

Doctor Who, Steampunk, and the Victorian Christmas

“It’s everywhere these days, isn’t it? Anime, Doctor Who, novel after novel involving clockwork and airships.” --Catherynne M. Valente¹

Introduction

It seems nearly every article or essay on Neo-Victorianism must, by tradition, begin with a defence of the discipline and an explanation of what is currently encompassed by the term—or, more likely, what is not. Since at least 2008 and the launch of the interdisciplinary journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, scholars have been grappling with a catch-all definition for the term. Though it is appropriate that Mark Llewellyn should note in his 2008 “What Is Neo-Victorian Studies?” that “in bookstores and TV guides all around us what we see is the ‘nostalgic tug’ that the (quasi-) Victorian exerts on the mainstream,” Imelda Whelehan is right to suggest that the novel is the supreme and legitimizing source². Though a number of scholars have published interesting discussions of Neo-Victorian media, one aspect that is perhaps less addressed is the issue of audience. By this I mean the assumption, that the Neo-Victorian audience should be comprised entirely of adults (i.e, children will not be reading Sarah Waters, John Fowles, or A.S. Byatt).

Lara Rutherford makes a strong case for the ambiguously-aged audience of Alan Moore’s *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, but I refer to an example that has, from its inception in 1963, had difficulty in defining itself as—at its core—an entertainment just for children, for “families” (i.e, it can operate on multiple levels) or for adults. As suggested by the title to this chapter, I am writing about *Doctor Who* (1963-1989; 2005-), the BBC television programme which in 2013 celebrates its 50th anniversary, and which, as Catherynne M. Valente suggests, has been visibly importing Neo-Victorian and Steampunk motifs into its visual and storytelling vocabulary, particularly in the last eight years. For brevity’s sake, in this chapter I focus on three *Doctor Who* episodes. On Christmas Day 2005, Russell T Davies, then-showrunner, inaugurated the tradition of that show’s “Christmas Special.” Subsequent Christmas Specials abandoned a present-day setting, culminating in three stories with strong Victorian identification, whether in setting or in theme. For two of these, the link is literal, with Davies’ “The Next Doctor” (2008) set in 1851, and Steven

¹ Quoted in Jeff Vander Meer with S.J. Chambers. *The Steampunk Bible: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Imaginary Airships, Corsets and Goggles, Mad Scientists, and Strange Literature*. New York, 2011, p. 60.

² Mark Llewellyn. “What Is Neo-Victorian Studies?” *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Autumn 2009), p. 168.

Moffat's "The Snowmen" (2012) set in 1892. The third story, Moffat's from 2009, "A Christmas Carol," used a Steampunk setting on an alien world as a virtual thematic rewrite of the eponymous Dickens novella.

We will skip "what is Neo-Victorianism?", a question that has been many times answered and exchange it for "what is *Doctor Who*?" In the context of this paper, it is necessary only to be aware that *Doctor Who* originated as a programme for family viewing on BBC television. At various times a popular money-spinner, a cult interest, and a definition of "so British" science fiction³, *Doctor Who* remained a staple on BBC television until 1989. It proliferated in a wide range of media through to 2005, when the show was re-vamped by Russell T Davies through BBC Wales; since then, it has gained enormous worldwide popularity. Its (seemingly inexhaustible) premise is that an alien traveler, the Doctor, can travel through time and space in his ship, the TARDIS, accompanied by an ever-changing array of companions. The Doctor, too, can change, regenerating his physical appearance and personality (allowing him to have been played by eleven actors so far). It seems obvious that a time traveler in a British programme would have visited the historical past during the reign of Queen Victoria before the making of the episodes we examine, and indeed, it is worth briefly mentioning the stops the Doctor (and the *Doctor Who* production team) have made prior to the episodes made in 2008, 2010, and 2012.

The first was in 1967, when the Second Doctor (Patrick Troughton) and his Jacobite companion, Jamie McCrimmon, were lured to 1867 in "The Evil of the Daleks." It was another ten years before the programme would return to a Victorian setting, this time with Tom Baker as the Doctor in "The Talons of Weng-Chiang," which as Andy Lane points out as quoted within the pages of *The Television Companion*, emulates the *idea* of Sherlock Holmes as much as it does the actual writing of Conan Doyle. Some twelve years later, the Seventh Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) took his companion Ace to Gabriel Chase, a manor house in the village of Perivale in 1883.

The next story in this progression, made in 2004 and set in 1869, predates Ruth LaFala's (8 May 2008) article "Steampunk Moves Between 2 Worlds" from the *New York Times* which is considered by many Steampunks to be the tipping point of when the movement became mainstream. One cannot mention Steampunk and *Doctor Who* without referencing Neil Gaiman's "The Doctor's Wife" (2011), but it is beyond the scope of this

³ I have borrowed the term "so British" from "Yeles," a French fan of *Doctor Who* and British cult programming from the message board Beans on Toast. See *The Terrible Zodin* 15, Winter 2013, pp. 29. <http://doctorwhottz.blogspot.com>.

present chapter. I would argue that the increased “flirtation” with Steampunk and Neo-Victorianism in *Doctor Who* is due to its post-2010 increase in worldwide success, the implication that with *Doctor Who* more popular and more lucrative in the US⁴, it can absorb a more US-centric aesthetic of Steampunk. “Every time the BBC is defending its track record and trumpeting its successes,” showrunner Steven Moffat said during an interview about “The Snowmen” in 2012, “*Doctor Who* is right up there. We’ve got the ratings, the reviews, *international success*, it makes money, it gets the occasional award”⁵ (my emphasis).

Dickens Darkly Through a Pair of Steampunk Goggles

It may seem a little late in the paper to ask ourselves “What is Steampunk?”, but the working definition for our purposes crystallizes extremely well with the link between what Whelehan calls “Victorian ‘Urtexts,’ pastiched or otherwise quoted,” and “Victorian hypertexts,” both of which she sees as informing the Neo-Victorian on screen⁶. The *New York Times* article from 2008 mentioned earlier gives us a starting point for what Vander Meer describes as a “fascination with Victoriana” and the fiction of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells⁷. Vander Meer suggests that Steampunk is both part of pop culture and “a way of life,” exhibiting an interest in “a DIY activism and sustainable technology”⁸. Based on Vander Meer’s description, that many Steampunks “have not read the literature, taking cues from history, visual media, and the original fashionistas,” it would seem that many Steampunks are more interested in Whelehan’s “hypertexts” than the “Victorian Urtexts”⁹.

Davies’ “The Next Doctor” responds more to Victorian hypertexts than to specific Urtexts unlike, for example, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and in that sense I find it uses many Steampunk motifs. Indeed, Vander Meer’s *Steampunk Bible* was published prior to the release of “The Doctor’s Wife,” to the extent that “The Next Doctor” is described as more than flirtation with Steampunk; *Doctor Who* never addressed Steampunk

⁴ It is a mistake to imagine that *Doctor Who* has only recently enjoyed popularity in the US. My research into the history of *Doctor Who* fanzines has suggested passionate and widespread interest and support for *Doctor Who* during the mid-1980s until the end of the decade as part of a wider British sci fi movement that often embraced *Blake’s 7* fandom. With increased BBC support of the post-2005 programme generated by its popularity among a new generation, US Public Broadcasting (PBS)—the traditional home of *Doctor Who* during the 1980s and 1990s—could no longer afford to show it. The show migrated to commercial cable channels like Sy Fy, reaching a new audience which saw its worldwide popularity reach unprecedented numbers. See Leslie McMurtry. “Do It Yourself: Women, *Doctor Who*, and Fanzines” in the forthcoming title *Doctor Who: Fan Phenomena*.

⁵ Benjamin Cook. “The Snowmen: Episode Preview.” *Doctor Who Magazine* no. 455 (December 2012), p. 19.

⁶ Imelda Whelehan. “Neo-Victorian Adaptations.” *Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Ed. Deborah Cartmell. Oxford, 2012, p. 274.

⁷ Op.cit. p. 8.

⁸ Ibid.cit. p. 9, 10.

⁹ Ibid. cit. p. 9.

“so directly” as when “a giant automaton [sic] from 1851 . . . battles the good doctor [sic] from a hot-air balloon”¹⁰. Whelehan has noted that on-screen and print Neo-Victorian constructions are a nod to the powerful influence of the Victorian age, but also show “the impact of the costume drama in television and film”¹¹. *Doctor Who* has been “doing” the costume drama since 1964, and though historical stories were quickly found to be “less popular” than futuristic stories, *Doctor Who*’s “historicals” are an important link to the BBC’s reputation in costume drama and heritage film. The costuming of two female companions gives us clues to what Whelehan calls “critical interventions or re-readings that might be located onto a neo-Victorian terrain in their own right”¹². Abigail Pettigrew in “A Christmas Carol” reflects an aesthetic that seems “popularized in movies and elsewhere that has no historical basis,” influenced more by director Toby Haynes’ Russian peasant costuming than the Victorian¹³. Rosita in “The Next Doctor,” on the other hand, “reinforces,” I think, the potential for a “blurring technique” within the visual vocabulary of Neo-Victorian screen adaptations¹⁴.

“The Next Doctor” is a Cyberman story¹⁵ but its central dilemma is over identity. The Tenth Doctor arrives in London on Christmas Eve, 1851, to hear a woman calling, “Doctor!”¹⁶ Believing he is wanted, the Doctor tries to help the woman—only to find she is referring to another man, the Other Doctor. The Doctor at first believes the Other Doctor to be a future incarnation of himself. Like the Doctor, the Other Doctor has a requisite companion. Described as a “serving-girl” and specified in Davies’ script to be “mid-20s, black, feisty,” Rosita is almost a stereotype of what a *Doctor Who* companion should be¹⁷. Her name is a combination of two previous companions of the Tenth Doctor, Rose and Martha, and like many companions, she was rescued by “her” Doctor. We are told that the Other Doctor rescued her from a Cyberman late at night in December on Osterman’s Wharf. This backstory, along with her costume, serves a shorthand for Whelehan’s “promise” of the Neo-Victorian that “exposes[s] the less seemly side of Victorian culture”¹⁸. Furthermore, the

¹⁰ Ibid. cit. p. 196.

¹¹ Op. cit. 274.

¹² Ibid.cit.

¹³ Vander Meer op.cit. 9.

¹⁴ Whelehan. Op.cit. 274.

¹⁵ The Cybermen are one of the Doctor’s oldest and most popular foes, humanoid cyborgs introduced in 1966’s “The Tenth Planet.”

¹⁶ The opportunity for humor and the mechanism by which “The Next Doctor” works is *its* reliance on *Doctor Who* Urtexts.

¹⁷ Jonathan Morris. “The Fact of Fiction: The Next Doctor.” *Doctor Who Magazine* no. 455 (December 2012) p. 68, 70.

¹⁸ Op.cit. p. 272.

female characters of “The Next Doctor”—Rosita and Miss Hartigan—serve to reinforce the geographical mutability of Victorian crime, as described by Lepine in reference to *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*:

The Victorians tried to contain crime by coding the city into areas of light and dark, rich and poor, safe and unsafe; however . . . Hyde commits his most notable crimes not in darkened, impoverished Soho but under the bright lamps of bourgeois neighbourhoods¹⁹.

As suggested by Vander Meer, the most obvious evidence for Steampunk in “The Next Doctor” is through technology. The implication in Davies’ tale is a linkage between the Cyber-empire and mid-nineteenth century British Empire. The hot-air balloon Vander Meer referred to is the Other Doctor’s “TARDIS.” The “real” TARDIS is a spaceship shaped like a blue police call box typical of the mid-twentieth century, with the acronym to mean “Time and Relative Dimensions in Space.” The Other Doctor’s TARDIS is a blue hot-air balloon which he says stands for “Tethered Aerial Release Developed in Style.” The headquarters for the Cybermen in “The Next Doctor” is described in the shooting script as “Steampunk Victorian – Cybertechnology welded to the Industrial Revolution, cogs and wheels mixed with computer screens”²⁰. Furthermore, one of the locations considered for the Other Doctor’s base was a rail yard. Russell T Davies described it as “a shed full of locomotives, genuine old steam trains . . . but why would he be building a balloon in his back yard, if he could go chuff-chuffing on a train?”²¹.

The Cyber-King menace in “The Next Doctor” is a “clanking, clunking, steaming” giant robot in a vaguely Cyberman shape, with “gouts of fire at the joints”²². It bestrides the Thames, piloted by Miss Hartigan as part of her desire for power and domination. Miss Hartigan, the antagonist of “The Next Doctor,” is like Rosita in that Davies considers her to have had “a lifetime of assault within brutal institutions”; as mistress of a workhouse, she has taken the opportunity to work with crash-landed Cybermen, using workhouse children to create a conversion centre on the way to Cyber-Empire, little knowing the Cybermen would try to convert her, too²³. However, Miss Hartigan proves too strong and individualistic for the Cybermen and bends the Cyber-King to her will. Miss Hartigan is an excellent example of Victorian hypertext using the period itself “as the source of

¹⁹ Anna Lepine. “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* Vol. 1 No. 2, Winter 2008/2009, p.80.

²⁰ Morris. Op.cit. p. 71.

²¹ Op.cit. p. 73.

²² Ibid. cit. p. 77.

²³ Ibid. cit. p. 78.

appropriation,” while the Cyber-King itself may be a reference to Edisonades, dime novels from the late 1860s in which a young (American) boy goes west by steam-powered invention²⁴. Crucially the pilot here is female, “as much a victim as the prisoners of the workhouse”²⁵. In order to visually prove her iconoclasm, Davies has Miss Hartigan arrive at a funeral in a voluptuous red silk gown. Montz argues that such costuming choices are not purely for contemporary shock value;

corsets *are* sexy; bustles *are* beautiful. To deny the appeal of such fashionable and romanticised items to a twenty-first-century audience is to deny their appeal to their ‘own’ nineteenth-century one, because the Victorians, too, saw them as sexy and beautiful, as an encumbrance and as, quite simply, *clothes*²⁶.

It might be argued that “A Christmas Carol” occupies an interesting space between Steampunk and the Neo-Victorian, an area outside the concentric circles, expanding upon the *contes philosophiques* and 1980s novelistic Steampunk. If the name of the alien town suggests an echo of *It’s a Wonderful Life* (“Pottersville”), the story suggests more than echo of Scrooge’s ghost. The Romantic age and *A Christmas Carol* both coincided with the popularization of (mostly) German customs to make a deep impression on the Christmas we now consider “Victorian.” An increasing notion of Christmas as a children’s festival came about during Dickens’ writing period, partly inspired by the Doctrine of Atonement giving way to the Doctrine of the Incarnation, where Victorians were supposed to meditate on the mystery of Christ’s birth and celebrate Jesus as a young child. Gilbert Thomas (b. 1891), son of a Methodist shop-keeper from Gloucester, recalled Christmas beginning each year with his father reading from the Biblical Book of Luke and his mother reading from *A Christmas Carol*, which “did justice to the Christian festival as well as the pagan feast”²⁷. The most recent Christmas Specials at the time of writing (2010, 2011, 2012) have all been written by Steven Moffat and have also featured increased child-centricism. This child-centrism has interesting parallels with Alan Moore’s *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, in his “appropriation of Victorian literary characters . . . and the positioning of his adult audience as neo-Victorian child readers”²⁸.

Returning to Victorian Urtexts and hypertexts, there is evidence for imagining them to be both the inspiration and object of Moffat’s “A Christmas Carol” and for the filmic

²⁴ Whelehan. Op. cit. p. 275.

²⁵ Morris. Op. cit. p. 78.

²⁶ Amy L. Montz. “‘In Which Parasols Prove Useful’: Neo-Victorian Rewriting of Victorian Materiality.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* Vol. 4 no. 1, 2011, p. 103.

²⁷ Neil Armstrong. *Christmas in Nineteenth Century England*. Manchester, 2011, p. 61.

²⁸ Lara Rutherford, “Victorian Genres at Play: Juvenile Fiction and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* Vol. 5 No. 1, 2012, p. 126.

hypertexts of *A Christmas Carol* to have played a great part in the making of the *Doctor Who* version. The first filmic adaptation of Dickens' novella was the 1901 *Scrooge; or Marley's Ghost*. The first postwar version is from 1951, known as *Scrooge* in the US and *A Christmas Carol* in Britain. James Chapman has argued that Scrooge in this film represents the British Conservative Party. The first made-for-television version arrived in 1947 on NBC, followed by a plethora of *Christmas Carols* on TV, seemingly a new one every year, during the 1950s. In terms of hypertexts, Steven Moffat translates Dickens' miserly old inhabitant of London's City, Scrooge, into Kazran Sardick, "the meanest man on the planet of snow"²⁹. Moffat's e-mail hook to Toby Haynes in 2010 continued, "He hoards his billions, lets a world starve at his door. . . Tonight the Doctor will save more than the universe—he will save a soul." The Doctor's Messianic status has been growing in *New Who*, from Russell T Davies' "The Last of the Time Lords" to Moffat's "A Good Man Goes to War." The supernatural beings who bring about Scrooge's changes in Dickens are the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, and three ephemeral Spirits. Clearly, Moffat wants the audience to take Matt Smith's statement literally: "The spirit of Christmas and the spirit of the Doctor are sort of in tune"³⁰. Moffat's Doctor encompasses the characters and dramatic functions of Marley, the Ghost of Christmas Past, and Dickens—narrator and instigator—himself. In Stave Two of *A Christmas Carol*, the following exchange takes place between the Ghost of Christmas Past and Scrooge:

He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare," said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

"Your reclamation, then. Take heed."³¹

The Doctor is not trying to reform his version of Scrooge, Kazran Sardick, for spiritual and moral reclamation; his more immediate concern are the lives of his companions Amy, Rory, and hundreds of others who will be killed by the unreformed Sardick's inaction. Although Dickens' Spirits famously make use of a kind of time and space travel, the Doctor's TARDIS can literally put him backwards in many points in Sardick's timeline, through which he intends to manipulate Sardick's character to reform him cumulatively. Moffat's Sardick seems as influenced by Dickensian hypertext as he is by the novella. The 1984 version of *A*

²⁹ "Shooting Fish! The DWM Interview with Toby Haynes." January 2011 *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 430 pp. 25-29. p. 25.

³⁰ David Bailey. "Halfway Out of the Dark . . ." *Doctor Who Magazine*, No. 429 (December 2010) p. 6.

³¹ Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*. The Literature Project. http://www.literatureproject.com/xmas-carol/xmascarol_2.htm

Christmas Carol, starring George C. Scott, “provides a psychological ‘explanation’ for Scrooge’s miserliness in that he was denied affection from his father”³². This is exactly the tack Moffat’s version takes, the Doctor traveling back in time to counter the influence of Sardick’s tyrannical father. Integral to Dickens’ vision of Christmas, as he eventually presented within his *Christmas Books*, was the situation of the English working class and poor, with the loss of Christmas Bank Holidays between 1790 and 1840 foremost among them. Scrooge, presenting the Cratchits with their turkey, seems informed by the new spirit of “Christmas paternalism” though the spirit to which people adhered to charity for the poor, of course, varied in practice³³.

Scrooge’s moneycounting services are preserved in Sardick’s vault full of people who have been frozen in time to pay debts; unlike Scrooge, however, who was never a New World tycoon, Sardick runs his community, another echo of *It’s a Wonderful Life*. There is a version here of Scrooge’s lost love, Abigail, an un-aging, beautiful and innocent commoner/songstress who has been frozen in time to pay debts. The Doctor solidifies his relationship with the boy Kazran; then the Doctor performs the function of the Ghost of Christmas Present by taking the now-teenaged Sardick to the Christmas-like celebrations of Abigail’s family. Abigail is Scrooge’s Belle, sister Fan, and Mrs Cratchit all in one. While the Spirits made no intervention in Scrooge’s love-life, the Doctor manipulates Sardick and Abigail into a relationship, an unintended consequence from his main efforts trying to reform. The Doctor can return to the present having made Sardick even more bitterly disposed against him than before.

The Doctor’s companion, Amy, by virtue of holographic technology, can be a stand-in for the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, by showing Sardick the consequences of his actions should he let everyone in the spaceship above die. Rather than a confirmation of the future wicked end he knows he will come to without reforming, the intervention of Amy is meant to appeal to Sardick’s sense of compassion rather than his sense of self-preservation. Amy’s attempts, however, are unsuccessful, while it is the Doctor and a further reference to “psychological explanation” for Sardick’s bereft soul, his father’s influence and abuse, that causes Sardick to save the spaceship, reconcile with the Doctor, and accept a short-term love with Abigail over denial. Forlini suggests that we should be suspicious of a Steampunk desire for mastery over technology; in “A Christmas Carol,” it seems significant that, despite all the

³² Chapman, James. 2001. “God Bless Us, Every One: Movie Adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*.” *Christmas at the Movies: Images of Christmas in American, British and European Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris. p. 28.

³³ Armstrong. Op. cit. p. 75.

technological trappings of Sardicktown, the Doctor labours quite a long time in working through the human dimension, though it does take a swish and a flick of the sonic screwdriver to circumvent disaster. The Doctor's technique is fascinatingly the reverse in "The Snowmen," which we will come to.

Sarah Waters in "The Snowmen"

When Neve McIntosh, the actress who plays Madam Vastra in "The Snowmen," told *Doctor Who Magazine*, "I love reading Sherlock Holmes, and that feel of the Basil Rathbone ones. Foggy London stuff like that," she highlights the symbiotic relationship between the Victorian Urtexts and hypertexts that crystallizes around her character's function in *Doctor Who*³⁴. Mark Llewellyn, in highlighting works by Sarah Waters, John Fowles, A.S. Byatt, and Jean Rhys, emphasizes "the academy" and the relationship it builds with "a concept of the neo-Victorian," and it is safe to say that these writers' work has been discussed more often than any others in relation to the Neo-Victorian and a concept of canon³⁵. Therefore, the fact that "The Snowmen" offers a Victorian portrait filtered through what is clearly a Waters-esque lens reinforces the "blurring" technique noted by Whelehan in regards to contemporary screen adaptations of Victorian texts. Whelehan discusses how the screen adaptations of Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (BBC) and Michael Faber's *The Crimson Petal and White* (BBC) do not use "overt visual references to the contemporary period" but rather the neo-Victorian is supplied by "anti-realist camera work and *characters acting contrary to their costumes*"³⁶ (my emphasis). The first condition is easily achievable in *Doctor Who*; the second is the crux of the characters of Madam Vastra and Jenny Flint.

Matthew Sweet in *Inventing the Victorians* "implies that there are hundreds of hidden histories of Victorian life waiting to be rediscovered or imagined," and this is one function of Madam Vastra and Jenny³⁷. The simplest explanation for their presence in "The Snowmen" is to exploit previous story arcs created by Steven Moffat in "A Good Man Goes to War." Silurian warrior³⁸ Madam Vastra was introduced in that story as having taken up refuge in nineteenth-century London, with her (human) lady's maid/companion (her

³⁴ "The Doctor Needs You!: the DWM Interviews, Catrin Stewart and Neve McIntosh." *Doctor Who Magazine* no. 437 (July 2011) p.31.

³⁵ Op.cit. p. 168.

³⁶ Whelehan. Op.cit. p. 273.

³⁷ Julie Kinzler. "Visualising Victoria: Gender, Genre and History in *The Young Victoria* (2009)." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 4:2 (2011) pp. 49-65.

³⁸ The Silurians aka *homo reptilia* are a race of humanoid lizards who "were here first" on Earth and introduced in "The Silurians" (1970). They were re-introduced in altered form in New *Who* in "The Hungry Earth"/"Cold Blood" (2010).

“partner,” as described by McIntosh), Jenny Flint³⁹. Fans and casual viewers alike responded strongly to Madam Vastra and Jenny. It is unclear whether the pair’s appeal is tied to their pro-active, action hero-character status (both women are accomplished combatants, fighting on the side of the Doctor and not averse to using force and weapons), to the inter-species relationship, to the cross-timeline relationship, or to the same-sex relationship. From the quality of the response, it suggests a combination of these.

In “A Good Man Goes to War,” the pair’s costumes are not especially indicative of their circumscribed roles—a lady and her maid—in late nineteenth century London⁴⁰. However, the purest invocation of Whelehan’s observation that the neo-Victorian can be shown in screen adaptations by “characters acting contrary to their costumes” is in “The Snowmen.” Only the character of Clara, not the well-informed audience, might make the mistake of deducing from Jenny’s sober and high-necked gown that she is anything other than a proper lady’s maid. By returning Jenny to “traditional” clothing in “The Snowmen,” it is suggested that even in corsetry she is not trapped or restricted. If what Whelehan proposes is true, that in the neo-Victorian, “risqué content is almost routine and rarely shocking,” perhaps Steven Moffat has gone the one step further in the attempt to assert “a diverse range of lesbian and queer identities”⁴¹. Both McIntosh and Stewart note the multiple identities and relationships implicit in the portrayal of Vastra and Jenny—“lesbian feel”⁴² in the script is how Stewart describes it, while McIntosh asserts a platonic reading is possible. The audience for whom “The Snowmen” is intended is therefore composed of all age groups; children, who can draw their own conclusions about Vastra and Jenny—an alien and her friend and/or crime-fighting partner and/or fencing partner and/or girlfriend; a detective and her sidekick; an alien and a human—and older viewers who are overwhelmingly meant to conclude that Vastra and Jenny pursue a sexual relationship not seen onscreen.

Appropriately, in “The Snowmen,” almost no character is what he or she seems. The Doctor himself, seeming to have stopped off long-term in London c. 1892, has uncharacteristically swapped his anachronistic bowtie and tweed for a top hat and nineteenth century frock coat while he withdraws from the world, companion-less after the loss of his friends Amy and Rory. Swept irresistibly into the Doctor’s path and drawn into the mystery by Jenny and Vastra is Clara Oswin Oswald, presented to us at first as “the barmaid . . . the

³⁹ “Neve McIntosh: the DWM Interview.” *Doctor Who Magazine* no. 455 (December 2012), p. 26.

⁴⁰ In fact, Jenny’s boyish costume resembles some of the costumes in *Tipping the Velvet* or the costume of the imagined Steampunk’s version of Ada Lovelace in Sydney Padua’s comic.

⁴¹ Op. cit. p. 277, 283.

⁴² “The Doctor Needs You!” op.cit. p. 30.

Nancy from *Oliver Twist*” as her portrayer, Jenna-Louise Coleman, puts it⁴³. With her Cockney accent (like Jenny’s) and her red, impossibly voluptuous “bar-maid” gown, Clara echoes both Miss Hartigan and Rosita. Jenna-Louise Coleman used a vocal coach to “work on the accent”⁴⁴ for Clara’s alter ego—the “‘practically perfect’ nanny to two” upper class children, and Leela, as the Fourth Doctor’s long-acknowledged Eliza Doolittle⁴⁵. “Actor, conjuror, and neo-Victorian writer/director all strive for a compelling performance”⁴⁶—but which is the performance, the governess or the barmaid? It is implied, with Clara returning to Cockney dialect in moments of stress, that it is the former.

Clara is one of the New *Who* companions who (spiritually, morally, emotionally, as opposed to simply physically) “save” the Doctor in some way. With reference to Kinzler, experiencing history in a personalised way “forms the basis for audience identification,” thus explaining one reason Clara was first introduced as a bar-maid⁴⁷. John Coulthart has described Steampunk as

= Mad Scientist Inventor [invention (steam x airship or metal man / baroque stylings) x (pseudo) Victorian setting] + progressive or reactionary politics x adventure plot⁴⁸

How does this definition chime with what we know of the Doctor and of Clara? It is possible to see the Doctor as originally presented in 1963 and portrayed by William Hartnell as an eccentric Victorian tinkerer. If “Steampunks seek to reject the conformity of the modern, soulless, featureless design of technology,” then surely the Doctor in his anachronistic police box shares some traits with the Steampunk Tinkerer?⁴⁹ There are thematic ways, too, in which the Doctor can be seen to embrace some Steampunk ideology. Forlini suggests “that both material and literary engagements with the Victorian era help us to imagine more ethical relationships with all others—including things”⁵⁰. One could suggest that this, indeed, is the entire theme of “The Doctor’s Wife.” The Steampunk novel *The Diamond Age* also shows “that even the most powerful characters (Neo-Victorian engineers, technologists, and even

⁴³ “Jenna-Louise Coleman: the DWM Interview.” *Doctor Who Magazine* no. 455 (December 2012) p. 24.

⁴⁴ Cook. Op. cit. p. 22.

⁴⁵ “Jenna-Louise Coleman.” Op. cit. p. 24.

⁴⁶ Ann Heilmann. “Doing It With Mirrors: Neo-Victorian Metatextual Magic in *Affinity*, *The Prestige* and *The Illusionist*.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Winter 2009/2010) p. 19.

⁴⁷ p.51.

⁴⁸ Vander Meer. Op. cit. p.9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.cit. p. 99.

⁵⁰ Stefania Forlini. “Technology and Morality: The Stuff of Steampunk.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:1 (2010) p. 74.

the best hackers) are ultimately not in control”⁵¹. If Clara can share some of the same time-traveling Tinkerer traits with the Doctor, she has the same ambivalent relationship with technology as he does; this is best illustrated in their conversation/duel in which a parasol becomes a prominent prop. Clara and the parasol, especially given the fact that the Doctor introduces the prop in order to encourage her to follow him into the TARDIS, in Montz’s view, repurposes a fashion item “for technological usefulness and for the protection of female bodies”⁵².

Finally, Moffat’s *Doctor Who* is proving to be more self-reflexive than ever before. Madam Vastra in “The Snowmen” is described by villain Dr Simeon as “the veiled detective,” then told that “Dr Doyle” is basing his Great Detective on her “exploits” and references the *Strand* magazine. The Doctor uses as further Urtext/hypertext combination when he shows up at Dr Simeon’s headquarters in a deerstalker hat and plaid cape. Not only is this a reference to the hypertext of Sherlock Holmes rather than the Urtext, it is also references “The Talons of Weng-Chiang” (in which the Fourth Doctor wore a similar costume) and Steven Moffat’s current reworking of Conan Doyle, *Sherlock* (BBC)⁵³. Furthermore, in placing the fictional Holmes in the context of the *Who* canon, we experience even more “blurring.”

“That’s Victorian Values For You”

It behoves us to think about why so many of the *Doctor Who* Christmas Specials are set in the Victorian era or using Steampunk themes. What unique linkage is offered between Christmas, the Victorian, and *Doctor Who*? When Whelehan offers the option of “watching our social and psychological concerns performed in costume,” it is not necessarily something that applies to *Doctor Who* given that in general the show’s premise almost always allows for social and psychological concerns performed in alien environments, whether these are literally alien (the future or other planets) or the past⁵⁴. Whelehan asserts that the neo-Victorian often exposes the seamy underbelly of the past, but this does not seem wholly appropriate to the *audience* we have established for *Doctor Who* Christmas Specials. It is certainly a notion of nostalgia that is at work—“one of the reasons that holiday [Christmas], both for the Victorians and for modern-day observers, seems so timeless is because of its strong connections with the past”—but why is the Christmas ideal which the English-

⁵¹ Ibid.cit. p. 86.

⁵² Montz. Op. cit. p. 72.

⁵³ “The Snowmen” even echoes musical cues of Moffat’s *Sherlock*.

⁵⁴ Op cit. p. 278.

speaking world currently holds inherited from the Victorian era?⁵⁵ Neil Armstrong focuses on this ideal and suggests that perhaps its bittersweetness can adapt it to many variations, ranging from “familial love, benevolence and anticipation” to “loneliness and disappointment”⁵⁶.

I want to examine some of the ways the *Doctor Who* Christmas Specials invoke this timeless, nostalgic, sometimes bittersweet English-speaking “Victorian” Christmas ideal, and why this bundle of associations should be labelled “Dickensian.” Musically, the Christmas Specials thrive on the carol “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen.” Dickens was certainly familiar with “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen,” one of the most enduring carols in English, then (1843) as now, and the Doctor whistles “Silent Night” in “The Snowmen.” More apparent is the visual shorthand as used on screen; Whelehan has cited the “relative difficulty” of overcoming “traditional motifs which have become codified” visually in heritage or period films, which can be challenging to subvert within a Neo-Victorian filmic context⁵⁷. To that end, the Reverend Fairchild’s empty house in “The Next Doctor” is highly modern, given that it features a Christmas tree, decorated with fruit, and some Christmas cards. Given that the Christmas tree had only recently been popularized within the royal household and that the first Christmas card, designed by Henry Cole, had only been sent in 1843, Reverend Fairchild is extremely trendy. Captain Latimer’s house in “The Snowmen” is less obviously decked out, though paper chains and a Punch and Judy toy theatre can be seen in a downstairs room. Much is made of Captain Latimer’s inability to govern his children, but in the lowkey references to the season, he may be emulating the 2nd Viscount Halifax who read ghost and adventure stories to his children, staged ruses, led trips to pantomimes, and in the 1870s and ‘80s his diary records him being busy with decorations, wrapping, writing cards, and shopping in London for presents (on the instructions of his wife)⁵⁸.

All three of the stories we’ve examined feature a city’s snowy streets, whether it’s London of the 1850s or 1890s or Sardicktown on an alien planet. Benjamin Cook goes so far as to posit that snow is one of the “seasonal tropes” of a *Doctor Who* Christmas Special⁵⁹. In fact, the snow, a sense of Christmas occasion, and the notion of historical drama seem to go hand-in-hand for Cook: “the murderous snowmen and beautifully-realised period setting”

⁵⁵ Tom Pold. “FATHERING Christmas: Charles Dickens and the (Re)Birth of Christmas.”

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/xmas/pold1.html>

⁵⁶ Op. cit. p. 76.

⁵⁷ Op. cit. p. 274.

⁵⁸ Armstrong. Op. cit.

⁵⁹ Op. cit. p. 20.

are key⁶⁰. “A Christmas Carol,” although not set in London, chimes with the other two stories’ ethos by having been conceived as in a cold environment, according to director Toby Haynes. “You know what defines Dickens?” he asked *Doctor Who Magazine*. “It’s austerity, and it’s people making do,” again relating the costuming of “A Christmas Carol” to the environment and linking this to a notion of what a Christmas Special should be⁶¹. It is obvious that Dickens was a major influence on the way the later Victorians came to celebrate Christmas and in turn has contributed much to our ideal. Armstrong suggests that the reason Christmas was embraced in the middle of the nineteenth century was partially the guilt that the upper-class had felt during the “hungry forties.” “The Next Doctor” is the Christmas Special that is most invested in the “socially conscious Dickens,” at least as hypertext, for its blindingly obvious use of *Oliver!* the musical-esque characters— Rosita the Nancy-esque lower class, “feisty” woman; the character names of Miss Hartigan’s fellow workhouse magnates; and as Jonathan Morris puts it, “masses of downtrodden children” whose tasks recall the treadmills of nineteenth century prisons and “the work performed by children in mills and coalmines⁶². Rutherford would see this as evidence of the “two incongruous, but coexisting iterations of childhood to be found within Victorian literature,” the other being the pampered children in “The Snowmen”⁶³. In “The Snowmen,” Dr Simeon is introduced in 1842 as a child who prefers his own company; the Doctor does not try to reform him in 1892 as he did Kazran Sardick, nor is the grisly fate of his workers framed as part of the crushing Victorian workhouse system. While Dr Simeon is literally turned to ice, his office is not a money counting exchange (in fact, it is unclear what kind of business mogul he is).

Establishing (computer-generated) shots of “The Next Doctor” (including the problematic mysterious bridge across the Thames) contrast with the outdoor sites of “The Snowmen,” such as the square where the Doctor’s invisible ladder to the TARDIS is situated, a country house landscape complete with frozen pond, and *Little Dorrit*-esque back alleys. “The Next Doctor” gives us both more traditional stately heritage-type shots and anachronistic interiors (the Cybermen’s base is a set recycled from the Torchwood Hub from *Torchwood* (2006-2008)). Nevertheless, we must remember that the vision presented in *A Christmas Carol* the novella is an idealized one itself. Dickens himself was recalling the Christmases from the memory of his father, John Dickens, who would have enjoyed the opulent celebrations at Crewe Hall up until he reached his mid-20s. Therefore, if Dickens’

⁶⁰ Ibid.cit.

⁶¹ “Shooting Fish!” Op. cit. p. 26.

⁶² Op. cit. p. 76.

⁶³ Op. cit. p. 129.

ideal is of a Christmas that perhaps never existed or was at least embellished upon by memory, any subsequent attempts to live up to this ephemeral quality are perhaps doomed to failure. This explains why Christmas in this fashion *is* often tinged with the hidden loneliness and disappointment cited by Armstrong, and which is one of the irresistible draws of “A Christmas Carol.”

Though “The Next Doctor” features children, it is not until “A Christmas Carol” that we find the relationship between children brought to the fore, which one can speculate is a purely Moffat invention. Sardick *as a child* is a locus of viewer identification, a catalyst for the Doctor’s solution to the problem of adult Sardick’s bitterness and selfishness, and finally plot solution itself (with no regard for the Blinovitch Limitation Effect). In Moffat’s later Christmas Specials, children are much more prominently featured than in Davies’ Specials “The Christmas Invasion,” “The Runaway Bride,” and “Voyage of the Damned,” even if they are usually mediated through an adult (their mother in “The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe” and their father and governess in “The Snowmen”). The child Kazran Sardick is first seen experiencing Christmas loneliness and isolation, and it is his acceptance of his damaged older self that spiritually heals him as well as, in story terms, solves the problem at hand. Although Moffat’s children in the later Specials have moments of loneliness and disappointment, both sets are siblings and have the emotional support of at least one parent. The link, however, with the Doctor’s childlike qualities is obvious; he can stand in for all children in this respect, whether he is awkwardly accepting the Other Doctor’s Christmas dinner invitation at the end of “The Next Doctor” (literally, “coming in out of the cold”) or setting up elaborate collections of presents with childlike glee in “The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe.” “What’s the point in being grown up,” the Fourth Doctor once asked, “if you can’t be childish sometimes?”

Conclusion

As alluded to above, “The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe,” the 2011 Christmas Special written by Steven Moffat, does not fit our category of Neo-Victorianism, with neither Steampunk elements nor a Victorian setting. Instead, it is set in the 1940s and relates to a different kind of English Christmas motif originating in C.S. Lewis’ classic works for children. “The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe” shared themes and motifs with previous Christmas Specials—as noted above, the centrality of children, the Doctor as a stand-in for children, and lots of snow. Nevertheless, it is generally perceived to be less popular than its predecessor, and it is worth reflecting that Moffat returned immediately to a

sense of the Neo-Victorian by using a Victorian setting for “The Snowmen.” How this pattern will continue to develop and the possible challenges of mining the “Dickensian” for the Christmas ideal year after year remain to be seen.

The *Doctor Who* Christmas Specials may be a unique case in examining Neo-Victorian screen adaptations because of the relative size of the audiences and the complicated factors regarding age-level within those audiences. Although the numbers of readers of the Neo-Victorian and Steampunk canons may be large, they cannot in sheer size alone compete with the viewing audience for a *Doctor Who* Christmas Special. “The Next Doctor,” “A Christmas Carol,” and “The Snowmen” are all helpful to us in examining the way *Doctor Who*’s showrunners have used Victorian Urtexts and hypertexts, as per Whelehan’s definitions. In particular, the characters of Madam Vastra, Jenny Flint, and Clara shed new light on invented Victorian histories within the Sarah Waters mode and within one definition of Neo-Victorianism, in that they allude to a seamier side of Victorian life. *Doctor Who* as link between mainstream, Steampunk and Christmas themes is a useful comparison. The way that the three stories marry the “English Victorian Christmas ideal” to a bittersweet notion of loneliness and disappointment, via Armstrong’s analysis of the motif’s power, gives us some reasons for the theme’s longevity and its nostalgic appeal.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, Neil. 2011. *Christmas in Nineteenth Century England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bailey, David. December 2010. “Halfway Out of the Dark . . .” *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 429 pp. 4-9.
- Blackburn, Farren. 2011. “The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe.” *Doctor Who*. Steven Moffat (writ.) Matt Smith, Claire Skinner, Maurice Cole, Holly Earl (perf.). BBC.
- Chapman, James. 2001. “God Bless Us, Every One: Movie Adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*.” *Christmas at the Movies: Images of Christmas in American, British and European Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Cook, Benjamin. December 2012. “The Snowmen: Episode Preview.” *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 455 pp. 19-22.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. The Literature Project.
http://www.literatureproject.com/xmas-carol/xmascarol_2.htm (23.03.13)
- “The Doctor Needs You!: the DWM Interviews, Catrin Stewart and Neve McIntosh.” July 2011. *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 437 pp. 30-31.
- Forlini, Stefania. 2010. “Technology and Morality: The Stuff of Steampunk.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:1 pp. 72-98.
- Goddard, Andy (dir.) 2008. “The Next Doctor.” *Doctor Who*. Russell T Davies (writ.) David Tennant, David Morrissey, Dervla Kirwan, Velile Tshabalala (perf.). BBC.

- Haynes, Toby (dir.) 2010. "A Christmas Carol." *Doctor Who*. Steven Moffat (writ). Matt Smith, Michael Gambon, Katherine Jenkins, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill (perf.). BBC.
- Heilmann, Ann. Winter 2009/2010 "Doing It With Mirrors: Neo-Victorian Metatextual Magic in *Affinity*, *The Prestige* and *The Illusionist*." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 2:2 pp. 18-42.
- Ho, Elizabeth. 2012. *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*. London: Continuum International.
- Hoar, Peter. 2011 "A Good Man Goes to War." *Doctor Who*. Steven Moffat (writ.) Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill, Alex Kingston (perf.) BBC.
- "Jenna-Louise Coleman: the DWM Interview." December 2012 *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 455 pp. 24-25.
- Kinzler, Julie. 2011. "Visualising Victoria: Gender, Genre and History in *The Young Victoria* (2009)." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 4:2 pp. 49-65.
- Lepine, Anna. Winter 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* 1:2 pp. 78-102.
- Llewellyn, Mark. Autumn 2008 "What Is Neo-Victorian Studies?" *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1:1 pp. 164-185.
- Maloney, David (dir). 1977 "The Talons of Weng-Chiang." *Doctor Who*. Robert Holmes (writ.) Tom Baker, Louise Jameson, John Bennett, Trevor Baxter, Christopher Benjamin (perf.) BBC.
- Martinus, Derek (dir). 1967 "The Evil of the Daleks." *Doctor Who*. David Whitaker (writ.) Patrick Troughton, Frazer Hines, Deborah Watling, John Bailey, Marius Goring (perf.) BBC.
- Metzstein, Saul (dir). 2012 "The Snowmen." *Doctor Who*. Steven Moffat (writ). Matt Smith, Jenna-Louise Coleman, Richard E. Grant, Neve McIntosh, Catrin Stewart (perf.) BBC.
- Montz, Amy L. 2011 " 'In Which Parasols Prove Useful': Neo-Victorian Rewriting of Victorian Materiality." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 4:1 pp. 100-118.
- Morris, Jonathan. December 2012 "The Fact of Fiction: The Next Doctor." *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 455 pp. 68-79.
- "Neve McIntosh: the DWM Interview." December 2012 *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 455 pp. 26-27.
- Pold, Tom. "Fathering Christmas: Charles Dickens and the (Re)Birth of Christmas." *The Victorian Web*. <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/xmas/pold1.html> (23.03.13)
- Rutherford, Lara. 2012 "Victorian Genres at Play: Juvenile Fiction and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 5:1 pp. 125-151.
- "Shooting Fish! The DWM Interview with Toby Haynes." January 2011 *Doctor Who Magazine* No. 430 pp. 25-29.
- VanderMeer, Jeff, with S.J. Chambers. 2011 *The Steampunk Bible: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Imaginary Airships, Corsets and Goggles, Mad Scientists, and Strange Literature*. New York: Abrams Image.
- Wareing, Alan. 1989 "Ghost Light." *Doctor Who*. Marc Platt (writ.) Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred, Ian Hogg, Katharine Schlesinger, Sharon Duce, John Hallam (perf.) BBC.
- Whelehan, Imelda. 2012 "Neo-Victorian Adaptations." *Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Ed. Deborah Cartmell. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

100 Word Bio

Leslie McMurtry was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and received her BA in English and French from the University of New Mexico. She received her MA in creative and media writing from Swansea University in Wales and is currently pursuing her PhD in English from Swansea University. She has had essays published in *The Mythological Dimensions of*

Doctor Who and *The Unsilent Library: Essays on the Russell T. Davies Era of the New Doctor Who*, and in forthcoming volumes of the *Fan Phenomena* series. She edits *The Terrible Zodin* (<http://doctorwhottz.blogspot.com>). She lives in London.