Patrick C. Fleming, ***Animating the Victorians***, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2025, 256 pp. Hb $99. ISBN 9781496855374. Pb $30. ISBN 9781496855381

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In *Animating the Victorians*, Patrick C. Fleming analyses the relationship between the Victorian era and Walt Disney, explaining how several films and adaptations of this famous company – along with their characters – derive from Victorian literature. Thereby, Fleming raises the issue of copyright and focuses primarily on widely recognized authors such Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll and Hans Christian Andersen. The book explores the themes of morality, childhood and sexuality, and illustrates how Disney reinterpreted Victorian authors by turning their works into diversified products, including films, theme parks, and merchandise. In order to do so, Fleming considers countless Victorian texts whose thematic structures were easily adapted by Disney for the international market.

While the book's introduction uncovers how contemporary Disney entertainment originates from nineteenth-century Victorian theatre, the first chapter, "Disney and the Victorian Tradition", details this relationship through the lenses of literature, culture, commerce, and technology, with particular attention to Disney's adaptations of *Oliver Twist* and *Cinderella*. The sections demonstrate not only how Dickens gained neither fame nor profit from the adaptations of his literature, but also how most of his multimedia and non-multimedia adaptations were limited by the Victorian moral guidelines – even at the expense of fidelity to the original works. This first chapter is so rich in historical information and examples of adaptations that the reader may occasionally lose the thread of the argument. Nevertheless, the sections are highly explanatory and support Fleming's central thesis, employing and consequently defining Victorian literature and history as a turning point in engagement with juvenile literature and its subsequent adaptations. Moreover, the absence of copyright in the nineteenth century and its introduction in the twentieth century are usefully highlighted in the chapter, contributing to illustrate how Victorian authors had little control over the adaptations of their works and were consequently unable to gain financial profit from them. Accordingly, the key examples of *Oliver Twist* and *Cinderella* successfully unveil how Disney reformulated and adapted them to conform to Victorian moral standards.

The second chapter, "Alice from Gag to Franchise", reflects upon the adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll featured Alice in European courts, even though

the narrative of *Alice*'s original story was deemed unsuitable for marketable adaptations. Besides omitting pivotal narrative details and modifying characters and storylines, the adaptations featured various gags, including "the distortion of a character's body, body parts used in unexpected ways, or inanimate objects coming to life and interacting with characters" (47). These versions did not have to be faithful to the original work, but they had to convey Alice's identity to function in the market. As in the previous chapter, this chapter presents coherent and corroborating ideas, with Kaufman and Merritt (49) and Perkins (58) highlighting the importance of reshaping original narratives and using comic elements to boost remake sales. In consequence, the concepts are so powerfully articulated that the audience gains a clear understanding not only of Disney's adaptation strategies, which turned Carroll's Victorian classic into a global franchise, but also of the importance of restructuring the original narrative and incorporating comic gags to maximise its commercial appeal.

The third chapter, "Animating Hans Christian Andersen", explores the relationship among Hans Christian Andersen's biography, his works, and their respective adaptations. Fleming exemplifies *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Little Mermaid* and *The Snow Queen*. This chapter is particularly accurate and fits effectively into the Victorian framework, as Andersen subverted Victorian values and thus enjoyed great success in Victorian England. The reading appears to be particularly convincing as Fleming unmasks Victorian society's discontent through the author's fairy tales and their adaptations. Fleming meticulously employs Andersen's life to expose the hypocrisy of the Victorian world. He additionally shows how most of this literature was adapted for both the stage and the screen to conform to the moral guidelines of the time, thereby safeguarding the Victorian moral facade.

The fourth chapter, "Princesses and Pirates", sheds light on the Victorian origins of the Disney archetypes of the princess and the pirate, exemplifying *The Princess* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Whereas the princess archetype oscillated ambiguously between female emancipation and traditional marriage, the pirate archetype became a playful, charming and purely comical figure. This chapter demonstrates Fleming's accurate research on the subject with several examples, and on the whole effectively connects the two archetypes to Victorian norms and prejudices. Furthermore, the chapter convincingly demonstrates how works were systematically adapted to align with the era's moral principles, making them suitable for young audiences who would internalise and reinforce these values.

The conclusion and appendix of the book propose an interdisciplinary approach by inviting the reader to consider Disney as a complex system: a modern franchise universe inspired by Victorian entertainment.

From my perspective, curious minds will find the entire volume thought-provoking, as it compellingly highlights how Disney's adaptations shaped the Victorian collective imagination. As a global entertainment leader, Disney significantly reinterpreted Victorian literature, thereby influencing how generations of viewers have come to visualise the Victorian age. Additionally, Fleming's interdisciplinary approach makes this book a valuable contribution to Victorian studies, as much of its literature is also consistently cited and contextualised. The main body successfully captures the readers' attention and curiosity, given that all the topics are of high historical and literary value, as well as being strongly consistent with the Victorian world and cohesive with each other. Nevertheless, its richness of detail might create some redundancy and dispersiveness: the reader might either gain insight into Victorian literature and its Disney adaptations or occasionally lose track of the discussion, due to the text's density of information. Overall, Fleming's *Animating the Victorians* is a captivating critical work, requiring careful reading to extract the necessary references without getting lost in its abundance of content. If approached carefully, it therefore serves as a comprehensive and multifaceted reference for Victorian literature enthusiasts.