184.
- Marlow, Christopher. 2009. 'The Folding Text: *Doctor Who*, Adaptation and Fan Fiction', in Carroll, Rachel (ed.), *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*. New York: Continuum, 45-55.
- Martin, Dan. 2012. 'Doctor Who: The Snowmen – Christmas Special 2012', *The Guardian*, 25 December, n.p., <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and->

- radio/tvandradioblog/2012/dec/25/doctor-who-snowmen-christmas-special (accessed 25 May 2017).
- Mills, Catriona. 2013. “Such a Dazzling Display of Lustrous Legerdemain”: Representing Victorian Theatricality in *Doctor Who*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 6:1, 148-179.
- Orthia, Lindy (ed.). 2013. *Doctor Who and Race*. Chicago: Intellect.
- Parker, David. 2005. *Christmas and Charles Dickens*. New York: AMS Press, Inc.
- Perryman, Neil. 2009. ‘*Doctor Who* and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in “Transmedia Storytelling”’, in Storey, John (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. London: Pearson Longman, 474-492.
- Plotz, John. 2013. ‘Serial Pleasures: The Influence of Television on the Victorian Novel’, *RAVON: Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 63 (April): n.p., <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ravon/2013-n63-ravon01450/1025619ar/> (accessed 25 May 2017).
- ‘Ratings Guide’, *Doctor Who Guide* (2018) n.p., <http://guide.doctorwhonews.net/info.php?detail=ratings&type=date> (accessed 15 January 2018).
- Richards, Jeffrey. 2015. *The Golden Age of Pantomime: Slapstick, Spectacle, and Subversion in Victorian England*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Ruediger, Ross. 2012. ‘*Doctor Who* Christmas Special Recap: Everything Old is New Again’, *Vulture: Devouring Culture*, 26 December, n.p., <http://www.vulture.com/2012/12/doctor-who-recap-christmas-special-the-snowmen.html> (accessed 25 May 2017).
- Storry, Mike and Peter Childs. 2007. *British Cultural Identities*, 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Tew, Phillip. 2007. *The Contemporary British Novel*, 2nd ed. London: Continuum.
- Turner, Mark W. 2002. ‘Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century’, *Media History*, 8:2, 183-196.
- Wheatley, Helen. 2006. *Gothic Television*. New York: Manchester University Press.
- Whiteley, Sheila (ed.). 2008. *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Filmography

- Anderson, Bill (dir.). 2017. ‘Thin Ice’. Screenplay by Sarah Dollard, *Doctor Who*, BBC, 29 April.
- Bazalgette, Ed. (dir.). 2016. ‘The Return of Doctor Mysterio’. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*. BBC 25 December.

-
- Blackburn, Farren (dir.). 2011. 'The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- Harper, Graeme (dir.). 2008. 'The Unicorn and the Wasp'. Screenplay by Gareth Roberts, BBC, 17 May.
- Hawes, James (dir.). 2005a. 'The Doctor Dances'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 28 May.
- . 2005b. 'The Empty Child'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 21 May.
- Hawes, Russell (dir.). 2005. 'The Christmas Invasion'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- Hayes, John (dir.). 2012. 'Vastra Investigates: A Christmas Prequel'. 2012. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 12 December.
- Haynes, Toby (dir.). 2010a. 'A Christmas Carol'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- . 2010b. 'Trailer. Doctor Who: A Christmas Carol'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC America, 19 December.
- Hoar, Peter (dir.). 2011. 'A Good Man Goes to War'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 4 June.
- Hurran, Nick (dir.). 2013. 'The Day of the Doctor'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 23 November.
- Goddard, Andy (dir.). 2008. 'The Next Doctor'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- Lyn, Euros (dir.). 2010. 'The End of Time: Part Two'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 1 January.
- . 2009. 'The End of Time: Part One'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- . 2008a. 'Forest of the Dead'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 7 June.
- . 2008b. 'Silence in the Library'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC 31 May.
- . 2006a. 'The Girl in the Fireplace'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 6 May.
- . 2006b. 'The Runaway Bride'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- . 2006c. 'Tooth and Claw'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 22 April.
- . 2005. 'The Unquiet Dead'. Screenplay by Mark Gatiss. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 9 April.
- Mackinnon, Douglas (dir.). 2015. 'The Husbands of River Song'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.

-
- Metzstein, Saul (dir.). 2013a. 'The Name of the Doctor'. Screenplay by Mark Gatiss. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 18 May.
- . 2013b. 'The Crimson Horror'. Screenplay by Mark Gatiss. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 4 May.
- . 2012a. 'The Snowmen'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- . 2012b. 'A Town Called Mercy'. Screenplay by Toby Whithouse. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 15 September.
- Payne, Jamie (dir.). 2013. 'The Time of the Doctor'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC 25 December.
- Strong, James (dir.). 2007. 'Voyage of the Damned'. Screenplay by Russell T. Davies. *Doctor Who*, BBC 25 December.
- Talalay, Rachel (dir.). 2017. 'Twice Upon a Time'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- Wheatley, Ben (dir.). 2014. 'Deep Breath'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 23 August.
- Wilmshurst, Paul (dir.). 2014. 'Last Christmas'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 25 December.
- Wilson, Marcus (dir.). 2013. 'The Battle of Demon's Run – Two Days Later'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, iTunes and Amazon, 23 March.
- . 2012. 'The Great Detective'. Screenplay by Steven Moffat. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 16 November.
- Yip, Wayne (dir.). 2017. 'The Empress of Mars'. Screenplay by Mark Gatiss. *Doctor Who*, BBC, 10 June.