(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction:
Definitions, Terminology, Contexts

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Abstract:
In the event of a new (sub)discipline forming around the postmodern refashioning of the nineteenth century, there are some basic tenets that need clarification. Concerning the research on postmodern fiction rewriting the Victorian novel, detailed discussions of the definition and terminology applied to the group of texts under scrutiny and of the possible discourses they can be contextualised in are still scarce. Therefore, the study begins by, first, surveying the meanings attached to the term *Victorian*, and second, analysing the existing terms and definitions categorising postmodern rewrites of Victorian fiction. Ultimately this should start a debate aimed at finding a suitable term and definition for this group of texts. The final part of the inquiry, examining the discursive contexts these novels appear in, is intended to provide an informative background for the ensuing discussion, pointing towards the emerging interdisciplinarity of the field.

Keywords: adaptation, appropriation, historical fiction, the neo/retro/post-Victorian novel, interdisciplinarity, postmodernism, sequelisation, serialisation, Victorian

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A remarkable trend has emerged in British fiction from the 1960s up to the present day: the production of a significant number of novels and literary biographies which critically engage with the Victorian age and its narratives. This paper will discuss the following texts belonging to this subgenre, variously referred to as neo-, retro-, or post-Victorian literature: Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1990), A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992), Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992), Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000) and Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004). All of these texts revoke and comment on Victorian narratives in various ways, both formally and thematically. Additionally, many of these recent works have themselves become canonised examples of such an endeavour.

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1.   Main Characteristics of Postmodern Rewritings

These postmodern rewrites of Victorian texts keep the average length and structure of Victorian novels: the bulky 500 pages (ranging between 150 and 1000 pages) are usually divided into books or chapters, sometimes preceded by chapter summaries or epigraphs. They imitate prevalent genres of the nineteenth century, such as the Bildungsroman, or the social, industrial and sensation novels, creatively intermingled with conventions of the (auto)biographical and (pseudo)historical novels, thus creating a hybridity of genres abundant in parody and pastiche so characteristic of postmodern novelistic discourse. The narrative design of these novels tends to be like that of their Victorian predecessors' and they typically employ narrative voices of the types dominant in nineteenth-century texts, i.e., the first person character narrator or the third person omniscient one.

The plots of these rewrites either take place in the nineteenth century or span both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. They are usually set at least partly in England, most often in London or in the countryside. Set in the age of the British Empire, the geographical locations may also vary between the centre and the colonies or territories of national interest, such as the West-Indies, Australia or scenes of the Crimean War – and, in the case of twentieth-century plots, between England and its possible reverse coloniser, the United States. Thematically, the texts invoke typical Victorian controversies, such as the definition and status of science, religion, morals, nationhood and identity, and the (re)evaluations of the aims and scope of cultural discourses and products, especially constructions of literary, political, and social histories which also feature prominently in contemporary thought. Furthermore, by creating a dialogue between narratives of the present day and the nineteenth century, strongly based on the concept of intertextuality, contemporary rewrites manage to supply different perspectives from the canonised Victorian ones.

But do we know what we mean by *Victorian*? Does the term refer to an age, a set of conventions, or an image of both based on a limited and biased selection of sources? And what should we call the rewrites of the era: historical novel, post-Victorian fiction or adaptation? And how to specify the differences between them? Why are there so many terms and so few definitions? The following survey constitutes an inquiry into these questions.

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2.   The Meanings of *Victorian*

In their introduction to *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (2000), Alice Jenkins and Juliet John identify *Victorian* as a difficult term, without making any further attempts at defining it. They only point out the fact that *Victorian* can be understood chronologically and non-chronologically, and they welcome the resulting diversity of readings as a constructive means to avoid interpretations that frame the Victorian period in various totalising myths (Jenkins and John 2000: 2). Such a broad understanding of the word seems to be a common attitude at present. It is easy to agree with the emphasis on the plurality of readings the term invites, while a closer scrutiny of its definitional nuances would nevertheless be useful, especially since 'Victorian', a chronically indefinable denomination, carries complexities that also unfold in the attempt to classify its postmodern refashionings.

Referring to Queen Victoria, as head of state, *Victorian* (like Elizabethan) holds a denotative meaning that self-evidently marks the life span of that historical person; however, since it also specifies characteristics of an era, its chronological boundaries often get extended. Various disciplines also employ the term at their convenience. In the case of literary studies, this includes literary historical, literary theoretical, and/or aesthetic applications. Additionally, *Victorian* also triggers connotative readings. These readings depend, on the one hand, on the following era or movement reviewing the earlier period, such as modernism or postmodernism, and on the other hand, on the school of thought emphasising different aspects of the term. Hence feminist, postcolonial and cultural revisions of the term *Victorian* prove crucial for a better understanding of how the postmodern takes issue with the nineteenth-century. Furthermore, all these considerations also influence the terminological choice for twentieth-century refashionings, including novelistic ones.

In current critical usage, the so-called *Victorian* referents of twentieth-century rewritings range from Jane Austen through Thomas Hardy and as far as Virginia Woolf, so the periodisation including all the reworkings gets construed aesthetically rather than historically. This way the concept of the *Victorian* comprises Romantic and pre-war fiction, ignoring historical data like the birth and death of the Queen (Green-Lewis 2000: 30). This premise seems very dangerous to begin with, since, if taken seriously, a system of common aesthetic denominators would have to be

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determined for fiction written between the mid-eighteenth and the early-twentieth centuries, against which we would then compare the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century corpus of texts. To my knowledge, no such endeavour has taken place so far, which, considering the dubiousness of the task, is not surprising. Thus, in the following, the term 'Victorian', used in a temporal sense (and not italicised), will denote the specific historical period of Queen Victoria's reign from 1837-1901.

The connotative meaning of *Victorian*, emerging in parallel with the denotative one immediately after the death of Queen Victoria, was first employed to separate Edwardian attitudes from Victorian ones, where "'Victorian values' took on an almost oedipal quality," partly still retained today (Bullen 1997: 2). An anthropomorphic historiography of the term expands this by now established view, claiming that by the 1950s the threatening fatherly nature of *Victorian* gives way to a more tender grand- or great-grandfatherly remoteness, and then becomes increasingly intimate, sisterly and brotherly from the eighties onwards (Bullen 1997: 1-3). A more progressive critical history of the term argues that binaries not only exist between Victorianism and each historical era it is contrasted with, but that these oppositions also appear within every particular era that rereads the Victorian (Joyce 2002: 7).

The connotative meanings of *Victorian* receive further scrutiny in the context of the postmodern movement. In the sixties, two conflicting attitudes to Victorianism emerged through the discourse of sexuality: on the one hand, *Victorian* referred to everything that stood in the way of sexual freedom; on the other hand, due to the increasing temporal distance from the era, the deconstruction and reassessment of the coherency of the Victorians' supposed sexual repression began to take place. (Kaplan 2007: 85-86). If the same duality is framed within the political context of the eighties, the Thatcherite (mis)interpretation of 'Victorian values' can be juxtaposed with the Kinnockian one: in order to promote the ideology of their own politics, the conservatives employed catchphrases like progress and prosperity, while labour opposed these by the likes of drudgery and squalor to describe the same concept (Joyce 2002: 3-4). Hence, while historicising the term *Victorian,* the construction of binary oppositions surfaces both in the discourses of sexuality and politics, the former pointing out the moment when the term started to acquire contradictory interpretations and the latter reflecting a stage when it was already deconstructed.

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All the above connotations come into play in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992). The text is both a biography and autobiography of two characters, that of Archibald McCandless followed by the heroine Bella Baxter/Victoria McCandless' narrative, framed by the author's introduction and closing critical and historical notes. The competing narrative voices reveal different attitudes to the Victorian age. Giving an account of the couple's courtship and marriage, the establishment of a family and their careers, the happy ending of Archibald's nineteenth-century diary echoes the closing chapter of *Jane Eyre*, emphasised by the remark "Reader, she married me and I have little more to tell" (Gray 2002: 240). Bella/Victoria revises this ending, and asks for the reader's sympathy (again in a very *Jane Eyre*-like fashion): "You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is more probable" (Gray 2002: 272). In case this does not convince the reader, she finally pronounces her distaste for the previous narrative:

> As I said before, to my nostrils the book stinks of Victorianism. It is as sham-gothic as the Scott Monument, Glasgow University, St. Pancras Station and the Houses of Parliament. I hate such structures. Their useless over-ornamentation was paid for out of needlessly high profits: profits squeezed from the stunted lives of children, women and men working more than twelve hours a day, six days a week in NEEDLESSLY filthy factories; for by the nineteenth century we had the knowledge to make things cleanly. We did not use it. The huge profits of the owning classes were too sacred to be questioned. (Gray 2002: 275)

Fictitiously written in 1914, this highly dismissive reaction to the Victorian age betrays a typically modernist refusal in a distinctly oedipal tone. The concerns voiced about Victorian economic and social policies echo the Kinnockian view of the era as one of ignorance, poverty and social inequality, countering the Thatcherite interpretation depicting the period as an age of general progress, enrichment and prosperity. Bella/Victoria's self-assertive feminist narrative finally meets correction by the author's closing notes to the novel. This tends to reinstate Archibald's version of the story by means of patriarchal revision, claiming that the heroine could only show her

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talent because her husband let her do so and that, in reality, she was quite mad (again, a reiteration of *Jane Eyre*'s madwoman topos). Similarly to Bella/Victoria's earlier attack on her husband, the author indirectly blames his character for being too Victorian, citing a purported earlier commentator from 1920, namely the socialist reformer and economist Beatrice Webb: "She is now quite sex-mad - an erotomaniac, to use the older term - and tries to hide it under prim language which shows she is still, at heart, a subject of Queen Victoria" (Gray 2002: 308). This remark sheds light on the controversial rhetoric and perception of Victorian sexuality as an issue of modernist as well as postmodernist criticism. The fact that she has two names – "Bella", used mainly in her private sphere, and "Victoria" employed in the public domain of her life – further complicates the interpretation of this sentence, and of the heroine's role in the novel on the whole, generating allusions to the much-discussed figure of Queen Victoria herself.[1]

        More contemporary readings of *Victorian* in our own time are similarly ideological and, hence, structuralist in nature, to return to the previously raised notion of binary oppositions. So, as much *Victorian* may be read as "a dialectical condensation of [...] contrary tendencies" (Joyce 2002: 7), we always have to be conscious of our own investment in the interpretation process (Joyce 2002: 15). In my view, the current investment mainly involves a drive to unearth – or invent – material not part of the official historiography of the nineteenth century, and utilise this to reinterpret the Victorians: witness the ever-growing number of literary biographies, such as Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1990) or Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), narratives of Charles Dickens and Henry James respectively. Matthew Sweet's *Inventing the Victorians* (2001) proves a successful critical venture in reinstating the Victorians, where, following a discussion of many sources that counter the cliché-like understanding of the Victorians as repressed, oppressed and dull, the author reminds us in a good Foucaultian spirit that "Victorian culture was as rich and difficult and complex and pleasurable as our own" (Sweet 2001: xxiii). Hence, he suggests not only that we are more Victorian than the Victorians, but also that we *are* the Victorians. On the one hand, we increasingly begin to acknowledge that "they [the Victorians] moulded our culture, defined our sensibilities, built a world for us to live in" (Sweet 2001: 231); on the other, we continue to deny our affinities with them, delimiting ourselves against

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the Victorians, thus acting as repressively and dully as we accuse them of having done.

By presenting these current attempts at differentiation within *Victorian,* I intended to emphasise the plurality of possible relationships with the Victorian era. Accordingly, the term, acquiring different possible readings in the sixties, in the eighties/nineties, and at present, summons a diachronic understanding, simultaneously inviting a synchronic one of multiple interpretations. Therefore, these different approaches can be read together, rather than against one another. Consequently, attitudes to current reworkings seem to be determined by a synthesis of the denotative and connotative meanings of the term *Victorian*. This, at the moment, allows for quite a number of possible interpretations, which readily shows in the abundance of terms used for rewrites, discussed further below.

3.   Appropriating *Victorian*: Terming Postmodern Rewrites
Is it *Victoriana*, *Victoriographies*, *retro-, neo-* or *post-Victorian novels* we encounter when we read rewritings of the Victorian era? Shall we adhere to the already well-rehearsed term *historiographic metafiction* or simply call them all *historical novels*? Could we categorise them as adaptations, prequels or sequels of Victorian texts, disguised as nineteenth-century novels, but in fact postmodern variations of them? Are they instances of *pseudo-Victorian* or *pseudo-historical novels*? Why so many terms? Why so many different perspectives? In the following I will review the terminology applied so far and deduce *post-Victorian fiction* as the most suitable at present, especially because, similarly to *Victorian*, it displays nuances in both the historical and the aesthetic realms and does not yet seem to exhibit enough distinctive features that would allow its separation from the current postmodern context. I will also point out the integrative nature of this term, which blends in with the interdisciplinarity of research in the field.

Two broad approaches to terming postmodern fictional reworkings of the Victorian era can be distinguished: one makes the literary critical terminology of the novel, such as *historical fiction* or *historiographic metafiction* its foundation, while the other takes the historically or culturally perceived term *Victorian* as a basis and attaches prefixes or suffixes to it, thus constructing *neo-, retro-, post-Victorian* or *Victoriana*, in order to recontextualise current rewrites in different ideological discourses. Some

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attempts synthesise the two and create hybridised terms like *Victoriography* to define the group of texts in question.

   Historical fiction, itself a term constantly redefined, proves the broadest possible category applied to current rewrites. In the spirit of Hayden White's *Metahistory,* Linda Hutcheon coined the term *historiographic metafiction* to depict a postmodern subgenre of the novel that interacts with history and, at the same time, questions the possibility of such a venture. As part of a general ideological discussion about whether we presently experience the end of history or a new beginning of it,[2] these two subcategories of fiction, *historiographic metafiction* and *historical fiction* engage in a dialogue. On the one hand, they compete, since the annexation of either by the other can be reasoned for (*historiographic metafiction* being just a postmodern subcategory of *historical fiction*, or *historiographic metafiction* debunking *historical fiction* as its identical category; on the other hand, their ongoing mutual modification may end in their merging or perhaps giving birth to a third category integrating both of them.[3]

   Whichever way we interpret the terms, the present stage of the dialogue yields denominations like *pseudo-historical fiction* or *contemporary historical fiction* (Bormann 2002: 75), both employed to describe postmodern rewrites of the Victorian era as well. The term *pseudo-Victorian fiction* (Gutleben 2001: 50; 56; Letissier 2004: 111) refines the classification further by also indicating their convergence with, and divergence from, their source. However, since history has by now been deconstructed as, at least partly, narrative in essence, depriving the term *pseudo-historical* of any heuristic power, the same prognosis could be given to the term *pseudo-Victorian*, especially since it is precisely its postmodern rewrites that take an active part in the deconstruction of the Victorian novel, naturally affecting the term *Victorian* itself.

   Thus numerous critics propose that, since rewrites of Victorian texts fit the definition, that is to say, they engage with history in a paradoxical way, they should be grouped as *historiographic metafictions*.[4] The use of this terminology is justified since it leaves room for many different types of rewrites, encouraging a comparison of the postmodern understanding of Victorian texts and of rewrites of Renaissance, Romantic or Modernist ones. Nevertheless, if only for heuristic purposes, a more specific terminology for reworkings of Victorian texts, rather than texts of any/all earlier periods per se, could be revealing in its descriptive power. Accordingly, the alternative

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term *Victoriography* presents itself as an option. Julian Wolfreys's book on contemporary rewrites bears this title,[5] and he employs the same term for one of his university courses, defining *Victoriographies* as "cultural writing formed out of interpretations and translations of the high ground of nineteenth-century culture" (Wolfreys 2001). Both his book and the survey course apparently relate mainly to fiction; hence this definition, inclusive of all kinds of rewritings of the Victorian era, literary and otherwise, not to mention the wider interpretation of text as product, sounds somewhat broad. However, *Victoriography* proves a useful term for locating reworkings of Victorian texts as part of the already established postmodern discourse of historiographical metafiction, and it helpfully also includes the sound pattern of the word *historiography*.

In his *Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel: A Poetics (And Two Case-Studies)* (2002), Daniel Bormann consciously combines the two approaches to defining postmodern fictional rewrites of Victorian texts, those of novelistic discourse and cultural-historical criticism. Discussing the aspect of literary terminology, he first adopts Ansgar Nünning's definition of historical fiction (Nünning 1995),[6] which applies to novels based on the tension between past and present, dealing with subject matters that belong to history, historiography and the philosophy of history on all narrative levels and discourses (Bormann 2002: 55). Following Nünning's typology, he then selects some subtypes of historical novels to limit his analysis to the discussion of *contemporary historical fiction*, a term referring to the broader category of novels in question, distinct from traditional or classic historical fiction (Bormann 2002: 56-59). As a second step, he gives a brief account of existing definitions based on the term *Victorian,* specifying different cultural-historical understandings of current rewrites of Victorian fiction. He finally arrives at his own choice, the term *neo-Victorian novel*, which he then defines by applying the adopted definition of the historical novel to postmodern reworkings of Victorian texts (Bormann 2002: 61-62). This connection of the two approaches, specifying the second as part of the broader context of the first, proves an important move. Although Bormann's terminological historiography is not developed in-depth in this work, he identifies the lack of a consensual and well-argued definition as a serious research gap in the field (Bormann 2002: 18). Before exploring his preferred definition further, a short detour of other applications of the terms *retro-* and *neo-Victorian novel* seems appropriate.

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        In her article 'Natural History: The Retro-Victorian Novel' (1998),
Sally Shuttleworth coins the titular term *retro-Victorian novel*, which she
uses interchangeably with the expression *Victorian-centred novel*. She
identifies *retro-Victorian fiction* as a type of historical novel, and explains
that the category of historical novel is broadly understood and thus inclusive
of historiographic metafiction (Shuttleworth 1998: 254). The author delimits
her analysis to a specific subset of *retro-Victorian novels* – explicitly
nostalgic texts that engage with the discourse of natural history – but does
not provide any further definition (Shuttleworth 1998: 253). Similarly, Dana
Shiller's seminal paper 'The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel'
(1997) introduces the term *neo-Victorian novel* "as at once characteristic of
postmodernism and imbued with a historicity reminiscent of the nineteenth-
century novel" (Shiller 1997: 538), though once again a more complex
definition fails to emerge. Both critics attempt to disprove Fredric
Jameson's critique of our current "historical deafness" (Jameson 1996: xi)
by demonstrating that retro- or neo-Victorian novels reveal an in-depth
engagement with history (Shuttleworth 1998: 266) and considerably enrich
the postmodern present (Shiller 1997: 558). While such an apology for the
artistic merit of contemporary rewrites has validity, the argument for the
current value of history and historicity may remain trapped within the
Jamesonian framework of recuperative practices towards the past (Jameson
1996: x-xi), unless a greater differentiated emphasis is accorded these
novels' specific relationship to the postmodern context.
        In his *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the
Contemporary British Novel* (2001), Christian Gutleben identifies a similar
fracture between nostalgically inclined and innovative strategies of
novelistic texts approaching history, which seems to raise terminological
problems as well. Initially, he adopts Shuttleworth's term *retro-Victorian
fiction*, which he uses interchangeably with *neo-Victorian*, interpreting it as
"a new literary movement whose very essence consisted in re-thinking and
rewriting Victorian myth and stories" (Gutleben 2001: 5). Surveying this
body of novels, the author later revisits the terminology and pinpoints a
paradoxical state where "the most famous neo-Victorian novels are the least
typical"(Gutleben 2001: 164). This means that apart from some well-known
examples which comply with postmodernist conventions, like John
Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), numerous novels in the
group, like Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998), resist them and

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"seem to partake of Habermas' category of *neo-Conservative fiction*" (Gutleben 2001: 164). Although the discrepancy between the heterogeneity of texts and their categorisation as *retro-Victorian novels* receives some attention, in the end the original terminology is retained.

Repairing this shortage of elaborate descriptions of *retro-* and *neo-Victorian fiction*, Bormann takes Nünning's typology of historical fiction detailed above, applies it to the term *neo-Victorian novel,* and constructs the following definition:

> [a] neo-Victorian novel is a fictional text which creates meaning from the background of awareness of time as flowing and as poised uneasily between *the Victorian* past and the present; which secondly deals dominantly with topics which belong to the field of history, historiography and/or the philosophy of history *in dialogue with a Victorian past*; and which thirdly can do so at all narrative levels and in any possible discursive form, be it through the narration of action, through static description, argumentative exposition or stream-of-consciousness techniques. (Bormann 2002: 62)

This definition contextualises postmodern rewrites as a specific group within historical fiction, establishing a relationship between history and fiction with a particular relevance to the Victorian age, yet it opens up the possibility of further delimitation. How exactly should "meaning" be understood that emerges from the intermingling of the Victorian past and the present? And which (sub)genres, narrative types and stratifications get reactivated by neo-Victorian fiction and why? In addition, the way the author makes his terminological choice implies a certain dissatisfaction with the existing possibilities: "If I will adopt Shiller's *neo-Victorian novel,* it is only because it resembles other approaches to contemporary literary phenomena […] and because, indeed, this kind of contemporary Victorian novel is a new – *neo* – phenomenon" (Bormann 2002: 61). Thinking along these lines, a detailed analysis of the parallels between neo-Victorian and other movements with the same prefix, like the neo-Renaissance or the neo-Gothic, could expand Bormann's reasoning. Similarly, the newness of a movement that has been in vogue for almost fifty years also deserves further periodisation, however useful it proves to call it (still) new. This process

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necessarily involves a closer scrutiny of the nature of these texts'
relationship with different aspects of postmodernism substantiating the
implied expectation of freshness and novelty.

Also comprising novels that are more innovative than nostalgic, the
term *post-Victorian*, applied by Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich provides
a comparable contextual background. Viewing contemporary rewrites from
a late-postmodernist angle, they define *post-Victorian* as "a term that
conveys paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption" (Sadoff and
Kucich 2000: xiii). Georges Letissier also adopts the term *post-Victorian*,
explaining his choice by suggesting that contrary to *retro-, neo- or pseudo-
Victorian*, *post-Victorian* "conflates *post*-modernism and *Victorianism*,
highlighting the paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption that
underpin the *post-Victorian* cultural movements" (Letissier 2004: 111).
Letissier implicitly suggests an important argument in favour of opting for
post-Victorian amongst competing possible terms, namely, that it
connotatively blends the Victorian, the modernist and the postmodernist
eras. This current integrativity of postmodernism demonstrates a substantial
move away from the exclusive nature it exhibited in the seventies:
"postmodernism became more and more an inclusive term that gathered to
itself all literary and cultural phenomena that could not be classified as
either Realist or Modernist" (Bertens 1986: 25).

Interpreting the prefix *post-* of *postmodern,* Brian McHale points out
the complexity of the relationship between the two eras encompassed by the
term: it includes a temporal posteriority, with postmodernism coming *after*
modernism, and it also implies a logical or historical consequentiality,
meaning that the postmodern follows *from* modernism (McHale 1999: 5).
By analogy, the prefix *post-* in the term *post-Victorian* may be read in at
least two senses: first, as a modifier of *Victorian* underlining the presence of
the Victorian tradition in everything that comes after, and second, as the
first part of the compound *postmodern* signalling that contemporary
practices are perceived to stem more from the Victorian than the modernist
era. In fact, the argument Fredric Jameson advances in his rejection of the
term *postmodernism*, namely that surveys under that heading do not yield
substantial results concerning the postmodern but inform us of modernism
instead (Jameson 1996: 66), can be fruitfully adapted to the analysis of *post-
Victorian*. Since *Victorian* itself still lacks a comprehensive referent, the
utilisation of *post-Victorian* to approach contemporary (re)interpretations of

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Victorian material may similarly yield substantial knowledge of the *Victorian*. Consequently, if the meaning of *post-* is contextualised in the postmodern debate, used both to depict whatever comes after modernism or structuralism and to signify a subversion of these trends, its reading can be harmonised with that of *Victorian*: both terms have a temporal as well as an aesthetic perspective.

Given the choice of prefixes attached to *Victorian* analysed above, I would summarise their suitability as follows. *Neo- and retro-Victorian fiction* both foreground the notion *Victorian*, differing temporally in perspective. Their interchangeability seems a general consensual but unreflected critical practice. Bormann proposes that these two prefixes denote the same group of texts only differing in focus: *retro-* emphasises the past and *neo-* the future (Bormann 2002: 61). Hence the main terminological accent is not only on the nineteenth-century era, but the relationship of the texts to the current postmodern context implicit in these prefixes needs more elaboration. The term *post-Victorian* comprises both historical settings without immediately taking a stance on the hierarchy of the eras. Those who use *post-Victorian* stress the existing debate between the nostalgic and innovative aspects of *Victorian* (Sadoff and Kucich 2000) and raise awareness of its historicity (Letissier 2004). Additionally, rather than having either the Victorian or the postmodern movement as the focus of their analysis, they usually examine the two together.

The suffix -a has also become an increasingly popular ending attached to the term, hence the word *Victoriana* to name postmodern rewritings of Victorian texts. Originally, the term was restricted to an exclusively material definition, denoting objects from the Victorian era. If employed in this sense, it lacks an explanation given its etymology (see e.g. Sadoff and Kucich 2000: xxii). Cora Kaplan, whose recent book bears *Victoriana* as its title, applies the term differently. Therefore she provides its historiographical context in her introduction, which reveals a gradual expansion of the semantic field of the word. Although in the 1960s *Victoriana* may still have referred to material remains of the nineteenth century, by the end of the seventies it was extended to a "miscellany of evocations and recyclings" of the age, to finally broaden its meaning to practically all "representations and reproductions for which the Victorian […] is the common referent," (Kaplan 2007: 3). This periodisation sounds convincing and explains Kaplan's choice of the same term for postmodern

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rewritings of the age, although she does not offer examples to illustrate this observation. Examples would be especially welcome because those who use the term in its original sense feel the need to add a qualifier to make it fit contemporary (con)texts, hence the term *Postmodern Victoriana,* which depicts products of a postmodern Victorian mode (such as literary, screen or stage adaptations of Victorian novels or artistic objects inspired by the era), considering the postmodern as the Victorian's historical other (Sadoff and Kucich 2000: x, xi).

Modified or on its own, the term *Victoriana,* just like *Victoriographies,* invites a broader frame of reference than just the fictional, since it relates to various representations, not only novels. Terms like *historical novel* or *historiographic metafiction* prove necessary in a generic sense, but they do not specify the age that is being refashioned. The terms *neo-* and *retro-Victorian fiction* designate the era but lack an emphasis of the postmodernist influence in these texts. Therefore, at the moment, the term *post-Victorian novel* lends itself as the most suitable to denote contemporary reworkings of Victorian texts, especially in that the interdisciplinary nature of research into the post-Victorian phenomenon, examined below, appears to ask for its integrative qualities.

4.   Contexts and Critical Discourses of Post-Victorian Fiction

Being a new research field, the framework of post-Victorian studies is still in the making. This section aims to review the disciplines and discourses that reflect on the post-Victorian phenomenon, in particular, through the post-Victorian novel. Literary criticism constitutes the most obvious context to look for discussions of the subject. Some studies, such as Gutleben's *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001) and Kaplan's *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), are exclusively devoted to examining how the post-Victorian phenomenon interacts with fiction, while others focussing more generally on literary history or the novel increasingly dedicate space to the analysis of rewritings, usually by way of a separate chapter towards the end of the collection.[7] Thus it seems that we can hardly address Victorian texts without reflecting on their rewritings too, and likewise the discussion of the novel as a genre proves difficult without considering the influence that literary adaptation has on its reception.

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Apart from literary studies, film and cultural criticism also represent fruitful platforms for discussions of the post-Victorian event. The collection *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (2004) edited by Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben not only surveys literary texts, but also how literature is adapted to the screen, thus inviting further research on post-Victorianism in the fields of adaptation and film studies.[8] Addressing an even wider spectrum of material culture, Kucich and Sadoff's *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000) surveys the dialogue of the Victorian and post-Victorian eras in the broader framework of cultural studies. Besides connections of social and political ideologies with economic production and reproduction, a range of art forms and technologies from photography to computing constitute sites of engagement as well.

This expansion of interest in rewriting and reinterpreting the Victorian has also interacted with some changes in postmodern theories of thought and political movements, such as feminism, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism or nationalism, affecting racial, sexual, economic and social policies.[9] Similarly, it has gone hand in hand with practical political and cultural influences, like the Thatcherite appropriation of Victorianism[10] the political practice ever since, or the mass production and consumption of Victoriana. These influences affect changes in various cultural and material perceptions, from trends in marketing and consumerism to literary prize distribution and concepts of national identity (Todd 1996; Strongman 2002). The common motivating factor for researchers of the described disciplines, discourses and contexts engaging with the post-Victorian phenomenon seems to be precisely its immense range, popularity and possible prestige, which they are trying to identify and explain in different but overlapping ways.

The perception of Victoriana as an inventor and coloniser of genres (Kaplan 2007: 4) or the view that the "[t]he Retro-Victorian novel is not a new genre, it is the novel of all genres, the composite novel of its epoch, which highlights the cannibalising, ever-broader, all-encompassing and all-assimilating nature of the novel" (Gutleben 2001: 223) illustrates how critics regard the effect post-Victorian fiction has on literary conventions. This being the case, one may ask what is happening to the genre of the novel. Is it becoming the dominant genre usurping all others? Is it being deconstructed into many different genres? Or is it being reshaped in other,

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as yet undefined ways? As the above observations show, the concept of rewriting definitely influences our perception of the novel. Anne Humpherys claims, for example, that novelistic texts are always in discussion with other texts, repeating old stories and existing conventions, so that the novel inherently reveals itself as a genre of rewriting and thus a postmodern project (Humpherys 2005: 444-445). In this framework, post-Victorian texts engaging with their nineteenth century predecessors indicate both generic and thematic repetitions in fiction, best visible in novels with a double plot, such as A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) or Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992).

The nature of these repetitions, most frequently termed *adaptations* or *appropriations*,[11] places them in the framework of the literary postmodern movement. They exhibit characteristics of nostalgia, especially in the case of the heritage film, at the same time as they display critical perspectives, particularly in postcolonial and feminist revisions of canonical texts. A case in point of the latter would be the adaptive chain of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)*,* Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, Edward Rochester's first wife, gets the most narrative space, while Rochester remains an unnamed speaker. *Charlotte* has two female narrators, Jane (responsible for the nineteenth-century plot) and Miranda (taking charge of the twentieth-century line of events), while Robert Rochester, Edward's son and Jane's later lover in the West-Indies, as well as Miranda's father, only earn space at the end of the novel where their letter and diary, respectively, amend the text.

Besides foregrounding female narrative voices, the geographical location of the events is also revised in both rewritings of *Jane Eyre*: they retain an English countryside setting but most of the plot of *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place in the tropical West-Indies, and Jane's pilgrimage in *Charlotte* also leads to the West-Indies in search of Antoinette and Rochester's son, a journey which Miranda repeats to give a conference paper on Charlotte Brontë in the twentieth-century plot of the novel. Furthermore, the sexuality of all three female characters receives emphasis in the tropical location: Antoinette's sexual explorations take place in her home and not in the English country house where she is later locked up; Jane becomes a lover to Robert Rochester in the West-Indies after the death of her impotent husband back in England; and Miranda gets involved in

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various sexual affairs with the locals of Martinique, countering her frustrating marriage back home.

Having a double plot, *Charlotte* creates a site for a more intimate dialogue of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in both historical and fictional contexts. Moreover, since it is not only an adaptation of *Jane Eyre* but also of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel assumes a synthesising role in the adaptive chain of a Victorian novel across three centuries. On a metafictional level, the text also continuously reflects on the pathetic and ironic nature of the act of rewriting itself, which both Miranda and, of course, the author of the novel practice, ranging from plagiarism, through imitation, to adaptation, raising issues of copyright, originality and authorship. Thus, *Charlotte* integrates the nineteenth- and mid-twentieth-century texts in a double plot with the late twentieth-century narrator, who becomes the ghostwriter of the Victorian author, and connects the prevalent discourses of colonialism and sexuality with those of producing and reproducing literature, hence linking the political and the erotic to the aesthetic.

Both adaptive texts seem to illustrate the suggestion that an ongoing engagement with *Jane Eyre* today can raise awareness of the metropole's failure to solve numerous problems following the abolition of slavery, and to the unsuccessful strategy of naïve idealism and escapism employed instead (Kaplan 2006: 207). Trying to make sense of the English-Jamaican context in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette envisions "Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English" and her mother "so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either" (Rhys 1968: 19). The identity of Antoinette's mother gets voiced in the binary negative only. Hence, besides narrating what she is not, it also becomes clear that against the dominant discourse she appears a non-entity. Self-confidence features as the only characteristic of Englishness and that, too, sounds suspiciously ironic, thus suggestive of pretence, as also illustrated by Daniel's remark, which highlights escapist strategies: the colonisers shy away from connecting with the colonised on the basis of their racial superiority: "A tall fine English gentleman like you, you don't want to touch a little yellow rat like me eh? [….] You believe me, but you want to do everything quiet like the English can" (Rhys 1968: 96). Miranda's reflections on the population of the ex-colony in *Charlotte* reiterate this still unresolved exploitative context and how it continues to affect twentieth-century identities as well:

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France and Europe, that had given him good roads and
unemployment benefit, and in return demanded that he give
up only his proud independence and become a slave. And the
tragedy was […] that he couldn't see any way of *not* being a
slave; trapped by the state's benevolence [.…] The plantation
slaves of the last century could rebel, or try to escape,
because life was toil and suffering; but there was no escaping
from the soft life. (Thomas 2000: 80)

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the feminist revision of *Jane Eyre* closely
intertwines with the postcolonial one. Firstly, the English white middle class
woman's perspective is simply omitted by denying Jane a voice and
foregrounding narratives of hybrid identities instead. Secondly, Antoinette's
renaming by her English husband and her relocation to England deprive her
of her identity. As she reflects from her attic prison:

Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and
I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents,
her pretty clothes and her looking-glass. There is no looking
glass here and I don't know what I am like now [….] Now
they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this
place and who am I? (Rhys 1968: 144)

In *Charlotte*, the white middle class woman returns twice, in the narrative
voices of Jane and Miranda. If read as an adaptation of both *Jane Eyre* and
Wide Sargasso Sea, here the postcolonial and feminist revisions also
interweave but in a more subtle way. Topicalising the ignorance many
Victorian women were left in concerning their sexuality, Jane (as opposed
to Antoinette) is allowed a sexual-sensual pilgrimage, which ends in a
quasi-incestuous relationship with her step-son, Robert. Her liberated state
does not last long, however: she soon dies of tropical fever, a prototypical
ending suggesting that metropolitans cannot acclimatise to the colonies, or
more dramatically, that the colony takes its revenge on the coloniser, as they
do in the case of Rhys' male narrator also. Nevertheless, contrary to
Antoinette's story, in Miranda's account relocation and renaming have a
liberating effect. In the West-Indies she satisfies her sexual appetite and

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happily goes along with her accidental renaming to Charlotte Brontë, an understandable choice considering how she perceives herself:

> I'd gone to university, got into sex and drugs, failed my first exams, had my first breakdown, then went to a third-rate poly where I scraped a pass (almost impossible not to) and met David, Art and Design Tutor with Wife and Toddler [….] Then marriage, kids, Valium, a flat in Sidcup, a maisonette in Blackheath, a lectureship in Women's Studies in the same third-rate poly, now laughingly described as a university, a minor reputation as a narrowly-based academic, Prozac, an increasing urge to escape from reality into fiction [….] There you have it, dear reader. (Thomas 2000: 109)

Compared to Jane's anxious call to her "Dear Reader," asking for understanding and acknowledgement, Miranda's address to the reader marks a disillusioned pilgrimage, admitting a number of problems inherent in white middle class women's lives. So, besides on-going critical reactions to *Jane Eyre*, novelistic reiterations also examine these still unresolved issues in today's discourse of feminism (Kaplan 2007: 25). As the above quote shows, these concerns range from the twentieth-century refashioning of the Victorian madness topos, through questioning the constructions of white, middle class, female identities in marriage and professional life, to the escapism into other fictional identities, and into writing and rewriting. As the adaptive chain of the three novels shows, critique and fiction are intertwined, pointing towards the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of criticism and the ideological usefulness of appropriating and revisiting nineteenth-century polemics.

Adaptation studies also provide a good example for the emerging interdisciplinarity of research invited by the post-Victorian phenomenon, where the templates for cinematic readings of canonical novels developed by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan are widely applied in film studies but also imported back into discussions of literary adaptation (Cartmell and Whelehan 1999). Julie Sanders does this in her comparative analysis of two literary processes of rewriting: adaptation and appropriation. She establishes that in the case of the former, a source-text is always identifiable, whereas in that of the latter it may either not be obvious or not

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exist at all (Sanders 2006: 26). Thus, appropriation proves more independent and more critical than adaptation (Sanders 2006: 4). In the context of this ongoing adaptation fever – with multiple post-Victorian perspectives available on the story of *Jane Eyre*, for example– might it eventually become impossible for readers ignorant of the texts' first publication dates to establish whether *Wide Sargasso Sea* or *Charlotte*[12] was written first? And, in the future, might non-academic readers even lose track of the *original* text? If this turns out to be the case, following Sanders's definitions, all adaptations may be in danger (or luck?) of becoming appropriations.

This anxiety concerning problems of texts' temporality and authenticity in chains of adaptation or appropriation reveals itself in other frequently used terms like *prequel, sequel* or *aftering*.[13] Unlike the terms discussed in the previous section of this paper, such as *neo-* or *post-Victorian* that encompass cultural matter beyond fiction, *appropriation, adaptation, prequels, sequels* and *afterings* feature in this section because they are seen as exclusively referential to dramatic, filmic or fictional adaptations of Victorian material. The abundance of terms not only shows that contemporary rewritings require classification and characterisation, but possibly also indicate changes in our reading habits. There are current experiments being conducted at various levels of readership of Victorian and post-Victorian fiction, from leisurely reading clubs to professional university classes, to reintroduce the reading of long novels in serial format as was common in the nineteenth century. This enterprise betrays complex cultural considerations. David Barndollar and Susan Schorn for example, propose that with the reintroduction of serialised reading, audiences would refocus their attention to text and context, re-establishing a relationship between reading, literature, and aspects of life more generally. They report on their experiments of subjecting groups of people to reading Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and *Tale of Two Cities* in monthly and weekly instalments, respectively, and explain the relevance and possible success of reading in serial format by relating it to methods of consumption audiences employ for digesting today's media soaps (Barndollar and Schorn 2002: 168-169). A certain cultural anxiety manifests itself behind this observation, raising questions about the public's abilities and willingness to read. Hence, the potential advertisement and publication of classics and their rewritings

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in a serialised format may also function as another attempt to save the Gutenberg-galaxy, especially literature.

The relationship between the serialisation and the sequelisation of fiction seems to me another paradoxical postmodern venture: by (re)introducing the novel series, never-ending novels come into being, which point towards the (re)establishment of the, by now supposedly deconstructed, grand narratives typical of the Victorian era.[14] Thus nineteenth-century literary conventions and the canon are reinforced at the same time as they are deconstructed. This duplicity of interpretation also informs opinions on post-Victorian fiction's impact on the literary canon. It conserves the canon by making people reread Victorian novels, while simultaneously (re)discovering, revaluing and transforming it (Letissier 2004: 112). As Gutleben describes, post-Victorian novels affect the canon in an oxymoronic way, namely, by the nostalgic subversion/reinforcement of the Victorian era and its texts (Gutleben 2001: 192).

Another theoretical implication of post-Victorian fiction is that it invites current redefinitions of postmodernism. A number of critics perceive the postmodern movement as witnessing a revolutionary phase in the sixties, followed by a conventionalisation of these changes during the eighties, to reach its present phase with a tendency to synthesise its own paradoxes. In his *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale outlines one of the central theses of postmodernism, claiming that while modernist fiction foregrounds epistemological issues, the dominant concerns of postmodernism are ontological (McHale 1999: 9-11). Alexander Marguerite questions this proposition in the early nineties, raising awareness that a number of late-twentieth-century British novels resist this distinction (Marguerite 1990: 22-23), and Gutleben explicitly disproves it in the case of post-Victorian texts (Gutleben 2001: 50-51). So, regarding today's state of the postmodern movement and its artistic products, rather than arguing for their opposition, critics suggest a compromise between modernist and postmodernist features (Butler 2002: 125-127). Hence post-Victorian fiction may also facilitate a terminological correction to postmodernism. This may eventually mean a move to another "condition," by renaming it syncretism, thereby focussing on its inclusive strategies of amalgamating previous aesthetic traditions and synthesising opposing ideologies (Gutleben 2001: 220-223). Similarly, as well as adding to the existing body of literature, the postmodern processes of adaptation and appropriation are interpreted as phenomena in the vein of

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Darwin and Derrida (Sanders 2006: 160), in other words, both evolutionary and revolutionary, de- and reconstructionist.[15]

Simultaneously, and probably deeply interconnected with its synthesising tendencies, postmodernism is also perceived as a movement becoming increasingly referential, re-centring ethics and historical knowledge at the heart of academic enquiry. In this context the novel becomes an important epistemological tool, of which post-Victorian fiction functions as a significant indicator (Gutleben and Onega 2004: 14). This position receives further specification in the statement that post-Victorian novels take a crucial part in narrating historical memory and influencing political attitudes beyond Britain's former empire (Kaplan 2007: 162). The changing perception of the Booker Prize provides an example for such an influence. In the last few decades, the Booker has frequently been awarded to post-Victorian novels, such as Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* in 1988 or A. S. Byatt's *Possession* in 1990. Other important works revising nineteenth-century historical events, like Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998) on the Crimean War or Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000) on colonial Tasmania, have been short-listed. Accordingly, Luke Strongman's *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (2002) engages with English fiction as an active participant in the ongoing process of negotiating national/cultural identities, raising awareness of the importance of the critical capacities of novels in framing contemporary historical reality.

Historical relevancies evoked by the post-Victorian phenomenon inform various contexts from the point of view of cultural studies as well. One way to make use of Victorian theory and culture is to employ it for historical nostalgia, attributing historical emergences such as modern conceptions of periodisation, history, or culture to the Victorian age, in order to promote epistemological narcissism, and economic or material commodification (Sadoff and Kucich 2000: xxvi). This point of view echoes Fredric Jameson's attitude to historical fictions as a compensation for present day impotence to facilitate historical changes (Jameson 1996: 369). Instead of only looking at post-Victorian novels as instances of wishful thinking, I would side with the argument for a more constructive application of our knowledge of Victorianism in a post-Victorian environment, using Victorian narratives to work out ways of being in the future (McGowan

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2000: 24), as demonstrated by the above case study of the adaptive chain of *Jane Eyre* and its rewrites.

The enlisted debates contextualised in literary, film, and cultural studies, as well as theoretical and political movements, show that the post-Victorian phenomenon constitutes a fruitful discursive site for diverse ideological schools, which may also explain the popularity of post-Victorian fiction. As an inevitable appropriation creating anxieties concerning originals, definitions, or historiographies, the post-Victorian novel proves a typical postmodern site of easy corruptibility, as illustrated by the paradoxical explanations of its effects on literary conventions, the canon, reading habits and the postmodern movement. Comparable to the aesthetic redefinitions of postmodernism, regarding its ideological implications for politics, history, and culture, the post-Victorian too features a terminological abundance in need of clarification. How much post-Victorian fiction is intertwined with current changes in the discourses of the postmodern is probably best illustrated by the fact that the same prefixes of neo-, reverse- or post- that are affixed to contemporary rewritings of Victorian fiction are also attached to words like feminism, colonialism, imperialism, nation, state or culture in the process of their reinterpretation.

As for the future, the paradoxical interpretations of post-Victorian fiction may result in further disciplinary changes. The current effort to save literary studies by reiterating and reforming the canon can soon work in another way, too, namely by pushing literature towards criticism. In some cases fiction is already regarded as both a cultural document and a form of criticism, which may imply a slow merging of literary criticism into cultural studies. Another consequence of this change may be that post-Victorianism becomes not only a theoretical, but also a more applied science, thus exemplifying the integration of humanities, explaining and prognosticating social and cultural changes. Whichever way it goes, at present, the research into post-Victorian fiction is clearly accomplished in an increasingly interdisciplinary framework.

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Notes

1. For a relevant feminist analysis that puts the Queen's attempt to harmonise her private and public lives in parallel with similar difficulties faced by today's feminist academics, see Laurie Langbauer's 'Queen Victoria and Me', (Langbauer 2000: 211-233).
2. See Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1975) and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) on a prevalent historical consciousness and an interest in establishing new historical approaches in theoretical movements like New Historicism, Neo-Marxism and Cultural Studies.
3. Brian McHale partakes in this dialogue in the 1990s, which can best be traced in how he amends his analysis on historical fiction from *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) to incorporate new generic insights into his *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992). One of these changes seems to be the employment of Hutcheon's term *historiographic metafiction*, instead of the earlier *postmodern (revisionist) historical fiction*, to denote contemporary examples of historical novels.
4. Personal communication with Susana Onega. Onega, whose clarification of Hutcheon's definition is widely used, claimed that she had also convinced Christian Gutleben of the application of this term.
5. Unfortunately, this publication has been out of print and unavailable in most libraries for the last few years.
6. Nünning has done valuable research in the fields of genre theory and the historical novel, though much of it only available in German.
7. See, for instance, Anne Humpherys' chapter, 'The Afterlife of the Victorian Novel: Novels about Novels', in Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing's *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2005).
8. See, for example, Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) in this respect.
9. Jeannette King's *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (2005) is an excellent example in point.
10. See, for instance, John Corner and Sylvia Harvey's *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (1991) on this issue.
11. Peter Ackroyd even identifies these two processes as major traits of English identity, claiming that "Englishness is the principle of appropriation" (Ackroyd 2003: 248), and that "the history of the English imagination is the history of adaptation and assimilation" (Ackroyd 2003: 463).

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12. Emma Tennant's *Adéle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002) also constitutes an important contemporary rewriting of the Victorian novel.
13. In 2002, Anne Humpherys claimed to have "coined the word 'aftering' to describe the 'writing over' of Victorian novels that have been such a distinctive part of the late twentieth-century literary scene" (Humpherys 2005: 442).
14. Fredric Jameson observes this paradoxical feature of postmodernism together with its similar attitude to history, which is prominent in post-Victorian fiction also: "this return of narrative as the narrative of the end of narratives, this return of history in the midst of the prognosis of the demise of historical telos" (Jameson 1996: xii).
15. There is a striking parallelism between these two authors' evaluations of post-Victorian fiction affecting the postmodern and Peter Ackroyd's views on the way English artistic creation reworks history, biography and fiction (the most prevalent genres mixed in post-Victorian novels as well): "The English imagination is also syncretic and additive" (Ackroyd 2003: 464).

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