



Manchester Metropolitan University

‘A Sphere within a Sphere’: Neo-Victorianism, Digital Cultures and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries*

Rebekah Evelyn Donovan

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Master of Arts (by Research)

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire

28th October 2016

Abstract

This thesis will explore the development of neo-Victorian fiction and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013) and will assess whether the text has a place within the contemporary digital world¹. I am aware of other avenues I may have explored within the text such as: death, the authority of the past, gender, and the inner consciousness of the individual perceiving subject. Moreover, it would have been possible to develop a theorized postcolonial reading of the text: a line of critical enquiry, which is briefly touched upon in chapter two. However, due to the nature of my research project and the limitation in word count, choosing to focus on the narrative techniques and astrology enabled me to explore *The Luminaries* as a neo-Victorian novel in more critical depth. With that in mind, the first chapter of my thesis will focus on discussing the key themes, tropes and questions surrounding the genre of neo-Victorian fiction. The second chapter is the heart of my project and where I engage closely with Catton's novel. This chapter will contain a close analysis of two main areas to *The Luminaries*: Catton's playful narrative structure and her painstakingly complex use of astrology. Following this the third, and final, chapter will focus on the place of Catton's text in our contemporary digital culture. This chapter will open by briefly touching upon the narrative techniques explored in chapter two to give this, admittedly speculative, chapter a stronger grounding in Catton's text.

I will then explore Catton's text as a product of (and for) the digital culture, in so much that the text would have been written very differently, if at all, if it was not for computer programmes. Following this I will discuss the notion of paradoxical relationships both within Catton's text and our wider contemporary digital culture as we are encompassed in a 'large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small stilled world of horror and

¹ Please note this project will be using the Manchester Metropolitan University Harvard referencing system, which differs slightly to the Harvard referencing system.

unease; [...] a sphere within a sphere' (Catton, 2013: 454). This will move the chapter onto the idea Will Self draws upon that in the increasingly digital age 'reading [has] become the solitary acts of social beings' (Self, 2013:The Guardian Online), and how our online behaviours have changed the way we read, both on/offline.