

Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca Mitchell. Eds. *Drawing on the Victorians. The Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2017. 386 pgs. ISBN 978-0-8214-2247-2.

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Drawing on the Victorians explores the complexity of image and text relationship in Victorian and neo-Victorian times, examining a variety graphic texts from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Lady Victorian* in order to understand the connection between print culture of both past and present. In this anthology scholars from a variety of disciplines discuss the critical engagement with the text and how to read images of both past and present. It is known that Victorians experienced an explosion in mass text production along with the rise of literacy rates. The interest in the Victorians explains our desire and connection to the past, which in turn explains the current neo-Victorian boom, including the rising fascination with steampunk, manga, and other neo-Victorian genres that influence many contemporary works. Despite the presence of graphic texts in circulation, the link between Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts is often missing and this important anthology aims to establish an existence of such a link.

The anthology addresses what Gerard Genette calls transtextuality in a way that ‘sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts’.¹ The palimpsest as a genre is important in our understanding of how Victorian graphic texts and its intertextuality show the relationship of presence of past through many contemporary productions (steampunk, manga etc.). It is a mode to ‘challenge the fixity of textual meaning and the linearity of historical

¹ Gerard Genette. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. U of Nebraska Press, 1997. p. 2.

progress', according to Genette.² Victorians were aware of how images were read evident from many such popular publications of the day such as the *Strand* and the *Punch* and the genre of palimpsest reveals the multiple levels of self-referential and meta-textual layers in a variety of Victorian texts across the historical and linguistic boundaries.

The anthology focuses on the various graphic texts and the authors of the anthology read illustrated books, periodicals, cartoons, comics and other texts across many boundaries, using the following categories: the authors bring to the attention the emergence of revival movements as many nineteenth century artists and writers turned to the past and revived the work of many earlier authors, they negotiated the Victorian self and modernity relationship. They also establish some self-referential practices in popular media, for example, Lewis Carroll's texts reveal the undeniable image-text connection. The relationship of image/text in high art and popular culture is discussed with the use of cartoons (e.g. 1895 "Zig Zags at the Zoo" by Arthur Morrison), which developed the visual vocabulary that readers could identify with (e.g. headers such as "Zig Zag Bovine" or "Zig Zag Ursine" etc. were added to the title graphics to make caricatures more readable). The caricatures of the animals in London Zoo and their characteristics were accompanied by the series of humorous articles that many readers could relate to (James Shepherd drew 580 animal caricatures for the series). Finally, the image to text relationship (embraced by or protested against) is explored in connection with the readership's ability to create and engage with the content since so many images tell a story or deliver a moral.

The anthology is divided into five large sections with ten chapters. It is well-structured in the way it is broken into the thematic pairs of texts and images, adaptations, iconography, social categories, graphic representation of history and readers' multilayered perception of visuality and

² Ibid. p. 7.

textuality. The first chapters “Adaptations” discuss the adaptation process in various mediums and across the boundaries, looking at Seymour’s *Sketches* (1831) and Meadow’s *Heads of the People* (1841), with the authors’ coming to a conclusion that Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* traces back to Seymour’s *Sketches*. The authors Brian Maidment and Monika Pietrzak-Franger discuss primary source and adaptation relationship focusing on the global adaptation of *Alice* (in order to rethink the local history). The next section “Graphic Epistemologies” looks at iconography to apply scientific theories and spiritualism to educate its readers. The authors Peter Sinnema and Christine Ferguson explore the ways natural and supernatural occurrences affect the readers’ views of the world (*Captain Seaborn’s Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* and Teed’s *The Cellular Cosmogony* and Plender’s *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* 2007 related to Davis’s *A Stellar Key to the Summer land* published in 1867). Part three, “Refigured Ideologies,” examines the ability of texts to change and shape social categories, as the authors Heidi Kaufman and Jessica Straley focus on the role of the Jew and the child and the role of cultural stereotypes and our use of it (looking at both Eisner’s *Fagin the Jew* published in 2003 and Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* in 1837). They question the possibilities and limits of the reinvention in these works. The next section “Temporal Images” explores the images of historical progress and how it is captured in many texts. Linda Hughes and Rebecca Mitchell examine the Victorian texts narratology, coming to a conclusion that these texts are a form of time keeping, with Hughes focusing on the Victorian poetry and Mitchell focusing on the 1897 Diamond Jubilee issue of *Punch* as a study for historicizing the typology. The final chapter of the collection “Picturing Readers” examines the relationship between texts and its readership. Jennifer Phegley and Anna Maria Jones in this section discuss the serials and the role of readers, specifically women, as consumers of illustrated narratives (*Bow Bells* magazine and Naoko’s *Lady Victorian*). The afterward, “Photography,

Palimpsest and the neo-Victorian” by Kate Flint, analyzes the role of a photograph as a medium to reveal both culture and tell a story and its meta-referential quality to ‘capture temporal complexities’.³

From reading the anthology, it is evident that despite the fact that palimpsest is a Victorian invention, its influence on the modern culture is undeniable; the anthology demonstrates that palimpsest is indeed a useful device to examine and establish the images and words’ complex relationship in our contemporary culture. The book gives scholars of Victorian era a unique understanding of the nineteenth century’s graphic texts and today’s steampunk as it addresses a number of the issues found in modern day visual culture to show the multiplicity and complexity found in both Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts; it allows scholars and readers alike to think of Victorians in various contexts and genres across the disciplines as well as to connect the past with the present. The anthology is a useful scholarly guide to open up a debate about the palimpsestuous nature of Victorian and neo-Victorian texts, and allow the current and future scholars to study its relationship and embrace its many juxtapositions.

³ Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca Mitchell. Eds. *Drawing on the Victorians. The Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2017. p. 28.