"I'm Too Broken to Belong:" Subverting the Victorian Nuclear Family through the Concept of Family of Choice in *The Irregulars* (2021)

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Abstract

Family occupies a central position in (neo-)Victorian fiction. Yet, the ideal nuclear family myth is often contested, since this institution tends to be portrayed as dysfunctional, broken and oppressive. By contrast, alternative reconfigurations of the heteronormative household in neo-Victorianism encourage an empathic and tolerant engagement to both Victorian and contemporary eccentric family models. The Netflix original series The Irregulars *(2021) follows this pattern by placing a gang of Othered outcasts rejected by their families at the centre of the narrative. In this article, I analyse how the series subverts the traditional conceptualization of the Victorian family and proposes, instead, an alternative concept of community: the neo-Victorian family of choice.*

Keywords: *Neo-Victorianism; dysfunctional families; family of choice; subverting gender conventions; Otherness*

The adventures of Sherlock Holmes are some of the most revisited texts from the Victorian era. Over the last decade, there has been a renewed interest in adapting Doyle's novels, arguably triggered by the commercial success of the Guy Ritchie film franchise – *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2010) – and its contemporary reimagining in the BBC TV series *Sherlock* (2009-2017). Other commercially successful adaptations include the CBS TV series *Elementary* (2012-2019), the Japanese film *Miss Sherlock* (2018) or the Netflix original *Enola Holmes* (2020).

The Irregulars (2021), a neo-Victorian mystery series created by Tom Bidwell for Netflix, is the latest of these 'Holmesian' adaptations. It follows the Baker Street Irregulars: a group of homeless teenagers that work for Dr Watson, solving crimes and saving Victorian London from supernatural creatures. These eccentric characters need to close 'a rip' between the world of the living and that of the dead, which threatens to bring about an apocalypse. *The Irregulars* premiered on 26 March 2021 on Netflix, but was cancelled in May 2021, despite landing on the platform's top 10 list. It retells the adventures of Sherlock Holmes for a young audience, foregrounding

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traditional aspects of teen dramas – e.g., the anguish of a first love, family dysfunctionalities and the importance of belonging to a community – or family of choice – where one can be accepted and loved. *The Irregulars* follows the pattern of other recent neo-Victorian screen texts, most notably *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) – which also features a group of dysfunctional detectives that confront supernatural forces to save London from an apocalypse – or the HBO series *The Nevers* – which follows a group of women, known as 'the Touched,' who are ostracized for having supernatural abilities.

This article first offers a brief introduction to the neo-Victorian serial television and the pivotal role that family plays in it. Second, it focuses on the concept of 'family of choice' as the central category of analysis and how it can help subvert the idealized notion of the nuclear family in *The Irregulars*. Attention is also paid to the manner in which its protagonists are Othered on account of their (dis)abilities and transgressions of Victorian gender conventions. All in all, the article shows that the portrayal of families of choice in neo-Victorianism on screen advocates for alternative models of family life and celebrates diversity in both Victorian and contemporary societies.

The Neo-Victorian serial television and the family of choice

The neo-Victorian TV serial greatly differs from "the traditional, fidelity-driven 'classic' adaptations" that were produced in the 1990s, since "it taps into current audience desire for a more playful, less reverential adaptive treatment" of Victorian literature (Griggs 2018: 13). Neo-Victorian TV series like *The Irregulars* subvert the audience's expectations, from their innovative adaptive approach of nineteenth-century canonical texts to their aesthetic style. Thus, they remain "in dialogue with," but are not defined by their antecedents (Griggs 2018: 14).

Moreover, historical TV series are usually judged by their creative capacity to meet the contemporary audience's expectations of the period. Claire Meldrum contends that neo-Victorian detective fiction like *The Irregulars* usually combines historical facts with fantasy, highlighting "both the continuities and discontinuities between the Victorian era and our own, suggestive of continuing social anxieties" (2015: 203). Yet, these screen representations do not always have self-reflexive or critical intentions. Sometimes, they are wish-fulfilment fantasies to retroactively right past wrongs. Marie-Luise Kohlke also highlights the "presentist" component of neo-Victorianism, which involves forcing deliberate changes in the past that might help fulfil the political agendas of contemporary creators (2018: 2).

A deliberate presentist aspect in *The Irregulars* is the choice of a colour-blind cast, as the actors were selected irrespective of their race. This, according to Mel Valentin, "adds another element of the fantastical and counter-factual to the series" (2021: 7). Choosing a colour-blind cast in historical screen texts is becoming increasingly popular, as Kim Newman claims, *The Irregulars* shares with historical TV series like *Bridgerton* "a vision of the past with colour-blind casting. Not only are ragamuffins and slum-dwellers multiracial, so are the nobility and indeed it is not uncommon for Black, White, and Asian characters to be related to each other without explanation" (2002: 37).

Thus, the show adopts an inclusive approach to race similar, which speaks "to the multicultural reality of the country" (Wolf 2021: 3). Even though the colour-blind cast in *The Irregulars* seemingly promotes inclusivity and diversity, it might actually have the opposite effect. Casting actors from different racial backgrounds without taking their ethnicity into consideration might result in "an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenization of heritage" (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2010: 26). These narratives might be perceived as reductionist and imposing a (neo-) imperialist colonization of ethnic communities.

On a different note, family occupies a central position in neo-Victorianism, although it is usually depicted as both dysfunctional and fragmented. Kohlke and Gutleben argue that the reconfiguration of the neo-Victorian family enables us to reflect on contemporary anxieties related to shifting family values and their potential collapse. Alternative portrayals of the nuclear family in neo-Victorianism encourage a more empathetic reading of unconventional family models in both present and past periods (Kohlke and Gutleben 2021: 1).

The family of choice is here understood following Kath Weston's definition as an alternative to traditional heteronormative models of family life, which includes friends, "lovers, coparents, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and offspring conceived through alternative insemination" (1997: 3). The family of choice is considered a support community and replacement parenthood for non-normative characters in neo-Victorian screen texts, as in *Penny Dreadful* or *The Nevers*. In Western societies, the nuclear family holds a privileged position and supplies a "cultural framework for configuring kinship that people can draw upon to interpret the world around them" (Weston 1997: 6-7). Thus, the family of choice would be an alternative to this institution, which can encompass those individuals who have lost their biological relatives or who

do not meet the requirements to form a nuclear family. *The Irregulars* seems to follow this trend, as its main characters – a group of orphan teenagers – favour the family of choice – a community that accepts their Othering traits.

Dismantling the nuclear family through the family of choice in *The Irregulars*

The Irregulars follows a group of teenage outcasts led by the female protagonists, Beatrice (Bea) and her sister, Jessie, who live in a basement in London's underbelly with their close friends: Billy and Spike. Thanks to Jessie's supernatural abilities, they help the iconic detective duo, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, solve paranormal crimes in Victorian London. Eventually, they discover that these crimes are all connected to a rip that Alice – Bea and Jessie's mother – has opened in the barrier between the world of the living and the dead. If they do not close it, the barrier will collapse and both worlds will become one. After a fortuitous event, disabled Prince Leopold of England (Leo) joins this unlikely gang of detectives.

Even though these characters come from very different backgrounds, they have one thing in common: their dysfunctional households. Some of them hail from fragmented families that have abandoned them, as Bea and Jessie, whose parents – Sherlock Holmes and Alice – prioritized the study of the supernatural over their children's safety. As mentioned above, *The Irregulars* depicts a colour-blind society where racial marginalization does not exist, although there are other forms of discrimination directed at the main characters. The four original friends have always been discriminated because they are orphaned and poor. Prince Leopold, on the contrary, comes from the most powerful family in England, but has been hidden from the public eye due to his disability: haemophilia. Although his family claims that they keep him confined in the palace for his own protection, he feels extremely alone and neglected, as he has never had any true friends. Likewise, Jessie is also Othered because of her supernatural abilities. Like her mother, she is a psychic that can access other people's minds and is feared because of it. Since all these characters have been marginalized by both society and their own families, they long for a family of choice where they can feel accepted.

In the nineteenth-century Anglo-American context, "the cult of domesticity" was adopted by middle-class families (Dulberger 1996: 23). In order for this ideal to be fulfilled, families needed to be sheltered in a "world of quiet, seclusion, and privacy:" the family house, which came to be regarded as a refuge from the dangers of the outside world (Dulberger 1996: 24-25). However, poor parents could not afford such privileges, and their only alternatives were the orphanage or – as in the case of *The Irregulars* – the workhouse.

The workhouse was a Victorian institution whose purpose was to provide shelter and work for poor people that did not have the means to support themselves. According to Simon Fowler, workhouses were originally designed for "able-bodied paupers, that is men and women between the ages of 16 and 60, who were judged fit enough to work for their living and therefore, should not require any assistance" (2014: 2). Nonetheless, from the mid-1840s onwards – after the economic depression – this institution became a "shelter" for "the elderly, the sick, orphans and those who were incapable of earning a living" (Fowler 2014: 2).

Workhouses were notorious for their "terrible conditions, forced child labour, long hours, malnutrition, beatings and neglect" (Brain 2021: 2). These conditions are graphically described by Bea in *The Irregulars*: "when we were in the workhouse being beaten and punched and spat on! […] when we were starving to death wondering whether to sell ourselves to stay alive" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 5, 00:44:06-00:44:21). Victorian writers denounced the harsh circumstances of workhouses in their works, most notably Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist; or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (1837-1839), where he criticized the cruel reality of an orphan child living in one.

On a different note, gender conventions were solidly established in the Victorian era and defined what behavioural traits men and women had to display. This was due to a "separate spheres ideology," adopted during the 1830s and 1840s in England, which redefined gender identities, as it "shifted the control over work to men and home to women" (Lewis 2011: 33). The separate spheres philosophy was adopted in order to establish a hierarchical system that favoured white, middle-class, heteronormative and patriarchal models of family life (Chambers 2021: 33). Indeed, Chambers defines the dysfunctional family as the nuclear family's counterpart, "as a counterfoil, as a permanent reminder of the need to fight for the preservation of the ideal as something more than a myth, as something that once existed and that must be recovered" (2021: 66). As a result, the Victorian nuclear family has played a pivotal role in (neo-)Victorian fiction, especially as the locus of gendered traumas (Kohlke and Gutleben 2011: 1). As a result, alternative portrayals to this institution in neo-Victorianism encourage a more empathetic engagement on the part of the audience towards unconventional family models, as in the case of *The Irregulars*.

Owing to Jessie's supernatural abilities, Dr Watson hires the protagonists to investigate a string of crimes with a supernatural component – that also appear to be rooted in family traumas. These include a number of new-born babies being kidnapped by the head ornithologist of the London Zoo, whose baby died in childbirth. He believes that his child was actually

swapped with a dead one, so he is now kidnapping all the babies that were born on that day to find her. There is also a woman – known as the tooth fairy – who steals people's teeth to grow clones of them and make them kill the man that led her father to commit suicide. An orphan girl also removes the face of the men that sexually assaulted her and gave her syphilis. She then 'wears' their faces to become them and infiltrate their families, as they ruined any possibility, she had of forming a family of her own. Finally, there is the case of the collector, which is seemingly inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818): a botanist collects body parts to put together a new body for her dying husband. Thus, all these criminals are actually desperate characters who lost a dear relative or were deprived of the possibility of forming a nuclear family. Now, they are using the supernatural powers from the rip to compensate for those losses.

Moreover, these supernatural criminals transgress Victorian gender conventions that were usually transmitted through the nuclear family – another trait they share with the protagonists. Both Jessie and her mother follow the recurrent pattern of female characters that are sensitive to supernatural forces in (neo-)Victorian fiction. They are psychics, rejected and considered madwomen by society – including their own families. Initially, when Jessie starts manifesting her supernatural abilities, Bea believes that she is going insane, as their mother supposedly did, before allegedly committing suicide. Nevertheless, they are actually "ipsissimi: a true psychic. It means 'powerful one.' One who can see into the souls of men. One who can change the destiny of the world" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 3, 00:31:08-00:31:17). Jessie can get into other people's minds and access their fondest memories, but also their deepest traumas, and is feared because of it. Therefore, she follows the (neo-)Victorian trope of the female medium.

The female medium subverted traditional understandings of Victorian femininity and defied established views of class and sexuality, as well as the role that women played in both the private and public spheres (Kontou 2008: 275). Spiritualist activities were arguably contradictory practices in terms of gender roles. On the one hand, they followed Victorian conventions of proper womanhood, as séances required "passivity, weakness and mental instability" (Arias 2005: 165). On the other hand, they granted women a female power that challenged them (Kontou 2008: 276). This is the case of Jessie in *The Irregulars*, as she is the most powerful of the group and the one that holds the key to closing the rip. However, she is also seen by her friends as a fragile and helpless child that needs to be protected, as she complains: "I'm just a burden to you all, aren't I? Just someone you have to look after" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 1, 00:38:14-00:38:19).

Likewise, the male protagonists of *The Irregulars* defy Victorian precepts of manhood. Men were forced to visibly perform their 'masculinity,' and were supposed to display "a strong and active physicality" (Lewis 2011: 13). This also implied a "homosexual panic" in their gender performance. Men did not want to appear "too attached to other men" and had to "enter into heterosexual marriage to avoid any doubts about their sexuality and heterosexual identity" (Lewis 2011: 46). Finally, men were supposed to display "manhood." This was "not innate," but "the result of arduous public or private ritual and, for the Victorian bourgeois, of continued demanding self-discipline" (Sussman 1999: 13).

All the male protagonists in *The Irregulars* fail to fulfil these Victorian gender conventions, and would thus not be considered 'real men' for nineteenth-century standards. When Alice was engulfed by the rip, Sherlock was left in charge of their daughters, Bea and Jessie, but he was so devastated by Alice's loss that he could not bring himself to behave like an ideal Victorian father – i.e., a protector and a provider. Instead, he became an opium addict and abandoned the girls at the workhouse, as drugs were the only thing that could numb the pain he felt. Nonetheless, he did not feel guilty for leaving his nuclear family, but for losing his family of choice: the original Irregulars, an amateur group of detectives made up by Alice, Dr Watson and himself. As he tells Jessie, he misses those days of camaraderie: "the darkest of times have a habit of forming the closest of bonds. It's a gift. To feel so connected to others. So close. To be part of a team. Cherish it. Believe me. Doesn't last forever" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 6, 00:23:45-00:24:11).

Sherlock claims that he lost his brilliance and capacity for deduction when Alice disappeared. She had tried to convince him to focus on their family, as he was putting them in danger with his investigations, but Sherlock's thirst for fame and recognition was stronger than his love for his family. In the end, he lost her when they tried to close the rip and she was engulfed by it. He tried to pull her out, but Dr Watson held him so that he would not be absorbed as well. Thus, he is rejected by his daughters for being an absent father and for his lack of self-control as a drug addict. These traits also question his Victorian masculinity and the possibility of his being part of a nuclear family.

Likewise, Billy also defies Victorian male gender conventions. He grew up in the workhouse believing that his mother was a weaver from Manchester that died giving birth to him, and that his father perished fighting for the empire in the Crimean War. Therefore, his only parental figure was a cruel and violent man named Vic, the master of the workhouse, who used to physically abuse Billy and his friends. Like Vic himself tells him:

"I'm the closest thing you ever had to a father" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:09:54-00:09:57). As a child, Bill felt guilty and powerless because he could not protect his friends from Vic's violence. Victorian gender conventions dictated that, as a man, he was supposed to be physically strong and protect his family – in this case, his friends. Thus, now that he is an adult, he has to prove that he is strong and able to provide for them, and he often takes part in clandestine fights in order to make money to support them.

The master's influence over Billy is ultimately seen when, in a fortuitous encounter on the street, Vic attacks him and Billy kills him in self-defence. For Vic, masculinity entails violence and physical strength. He sees Billy as weak because he is an orphan and did not have a male role model growing up: "The trouble is with boys without dads, they don't learn how to be real men. But I'm going to teach you" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 6, 00:42:17-00:42:20). Despite the fact that Billy's actions might be understood as Vic's victory in turning him into a prototypically aggressive working-class man, Vic's taunting and villainy are portrayed as so extreme that the audience is given the opportunity to enjoy his death vicariously. Moreover, Billy is presented as ethical for resisting violence for so long. This is so because, even though Billy has now removed this instance of toxic masculinity from his life, he feels guilty for killing Vic, as his bloody ghost haunts him. This seems to prove that, despite Vic' efforts to transform Billy into a 'real man,' he remains true to his principles.

On a different note, Prince Leopold resembles the disabled prince in Dinah Maria Mulock Craik's *The Little Lame Prince* (1875), as he has been kept hidden from the public eye because he is haemophilic. Therefore, "it would appear as a sign of the nation's weakness to have a prince whose visible appearance did not meet the requirements of being physically active and strong. The eventual visibility of the prince is" key in developing his masculinity (Lewis 2011: 34).

Arias compares the fragmentation of the nuclear family and its corresponding failure of national harmony with the link between disabled bodies and disabled nations in neo-Victorianism (2011: 362). Consequently, Leo's disability would not merely be an outer reflection of his fragmented and flawed family, but also of the corrupted and divided British empire. His family has kept him hidden in a golden cage, making him feel abnormal and unlovable. Yet, when he meets Bea and joins The Irregulars, he feels a sense of belonging that he has never experienced before. They treat him as an equal, since he conceals his true identity at first. When they discover who he really is, he is forced to go back to the palace, where he feels unloved once

again. Nevertheless, Spike reminds him that he is still part of the gang, precisely because he is Othered and damaged:

> Leo: My problem is that I lost the only friends I ever had. My problem is that I-I don't belong anywhere. Not here, not there, nowhere. That's because no matter where I go, I'm always me. I'm too broken to belong.
> Spike: That's why you belong to us (Bidwell 2021: Episode 7, 00:26:20-00:26:27).

Thus, Prince Leopold chooses the Irregulars as his family of choice, the place where he feels respected, loved and protected. Whereas his family see his disability as something shameful that needs to be kept concealed from the public – as it threatens both his masculinity and the nation's stability – his friends accept him as he is and celebrate his capacities.

Finally, Dr Watson is another male character in *The Irregulars* who does not fit Victorian gender conventions. Watson displays self-discipline and restraint and he could be a provider and protector for his prospective family. However, he is not married and lives with another man – Sherlock – to whom he is overtly attached. Other adaptations of Sherlock Holmes had played with the homoerotic subtext present in the relationship between Sherlock and Dr Watson. This is the case of the BBC TV series *Sherlock* and the abovementioned filmic adaptations directed by Ritchie. Here, some paratexual elements – like Robert Downey Jr.'s interviews – arguably predisposed the audience to see the films as "queer texts" (Thomas 2012: 36). This homoerotic desire is explicit in *The Irregulars*, albeit one-sided. Watson confesses to Bea that he has always loved his partner (Bidwell 2021: Episode 7, 00:03:49-00:03:55), but Sherlock was in love with Alice. Thus, Watson opened the first rip that took Alice because he was jealous of her relationship with Sherlock.

Moreover, Dr Watson was as responsible for abandoning Bea and Jessie as Sherlock, since he was the one that took them to the workhouse. He had lost the only family he had ever had, Alice and Sherlock, and did not want to take on the responsibility of providing a home for their daughters. As a consequence, Dr Watson is portrayed here as an egotistical character that only cares about his and Sherlock's wellbeing, even if that means putting other people in danger. Yet, he tries to redeem himself by the end of the series, when he saves Jessie from being engulfed by the second rip, and arguably becomes The Irregulars' father of choice.

Thus, the protagonists of *The Irregulars* are marginalized and rejected by both society and their biological families on account of their gender

transgressions. Investigating the supernatural cases connected to the new the rip has brought them together, forming a family of choice that has granted them a sense of belonging that they had never experienced before. Nonetheless, discovering that Alice, who was trapped in Purgatory, was the one who opened the new rip to return to the world of the living brings to the fore repressed questions about the nuclear family. Alice needs to be pulled back to the other side of the rip so that it can be closed, but she refuses to do so because she does not want to be away from her family anymore. Sherlock and Bea also want Alice to stay and do not care about the consequences.

Sherlock and Bea's attitudes are completely selfish and unethical, yet understandable, because the girls grew up without their mother, and Sherlock has spent the last sixteen years of his life without the love of his life. Jessie and Watson are the only ones that understand the risks that the rip entails. By accessing Bea's fondest memories, Jessie shows her that it is not worth risking that happiness and the safe of humanity for a nuclear family that abandoned them. Bea finally realizes that what tore their family apart was not losing her mother, but repressing all the pain and suffering caused by that loss. Their mother's return has granted them the chance to come to terms with her passing and accept that they have to move on.

Hence, the two sisters decide to let their mother go and embrace their family of choice. The rip absorbs Alice, but it is so powerful that is about to engulf Jessie as well. Whilst Sherlock holds onto Alice to join her on the other side, Watson tries to pull him out again. Bea begs the latter to help her save Jessie, and the doctor finally lets Sherlock go and pulls Jessie out. The rip closes and the girls accept that their father has chosen to go with Alice and abandon them once again, as Bea says: "They definitely loved each other. And I guess some can't exist if they're apart." (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:42:20-00:42:26). Even though Sherlock and Alice have left them again, the series finale ends with a hopeful note, in an emotive scene between Bea and Dr Watson, who will likely adopt the role of a surrogate father to The Irregulars. When Bea complains that "[e]verybody leaves me," Dr Watson replies, "I'm here. I'm not going anywhere" (Bidwell 2021: Episode 8, 00:52:27-00:52:38). Thus, the series favours the family of choice over the nuclear one, as it provides a loving community for Othered characters.

It is also worth considering how the series ambiguously portrays Dr Watson. He is first depicted as egotistical and possessive of Sherlock, when he opened the first rip. Moreover, he did not protect the girls when Sherlock wanted to give them up, although he appears to atone for his sins when he saves Jessie from the rip and becomes a father figure for the kids. However, there is little guarantee that Watson would have remained a surrogate father

to The Irregulars had the series not been cancelled, given the ambivalent manner in which the show has been presenting the character. This would compromise the idea of the family of choice, especially if we also consider Leo's inability to stay with the others because of a deal that saves Billy's life, but forces him back to the palace.

Conclusions

The nuclear family is usually depicted as fragmented and dysfunctional in neo-Victorian TV series. This is the case of *The Irregulars*, where it fails as the institution upholding the nation's principles of community, cooperation and life in society. Likewise, its protagonists challenge Victorian gender conventions that this institution conveyed and, as a result, they are Othered by both society and their relatives. Nevertheless, they could be said to fit neo-Victorian conventions of the unconventional, as they are almost stereotypical neo-Victorian marginalized characters: the strong female protagonist that fiercely protects her family, a tortured character that becomes a drug addict because of past trauma and a woman with supernatural abilities that is marginalized for it.

In neo-Victorian family narratives like *The Irregulars,* one sees a prioritization of the family of choice, since the protagonists have been abandoned by their biological families because of their Othering traits. In their chosen families, there are more collaborative models of life in society and a philosophy of "care for the other" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2021: 39). Furthermore, these neo-Victorian families of choice embrace diversity –e.g., Leo's disability, Jessie's supernatural abilities or Watson's homosexuality–, whereas the nuclear family is portrayed as a conservative institution that rejects those who do not follow gender conventions. Finally, the subversion of traditional family values through the neo-Victorian family of choice arguably dismantles the myth of the ideal nuclear household and promotes other family models in our society, such as childless and queer marriages, monoparental households, or alternative forms to traditional ways of parenting, including adoption or subrogation.

Nonetheless, it is also worth stressing how the plot twists in season 1 sometimes undermine the idea of a chosen family. In the series finale, the Irregulars are abandoned by Alice and Sherlock, who leave them with Watson. This latter character experiences an abrupt change in the series, since he is first portrayed as a jealous, lying and selfish man, who is later redeemed when he saves Jessie from the rip. The fact that he is forgiven in the end, despite his inexcusable betrayal of Alice and Sherlock, and his

refusal to save Bea and Jessie from the workhouse, raises some questions about the series' ethics.

Finally, if we consider the target audience of *The Irregulars* and other recent screen adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, such as the above-mentioned *Enola Holmes* or *Miss Sherlock*, we could consider them as part of a new trend that reimagines Doyle's novels as young adult fiction. These adaptations update the Victorian detective story to become more appealing to a young audience. Moreover, the focus of the series on family and the importance of belonging to a loving and accepting community aligns neo-Victorian young fiction with teen dramas, which could contribute to the increasing popularity of both genres in the coming years.

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