

Detective Fiction and the Neo-Victorian: Sexual Violence, Morality and Rescue Work in Lee Jackson's *The Last Pleasure Garden* (2007)

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In his third Inspector Decimus Webb novel, a detective from Scotland Yard, Jackson Lee re-appropriates the crime-fiction genre to portray several stories of gender abuse and violence. Several women become the victims of “The Cutter”, including Rose Perffit, who is an aspiring debutante and the daughter of a respectable middle-class family. At the same time Lee makes use of the Neo-Victorian genre to recover aspects of the Victorian archive like the popular pleasure gardens, a kind of public entertainment that provides the setting to discuss issues of morality, sexual exploitation and reform so important for the Victorian mind but also of relevance in our contemporary societies. The role of religion and rescue work is emphasized from the very beginning, and allusions to many events and cultural aspects of the period are frequent, following the Neo-Victorian trend of re-writing the past. Also, the novel’s commitment to the crime-fiction genre facilitates the appearance of chaos and disorder—a natural feature of crime fiction—within society and, furthermore, creates the atmosphere for the investigation of the mystery, the restoration of order—when possible—and the pursuit of the truth in the hands of the male protagonist. This attempt at the restoration of order is also a prevalent characteristic of our contemporary chaotic world. Following Julia’s Kristeva’s notion of the abject and Judith Butler’s theories of gender, violence and mourning, this paper aims to discuss issues of the Victorian neglected other and contemporary concerns about the deaths and suffering of the “prostituted other”.