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„Oedipal Murders and Nostalgic Resurrections:
The Victorians in (historical) middlebrow fiction, 1914–1959“

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Contents

0. Introduction: Who are the Victorians? 1
1. Theoretical Background 15
1.1 From historical fiction to the Victorian-centred novel 15
1.2 The uses of history 24
1.3 Reading the past through 'historical' fiction 30
1.4 Cognitive poetics: deictic shift theory and schema theory 37
1.4.1 Schema theory 39
1.4.2 Deictic shift theory 47
1.4.3 Intertextuality – a cognitive view 61
2. The Public Legacy of the Victorians 65
2.1 Inheriting the family business 67
2.1.1 Phyllis Bentley: *The Inheritance* (1932) 70
2.1.2 Politicising the Victorians: the interwar years 81
2.1.3 The 'Romance of Commerce' 91
2.1.4 After the war: capitalism triumphant 97
2.2 The Heroic Futility of War 103
2.2.1 Sheila Kaye-Smith: *A Challenge to Sirius* (1917) 105
2.2.2 "Glorious madness": rewriting the Charge of the Light Brigade 119
2.2.3 Women in wartime 123
2.2.4 Britishness, patriotism, and conscientious objectors 130
2.3 Conclusion 141
3. The Private Legacy of the Victorians 145
3.1 Patriarchy in practice: Victorian family life 146
3.1.1 Introducing the patriarch 149
3.1.2 Dorothy Hewlett: *Victorian House* (1939) 154
3.1.3 From type to stereotype 170
3.1.4 The Victorians are dead – long live patriarchy! 175
3.2 Outgrowing the Victorians, 1870 to the present 180
3.2.1 Phyllis Bentley: *Sleep in Peace* (1938) 183
3.2.2 The victims of the Victorians 193
3.2.3 Success stories, part one – outgrowing the gender divide 199
3.2.4 Success stories, part two – outgrowing Victorian sexuality 203
3.3 Conclusion 208
4. Rediscovering the Victorians 215
4.1 Exceptional Victorians 216
4.1.1 Victorian career women 217
4.1.2 Fictional biographies and fictional biographees 225

4.1.3 Maurice Hewlett: *Mainwaring* (1920) 234
4.2 “Crossing the great divide”: Victorian lowlife 242
4.2.1 Beyond Dickens 243
4.2.2 Exposing the Victorians 246
4.2.3 Michael Sadleir: *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) 255
4.2.4 Homosexuality 267
4.3 Conclusion 284
5. Re-inventing the Victorians 287
5.1 Reading the Victorian nightmare 287
5.1.1 Defining the ‘Victorian-centred Gothic’ 287
5.1.2 Playing with the Victorian-centred Gothic 292
5.1.3 Marghanita Laski: *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953) 295
5.2 Victorian Afterglow 311
5.2.1 Love in the Age of Crinolines: Victorian-centred romances 312
5.2.2. Victorian reminiscences 324
5.2.3 Look Back With Laughter: humour and irony in Victorian-centred fiction 331
5.2.4 Angela Thirkell: *Coronation Summer* (1937) 335
5.3 Conclusion 340
Bibliography 347
Index 363
Appendix 369
Deutsche Zusammenfassung 369
Short summary 371
Curriculum Vitae 373

0. Introduction: Who are the Victorians?

Given the thematic focus of the present study, it appears expedient to begin with the one question which it does *not* attempt to answer, and which yet determines both its subject matter and its methodological approach: *Who are the Victorians?* Analysing popular historical novels from the period between 1914 and 1959, the aim of this thesis is to provide a survey of the various, divergent, and occasionally contradictory ways in which individual authors have posed and answered this question, each in turn contributing to and drawing on the transformation of the concept of 'Victorianism' during the first half of the twentieth century.

On the simplest and most purely denotative level, the label 'Victorian' – following the established convention of historical periodisation according to the reigning monarch – refers to the historical period between Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837, and her death in 1901.[1] It has to be borne in mind, however, that "Victoria's accession did not happen to coincide with any sudden social, political, or cultural changes whose incisiveness could otherwise have justified the demarcation of a new era" (Glitz, 18). Nonetheless, and despite the inhomogeneity of the period, the term seems to have been adopted with very little resistance by scholars: as Rudolph Glitz points out, by the time 'Victorian studies' established itself as a distinct field of academic enquiry during the 1950s, it appears to have been universally accepted that "[t]he queen's reign delineates a section of the past that has a historically significant and empirically verifiable claim to individuality. In other words, it possesses certain objective peculiarities, which, however complex and hard to pin down, are fixed and recognisable, and recommend the Victorian era as a separate historical category" (Glitz, 12). Such an assumption, however, relies on what Glitz (12) calls the "perceptual habits" of the audience rather than on empirically verifiable historical data, pointing towards the fact that by the time it was taken up by the academic community, the term 'Victorian' and the period to which it refers had already acquired its unified image in popular discourse, so that the label was merely adopted by academic researchers as a matter of convenience.[2]

However, it is rare to find the word used in a purely *denotative* context: as Michael Mason (2) points out, "'Victorian', as we employ the term in our ordinary usage, is unique among historical labels, or very unusual, in the amount of meaning it can carry beyond the chronological." Glitz notes that the Victorian period has received a significant amount of attention on the part of historians and literary scholars from the 1950s onwards, but that there is little evidence of conscious engagement with the term 'Victorian' and its shifting *connotative* meanings prior to that time – an omission that has in recent years attracted some notice among literary scholars, especially within the field of neo-Victorian studies. "As a consequence," Grace Moore ("Reworkings", 135) suggests, "the term 'Victorian' is both a useful shorthand and a barrier to

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1 Cf. Glitz, 13.

2 Gardiner locates the emergence of a unified concept of the Victorian period during the 1930s, with the mid-Victorian era establishing itself as "a sort of essence of Victorianism" (43).

understanding the complexities of a series of shifting cultural identities across a period of more than sixty years."

In *Writing the Victorians* (2009), Glitz sets out to describe "the actual emergence and popularisation of the Victorian era as a narrative construct" (14), tracing its shifting denotative *and* connotative meanings from the 1870s to World War II (after which no further changes appear to have taken place). As Glitz points out, there are significant differences between the late Victorian and mid-twentieth century (or, indeed, early twenty-first century) usage of the term. Initially, 'Victorian' had a purely celebratory function, used in contexts "almost exclusively royalist, nationalist, progress-worshipping, and eulogistic" (Glitz, 18) on the occasions of the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees. As a consequence, "[e]arly invocations of the Victorian era were by their very nature politically suggestive rather than historically descriptive", celebrating the Queen as an "emblem of national identity" (Glitz, 20) and endorsing "that conglomerate of personal qualities subsequently criticised under the names of prudery, sentimentality, earnestness, internalised male sexism etc. [that] was a crucial factor in her conquest of popular opinion" (Glitz, 20). However, the concept of 'Victorianism' was, at that time, still very broad: in celebratory texts, "the notion of the Victorian age does at times serve to demarcate a section of moral history in particular, e.g. one of sexual restraint or sanctified domesticity. In addition, more generally, and primarily, though, it represents the glorious culmination of national grandeur and prowess that was (held to be) contemporary Britain" (Glitz, 21). As both Rudolph Glitz (24f.) and Grace Moore, following John Plunkett, point out, "those responsible for the circulation of the Queen's public image were keen to associate Victoria with the modernity of the industrial age and the bourgeois family unit" (Moore, "Reworkings", 135). By the time of the Queen's funeral, the term 'Victorian' had come to *express* attitudes such as royalism, progress-worship, and nationalism, but did not *refer* to them;[3] moreover, it also carried implications of technological advancement and was almost synonymous with 'modern'.[4] In contrast to later usage, notions such as materialism, hypocrisy, or the downsides of individual liberty were not yet connected to the term 'Victorian' at the time of the Queen's death; nor was the sexual repression that later came to be regarded as the most typical feature of the era – though noted and heavily criticised already during the late Victorian period – at that time labelled 'Victorian'.[5]

While the Victorians' use of the word was thus always infused with nationalist and pro-royalist sentiment – it was essentially a propaganda term for the monarchy and the Empire, symbolised by its Queen – it first came to be used as a purely denotative term for a distinct historical period in fashion and art magazines during the Edwardian era, probably because the characteristic traits of such objects are easiest to define.[6] Up to World War I, the opposition between the Victorian period and the writers' own was almost exclusively confined to the domains of literature, fashion, interior design, and occasionally art.[7] As Glitz (33) points out, G.K. Chesterton, in his 1913 study of *The Victorian Age in Literature* became probably the first writer to use the word 'Victorianism' and to define its characteristics as comprising rationalism, comfort

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3 Cf. Glitz, 29.
4 Cf. Glitz, 24f.
5 Cf. Glitz, 17; also Mason, 11.
6 Cf. Glitz, 32.
7 Cf. Glitz, 33.

and compromise, cosiness, Bowdlerism, seriousness, Individualism, provincialism, and sincerity.[8] Gradually, 'Victorian' sexual repression and moral hypocrisy were also beginning to come under attack: Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) "might well constitute the first published indictment of Victoria's reign as a period of exaggerated sexual reticence" (Glitz, 44), and the topic features also in G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912), Netta Syrett's *The Victorians* (1915),[9] and (hardly surprisingly) in Edward Carpenter's autobiography *My Days and Dreams* (1916).[10] However, "sexual prudery forms at best only one among many topics of discussion. The central questions [...] of the [interwar] era revolved much rather around moral authority and public values in more general terms" (Glitz, 34).

> For more than two decades, assessments and reassessments of the Victorian past formed a highly familiar feature not only in the most obvious print media [...] The particular concerns these texts address as typically Victorian, and which are either defended, yearned for, criticised, or ridiculed, are more or less the ones mentioned by Chesterton. (Glitz, 37)

Virginia Woolf's oft-quoted anecdote about Lytton Strachey's notorious one-word question to her sister ("Semen?")[11] obscures the thrust of anti-Victorianism during much of the period: as will become apparent from the analyses presented in this study, "[i]n the interval between the major conflicts of the century, the validity of the nationalist ideals of self-sacrifice, greatness, unity, and progress was a much more sensitive subject" (Glitz, 35).

With the identification of the most salient features of Victorianism, however, comes also a questioning of the validity of the term as a temporal marker, with critics arguing both for an extension of the label 'Victorian' (to cover the entire nineteenth century from the end of the Regency onwards on the one hand, and up to various points between 1901 and 1914 on the other) and alternatively for pre-dating the break-off point into the 1880s or 90s. The ongoing debate about the end of the Victorian period in particular is reflected in much of the literature of the interwar era, most famously perhaps in Virginia Woolf's dictum that "in or about 1910, human character changed" ("Mr Bennett", 320). Victorian-centred fiction, too, reflects this uncertainty regarding the exact boundaries of the Victorian period and its subdivision: for instance, Netta Syrett in *The Victorians* (1915), Rose Macaulay in *Told By An Idiot* (1923), and Shirley Darbyshire in *Journey to Melbury* (1953) emphasise the difference between the young people of the 1880s and the generations before them; Ralph Hale Mottram in *Our Mr Dormer* (1927) subdivides the era into the 'age of gentility' (up to the 1850s) and the 'industrial-commercial age' (from the 1860s to the beginning of World War I); and Betty Askwith in *The Blossoming Tree* (1953) (as well as Mottram in his later novel *Scenes That Are Brightest* [1956]) imply that Victorianism endured relatively unchanged until 1914.

Moreover, the notion of anti-Victorianism itself – something of a key term in scholarly accounts of interwar attitudes towards the Victorians – is misleading, suggesting a far more homogeneous, programmatic movement than existed in practice.[12] Nor was anti-Victorianism in any sense a

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8 Cf. Chesterton, 40, 43, 48, 90, 101, 105, 159, 162; qtd. in Glitz, 33.

9 The novel is discussed at greater length in ch. 3.2.3 and 3.2.4.

10 Cf. Glitz, 33f.; Gardiner, 26.

11 Cf. e.g. Loesberg, 361.

12 Cf. Gardiner, 37.

universal (much less cross-generational) trend, but rather "a particular version of that universal phenomenon of inter-generational tension" (Gardiner, 32). In addition, the notion of 'anti-Victorianism' implies disaffection with the past, but obscures the fact that much of the younger generation's revolt against the Victorians was still to some extent targeted at the present: given the "undiminished influence of ideological, institutional, and material remnants of the Victorian age" in post-World War I society, anti-Victorianism "can be understood as an attempted self-fulfilling prophesy: by declaring many still prevalent attitudes, public values, and existing power structures for just as dead, buried, and irrevocably passé as Queen Victoria herself, the modernist intellectuals hoped to further the cause of their actual removal" (Glitz, 36). It is also worth stressing the obvious fact that anti-Victorian attitudes were by no means shared by all authors or readers during the period: especially – but not exclusively – those of the older generation occasionally presented the past as a standard towards which the present ought to aspire rather than one that had been (or ought to be) overcome by historical progress. As will be shown in the analyses included in this study, it is by no means uncommon in Victorian-centred fiction to find attacks on particular features of the Victorian period – be it its alleged hypocrisy, materialism, sexism, prudery, or exploitative capitalism – combined with open endorsement of others.

It goes without saying that there exists a substantial body of work on the Modernists' revolt against the Victorians; in addition, there are numerous recent surveys of twentieth- and twenty-first-century neo-Victorian fiction, among them J.B. Bullen's edited collection *Writing and Victorianism* (1997), Petra Deistler's *Tradition und Transformation – der fiktionale Dialog mit dem viktorianischen Zeitalter im (post)modernen historischen Roman in Großbritannien* (1999), John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff's collection *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000), Christian Gutleben's important but somewhat controversial *Nostalgic Postmodernism: the Victorian tradition and the contemporary British novel* (2001), Alice Jenkins and Juliet John's *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (2002), Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: the Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (2003), Cora Kaplan's *Victoriana – Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), Penny Gay, Judith Johnston, and Catherine Waters's edition *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns: Essays on Fiction and Culture* (2008), Imke Neumann's *„The past is no foreign country": Der neo-viktorianische Roman in Großbritannien und Irland* (2008), Marieadele Boccardi's *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (2009),[13] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's influential study *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), Kate Mitchell's *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), Louisa Hadley's *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's edited collections on *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma* (2010) and *Neo-Victorian Families* (2011), and Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2011).

While not all of these works display an interest in the chronological development of the genre, those which do tend to chart its (pre)history from the mid-1960s onwards – not

[13] Other works which focus on neo-Victorian literature in a post-colonial context are, for example, John Thieme's *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing back to the Canon* (2001) and Kathleen Renk's *Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts: Women's Writing and Decolonization* (1999).

surprisingly, since the flood of literary re-engagements with the Victorian era in recent decades is most frequently assumed to have been sparked off either by Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) or John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969); the latter in particular is frequently claimed to have been "the book that heralded the revival of an interest in the Victorian period both for its persisting influence on the present and for its psychological, social and cultural distance from it" (Boccardi, 2). Where earlier contributions to the twentieth century's ongoing literary dialogue with its predecessors are concerned, this typically takes the form of investigations into the violent anti-Victorianism of Lytton Strachey and the other members of the Bloomsbury group,[14] or the even earlier example of Oscar Wilde's revolt against the Victorian establishment.[15] With the exception of brief survey articles,[16] however, relatively little attention has hitherto been given to the ways in which popular fiction was informed by and contributed to the (re)shaping of the concept of Victorianism during the first half of the twentieth century. As Grace Moore lamented in a 2008 article, "there has been no sustained study of the origins of writing back to the Victorians, the ways in which each generation from the 1880s onwards has, in its differing way, 'argued with the past', and the ways in which wilful mis-readings of the past accumulate to form accepted 'truths' about what has come before" ("Reworkings", 135). A step towards rectifying this omission was taken by Rudolph Glitz in his important study *Writing the Victorians* (2009), which investigates the depiction of the Victorians in the early-twentieth-century family sagas of Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and John Galsworthy. Glitz convincingly argues that these writers, whom he repeatedly calls the most highly acclaimed and most successful of their generation, played an active role in shaping the concept of Victorianism and the Victorians during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Whereas the underlying assumption – that fiction shapes and influences readers' knowledge and beliefs about the real world – is one that will be addressed at greater length in subsequent chapters, it is important to briefly raise the issue of Glitz's selection criteria based on literary success and critical acclaim. While both Galsworthy and Bennett were, indeed, enormously popular during the period, and are not infrequently cited as sources of inspiration and information about the Victorians by the writers discussed in the present study, this applies only to a very limited extent to the more experimental writings of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, neither of whom ever enjoyed bestseller status or, indeed, a wide readership among the middle and lower classes.[17] *The Years*, in particular, (which Glitz discusses in some detail in his study) was the least popular of Virginia Woolf's novels even among her most dedicated readers.[18] That these authors have withstood the test of time and have been included into the literary canon pays tribute to their literary merit; however, it does not, arguably, furnish sufficient proof of their influence on contemporary readers' knowledge and beliefs about the Victorian period. It is therefore not implausible to suggest that most readers' image of the Victorians was influenced more decisively

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[14] Cf. e.g. Deistler, 53; Neumann, 13.

[15] Cf. e.g. Moore, "Reworkings", 136.

[16] Cf. especially Gilmour, "Using the Victorians", Hargreaves, "'We Other Victorians'", and Moore, "Twentieth-Century Reworkings".

[17] For working-class reading habits, cf. Rose, 139; also Gardiner, 41.

[18] Cf. Fromm, 289. Fromm notes that critical interest in the novel started to develop during the 1970s.

by the more 'traditional' of the canonical nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novelists, but also – and this is the main area of interest in the present study – by those works which had a much wider popular appeal during the period, but whose contribution to the gradual transformation of the concept of 'Victorianism' has hitherto received scant attention.[19]

This type of fiction is best defined – as Nicola Humble notes in her ground-breaking study – as 'middlebrow' as opposed to the 'highbrow' Modernist elite. However, this label is somewhat problematic: "'Middlebrow' has always been a dirty word. Since its coinage in the late 1920s, it has been applied disparagingly to the sort of cultural products thought to be too easy, too insular, too smug" (Humble, 1) in comparison to the more demanding modernist novels of the period. Encompassing a wide range of popular novels, 'middlebrow' fiction is most easily defined through its audiences rather than its content:[20]

> For many who applied the term, one suspects that the central tenet that allowed a novel to be dismissed as middlebrow was the issue of whom it was read by: once a novel became widely popular, it became suspect, and bestseller status, or adoption as a Book-of-the-Month choice by a major book club was sufficient enough to demote it beneath serious attention. A novel was therefore middlebrow not because of any intrinsic content, but because it was widely read by the middle-class public. (Humble, 13)[21]

The label 'middlebrow' – which, following Humble, will be used as a purely denotative term in the context of the present study – may thus be seen as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the content-based generic classification of a text as 'historical' or 'Victorian-centred' which shall be outlined below.

Even though various researchers have lamented the difficulty of determining with any degree of certainty either sales figures or readership statistics for the first half of the twentieth century,[22] a few general remarks on audiences are certainly in order at this juncture. As indicated by Humble, when dealing with the first half of the twentieth century, the term 'popular' does not (as it otherwise often does in cultural studies) mean 'directed at a working-class audience'. The largest sector of the book-reading public during the twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties was made up of the middle classes, with women accounting for the vast majority of readers:[23] "It is neither the castle nor the hovel, the top drawer nor the bottom, but that large class of people in between who would prefer life to go on rather as it always has done, people of a comfortable frame of mind who cling, conservatively, on to the established moral framework" (Beauman, 7) from which the audience of Victorian-centred fiction is primarily drawn. It would be unduly simplistic to assume, however, that middle-class necessarily equates ideologically conservative; indeed, middlebrow fiction "not only reflected shifts in middle-class opinion and ideology, but also inspired them. [...] the 'feminine middlebrow' in this period was a powerful force in establishing and consolidating, but also in resisting, new class and gender identities, and [...] it is this

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[19] Historical fiction in particular – the most profitable area of investigation when it comes to examples of 'writing the Victorians' during the first half of the twentieth century – has been, as Diana Wallace (ix) has noted, a notoriously undervalued genre for most of the period, not least because of its almost exclusively female author- and readership.

[20] Cf. Humble, 13.

[21] Cf. also D. James, 61f.

[22] Cf. Hughes, 29; Cockburn, 3.

[23] Cf. Hughes, 3; Wallace, 20; Maslen, *Political*, 17.

paradoxical allegiance to both domesticity and a radical sophistication that makes this literary form so ideologically flexible" (Humble, 3).

To a certain extent, the critical neglect of middlebrow fiction is due to the pronounced emphasis that critics have tended to lay on male (modernist) literature when dealing with the interwar years: "The middle-class women writers – and not only they – have been nudged out of view by the unquestioned assumption that the literature of the 1930s belongs only to its young(ish) males," as Janet Montefiore (22) observes in *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*. Along similar lines, critics tend to focus on the literary revolt of the Angry Young Men in the postwar decades.[24] Where the former period in particular is concerned, the term 'modernist' has virtually established itself as a label of literary merit, and hence as a touchstone whether a given work deserves 'serious' scholarly investigation. As Nicola Humble points out, however,

> 'Modernism' is a label that was applied retrospectively to the experimental writing of the early twentieth century, and would, of course, have meant little to writers at the time. We can renegotiate its definition endlessly, but it brings us no closer to seeing the literary map of the time as contemporaries would have seen it. Indeed, I would argue that the critical insistence, since the 1950s, on seeing the literature of this period solely in terms of modernism has significantly distorted our understanding. (25)

This development has had a number of problematic consequences where the literary scholarship of the period is concerned: almost every attempt at rediscovering writers outside the widening boundaries of the Modernist canon has, to some extent, had to take account of the evaluative connotations of the label 'Modernist'. As a consequence, many scholars have tended to argue the case for the rediscovery of forgotten 'traditionalists' on the basis of their equal literary merit, not infrequently conceived in terms of stylistic and formal innovativeness or intellectual aspirations. In view of this fact, critics seeking to rescue 'forgotten' authors – especially women writers – of the period from critical oblivion have done so mainly by co-opting them into the established modernist canon, or by aiming to construct a 'counter-canon' that, by extending the stylistic features that are labelled 'modernist', weakens the definition of modernism and blurs its boundaries to such an extent that the term has little denominative value except for its merely chronological implications.[25] Inevitably, this trend has led to the undervaluation and hence neglect of middlebrow fiction, which offers "narrative excitement

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[24] Cf. e.g. Robert Hewinson's *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (1981). For criticism of this tendency, cf. also Humble, 2f.; Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 7f.; Light, "Writing", 143. Even though several of the female authors discussed here are included in Faye Hammill, Esme Miskimmin and Ashley Sponenberg's *Encyclopedia of British Women's Writing* (2006) and similar reference works, few of them feature in standard accounts of the period: Morag Shiach's *Companion to the Modernist Novel* (2007) merely includes a chapter on (amongst others) May Sinclair, and Valentine Cunningham's influential *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988; 26) mentions (but does not discuss) Sylvia Townsend Warner and Sheila Kaye-Smith. In addition, a small number – among them Sylvia Townsend Warner, May Sinclair, F. Tennyson Jesse, and Angela Thirkell – have had monographs devoted to their life and oeuvre; others (such as, for instance, Marghanita Laski) have hitherto escaped critical attention (cf. also Hammill et al., sv. "Laski, Marghanita").

[25] This becomes apparent especially when one considers that a number of writers (for instance Silvia Townsend Warner, May Sinclair, and Rose Macaulay) have, on the one hand, found inclusion into a newly-formed 'female' modernist canon – as exemplified by Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (1990), Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (1991), or Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers's *Writing for their Lives. The Modernist Women, 1910–1940* (1988) –, while also featuring in studies such as Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton's *Outside Modernism* (2000).

without guilt, and intellectual stimulation without undue effort" (Humble, 11) and which can be regarded as the direct inheritor of many of the narrative characteristics (most notably realism) of Victorian fiction, as well as many of its thematic concerns.[26]

While recent studies such as Nicola Beauman's *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914–1939* (1983); Joseph McAleer's *Popular Reading and Publishing 1914–50* (1992); Alison Light's *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservativism Between the Wars* (1991); Maroula Joannou's *'Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows': Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change, 1918–1938* (1995) and *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (1999); Jenny Hartley's *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (1997); Heather Ingman's *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (1998); and Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* (2001) have to some extent offered a corrective to the established critical view of the period, these excellent surveys have not been primarily concerned with historical fiction. Moreover, most of these critics (with the exception of McAleer) have concentrated on female authors and the ways in which the works under consideration reflect the concerns of a predominantly female audience – a topic which, as shall be seen, indeed merits lengthy investigation when dealing with middlebrow fiction from the period, but which tends to obscure both the wider socio-political context of these works, and the contribution of male authors.[27]

A similarly feminocentric focus underlies Diana Wallace's important study of *The Woman's Historical Novel* (2005). By providing a much-needed corrective to the dominant view of the first half of the century as dominated by a predominantly male modernist elite, or the historical novel as a 'masculine' form on the decline throughout these decades, these scholars have tended to 'write out' male writers of middlebrow (historical) fiction such as, for instance, Maurice Hewlett, John St. Loe Strachey, Ralph Hale Mottram, David Leslie Murray, Michael Sadleir, Bernard Ash, or Frank Wilson Kenyon, all of whom contributed in various ways to the ongoing fictional dialogue with the Victorian period. The scholarly emphasis on women writers is to some extent counterbalanced by Helen Hughes's *The Historical Romance* (1993) and Lisa Fletcher's *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (2008), both of which include discussions of works by male authors, but concentrate on works which were mainly targeted at a female readership. Moreover, neither is primarily concerned with the image of the Victorian period in historical fiction, and the way in which it reflects issues that transcend gender boundaries.

This is not to say, however, that the changing image of the Victorians in popular discourse during the first half of the twentieth century has received insufficient attention; indeed, the wealth of material available on the legacy of the Victorians in areas as diverse as art, education, politics, economic issues, gender roles, state intervention in the private sphere, and sexual morality, has given rise to a number of recent publications, as has the Victorians' presence and presentation in the media, in autobiographical writing (including published memoirs), and in canonical literature.

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[26] Cf. Humble, 11.

[27] A noteable counter-example to the tendency to read women's fiction from the period in isolation from that of their male contemporaries is provided by Katherine Binhammer and Jeanne Wood's collection *Women and Literary History* (2003), which (apart from Suzanne Raitt's article on May Sinclair), however, does not deal with the authors discussed in this study.

As Rudolph Glitz, John Gardiner, Simon Joyce, and the contributors to the collection edited by Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff have shown, the Victorian period was during the first half of the twentieth century present in a wide variety of cultural discourses, ranging from politics over newspapers and magazines to autobiography and fiction, all of which contributed to the narrativisation of the Victorians. Further contributions came from the emerging electronic media, both radio (immensely popular especially with housewives during the interwar period[28]) and the cinema (the most popular form of entertainment during the 1920s and 1930s[29]), with Victorian history films such as *Victoria the Great* (1938)[30] and David Leach's Dickens adaptations.[31] Moreover, it is also worth noting that during the interwar years in particular, the Victorian period was still for many people a personal memory. As Roger Bromley (10) points out, however, personal memory is always, to some extent, shaped by collective memory: popular narratives about the past determine which aspects of the past the individual remembers, and how they are evaluated, just as personal memory – emplotted in autobiographical or fictional narratives – feeds into the collective image of the past:

> Narratives, particularly, represent our ideas about everyday life by producing cultural images and stereotypes of it. They thus have an important function in representing the past, because they present crucial forms in which memories are made. Memory is not simply the property of individuals, not just a matter of psychological processes, but a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and 'forgetting'. Memory is, therefore, a construction. (Bromley, 1)

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how one particular set of narratives – popular novels from the first half of the twentieth century set in the Victorian period or focusing on its after-effects on the present, which I have subsumed under the heading `Victorian-centred fiction'[32] – contributes and is in turn shaped by this construction. While I have deliberately avoided the application of the term 'neo-Victorian' to the works under consideration in this thesis in order to steer clear of its connotations of postmodernism and metatextual self-consciousness, it is important to stress that Victorian-centred fiction must be regarded as the precursor of these later texts, and that many of the insights into the ways in which contemporary re-engagements with Victorian literature and culture reflect the shifting social and cultural concerns of the last six decades (starting with the late 1960s or the 70s) can profitably be extended or adapted to culturally contextualise earlier Victorian-centred texts.

Following Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), the narratival shaping of history, and its 'emplotment' in historiographic writing as well as in fiction has become something of a platitude among historians and literary scholars. Especially among neo-Victorian critics, however, the emphasis has frequently either been placed on the way in which the Victorian era has been handed down to us 'emplotted' in its own writings,[33] or on the ways in which more recent neo-Victorian

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[28] Cf. Beddoe, 129f.
[29] Cf. Beddoe, 115ff.
[30] Cf. Beddoe, 117.
[31] Cf. Samuel, 402; also Joyce, 141.
[32] For a definition of 'Victorian-centred fiction', cf. ch. 1.1.
[33] Cf. Shiller, 546.

novels contribute to the ongoing process of narrativising the Victorians. Interestingly, however, few critics have shown a similar awareness where literary history is concerned: the linear narrative of the fictional transformation of the Victorians – from the violent anti-Victorianism of Lytton Strachey to the nostalgic recreations of the 1950s[34] – has not only been left largely unchallenged; more crucially, its status as a *narrative* has gone largely unnoted.[35] It is precisely at this point that the present study attempts to enter into the critical discourse about the narrativisation of the Victorians: by critically engaging with the established literary historical narrative of fictional images of the Victorians during the first part of the twentieth century, by offering fresh perspectives, and by adding evidence from the works of authors whose contribution to the shifting image of the period has hitherto gone almost unnoticed.

As will be outlined below, my approach differs from Glitz's in that it assumes that fiction, rather than merely contributing to the formation and transformation of the concept of 'the Victorians', engages in a much more complex dialogical interaction with its audience: as Nicola Humble points out, middlebrow fiction "not only reflected shifts in middle-class opinion and ideology, but also inspired them" (3). On the one hand, each text contains an amount of ostensibly 'factual' information as well as a plot structure calculated to trigger emotional responses and value judgements on the part of the reader; on the other hand, however, each text also depends on the background knowledge that the reader already brings to the experience of reading the book. In this sense, the image of the Victorians that emerges during the act of reading is comprised in roughly equal parts of the information that the reader reads out of the text, and that which s/he reads into it. As Wolfgang Iser argues in *The Act of Reading* (1978), reading is not merely an act of one-way communication by which ideas contained in the book are transferred to the reader: it is an activity in which the information contained in the text, and that activated by the imaginative effort that the reader brings to the act of reading, result in a composite entity (the 'virtual work') which is identical neither to the text nor to its concretisation by the individual reader.

My approach in this thesis focuses on the interaction between work and reader emphasised by Iser, drawing on approaches from cognitive poetics to investigate how the work acts as a "structured prefigurement" (Iser, *Act*, 107) that provides "a set of governing rules" (108) guiding the "dynamic *interaction* between text and reader" (107; italics in original) by evoking readers' antecedent knowledge and beliefs, facilitating immersion into the fictional world of the story, and mapping out a position – both spatio-temporal and ideological – from which the reader perceives the Victorians depicted in the novels. In particular, I will be drawing on schema theory – which focuses on the way in which the text interacts with (instantiates, confirms, or modifies) readers' existing knowledge and beliefs about the real world – and on deictic shift theory, which concentrates on the means by which texts map out a position from which the characters, setting and events of the text are viewed. As will be demonstrated below, both of these theories are intimately related to Iser's approach and provide complementary insights into the cognitive processes that trigger and guide the dynamic processes by which the text interacts with its

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[34] Cf. e.g. Deistler, 53ff.; Moore, "Reworkings", 137f.

[35] For a notable exception to this trend, cf. Hargreaves, 278.

reader.[36] This approach also takes up Alan Richardson and Francis F. Steen's call for "cognitively informed interpretative readings of literary texts that at the same time fully acknowledge their historical specificity" (5), which chimes in with the line of argument already outlined by Raymond Williams at the beginning of *The Long Revolution* (18ff.).[37]

Iser's approach, however, to some extent reflects the stance criticised by Anthony Easthope (66f.) in *Literary into Cultural Studies* (1991), assuming that 'literary' works move the reader to critically engage with ideology,[38] while popular literature – "works [which] tend to be of a more trivial nature, as they affirm specific norms with a view to training the reader according to the moral or social code of the day" (Iser, *Act*, 77) – tends to map out an ideological position that the reader is led to accept unquestioningly[39] As a consequence, texts of this type permit the reconstruction of values prevailing at the time of writing.[40] However, as Humm, Stigant and Widdowson point out in their Introduction to *Popular Fictions* (2003), "[p]opular fictions, then, need to be read and analysed not as some form of sugar-coated sociology, but as narratives which negotiate, no less than the classic texts, the connection between 'writing, history, and ideology'" (2).

Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production* (1966) focuses on the complex inter-relationship between world and text. As Macherey claims, no text is produced – or, indeed, read – outside ideology; the fictional work always reflects, either consciously or unconsciously, the ideological conditions of its production (and, as Iser maintains, its reception[41]). However, as Macherey argues, the relationship that exists between text and ideology is never straightforward: applying Althusser's theory of symptomatic reading to cultural texts, his analyses highlight the difference between the ideological project of the text (i.e. what is said) and the realization (i.e. what is shown), exposing the gaps, breaks and silences in the ideology of its day:[42]

> The book is not the extension of a meaning; it is generated from the incompatibility of several meanings, the strongest bond by which it is attached to reality, in a tense and ever-renewed confrontation. In seeing how the book is made we also see what it is made from: this defect which gives it a history and a relation to the historical. (Macherey, 80; italics in original)

As Macherey argues, the 'historical' dimension of the text is determined through a number of interconnected factors "[t]hrough its relationship to the theoretical and ideological uses of language, the text is also influenced by the formal function of the writer and by the problems of his individual existence; finally, specific literary works are determined by the history of literary production from which they receive the means of their own realisation" (53). While Macherey stresses that a fictional

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[36] Both of the cognitive theories underlying the present approach have recently been criticized as 'outdated' and unduly 'mechanistic'. As will be demonstrated in the analyses in the present study, they nonetheless provide a powerful toolkit for investigating the textual strategies deployed to channel readers' responses, if not the precise workings of the reader's mind during the reading process (for criticism of deictic shift theory, cf. e.g. Easterlin, 160; for a discussion of the shortcomings and strengths of schema theory, cf. Stockwell, "Schema Poetics", 253ff.).

[37] For an sustained discussion of Williams's arguments, cf. Zunshine, 6ff.

[38] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 77f. and 153.

[39] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 77 and 83. This attitude is also reflected in Guy Cook's schema-based approach to literature, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

[40] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 152.

[41] Cf. also Macherey, 70f.: "Readers are made by what makes the book."

[42] Cf. Storey, 39. For a similar point, cf. Humm et al., 5f.

text reveals not the author's biography, but at best merely the way in which s/he used his personal experiences for her/his work, it is also important to note that it is through the existence of an individual author at a given point in time that a work is, first and foremost, connected to the historical situation of its production. A similar view of the author's role underlies the cognitive approaches implemented in this study, which assume that "literary texts are the products of cognizing minds and their interpretations are the products of other cognizing minds in the context of the physical and socio-cultural worlds in which they are produced and are read" (Freeman, 253).[43] In addition, Macherey (41f.) adds the caveat that authors do not manufacture the components of their works, nor do they discover them by accident, but merely select and assemble those that are already in existence; as a consequence, these components are not neutral and do not fully absorb the meaning which they are accorded in a given text, but retain a certain autonomy in terms of their connotative meaning. As a consequence, not even the most transparently propagandist text ever fully reflects its author's intention.[44] As Maroula Joannou argues, however,

> [a] text may, of course, signify something more, something less, or something other than its author intended and may sometimes signify all three. But unless we know what the author's intention was in the first place it is difficult to specify what corresponding more, less or other may be. To say that a literary text cannot be reduced to the author's intention is not to say that what we know of the latter should play no part in our response to the work. A writer can never be completely unconscious of the external world nor wholly conscious of all the contexts; material, ideological, aesthetic, political, institutional, ideational, cultural, social, to which the text may at any time be related. Authorial awareness varies and for this reason the helpfulness of biographical information varies too. [...] It is mistaken to assume that all texts have the same intentional standing. The relationship between an author's biography and her work may be of crucial importance. Alternatively, it may be of little importance. This will depend largely on the circumstances in which a work comes to be produced and read. (*'Ladies'*, 18–9)

Given the highly personal note that informs many authors' depictions of the Victorians,[45] and the occasionally idiosyncratic position their works occupy in relation to the period, I have followed the same course as Joannou in her study of 1930s writing, including biographical information where this appeared relevant to the thematic focus of a given work, or to its overall attitude towards the Victorians or an isolated facet of Victorianism.

The way in which Victorian-centred novels can – and, as I have argued, must – be regarded as cultural artefacts which relate to and reflect the ideological and socio-political climate of their production, however, is only one aspect which will be considered in this thesis. In *Literary into Cultural Studies*, Anthony Easthope directly addresses the issue, highlighting the fact that cultural studies approaches tend to privilege the context over the text, regarding the latter merely as the secondary and subsequent effect of the former.[46] Easthope, like Iser and Macherey, rejects what

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[43] For a similar point, cf. Talmy, 421.

[44] Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that however fraught the issue of authorial intention is within the scholarly community, many readers tend to assume that there is a direct connection between the attitudes of the authors and those reflected in the text, and tend to construct an image of the writer in conformity with these textual clues. This issue will be explored at greater length in ch. 1.4.2 in connection with deictic shift theory.

[45] On the highly personal and idiosyncratic nature especially of anti-Victorian writing, cf. Gardiner 37f.

[46] Although Easthope's criticism is aimed primarily at Marxist criticism, it is worth noting that Macherey makes a similar point when he writes: "The specificity of the work is also its autonomy: in so far as it is self-elaborating it is a law unto itself and acknowledges only an intrinsic standard, an autonomous necessity. This is why literary works ought to be the object of a *specific science*: otherwise they will

he (following Jane Tompkins [125f.]) terms "the modernist reading" (*Literary*, 13), which concerns itself with questions of literary value and aims at demonstrating the unity of the text, and argues for a new paradigm which retains the methodology of literary analysis in the form of a closely text-based investigation that nonetheless takes into account key concepts of cultural studies, among them issues of ideology, gender and the other; the subject position(s) and opportunities for identification offered by the text, and the institutional context in which a work of fiction is produced and received.

For the purposes of my investigation, I have found it useful to carry Easthope's approach a step further: the readings contained in this study bring together Iserian aesthetics, cognitive approaches to literature, and Macherey's theory of literary production in order to show how the texts under consideration position themselves and their readers within and in relation to history, providing a framework for readers' acts of ideation that, as will be shown, sets out to act upon the audiences' prevailing notions of Victorianism and to veil the conflicting and conflicted attitudes towards the recent past that characterize the first half of the twentieth century. By focusing particularly on the textual structures and strategies that allow the works under consideration to act as 'structured prefigurements' in the Iserian sense, this study aims to emphasise their status as fictional works which – though open to symptomatic readings which reveal the gaps, silences, and contradictions in their relation to the dominant ideology – are not mere 'symptoms' of the ideological climate under which they were produced.[47] While drawing on Guy Cook's schema theoretical approaches to literary analysis, the present study questions the link between 'literariness' and schema-disrupting potential postulated by Cook, showing that works which are unremarkable in terms of 'literary' merit – neither stylistically brilliant nor formally innovative – may have equal, if not greater, potential for schema disruption and modification by allowing readers to access the story world unrestricted by stylistic, intertextual, and metatextual features which impede total immersion.

With the exception of chapter one, which presents an overview of the relevant theoretical and methodological approaches and aims to situate the Victorian-centred novel within the wider framework of historical 'middlebrow' fiction, the structure of this thesis reflects its complementary aims in regard to its main research question, i.e. that of how popular novels from the years between 1914 and 1959 contributed to and were influenced by shifting perceptions of the Victorians, and how their depictions of the period reflect and comment on contemporary issues and concerns. In keeping with this project, the structure of this thesis is thematic rather than

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never be understood. And though various disciplines such as linguistics, the theory of art, the theory of history, the theory of ideologies, the theory of unconscious formation, must all collaborate in this enterprise – for without them it would remain incomplete and would perhaps be impossible – yet they can in no sense replace this specific science of the literary work. It is important to recognise that literary texts make a novel use of language and ideology (perhaps the two are not so very different) by wresting them in a new direction and conscripting them into a project peculiar to them alone" (52; italics in original).

[47] Focusing on middlebrow fiction rather than canonical literature, the analyses presented here also aim to subvert the attitude – frequently displayed and criticised with almost equal frequency – that 'high' culture and 'literature' has the power to shape ideology, while 'low' culture, in the form of popular fiction, merely reproduces and reflects it.

chronological, and is determined by the attitudes and approaches to the Victorians and contemporary readers' knowledge and beliefs about them evidenced by the works under consideration. In those cases where a linear development from 1914 to the 1950s can be traced, this is explicitly indicated.

Chapters two and three focus on those novels which aim to present the 'typical' aspects of the period and their influence on the present, setting out to confirm or reinforce the audience's schematic knowledge; chapter four is devoted to works which aim to 'rediscover' forgotten and potentially surprising facets of the Victorian age, thus tending towards schema addition or disruption; chapter five, in turn, concentrates on works which apparently rely on the existence of a well-established schema which they instantiate in order to use the Victorian period as historical background, and which, by doing so, tend towards a simplifying re-invention of the era that especially during the 1950s becomes tinged with overtones of nostalgia. Within each chapter, every section focuses on one of the key themes of the Victorian-centred novel, so that the sub-division follows thematic rather than chronological lines. Where a chronological development can be traced, this will receive due attention; as will become apparent from the analyses, however, this is not always the case. In addition to those sections which provide overviews over a number of relevant texts, each chapter also includes a more detailed discussion of a paradigmatic work in which the textual strategies employed to channel the readers' response as well as the gaps and contradictions which reveal the problematic of the text are given in-depth consideration.

Although this study is focused on works which significantly pre-date the body of literature commonly subsumed under the heading 'neo-Victorian', its aim is in essence closely allied to the neo-Victorian novel's project of uncovering hidden voices from the past and challenging historical master narratives – in this case, the by now well-established narrative of Bloomsbury's Oedipal murder of the Victorians, and their nostalgic resurrection during the 1950s. By focusing on popular fiction, what emerges is not, however, a linear counter-narrative to the established account, but rather a set of narratives following different thematic strands, some of which closely adhere to the acknowledged 'linear' model. Others, in contrast, are fascinating precisely because of the fragmented plurality of views on the Victorians that manifests itself, bearing witness to a "burgeoning conflict between nostalgic admirers of the Victorian past and critical denouncers of the era" (Glitz, 34) that defies reduction to a chronologically ordered account. Inevitably, however, it is an account that remains bounded by the same constraints as the literary historical master narrative, and subject to the same processes of selection (beginning with the decision which novels from the wealth of available titles to include in this survey), omission, and distortion through the interests (personal and academic), aims, and viewpoint of its writer.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1 From historical fiction to the Victorian-centred novel

Most of the works discussed in this survey were marketed and presumably read as historical fiction. The majority of titles were suggested by one of three relevant bibliographies: Jonathan Nield's *A guide to the best historical novels and tales* (1929), G.B. Cotton and Alan Glencross' *Fiction Index II* (1957), and Aruna Vasudevan and Lesley Henderson's *Twentieth-Century Romance and Historical Writers* (1994).[48] Nonetheless, the generic classification of the texts under consideration is not without its problems, and requires additional comment. As Clive Bloom points out, genre conventions during the first half of the twentieth century were by no means as clear-cut then as they are today. Despite the fact that a division of popular fiction into genres begins in the 1920s (before that, popular fiction was commonly classified as 'romance'), coinciding with a striking increase in popular fiction titles, this categorisation "did not exercise readers or publishers in a pragmatic way. It interested critics not at all" (Bloom, 86).[49] By the 1930s, however, most genres of popular fiction – except science fiction, fantasy and women's romance – were sufficiently well-established "to have a sense of origins and tradition" (Bloom, 87); an important aspect that will be outlined at greater length below both in its relevance to authors' awareness of the textual tradition in which they situated their work, and in regard to readers' expectations towards a given novel or genre.

In this context, it appears necessary to examine the contemporary (i.e. late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century) concept of 'historical fiction' as applied to the texts under consideration, since the categorisation of these novels at their time of publication diverges significantly from more recent definitions of the genre. It has often been argued that the term 'historical', especially in connection with the term 'fiction', is notoriously difficult to define; and indeed, the fact that none of these titles appear in all three of the above-mentioned bibliographies, and only very few in any two of them, may already be seen as evidence of the variety of definitions applied to the genre. As Fleishman ironically observes, "[e]veryone knows what a historical novel is; perhaps that is why few have volunteered to define it in print" (3). As shall be seen, the most controversial aspect with regard to Victorian-centred fiction lies in the relatively small temporal distance that separates these novels' time of writing from the period of their setting; however, there are other issues which are equally problematic when the most generally accepted definitions are applied to the texts in question.

Both George Lukács and Avrom Fleishman, arguably the most influential twentieth-century critics of the historical novel, offer definitions which form valuable starting points for an

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[48] A few additions to the corpus were suggested by Helen Hughes' *The Historical Romance* and Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel*; further sources included chronological accounts of neo-Victorian fiction, as well as various books and articles on Modernism and its attitude towards the Victorians, or on changing perceptions of the Victorians in the course of the last century. In addition, I am greatly indebted to the staff of the Bodleian and London Libraries for further suggestions.

[49] The lack of critical interest in genre divisions – and hence in definitions of individual genres – may serve as an explanation for the lack of homogeneity exhibited by the texts discussed in this thesis.

account of what constitutes the 'historical' aspect of such texts. Lukács' definition of the "specifically historical" in historical fiction, i.e. the "derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (15) and Fleishman's reference to "the active presence of history [in the text] as a shaping force" (15) are applicable to a significant percentage of the texts under discussion in this study. However, Lukács' insistence on strict realism[50] and hence his exclusion of more experimental texts creates problems in its application to some of the works considered here. Moreover, as Peter Munz (864) points out, Lukács insists on a strict division between the explanatory and the interpretative modes of narrative, insisting that a novel is historical only if it restricts itself to the presentation of generalisations and institutions that are characteristic of the place and period of its setting. While such a restriction would make for what Munz calls an explanatory narrative, most texts under consideration here are interpretative in the sense that they attempt to draw conclusions about the Victorian era on the basis of twentieth-century generalisations.[51] Fleishman's attractively clear-cut definition of the form, on the other hand, is too narrow to encompass the wide range of works dealing with the Victorian age which appeared during the first half of the last century: "The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person among the fictitious ones" (4).

This stipulation becomes problematic in the context of texts focusing on the experience of women in the Victorian age, a period which notoriously strove to exclude women from the public sphere and thus from contact with historical personages. As will be seen, few of the novels focusing on Victorian women's experience fulfil Fleishman's criterion. Fleishman (10f.) implicitly acknowledges this when he consistently refers to the historical novel's aim of showing how the life of "the typical *man* of an age" (my italics) is shaped by historical figures and events. In addition, his insistence on the 'typicality' of the protagonist[52] fits ill with the pronounced interest in marginalised groups which is apparent in many of the texts discussed here.[53] Moreover, it is important to note that Fleishman (11) himself transcends this definition of the historical novel when he stresses that it is not merely the 'typicality' of the protagonist but his 'symbolic universality' which lies at the core of historical writing, in that it aims to show that the lives of all individuals, at each point in time, are shaped by the forces of history. As it is, Fleishman's definition of the historical novel as fiction which has "human life as conceived as historical life" (11) as its subject says little about the temporal distance of events described in the novel. Indeed, when Fleishman stresses that the essential function of historical fiction is to make the reader feel that "history as a shaping force" acts

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[50] In contrast to Lukács, Mariadele Boccardi in her recent survey of the contemporary British historical novel constructs a binary opposition between realist novels and historical fiction. According to her, the former envisage history in synchronic terms, i.e. try to depict the particularity of a given period, while the latter examine the mechanisms of social change and their impact on humanity and are thus concerned with a notion of historical progress that includes the present (cf. Boccardi, 11).

[51] For a more detailed discussion of the difference between interpretative and explanatory narratives, and the role of generalisations in creating coherence in narrative, cf. Munz, 863. Munz's term "generalisation" might be paraphrased as "assumptions about causality based on our knowledge of human nature." Munz (860ff.) stresses that these generalisations possess no universal validity, but are temporally, culturally and socially contingent.

[52] Cf. Fleishman, 11.

[53] For a similar argument concerning women's historical fiction, cf. Wallace, 12. This applies especially to the novels discussed in ch. 4.

on her/himself as much as on the characters in the novel, he implicitly extends his definition to include novels set in the present, as the life of wo/men is always shaped by the forces of history. David Cowart (6ff.), in his study of history in contemporary fiction, does indeed extend the concept of 'historical fiction' along these lines, including novels set in the present and even in the future (because these present contemporary reality as the past); according to him, the term 'historical fiction' denotes "any novel in which a historical consciousness manifests itself strongly in either the characters or the action" (6). In her analysis of recent historical novels, Mariadele Boccardi makes a similar point when she notes that "a historical novel either contains in inchoate form or outlines explicitly the workings of the historical process" (6).

For most readers both within and outside the academic community, however, it is the presence of *past* history that distinguishes the historical novel from other kinds of realist fiction. At this point, however, the issue becomes complicated by the narrative convention common to all realist novels, i.e. that of setting their narratives in the past and presenting them in the past tense.[54] While this is in keeping with our real-world experience (things must have happened before they can be narrated) and thus a crucial feature of the realism of these texts, it also means that the distinction between realist novels in general, and historical novels as – arguably – representative of a sub-genre of realist fiction, becomes blurred. As a consequence, many theorists have attempted to define – with varying degrees of exactitude – the temporal distance between the present and the setting of a novel that allows it to be classified as 'historical'. While not unanimous on this issue, Fleishman (3) points out that many critics appear to agree that a temporal distance of forty to sixty years, the equivalent of two generations, between the setting of a particular novel and its time of publication will cause it to be regarded as a work of 'historical' fiction rather than a 'novel of the recent past'.[55]

In *The Woman's Historical Novel*, Diana Wallace addresses the issue, quoting Roland Barthes' definition of history in an attempt to determine the temporal distance between its setting and its time of writing/publication that makes a novel a work of 'historical' fiction:

> Is History not simply that time when we were not born? [...] History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it. As a living soul, I am the very contrary of History, I am what belies it, destroys it for the sake of my own history [...] That is what the time what my mother was alive before me is – History. (Barthes, "History as Separation", 64–5; quoted in Wallace, x)

Wallace's definition is based on Barthes definition of "History" as the time "when we were not born". According to her, a historical novel has to be set in "a period before the birth of its author, that is, a period she has not experienced herself but must reconstruct through (usually textual) evidence" (Wallace, x).[56] Although convincingly argued, this definition is not without its problems: according to Wallace, a novel set forty years before its date of publication written by a sixty-year-old writer would not qualify, while the same novel written by a twenty-year-old would;

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[54] As Zubin and Hewitt (137) point out, the past-tense convention is characteristic of, but by no means limited to, realist fiction: even science fiction novels, which purport to narrate events which will happen in the future, employ the past tense to do so.

[55] The time span may have been inspired by the famous and oft-quoted subtitle of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), "T'is sixty years since" (cf. e.g. Fleishman, 24).

[56] A similar point is implied by Boccardi, who regards historical writing as a "retrospective view of a time beyond direct experience" (6).

what, then, of the same novel written by a forty- or forty-five-year-old writer, whose first-hand experience would hardly give her/him much insight into the period in question? What, if the idea of separation were to be extended along the spatial rather than the temporal angle, of a sixty-year-old writer living on another continent, who, one may assume, also has no first-hand experience of the era in question despite the date of her/his birth? And how to define the status of anonymous texts, or of those about whose author no biographical information is available?

As a consequence of the above, any definition of historical fiction which relies on the author as a point of reference is arguably open to attack both on theoretical grounds (especially if one bears in mind the mild irony of taking Barthes' comments as a starting point for a definition which relies so heavily on the *author* of a given work), and on those suggested by common sense. Irrespective of the theoretical approach of this study, which (as shall be outlined below) insists that *meaning* arises from the dynamic interaction between individual reader and text, it is likewise highly problematic to base the *definition* of the genre on the reader's personal experience of the historical setting,[57] since this varies with the age of the individual.

As a consequence, I should like to follow Wallace's lead in taking Barthes' notion of history as a starting point, laying the emphasis, however, on Barthes' concept of history as "constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it", and, most crucially, as something from which we – both author and audience – are excluded. 'Exclusion', in my reading, does not signify an absence of personal knowledge; indeed, when dealing with historical novels set in the Victorian era, such a definition – whether applied to the author or the reader – would rule out a significant portion of the corpus of early-twentieth-century fiction. While it is certainly possible to argue, as Mariadele Boccardi (3) does, that it is important to differentiate whether "the past is the site of direct or mediated experience, of memory or of history", this is complicated by a number of factors in regard to the Victorian period. Firstly, as Roger Bromley (10) has convincingly argued, memory is a narrative construct shaped by dominant cultural discourses as much as by individual experience.[58] Even in regard to older writers, it is worth noting that personal memory can never encompass a period of history as a whole, even if the subject has lived through (parts of) it, but can only refer to experiences, situations and events which took place during that time; indeed, the experience of living through a particular historical period in itself precludes the comprehensive view informed by hindsight and temporal distance that emerges through retrospective narration. On this basis, Barthes' definition and Boccardi's addendum arguably rule out purely autobiographical writings (already excluded from the category of historical fiction because of their non-fictional status); they do not, however, constitute an *a priori* exclusion of novels set in the recent past, even where these feature autobiographical elements or draw on the author's personal experience. As a second and related point, the issue is complicated by the increasingly homogeneous image of the Victorian era in popular discourse, giving rise to what might be termed the 'Victorian fallacy' among readers and academic critics alike: from the mid-century onwards, authors born during the last decades of Queen Victoria's reign are not infrequently regarded as eye witnesses of 'the Victorian period' as a whole.

What constitutes 'exclusion' is therefore less a sense of temporal than of emotional and ideological distance which enables authors "to look back at a past age and see it as a coherent

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[57] Cf. Fleishman, 3.

[58] Cf. Introduction.

system" (Fleishman, 14):[59] not so much an absence of first-hand experience as a sense that, for better or for worse, a given period is irrevocably over, to be re-constructed (in every sense of the word) only in textual form. Inevitably, the evocation of a lost past serves as the starting point for an imaginary world: as Gerda Zeltner remarks in a different context, "where something has been lost, language commences" (76; qtd. in Iser, *Act*, 208). It is perhaps worth pointing out that a significant percentage of the texts discussed here open with a clear reference to the fact that not only the temporal and spatial setting of the plot, but also the social and ideological conditions which shaped the characters, have definitely and irrevocably disappeared – that, in Virginia Woolf's famous phrase, "human character [has] changed" ("Mr Bennett", 320). For the purpose of this study, consequently, any novel which constructs the Victorian era as clearly distinct from (but often intimately connected to) the present of its writing – as a thing of the past, as it were, regardless of whether this past includes or transcends the writer's personal experience – will be considered 'historical'.

However, even the most inclusive definition of historical fiction will tend to exclude some of the less typical – but by no means least interesting – texts discussed in the present study; indeed, even the gradation of texts on a scale of typicality and conformity that is by necessity implied by the existence of a definition becomes problematic, allied as it almost inevitably is to evaluative judgements. As a consequence, my tentative account of what constitutes a historical novel must be regarded as a description of the lowest common denominator of all the texts treated in this thesis, rather than as a definition of historical fiction that aims at universal validity. By contrasting a number of definitions of the genre, I have aimed to show to what extent the texts under consideration partake of the characteristics of the historical novel, and thus arguably conform to, disrupt, or redefine readers' expectations as regards the genre.

It is worth noting, moreover, that many of the texts discussed in this study are 'historical' also in the stricter sense advocated by Lukács, Fleishman, and their successors, in that they aim to show the workings of the historical process, and the influence of history on the individual. Indeed, as will be argued in the following chapters, it is precisely their position as 'novels of the recent past' which puts them in a peculiarly apt position to show to what extent the lives of all human beings must be regarded as 'historical' in the sense of being influenced not only by great historical events, but by the everyday lives of our ancestors – by everything, in short, that from the point of view of the contemporary reader constitutes 'the past'. As shall be shown, this is true especially of those texts which have been classed under the heading "Outgrowing the Victorians" (chapter 3.2) and some of the family sagas discussed in this thesis, as their story lines bridge the gap between the past and the present of their publication. On the other hand, there are a number of texts on my list which offer valuable insights and opportunities for comparison with more straightforwardly 'historical' novels, but which – often because of their unconventionality which resists facile genre classification – are 'historical' only in the very loose sense outlined in the preceding paragraph.[60] Nonetheless, the genre conventions and typical structures of the historical novel provide too valuable a starting point for my own analyses, especially in regard to contemporary readers' genre-based expectations, to be

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[59] Cf. also Boccardi, 6.

[60] To some extent, this also applies to the reminiscences of the Victorian era discussed in ch. 5.2.2.

discarded entirely even in the case of the more unorthodox texts, while to discard the 'deviant' texts would close down valuable fields of enquiry.

As a consequence, I propose to retain the historical novel as an important point of reference and as the underlying text schema that contemporary readers will have drawn on,[61] but to abandon the initial concept of 'historical fiction set in the Victorian age' in favour of the more inclusive (and less unwieldy) term 'Victorian-centred fiction'[62] to include all the 'novels of the past' discussed in this study; if not all of them fit the established definitions of historical fiction, they are 'historical' at least in the sense that their primary focus lies on a specific and clearly delineated era in British history, i.e. the Victorian age.

To some extent, this broadening of the term 'historical fiction' to include the Victorian-centred novel in all its diversity chimes in with a shift in emphasis within the genre of the historical novel itself at the beginning of the era under consideration. According to Clive Bloom, the tensions of the late 1920s and 1930s resulted both in an "edgier literature devoted to social commentary" (93) and in an increased demand for escapist fiction, especially historical novels; this development also coincides with a renewed interest in history and biography. It is important to stress, however, that the distinction between "edgy", socially critical novels and "escapist" historical fiction is by no means as clear-cut as Bloom's remark implies. As Avrom Fleishman (208ff.) argues, the historical novel undergoes a transformation during the first decades of the twentieth century. A genre that had previously consisted mainly of descriptive accounts of past historical eras now begins to incorporate a "methodological self-consciousness" and an "interpretative process" which shows its awareness of its own textual tradition (Fleishman, 255). For Fleishman, this break in the history of the genre, the point at which the historical novel becomes "not a novel about history but a novel about the consciousness-of-history" (255), is marked by Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941). Fleishman (208) points out, however, that this caesura was to some extent foreshadowed by the work of earlier historical novelists, such as Ford Madox Ford, George Moore, and Maurice Hewlett, who turned towards more subjective accounts of the past under the influence of French naturalism and impressionism,[63] thus creating an argument for locating the turning point within the development of the historical novel somewhat earlier than he himself does.

This is corroborated by Diana Wallace's conclusions from her survey on women's historical fiction. While Fleishman (255) emphasises the 'new' historical novel's metafictional self-awareness as part of the tradition of narrativising history (which, incidentally, also encompasses historiography), Wallace focuses on the emerging sense of social and political consciousness among (female) writers of historical fiction. Both of these aspects play an important part for the analyses of the texts under discussion in the present study. As Wallace shows, the genre of the historical novel undergoes a number of marked changes which coincide with the emergence of women writers to take the place of earlier male authors of historical fiction from World War I onwards. Not only does this development bear evidence to the fact that women were – under the impact of World War I –

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[61] For a detailed outline of schema theory and the relevance of text schemata, cf. ch. 1.4.1.

[62] This term was suggested by the title of an article by Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, who uses it to refer to postmodernist historical metafiction of the type now almost universally known as 'neo-Victorian'.

[63] For a discussion of Maurice Hewlett's *Mainwaring* (1920), cf. ch. 4.1.3.

becoming increasingly aware of the crucial influence of historical events on their own lives.[64] Moreover, "[h]istorical fiction provided (and still provides) a means by which women could reappropriate a past that had largely been denied them" (M. Shaw, 181; qt. in Maslen, *Political*, 37).

Inevitably, this is reflected in the corpus underlying this study: over sixty percent of the works discussed here were written by female authors. As a consequence, some remarks on Wallace's observations appear called for, even if (as will be shown) not all of her conclusions hold true for the Victorian-centred novel. As Wallace points out in *The Woman's Historical Novel*, the 1920s and 30s are marked by a "seismic shift in the genre of the historical novel" (43–4) characterised by the emergence of a heavily politicised form of historical fiction as concerns about gender and class come to the forefront of public consciousness. For Wallace, this shift is epitomised by the bestselling novels of Naomi Mitchinson, who rewrote Greek and Roman history to include marginalised groups: "showing that historical fiction could be deployed as a political weapon without losing its integrity as a depiction of an earlier time, she opened up the form of the historical novel in ways which would be especially important to other woman writers" (Wallace, 52). Having finally gained the vote and thus forced an opening into the public domain hitherto dominated by men, women turned to historical fiction "as a way of making sense of history and of their position in it" (Wallace, 54).[65] In the context of this thesis, this type of historical novel is exemplified especially, though not exclusively, by the works of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Phyllis Bentley.[66] In the hands of these writers, historical fiction becomes, first and foremost, a vehicle for understanding and commenting on present social and political concerns, and thus "one of the means whereby the present can know itself" (Cowart, 27).[67]

In general terms, the heavily politicised historical novels of the 1920s and 30s give way to nostalgic recreations of an idealised past during World War II.[68] As shall be shown in this study, in regard to the Victorian-centred novel this trend continues and even intensifies well into the 1950s. In this, Victorian-centred fiction contrasts with the more critical texts Wallace identifies as typical of this particular decade, which "explore the inadequacies and dangers of traditional constructions of masculinity, put into question by two world wars" (101).[69] Along similar lines, Grace Moore points out that historical fiction often reflects a "need to detect traces of the present in the past", thereby also acting as a "coping mechanism for doubts and anxieties about the future" ("Reworkings", 136).[70] Moore's observation that "Victorian Britain offers a compelling template or scapegoat for present-day anxieties and tensions, contemporary debates […] are frequently off-loaded onto the

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64 Cf. Wallace, 25.

65 Cf. also Maslen, *Political*, 4.

66 Cf. especially ch. 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

67 For historical writers' use of the genre to detect traces of the present in the past, cf. Maslen, *Political*, 25. For Fleishman's rejection of this type of historical fiction as a "lesser" form of historical writing, cf. Fleishman, 13f.

68 Cf. Wallace, 78ff.

69 For the existence of socially critical women's novels which allow women access "into a different terrain within a culture where they mostly exist in the imaginary representations of men" (147–8) during the 1950s, cf. Light, "Writing", 147f. For middlebrow fiction's preoccupation with changing concepts of masculinity, cf. also Maslen, *Political*, 18.

70 For a similar point, cf. also Cowart, 11.

Victorians" ("Reworkings", 136) is as true of Victorian-centred novels from the first half of the twentieth century as it is of the more recent neo-Victorian texts which form the basis of her analysis.

It must be noted, however, that the different aims and emphases that Diana Wallace identifies as typical of twentieth-century historical fiction (and, by extension, of the Victorian-centred sub-genre) do not adhere to the strict temporal progression that her analysis seems to imply. As shall be shown, the trend identified by Wallace is certainly correct; at the same time, there exist – at each of the stages postulated by her – a varying percentage of works which do not conform to the dominant mode of historical fiction identified by her. David Cowart (8f.) implicitly makes the same point about the diversity of historical novels of the late twentieth century: in his monograph on history in contemporary fiction, he divides historical novels into four basic categories,[71] the first, third and fourth of which are relevant to the analyses presented in this study:

1. The Way It Was, i.e. fictions whose authors aspire purely or largely to historical verisimilitude
2. The Way It Will Be, i.e. fictions whose authors reverse history to contemplate the future
3. The Turning Point, i.e. fictions whose authors seek to pinpoint the precise historical moment when the modern age or some prominent feature of it came into existence
4. The Distant Mirror, i.e. fictions whose authors project the present into the past

As Cowart himself points out, however, there are few pure examples of any of these types. Even though I have not followed Cowart's categorisation in my thesis, his subdivision of historical fiction nonetheless serves to highlight the main aims of historical novels, i.e. that of creating an alternative world to the present reality (those texts usually disparaged as 'escapist'); of charting the historical development that shaped the present, and of explaining and commenting on contemporary problems by transposing them into the past.

In the following chapters, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the narrative of the Victorian age as handed down to us through Victorian-centred fiction is therefore an ideologically charged construct influenced by contemporary tastes and concerns as much as it is shaped by historical 'facts' about the epoch in question.[72] As outlined above, the image of the Victorians is by no means a stable one, but one which undergoes a series of revisions as the Victorian self-perception of the nineteenth century as a time of modernity, progress, and enlightenment is deconstructed through the sometimes violently anti-Victorian perspective of the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, and finally re-invented as a quaintly old-fashioned backdrop to historical romances and crime novels in the post-war era. As shall be shown in the following chapter, these texts are therefore 'historical' in a twofold sense of the word: on the one hand, in that they focus on the (Victorian) past, and on the other in that they encapsule, exemplify and comment on contemporary history, values and concerns.[73]

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[71] The division highlights Cowart's extremely inclusive concept of 'historical' fiction, which also includes novels set in the future, i.e. which 'historisise' the present.

[72] Cf. Moore, "Reworkings", 136ff.; Hargreaves, 278.

[73] For the latter interpretation of 'historical' fiction, cf. Marriott. Diana Wallace (4) points out that historical novels must be read as 'historical' in four senses of the word, i.e. their choice of a historical period for their setting, their engagement with contemporary history at the moment of writing, the way in which they reflect the author's life history, and their relation to literary history.

At this juncture, it appears advisable to address the tacit assumption that underlies this approach, i.e. that historical novels can be – and, in fact, *are* by many readers – regarded as sources of 'factual' information about the past. As Ann Rigney notes,

> what defines the historical novel as a genre is precisely the interplay between invented story elements and historical ones. As novels, they are written under the aegis of the fictionality convention whereby the individual writer enjoys the freedom to invent […] a world 'uncommitted to reality'. As historical novels, however, they also link up with the ongoing collective attempts to represent the past and invite comparison with what is already known about the historical world from other sources. […] They are not 'free-standing fictions' […], they also call upon prior historical knowledge, echoing and/or disputing other discourses about the past. (19)[74]

Prior to the recognition that all textual representations of history are discursive constructions which narrativise the past through processes of selection, foregrounding and arrangement, historical fiction was (and, for readers situated outside the academic community, arguably still is) regarded as a genre positioned at the intersection between reality in the shape of historical 'facts', and fiction.[75] As numerous critics point out, part of the attraction of historical fiction lies in its quasi-educational appeal, apparently teaching readers facts about the historical era of the setting: "Even the popular historical novel instructs as it delights" (Cowart, 20).[76] The extent to which this 'educational' function of historical fiction was recognised during the first half of the twentieth century is borne out by Jonathan Nield's bibliography of historical fiction, the foreword of which explicitly states his intention of providing a selection of the best historical novels for use in educational institutions.[77] Unlike that of other works of fiction, the quality of a work of historical fiction is often perceived as directly related to its historical accuracy rather than its stylistic or other 'literary' merits; the "best" historical novels, in Nield's view, are those which are best suited to furnish the reader with accurate factual information about the past.[78] If it is true, as Ann Banfield (258) argues, that the difference between the historian and the novelist lies in the fact that the statements of the first are open to judgements of truth or falsity, while those of the second must be taken as 'true' within the context of the fictional world of the novel,[79] it is also worth noting that many writers of historical fiction lay claim to both of these roles, including authorial notes, forewords or postscripts which attempt to distinguish 'truth' from 'invention', and to foreground the amount of research and historical scholarship upon which these fictional accounts of the past are based.[80]

As already stated, it is one of the objectives of this thesis to illustrate and explain the interest in the Victorian age on the part of early- and mid-twentieth-century writers and readers, both as a means of understanding the present, and as a nostalgic (re)construction of the past as an escape

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[74] Cf. also Boccardi, 4f.

[75] Cf. Wallace, xf.

[76] Cf. Wallace, 4.

[77] Cf. Nield, xviiff.; for the educational appeal of historical fiction, cf. also A.M. Taylor, 19; Butterfield, 3; Trevellyan, 28; Sykes, 106.

[78] Interestingly, a shift in the basis for evaluative judgements of historical novels appears to have taken place at some point between the fifties and the late twentieth century: in contrast to Nield, Cowart judges that an over-reliance on factual history is the mark of second-rate historical fiction, which frequently "neglects the necessary subordination of factual to fictive" (22).

[79] Cf. also Macherey, 45. For a more detailed discussion of Banfield's arguments, cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[80] Cf. Wallace, x.

from present concerns and anxieties. In this context, it appears useful to outline some of the more general approaches underlying my analyses, most significantly Hayden White's view of the past as a narrative construct, and David Lowenthal's inquiry into our fascination with the past in contemporary culture.

1.2 The uses of history

The "self-consciousness" which historical fiction begins to display during the first part of the twentieth century, and which Fleishman (255) remarks on in his study of the genre, does not stop at the methodological level, but also encompasses a further dimension, as a number of historical novels begin to critically examine their choice of subject matter and present arguments for engaging with the past: as shall be seen in the analyses contained in this study, different attitudes towards and ways of dealing with the past – both in terms of its benefits and of its baneful influences on the present – are a major theme in a significant number of the texts under consideration. Whereas Lukács and Fleishman argue that historical fiction depicts "human life as historical life", these texts also focus on the ways in which individuals are affected by their memories of the historical events that have shaped their lives, or by their knowledge of history in general. In his study of history in contemporary fiction, David Cowart argues that "the more self-consciously historical novelist sets out to deal directly with the Ur-historical question: What in the past made the present?" (7).[81] As shall be seen, many novelists additionally attempt to answer a number of attendant questions, among them "Why should we want to know?" and "How can we deal with our knowledge, both in terms of profiting from it, and in terms of coping with historical traumata?", thus attempting to shape the reader's own attitude towards the past.

As Lowenthal (38ff.) notes, the past, as seen from the vantage point of the present, is perceived as having a range of positive effects. While Lowenthal's analyses rely on a wide range of texts and practices – fiction, newspaper articles, films, theme parks and the tourist industry, to name but a few – many of his observations are applicable to the more narrow scope of this thesis. As Cowart (1) points out, the past appears often more accessible to historical fiction than to history;[82] conversely, one may also argue that to the average reader, it appears more accessible *through* historical fiction than through historiography. As Peter Munz explains, "the past does not lie out there or back there, for us to look at. If we want to know it and talk about it, it first has to be written up and turned into a story" (852). The better – in the sense of more accessible, suspenseful, or aesthetically pleasing – the story, the more likely it is to be read, and the more likely it is to affect people's views and beliefs about the past. David Cowart asserts that both history and art ultimately aim at cultural self-knowledge; as he points maintains, "[…] every culture expresses itself more definitely through its artists than through its historians. Artists, after all, speak to the cultural memory with greater authority than do historians. Artists provide the myths by which any cultural body defines itself, the myths that historians mistakenly seek to unravel" (25). The main contribution of history, in the last resort, is to provide the present with "raw material" (Cowart, 25) for artists to transform.

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[81] Cf. also de Groot, 3; on our view of ourselves as products of the past, cf. also Munz, 851f.

[82] Cf. also Munz, 853f.

Munz claims that there are a number of reasons for our interest in the past, ranging from idle curiosity and a fascination with the exotic, over a belief in its didactic potential, to the assumption that it defines our personal and communal identity.[83] Drawing on the same assumptions, Lowenthal provides a much more detailed catalogue of benefits we stand to reap from the past. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, many, but not all, of Lowenthal's points are reflected in Victorian-centred fiction; however, those which are omitted offer as significant a comment on contemporary views of and attitudes towards the Victorians as those which are included. As a consequence, a brief summary of Lowenthal's arguments appears called for.

Under the heading 'familiarity', Lowenthal outlines the importance that the past has for our understanding of the present, suggesting that without memories of the past, the present would be both unfamiliar and incomprehensible – only our memories of the past allow us to make sense of the present. The implied emphasis on the personal rather than the historical past does not, however, render this point entirely inapplicable to historical fiction: as Lowenthal notes, "surrogate and second-hand experiences further infuse present perception: we conceive of things not only as seen but also as heard and read about before" (40);[84] moreover, as noted above, many of the texts under consideration focus on the intersection between historical events and the personal histories of the protagonists, and the ways in which their lives are shaped also by the memories of these events.

A second benefit that the past bestows on the present is its ability to reaffirm and validate present attitudes or actions by stressing their resemblance to historical precedents. The most obvious means of reaping this benefit is that of insisting on the immutability of a given way of life, implying that things have always been as they are at present and that change is neither possible nor desirable; however, literate societies are usually precluded from this approach, since there exist written records of the changes that have already taken place. As Helen Hughes (18) points out, however, this drawback of literacy is turned into an advantage in the historical novel, as it re-writes the past to incorporate the values of the present, 'historicising' them to justify their existence at the moment of writing. In addition, validation of the present via the past often takes the shape of restoring "subverted or lost values and institutions" (Lowenthal, 41). As both Lowenthal (41) and Hughes (68) note, this often happens in hard times when people want to enhance their self-esteem by identifying with a successful (national) past, just as, on a more personal level, remembering a successful personal past may be a means of self-validation for old people. On the other hand, however, Lowenthal remarks that people who have lived through a difficult or inglorious past may enjoy looking back because these memories prove how vastly things have improved in the present. This idea is also linked to the importance both personal and national history have for identity formation: as Lowenthal points out, the ability to recall our past is an essential part of our individual identity, which, in this sense, consists largely of "our cumulated lives" (41). In the same way, "[a]wareness of history likewise enhances communal and national identity, legitimating a people in their own eyes" (Lowenthal, 44).

The idea that history offers guidance for present conduct, and that by studying history, we might be able to avoid repeating past mistakes goes back to the beginnings of historiography

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[83] Cf. Munz, 851.

[84] On this point, cf. also ch. 1.4.1.

itself.[85] Even after the belief in historical continuity had been shattered by the revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the Victorians still believed that "[h]istory taught morals, manners, prudence, patriotism, statecraft, virtue, religion, wisdom" (Lowenthal, 47).

This belief in the didactic function of history has long been largely abandoned – *vide* Hegel's pessimistic dictum that history only teaches us that people have never learnt from history;[86] nonetheless, history is still considered important, as "one of the most effective ways of inhabiting the present is to learn how the past made it what it is" (Mendelson, 10; cited in Lowenthal, 47).[87] Nonetheless, the idea of learning from history is also problematic, because different individuals draw different lessons from the same set of historical facts, and may moreover apply the wrong historical principles to contemporary situations.[88]

In addition to its 'explanatory' function, the past also offers a source of enrichment, as the consciousness of being surrounded by history or historical objects adds a further layer of meaning to present-day experience.[89] However, the past not only enriches the present, it also offers a means of escape, an alternative to the unacceptable present that has, moreover, the additional advantage that we have no responsibility for the past and that "no one can answer back" (Lowenthal, 49). As Lowenthal (49f.) notes, this sense of the past as entirely divorced from the present is typical of the nineteenth century, after revolutionary change had produced a radical caesura in what had hitherto been perceived as a historical continuum. In addition, the past – especially as reflected in historical fiction and film – can be seen to fulfil a 'consolatory' function in that it "allows [us] to construct a history of our modernity that gives us an entirely traditional impression of a movement from Victorian delusion to contemporary knowledge" (Loesberg, 363), implying that, although in some respects still far from ideal, our present condition is a vast improvement on that of the Victorians. It should be noted, however, that this conscious or subconscious 'othering' of the Victorians, usually analysed in connection with depictions of Victorian sexuality in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts,[90] is applicable to a wide range of issues: in her essay on twentieth-century reworkings of the Victorian novel, Grace Moore succinctly points out that "[b]y labelling racial, economic, gender, or any other form of discrimination 'Victorian' we deny its continued existence in our own society" ("Reworkings", 140). However, Moore's point is relevant not only to her corpus of late twentieth-century fiction, but also to earlier Victorian-centred texts, and the critical examination of the cultural and ideological position of contemporary readers and writers which Moore describes as essential to the study of neo-Victorian literature is therefore also a necessary precondition for understanding those earlier works.

Lowenthal's last two points are of particular relevance in explaining the attractivity of the past as a subject for fiction: "termination" (i.e. the fact that the past is irrevocably over) makes it appear safe, well-ordered, and more comprehensible than the present (because we can better understand

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[85] Cf. Lowenthal, 46.
[86] Cf. Cowart, 24.
[87] Cf. Cowart, 27.
[88] Cf. Cowart, 24f.
[89] Cf. Lowenthal, 47ff.
[90] Cf. e.g. Loesberg, 361ff.; Kaplan, 95; Brosh, 139.

past actions of which we know the consequences).[91] Along similar lines, "sequence" can be considered a further asset: the well-ordered chronological order in which we are wont to describe the past "clarifies, places things in context, underscores the uniqueness of past events, and forms them into the lineaments of a true landscape" (Lowenthal, 63). It is important to note, however, that both "termination" and "sequence" are not as such attributes of the past, but are in fact conferred upon it through the process of narrativising it. As Mariadele Boccardi points out, "the retrospective view of a time beyond direct experience forces the historical novelist to confront the textual nature of the material at his or her disposal, with the corollary lack of a comprehensive and unified image of the past, and to acknowledge the imaginative leap from the fragmented evidence to the finished representation of the period or events that are the setting and subject of his or her work" (6).

In addition, Boccardi makes a second and related point when she describes historical novels as "benefiting from the formal trappings of omniscience [as] the elapsed time between the past of the events and the present of their writing situates the author in a position of privileged knowledge, in that he or she is aware of the outcome of events and their effect on those events' future, which is the writer's present" (6). It is important to note, however, that it is not only the author but also the reader who finds her/himself in a privileged position in relation to the characters of these novels, being able to draw on her/his knowledge of history in order to foresee the course the events of the narrative are likely to take. This impression of superior knowledge – which, as shall be shown, is consciously instrumentalised (and occasionally deconstructed) by many writers of Victorian-centred fiction – is enhanced by the fact that the past, merely because of our familiarity with its everyday objects and technologies (so much less advanced and thus also more comprehensible than those of the present), tends to strike us as less complex and less complicated than the present day.[92] It is tempting to extend the resultant feeling of superiority towards all aspects of the plot; some Victorian-centred novels appear carefully constructed to induce in the reader a self-congratulatory frame of mind at being able to survive in the much more complicated present, and to disparage the Victorian characters for their inability to cope with the problems they encounter in the course of their apparently much simpler lives. While a number of writers of Victorian-centred fiction adopt a patronising attitude towards the Victorians that appears constructed to produce a similar frame of mind in the reader, however, others strive to dispel this illusion of the simplicity and comprehensibility of the past.

As Cowart's analysis of historical fiction as a means of understanding the present[93] demonstrates, Lowenthal's concepts of familiarity, identity and guidance are likewise of considerable relevance to the discussion of historical fiction. In addition to these positive effects of the past, however, Cowart's idea of historical fiction as a means of comprehending and coping with the present also implies that historical novels offer an antidote to the detrimental effects of the past noted by Lowenthal (63ff.): to some, the past appears merely a catalogue of "evil memories" (63–4), implying that "a past too painful to recall must be expunged from memory" (66–7) and destroyed in bouts of iconoclastic exorcism in order to make room for a better future. On the other hand, the discursive construction of the superiority of past achievements can be even

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[91] Cf. Lowenthal, 62.

[92] Cf. Lowenthal, 62.

[93] Cf. Cowart, 27.

more crippling to the present generation: "A past too much esteemed or closely embraced saps present purposes, much as a neurotic attachment to childish behaviour precludes mature involvement in the present. […] Reverence for the past is commonly seen to inhibit change, embargo progress, dampen optimism, stifle creativity" (Lowenthal, 65). In the nineteenth century, "intense historical awareness led to remarkable nineteenth-century insights into the past, but also left European society crippled by a despairing sense of being totally determined by it" (Lowenthal, 73). It is this sense of despair that led to the Modernists' rejection of the (Victorian) past,[94] and that finds its expression also in the works of other writers of the period.[95]

Paradoxically, however, both imitation and rejection of the past imply their opposites: continuation exposes its "pastness" and difference from the present; rejection also reveals how much we are indebted and dependent on the past. Indeed, ambiguity between veneration and rejection of the past is a necessary part of our being: children grow up amongst things older than themselves. As Sigmund Freud (18) notes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, they must begin by imitation and emulation, but finally throw off the influence of their elders in order to develop into individuals. Failure to do so obliges the subject to repeat the repressed past in their present experience instead of remembering it as the past.[96] As Lowenthal notes, "[a]mbivalence toward the past reflects or stems from problems of filial dependence" (71). In a society where the dominant position can no longer be attained on the basis of brute strength and physical superiority, the younger generation finds it increasingly difficult to achieve independence from parental authority. No longer sure if and when they will be able to succeed to the position of dominance that their elders are reluctant to relinquish, their attempts at rebellion meet additional resistance from those members of their age group that have internalised their role as dutiful offspring. The resultant dilemma is intensified by the fact that forgetting one's links with the past is not a viable solution to the conflict between veneration for the parental generation and the need for autonomy, as the past (as outlined above) is an essential constituent of our identity;[97] consequently, it is often difficult to achieve a healthy balance between admiration for the past and the need for change and innovation. In a sense, it could be argued that historical novels provide a means of "neutralizing the past" (Lowenthal, 68), especially where they deal with a past epoch that may appear particularly problematic, as it immediately precedes the birth of (or is even closely connected with the childhood of) many writers and readers of these texts.[98] Indeed, the attitude toward the past displayed in the texts under consideration encompasses the whole range of 'neutralisation strategies' listed by Lowenthal (67f.): satirical accounts of the Victorians cut past greatness down to size; more serious texts attempt to escape the baneful influence of their parental generation by trying to understand and explain the workings of the Victorian character, both in general and in particular, while popular romances and crime novels transform the

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[94] Cf. Lowenthal, 66.

[95] Cf. e.g. Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* (1938), discussed at greater length below.

[96] Qtd. in Lowenthal, 71.

[97] Cf. Lowenthal, 72.

[98] For the fascination of the past immediately preceding our own birth, and the problems of dealing with that which is connected to our own childhood, cf. Lowenthal, 51. These concepts will be discussed at greater length in connection with the 'Victorian-centred Bildungsroman' in chapter 3.2.

Victorian age into a marketable commodity that forms the decorative background used to authenticate formulaic and somewhat unlikely plots.[99]

Not surprisingly, the theories of Sigmund Freud form an important intertext for many of the works from the period under consideration as novelists (in keeping with Roland Barthes definition of "History" as "hysterical") use the historical novel as a means of analysing collective neuroses. A significant number of these writers explore the relationship between the Victorians and their own generation in terms of an oedipal conflict, or attempt to chart the crippling effects Victorian moral and social codes have on the development of the protagonists. As shall be seen, the incorporation of Freudian ideas ranges from a naïve belief in Freud as a panacea for all social ills,[100] over several studies of the crippling effects of sexual repression,[101] to Maurice Hewlett's critical engagement with Freudian theory in his biography of a man without super-ego.[102] The marked interest which many novels from the nineteen-twenties and-thirties display in regard to the Victorian era also becomes part of the metafictional tradition of historical writing, since later authors offer tongue-in-cheek comments on their precursors' predilection for psychoanalytical writing,[103] and playfully subvert readers' expectations in this regard.[104]

When Lowenthal analyses the 'uses' to which the present puts the past, he touches upon one of the key assumptions that underlie this study, i.e. that the past – whether presented as fictional in the shape of historical novels, or factual in the form of historiography – is always a narrative construct shaped by the concerns and ideological tenets of the present.[105] As Hayden White notes in his seminal work *Metahistory*, "the historical work [must be considered] as what it most manifestly is – that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them" (2; italics in original). Along similar lines, David Cowart asserts that "[t]he historian presents not the past, but a version of the past, for history, like imaginative writing, involves a selection of detail, a determination of emphasis, a narrational shaping" (17).[106] Historians' and historiographers' view of history is thus inevitably shaped by their own subjectivity and their immersion into the beliefs and values of their own time; it is an artificial and ideologically charged construct relying on textual traces of the past which are, in turn, transformed or 'emplotted' (to borrow White's term) in another text (i.e history as depicted through historiography).[107] This

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[99] For the use of 'period' settings to lend verisimilitude to otherwise unrealistic plots, cf. Wallace, 38f.; Hughes, 18.

[100] Cf. e.g. Phyllis Bentley's *Inheritance*, discussed in chapter 2.1.1.

[101] Cf. e.g. Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor*, discussed in ch. 4.2.4; for a less successful attempt cf. Eleanor Dunbar Hall's *Mine Is The Power* (1954).

[102] *Mainwaring*; cf. ch. 4.1.3.

[103] Cf. Bernard Ash's *Silence For His Worship*; cf. ch. 4.2.2.

[104] Cf. S. Smith, *Afternoon to Kill*; cf. ch. 5.1.2.

[105] Cf. also Hargreaves, 278; Moore, "Reworkings", 134. Sarah Waters, herself author of three neo-Victorian novels, implicitly acknowledges this fact when she notes that "we've constructed [the Victorian age] in a very particular way" (Dennis, 45) in order to ensure its continuing relevance to contemporary readers.

[106] Cf. also White, 5ff.

[107] Cf. Boccardi, 6f.; Cowart, 14ff.; Lowenthal, xvi; Boccardi (7) also points out that the establishment of history as a science rather than an art form dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century: historians distance themselves from fiction writers and insist on factuality and objectivity of their approach precisely at the time when the first historical novels begin to appear.

applies in the same measure to historical fiction: even those works which have no overt political agenda and eschew veiled criticism of the present in favour of historically 'accurate' recreations of a past reality (i.e. the first of Cowart's categories) are by necessity selective accounts of a fictional(ised) past, as the transformation of the 'facts' provided by historiography into fiction inevitably involves further processes of selection, excision and distortion. As shall be seen, Cowart's "Ur-historical question" (7) also needs to be reversed: What in the present makes the past, in the sense of the particular narrative of the past presented in contemporary historical fiction? In other words, in what way do historical novels incorporate, challenge and otherwise engage with other discourses about the era which they claim to represent? And, in doing so, in what way are they 'historical' also in that they reflect the moment of their creation?

1.3 Reading the past through 'historical' fiction

As Wolfgang Iser points out in *The Act of Reading*, all literature – not only historical fiction – is 'historical' in the sense that it engages with and encodes the social norms and values of its moment of production:[108] according to Iser (*Act*, 61), novels contain a selection of the prevailing social and cultural norms, but present them to the reader in unexpected combinations which undermine their validity, thus forcing her/him to critically engage with conventions and ideological tenets which s/he has hitherto taken for granted.[109]

> Herein lies the unique relationship between the literary text and 'reality', in the form of thought systems or models of reality. The text does not copy these, and it does not deviate from them either – though the mirror-reflection theory and the stylistics of deviation would have us believe otherwise. Instead, it represents a reaction to the thought systems which it has chosen and incorporated in its own repertoire. This reaction is triggered by the system's limited ability to cope with the multifariousness of reality, thus drawing attention to its deficiencies. The result of this operation is the rearranging and, indeed, reranking of existing patterns of meaning. (Iser, *Act*, 72)[110]

[108] The same assumption underlies Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production*. For a similar interpretation of the 'historical' element of fiction, cf. also Light, *Forever*, 2; Maslen, "Sizing up", 195, and Marriott. Diane Wallace (4) points out that historical novels must be read as 'historical' in four senses of the word, i.e. their choice of a historical period for their setting, their engagement with contemporary history at the moment of writing, the way in which they reflect the author's life history, and their relation to literary history. The last aspect is also mentioned by Iser (*Act*, 79); the significance of the author's life is commented on by Macherey (51f.).

[109] Cf. also Iser, *Act*, 78 (see below).

[110] A similar argument can be found in Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production*: "Fiction is determinate illusion, and the essence of the literary text is to establish these determinations. […] Fiction is not *truer* than illusion; indeed, it cannot usurp the place of knowledge. But it can set illusion in motion by penetrating its insufficiency, by transforming our relationship to ideology. (By its nature, ideology is always elsewhere, it can never be located; consequently, it cannot be totally subdued, diminished or dispelled.) Fiction deceives us in so far as it is feigned; but this is not a primary act of deception, because it is aimed at one even more profound, exposing it, helping to release us from it" (64; italics in original).

It may be argued that historical fiction, in particular, is in a unique position to achieve this effect of estrangement and critical scrutiny of hitherto accepted norms, as it transposes contemporary ideology into the past and induces the reader to view it from a distance. As fiction foregrounds the deficiencies in the prevalent thought systems and fills in its gaps, it depicts, as it were, the historical moment of its production in negative: it produces an outline of the dominant ideology by filling in everything that lies outside it. Through literature, "we can reconstruct whatever was concealed or ignored by the philosophy or ideology of the day, precisely because these neutralized or negated aspects of reality form the focal point of the literary work. […] And so the literary recodification of social and historical norms has a double function: it enables the participants – or contemporary readers – to see what they cannot normally see in the ordinary process of day-to-day living; and it enables the observers – the subsequent generations of readers – to grasp a reality that was never their own" (Iser, *Act*, 73–4).[111] This does not mean, however, that Iser interprets texts as having as their specific, unified project that of criticising dominant ideology. Rejecting the concept of a hidden, unified meaning as an intrinsic component of the literary work of art, he insists instead that each text contains a multiplicity of meanings, and that different readers will, in the process of reading, dynamically interact with the text to produce a wide range of different, but equally valid, meanings.[112] According to Iser, meaning arises out of the dynamic interaction between text and reader, in which the text, acting as a 'structured prefigurement', induces the reader to draw on her/his world knowledge in order to arrive at a coherent image of the work: coherence is not a property of the fictional text, it is established through the reader's "acts of ideation" (*Act*, 185). These are necessitated by the fact that each text contains blanks (i.e. things which it does not or cannot explicitly say, and which the reader is called upon to fill from her/his store of world knowledge) and negations (i.e. instances where it calls upon the reader's antecedent knowledge only to cancel out the images it evokes). However, these negated images nonetheless remain in the reader's mind as a necessary background to the input provided by the text; by cancelling out the very images it has evoked, the text thus modifies the reader's attitude towards the familiar.[113]

Iser's analysis of the literary work as fragmented and incoherent, and capable of producing a plethora of different and even contradictory meanings, links up with another theoretical approach that likewise aims at situating the literary work in the historical and ideological situation of its production: Pierre Macherey (78), in his application of Althusserian theory to literary production, like Iser discards the idea that dominated literary criticism for much of the twentieth century, i.e. that of the literary work as 'unified' in the sense of possessing a single hidden meaning.[114] Like Iser (*Act*, 96ff.), who lays down the four different perspectives offered by a literary text (that of

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[111] Cf. also Iser, *Act*, 78: "For the contemporary reader, the reassessment of norms contained in the repertoire will make him detach these norms from their social and cultural context and so recognize the limitations of their effectiveness. For the later reader, the reassessed norms help to re-create the very social and cultural context that brought about the problems which the text itself is concerned with. In the first instance, the reader is affected as a participant, and in the second as an observer."

[112] It is important to note, however, that both Macherey (80) and Iser (*Act*, 24ff.) reject Umberto Eco's notion of the 'open text', insisting that the number of possible meanings are inscribed in the text and are therefore finite.

[113] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 169; also 155.

[114] Cf. also Easthope, 16ff.

the plot, the characters, the narrator, and that mapped out for the reader), Macherey argues for a plurality of (contradictory) meanings within the same text, as different discourses – explicit, implicit, present and absent – are at war with each other. Unlike Iser (*Act*, 114), however, who defines the task of the reader as that of arriving at a synthesis of the different perspectives, Macherey (78ff.) regards the attempt to establish coherence as a trap laid down for the naïve reader, which it behoves the informed specialist to avoid. The task of the literary critic is not to analyse and evaluate the text in terms of a unified aesthetic whole, but to explain the presence of these contradictions within the text:

> This conflict is not the sign of imperfection; it reveals the inscription of an otherness in the work, through which it maintains a relationship with that which is not said, that which happens at its margins. To explain the work is to show that, contrary to appearances, it is not independent, but bears in its material substance the imprint of a determinate absence which is also the principle of its identity. The book is furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated; it circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return. The book is not the extension of a meaning; it is generated from the incompatibility of several meanings, the strongest bond by which it is attached to reality, in a tense and ever renewed confrontation. (Macherey, 79–80)[115]

Both Iser and Macherey thus highlight the presence of contradictions, blanks and absences within the literary text. For Macherey, they are symptoms of the subversive discourses repressed by the dominant ideology of the moment of the text's production. For Iser, in contrast, these are a necessary strategy for drawing the reader into the dynamic interaction with the text which generates meaning and is an essential component of the reader's aesthetic enjoyment during the reading process. According to Iser, it is necessary that the text does not say everything, instead leaving the reader to fill in some of the blanks through 'acts of ideation':

> Thus author and reader share the game of the imagination, and, indeed, the game will not work if the text sets out to be anything more than a set of governing rules. The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text allows him to bring his own faculties into play. There are, of course, limits to the reader's willingness to participate, and these will be exceeded if the text makes things too clear or, on the other hand, too obscure: boredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game. (*Act*, 108)

In contrast, Macherey insists that the blanks and absences within the text are symptomatic of an underlying conflict between dominant and subversive discourses within the text; according to his theory, the reader who arrives – through Iser's 'acts of ideation' – at a coherent interpretation of the text in fact fails to understand it, and ignores the social, cultural and economic conditions of its production.

Macherey implicitly signals the divide between his own work and that of Iser when he writes that "no description of the conventions of reading, however thorough, can replace a theory of literary production" (72): criticism which defines the conditions of the production of the work is entirely different from reading. Despite the fact that Macherey's theories can be read as implicit criticism of Iser,[116] however, the two approaches are by no means mutually exclusive, if one bears

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[115] Cf. Storey, 59–60.

[116] It is important to note, however, that no such criticism was intended; as a matter of fact, Macherey's theory precedes Iser's by a decade, and Iser in turn shows no awareness of the other's work.

in mind that the goals which they define as the desired outcomes of their 'acts of reading' are to some extent complementary. Iser's theory focuses first and foremost on the aesthetic response that arises out of the dynamic interaction between reader and text. In addition, he argues that literary texts are ideologically charged in that they thematise and fill in the gaps in the ruling ideology of their day,[117] and that they lead the reader to critically contemplate established norms and conventions by taking them out of their context and depragmatising them.[118] Macherey, on the other hand, shares none of Iser's interest in the phenomenology of reading;[119] for him, aesthetic response and 'acts of ideation' are what leads the reader to commit the fatal error of privileging one of the possible meanings of the text – i.e. that which s/he has created in the course of the act of reading – over all other possible meanings, and of glossing over breaks and contradictions.[120] In contrast, Macherey insists that it ought to be the aim of the critic to contemplate all possible meanings inherent in the text, and, through an analysis of their contradictions, to reconstruct the ideological conditions of its production. These differences arise, however, to a great extent from the different foci of these two theorists: while Iser's account is a *de*scriptive approach to the act of reading, Macherey's is a *pre*scriptive approach to Marxist literary theory, relying predominantly on Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, and formulating – as the title of his work announces – a theory of literary production. Whereas Iser postulates that both aesthetic response and 'meaning' arise through a dynamic interaction that takes place *between* text and reader (and, incidentally, explains how the text forces the reader to critically examine her/his ideological position), Macherey focuses exclusively on the task set down for the literary critic, whom he distinguishes from the "naïve reader" (47). Concentrating on the text and the way in which it reflects the ideological conditions of its production through its gaps, breaks, and silences, he cautions the critic against attempting to establish coherence by reconciling the contradictory meanings contained in the text: in effective literary criticism, the conflict between different meanings within the book is not resolved or absorbed, but displayed.[121] According to Iser, literature shows up the gaps and contradictions in contemporary ideology; according to Macherey, contemporary ideology moreover conditions the gaps and contradictions in literary texts.

It is important to note, however, that both theorists choose their texts carefully to fall in with their theoretical approaches: defining the extent to which a text engages critically with the norms, values and social practices of its day as its potential for evoking aesthetic response in the reader, Iser (*Act*, 180ff.) goes on to identify the textual strategies underlying this project,[122] and to demonstrate them on suitable examples from the literary canon. Macherey, on the other hand, focuses on works which (ostensibly) subscribe to the dominant ideology of their day, and proceeds to identify the latent contradictions within them that subconsciously undermine the overt ideological message.

While Iser (*Act*, 77f. and 83) concedes that literature may also serve the function of stabilizing and validating existing thought systems, especially where these are under threat in the real world

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[117] A similar idea is expressed in Macherey, 60.
[118] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 61ff.; 73f.
[119] Cf. especially Macherey, 71f., where he dismisses the issue as "banal".
[120] Cf. e.g. Macherey, 17f.; 27ff.; 51.
[121] Cf. Macherey, 84.
[122] For a more detailed discussion, cf. ch. 1.4.

of the reader, he merely goes on to show that these make use of fewer of the strategies previously identified by him as typical of more ideologically critical works. By implication, however, this means that Iser identifies the textual strategies which inveigle the reader into sharing the ideological viewpoint expressed in the text, and overlooking the breaks and contradictions for which Macherey exhorts the critic to look. In keeping with his theory of aesthetic value which privileges ideologically critical over conservative texts, Iser points out that many of the latter "tend to be of a more trivial nature" (*Act*, 77), although this is not always the case. Arguing the point from the opposite direction, Helen Hughes, in her analysis of historical romances, points out that 'trivial' texts (i.e. popular historical romances) tend to be ideologically conservative:

> History retold is an imaginative construct, just as narrative is, and in the case of historical romance, where the plot is made up so largely of traditional situations, the historical element may paradoxically provide the most inventive element. The *impression* is, however, that it is the detailed historical picture which is true; and the effect of placing such a description side by side with an invented episode is to suggest that the author is well aware of the possibility of bias in invented episodes and is providing compensatory evidence which leaves the reader free to make up his or her own mind about what is likely to be the truth. (27)

History thus becomes the sugar coating which covers the ideological 'pill' hidden in the romances; the inclusion of 'factual' history serves to validate – in Lowenthal's sense – the conservative attitudes expressed by the text, and stresses their applicability to the real world of the reader by anchoring them to a past 'reality'.[123] By ostensibly focusing on the past, these texts further obscure the extent to which their inherent contradictions reflect *contemporary* ideology.

In their ideological orientation, these romances lie at the other end of the spectrum from those historical novels (such as those of women writers of the 1930s) which possess a clear political agenda, presenting alternative versions of history which focus on marginalised groups and challenge and subvert the dominant historical discourse, and using the past not only to comment on the present, but to call for political action. As shall be seen, however, the textual strategies employed to influence the reader's viewpoint and reaction are essentially the same in all types of text.[124] It must be noted, moreover, that even novels of the ideologically critical kind privileged by Iser are not free from the inherent contradictions that Macherey identifies as typical of every literary text: while the overt message is one of criticism of the dominant ideology, upon closer scrutiny the texts nonetheless reveal a latent counter-current that undermines their critical attitude.[125]

Ideologically critical texts of the type privileged by Iser are 'historical' in the sense that they allow the present-day reader to reconstruct the gaps and silences in the historical thought system that characterises the moment of their production.[126] Popular fiction, however, despite its often conservative tendencies likewise possesses the ability to provide subsequent generations of readers with an insight into the historical period at which they were written: "The techniques used for such didactic purposes can help a great deal in reconstructing the history of the perceptive

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[123] Cf. Hughes, 18 and 24.

[124] Cf. Wallace, xf.

[125] Cf. especially the analyses of Phyllis Bentley's *Inheritance* (1932) and Dorothy Hewlett's *Victorian House* (1939).

[126] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 73f.

modes, feelings, norms, and dispositions of the intended reading public" (Iser, *Act*, 190)[127] – in both cases, this refers to the techniques, in other words, which distract the reader from the breaks, gaps and silences identified by Macherey. Indeed, Macherey makes the same point as Iser when he writes that "[i]n seeing how the book is made we also see what it is made *from*: this defect which gives it a history and a relation to the historical" (80). In the case of Victorian-centred texts, it is useful to distinguish between applications Macherey, of these techniques which are specific to individual texts or groups of texts, which will be discussed at greater length in the subsequent chapters, and those which are generic features of historical fiction. As Hughes (27) and Boccardi (9f.) point out, the formal conventions of historical fiction, which often tend towards an appearance of 'realism' and 'historical accuracy', serve to obscure the ideological component of such texts. In particular, this applies to the past-tense convention characteristic of most works of narrative prose, especially those belonging to the genre of realist fiction.[128] It implies a meaningful progression and closure of the narrative and "grants [events in the narrative] a degree of fulfilment and inherent significance they would not otherwise possess" (Boccardi, 9). In addition, the structural organisation into beginning, middle and end complements real-world temporality and reading experience (i.e. the reader's temporal progression through the novel).[129]

In historical novels, the temporal setting and the past tense convention characteristic of realist novels coincide, and the impression of retrospective understanding is reinforced by the fact that the subject is 'the past'.[130] This results in an "attenuated consciousness of the formally codified traits of narrative representation and the greater impact of the impression of reality" (Boccardi, 10) – an experience that is to some degree paradoxical, because the recreation of the past needs a greater imaginative effort than representation of the present. In order to trigger our capacity for identification and invite suspension of disbelief by blending strangeness of the past with familiarity, historical fiction tends to rely on a strategy which Helen Hughes (19) compares to what Eco identifies as the "technique of the aimless glance" (Eco, 166).[131] A passage from Phyllis Bentley's *Inheritance* (1932) exemplifies this technique:

> Will threw his hat on the table, sat down in a spindle-backed chair by the hearth and looked about him – not because the low beamed ceiling, the flagged floor, the wide hearth, the table with its couple of dirty mugs and plates, the high-backed oak settle, the pot of musk in the mullioned windows, or the ginger cat crouched beside it, were any of them new to him, but for something to do. (17)

As will be discussed in conjunction with deixis, this strategy allows the author to convey the maximum amount of information about the setting of the narrative, while avoiding descriptive

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[127] Cf. also Iser, *Act*, 152. This approach is exemplified by Helen Hughes' study of historical romance fiction. Cf. also ch. 5.2.1.

[128] For the cognitive aspect of the past tense convention, cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[129] Cf. ch. 1.4.2 for the importance of this feature of the reading process in creating an illusion of reality.

[130] Cf. Lowenthal, 62f., discussed in ch. 1.1.

[131] It must be noted, however, that whereas Eco uses this phrase to refer to descriptive passages which focus on events which either have no relevance to the text, or are, in his words, even openly "rejected" (166) by the plot and contradicted by subsequent plot developments, Hughes applies the phrase to minute descriptions of everyday situations which are, to a certain extent, irrelevant to the plot, but not in open contrast to it.

passages of excessive length.[132] According to Eco, romances consist of 'common' and 'intertextual' frames; 'common' frames refer to everyday experience; 'intertextual' frames are stereotyped situations from textual tradition.[133] As Eco has shown in his analysis of Ian Fleming's *James Bond* novels, it is especially in those cases where much of the action consists of events and situations alien to the reader's personal experience, that authors tend to devote lengthy passages to the description of 'common' frames, "because it is with the familiar that he [i.e. the author] can solicit our capacity for identification" (167). In historical fiction, this strategy is reversed: 'common' frames are often used to call the reader's attention to the period setting; the sometimes expansive descriptions of everyday events and procedures stress the *difference* to the reader's own experience by their evocation of period detail, but make the situation seem 'normal' by depicting it through the eyes of one of the characters.[134]

The identification of textual 'strategies' (and, by implication, their effect on the reader) provides the link to another of Iser's key assumptions underlying this study, i.e. that meaning is not the sole property of the text, but arises out of the dynamic interaction between the text and the reader. It is therefore of paramount importance to define – as far as this is possible – whom, (or indeed what,) I refer to when I use this term, and how s/he can be defined with regard to her/his socio-cultural background, world knowledge, literary competence and reading experience. Wolfgang Iser takes up this point in *The Act of Reading* (27ff.), where he discusses different types of 'reader' postulated by various literary theorists. It is tempting to analyse Macherey's statement that "[r]eaders are made by what makes the book" (70) – in the sense that the contemporary reader is subject to the same ideological conditions as the work itself – as an indication that the text can be taken as the starting point for a reconstruction of the contemporary reader. However, as Iser points out, the 'contemporary reader' is difficult to generalise, and almost impossible to derive from purely textual evidence: "The problem here is whether such a reconstruction corresponds to the real reader of the time or simply represents the role which the author intended the reader to assume. In this respect, there are three types of 'contemporary' reader – the one real and historical, drawn from existing documents, and the other two hypothetical: the first constructed from social and historical knowledge of the time, and the second extrapolated from the reader's role laid down in the text" (*Act*, 28). However, all three of these categories are somewhat problematic: the first because it depends on written evidence of real readers' reactions to the texts in question, which is often hard to come by;[135] the second because it is often exceedingly difficult to determine the gender, social class and educational background of the contemporary reader, and the third because, as Iser demonstrates, the role laid down in the text is only one of several perspectives which the reader is led to occupy during the act of reading, and is not necessarily

[132] Cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[133] This idea is closely connected to cognitive approaches to literature, most notably schema theory, as outlined in ch. 1.4.1.

[134] Cf. Hughes, 19; cf. also comments on 'textual economy', ch. 1.4.2.

[135] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 28.

identical with the real reader's ideological position or point of view.[136] In order to address this difficulty, Iser reviews the work of Erwin Wolff:

> This image of the intended reader can take on different forms, according to the text being dealt with: it may be the idealized reader (Wolff, 145); or it may reveal itself through anticipation of the norms and values of contemporary readers, through individualization of the public, through apostrophes to the reader, through the assigning of attitudes, or didactic intentions, or the demand for the willing suspension of disbelief (Wolff, 143; 151–4; 156; 158; 162). Thus the intended reader, as a sort of fictional inhabitant of the text (Wolff, 160), can embody not only the concepts and conventions of the contemporary public but also the desire of the author both to link up with these concepts and to work on them – sometimes just portraying them, sometimes acting upon them. […] But, in any case, by characterising this fictitious reader it is possible to reconstruct the public which the author wished to address. (*Act*, 32–3)

The 'intended reader' is thus, as Iser has it, "the idea of the reader that the author had in mind" (*Act*, 32);[137] it is this idea – and thus the idea that the authors of historical fiction had in mind concerning their intended readers' ideas about the Victorian age – that I shall attempt to reconstruct in my analyses.

1.4 Cognitive poetics: deictic shift theory and schema theory

As I have argued in the preceding chapter, both Iser and Macherey present approaches that highlight to what extent texts map out a position into which the reader is interpellated.[138] While a number of textual strategies have been described as typical of the historical novel – and, by extension, of Victorian-centred fiction – this chapter aims at providing a more comprehensive overview of the mechanisms through which the reader is drawn into the text, and encouraged to draw on her/his world knowledge to fill in the gaps and blanks s/he encounters during the act of reading. As will be shown in this chapter, cognitive poetics – especially schema theory and the concept of deixis in fiction – are a logical extension of Iser's theories, as both of these approaches focus on the strategies which lead to the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text that, for Iser, is central both to the experience of aesthetic enjoyment and the creation of meaning (located in what he refers to the 'virtual work'):

> It [i.e. the work] must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this *virtuality* that it derives its dynamism. […] If the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself. This is not to deny the vital importance of each of these two poles – it is simply that if one loses sight of the relationship, one loses sight of the virtual work. Despite its uses, separate analysis would only be conclusive of the relationship were that of transmitter and receiver, for this would presuppose a common code, ensuring accurate communication, since the message would only be travelling one way. (*Act*, 21; emphasis in original)

There are also a number of further overlaps in the basic assumptions underlying these approaches which warrant a few comments: both cognitive poetics and Iserian aesthetics emphasise that no fictional text can include all the details which make up the mental representation of the fictional

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[136] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 96ff.

[137] It is worth noting that this stands to some degree in opposition to Iser's own concept of the (dehistorizised and decontextualised) 'implied reader', which he develops in *The Act of Reading* and *The Implied Reader* (cf. also Selden and Widdowson, 55).

[138] For this aspect of Althusserian theory, cf. Easthope, 69.

reality created by the reader; all three theories hinge on the fact that readers (have to) import their knowledge of the everyday world into the text in order to establish coherence;[139] by inversion, all of these approaches thus serve to identify the textual strategies that distract the reader from the inherent breaks and contradictions identified by Macherey, and thus lead her/him to subscribe to the dominant ideology contained in the text. Secondly, all three approaches postulate that narrative or literary discourse belongs to a different linguistic realm than the communicative function of language.[140] Moreover, literary language use lacks many of the pragmatic features of everyday (face-to-face) interaction, in that there exists no communicative situation which allows for non-verbal communication, nor is there necessarily any shared background knowledge or common ground between the reader and the author or narrator of a text.[141]

Finally, both cognitive approaches and Iserian aesthetics attempt to account for the importance and popularity of narrative fiction by posing the same question: "What does it do for the reader?" (Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 62), and arrive at a similar conclusion. As Wolfgang Iser points out, reading allows us to live another life for a short while, to acquire new and to modify existing knowledge and experience,[142] and, most significantly, to see our own reality with new eyes after having been 'absent' (i.e. immersed in a book) from it for a while.[143] Erwin Segal takes up the same point when he remarks that narrative allows the reader to vicariously share the experience of characters in the story; it provides us with opportunities to observe situations and phenomena inaccessible to us in real life, and permits us to experience excitement and even tragedy without having to suffer the consequences. Most significantly, it provides us with opportunities to learn.[144] From the point of view of schema poetics, Guy Cook (182f.) likewise postulates that the value which our society accords to literary works stems from their potential to add to and restructure our existing world knowledge, and to do so in a 'safe' environment, where experiments in schema disruption and refreshment have no direct social and practical consequences.[145]

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[139] Cf. Cook, 33ff.; Iser, *Act*, 108, 169, 185, and passim; Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 75; Zubin and Hewitt, 142.

[140] Cf. e.g. Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 16f.; Galbraith, 27ff.; Cook, 40ff. Iser (*Act*, 54ff.) likewise rejects the idea of the literary work as author-reader communication, but replaces this by an analysis of reading as communication between reader and text. Less radical than the outright rejection of Speech Act Theory which underlies cognitive approaches, his definition of literary communication – whose divergence from everyday communicative situations he repeatedly emphasises – is by no means incompatible with schema theory and deictic shift theory. Macherey (54) also notes that literary language eschews social conventions. In particular, it is pointed out that the Gricean Cooperative Principle, which stipulates that senders ought to observe the maxims of quality (i.e. tell what they believe to be the truth), of quantity (i.e. give as much information as necessary, neither more nor less), of relation (i.e. tell only what is relevant to the topic), and of manner (i.e. express themselves as clearly and orderly as possible and avoid obscurity or ambiguity) functions differently in (or is not applicable to) narrative discourse (cf. Cook, 40f.; Galbraith, 32). As will be outlined below, however, this is problematised by the epistemological position of historical novels between history fact and fiction.

[141] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 183.

[142] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 132 and 155.

[143] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 140.

[144] Cf. Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 62.

[145] For a similar – albeit less comprehensive – argument, cf. also Iser, *Act*, 61, where he outlines the ability of literature to 'depragmatise' conventions and rules of behaviour in order to allow the reader to examine them: "We call upon a vertical convention when we want to act; but a horizontal convention enables us to see precisely what it is when we do act."

The present chapter aims at presenting a brief outline of two different theories from the field of cognitive poetics. As a preliminary comment to the following detailed accounts, it is worth noting that deictic shift theory and schema theory are two independent, but in some respects complementary, approaches. As has been argued above, there are significant – albeit largely unacknowledged – overlaps between these approaches and Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response as outlined in *The Act of Reading*, which to some extent anticipates key tenets of both theories presented here, and which I shall therefore use as a background and unifying framework to bring together and emphasise the parallels between these two approaches; in addition, the points of contact between these theories and Macherey's theory of literary production will also be indicated. The arrangement of this chapter takes into account both the chronology of the development of the two cognitive approaches under consideration, and the fact that, as Segal ("Narrative Comprehension", 7ff.) points out, schema theory and other theories of structured representation contributed in some measure to the development of deictic shift theory.

1.4.1 Schema theory

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it contains an outline of the principal features of schema theory as developed in psychology, artificial intelligence, and discourse analysis. Secondly, I have devoted some space to the modification of schema theory and its application to literary discourse as outlined by Guy Cook in *Discourse and Literature* (1994), whose theoretical approach to a significant extent forms the basis of the analyses presented in this study.

The term 'schema' was introduced into linguistic terminology by the British psychologist Frederick Bartlett in 1932, who in turn may have found it in the writings of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant; however, schema theory in the narrower sense referred to in this study was only developed in the late 1970s, most notably in a seminal work by Schank and Abelson (1977).[146] According to these theorists, schemata can be regarded as the building blocks of cognition. As such, they are "employed in the process of interpreting sensory data (both linguistic and nonlinguistic), in retrieving information from memory, in organizing actions, in determining goals and subgoals, in allocating resources, and, generally, in guiding the flow of processes in the system." (Rumelhart, 33–4). Schemata can thus be regarded as 'storage units' of our knowledge about the world in general:

> There are schemata representing our knowledge about all concepts: those underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions. A schema contains, as part of its specification, the network of interrelations that is believed to normally hold among the constituents of the concept in question. A schema theory embodies a *prototype* theory of meaning. That is, inasmuch as a schema underlying a concept stored in memory corresponds to the *meaning* of that concept, meanings are encoded in terms of the typical or normal situations or events that instantiate that concept. (Rumelhart, 34; italics in original)

As the quote shows, each schema consists of a number of constituents or 'variables' (also referred to as 'slots')[147] which depend on the specific environment or situation in which the schema is instantiated. By associating these variables with known real-world events, the typicality of a given

[146] Cf. Rumelhart, 33; Cook, 15ff.; Cook, 79.
[147] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 79; Cook, 82.

object or event can be assessed. This is aided by the existence of so-called "variable constraints" (Rumelhart, 35), our knowledge of the typical values of the variables and their interrelationships which help us to identify the various aspects of a situation or event with our mental schema. In order to interpret a given object or situation according to a particular schema, this schema must be *instantiated*; traces of instantiated schemata serve as the basis for our recollections. Rumelhart compares schemata to "informal, private, unarticulated theor[ies] about the nature of the events, objects or situations that we face", noting that the " total set of schemata instantiated at a particular moment in time constitutes our internal model of the situation we face at that moment in time, or, in the case of reading a text, a model of the situation depicted by the text" (37). Schema-driven processing works either bottom-up (i.e. recognition of one or more components of a given schema instantiates this particular schema) or top-down (i.e. instantiation of a particular schema leads to the activation of relevant sub-schemata and to the recognition of individual components).[148] This outlines the primary activity associated with schemata, i.e. testing whether they account for our current situation by trying to determine the values of the variables of the schema. If a promising schema fails to account for some aspects of the situation, one can either accept it despite its shortcomings or look for another schema. This applies both to real-world experience and to reading; in the latter case, the reader continually tests hypotheses about the interpretation of the text. As Rumelhart points out, "the process of understanding discourse is the process of finding a configuration of schemata that offers an adequate account of the passage in question. [...] Clues from the story suggest possible interpretations (instantiations of schemata) that are then evaluated against the successive sentences of the story until finally a consistent interpretation is discovered" (47–8).[149]

In addition, knowledge of the 'default values' of the variables of the schema allows the observer to draw conclusions or make predictions about unobserved aspects of a situation on the basis of that which is already known or observed.[150] In describing a situation, the existence of schemata thus permits the omission of well-known causal links, as they are provided by the schematic knowledge of the listener or reader.[151]

Rumelhart's theory thus implies three reasons for a particular reader's failure to understand a given text: firstly, the reader may not have the appropriate schema at all; secondly, the reader may find insufficient clues in the text to instantiate the correct schema; and thirdly, the reader might find a consistent interpretation on the basis of his/her schematic knowledge, but not the one intended by the author: "In this case, the reader will 'understand' the text, but misunderstand the author" (Rumelhart, 48). However, as Schank and Abelson point out, schema theory stipulates a hierarchy of levels on which actions or events can be understood, ranging from 'scripts' (the lowest level) over 'plans' and 'sub-goals' to 'goals'; failure to understand on a low level can be referred to the level above. In reading, this means that readers are able to understand the actions

[148] Cf. Rumelhart, 41f. Rumelhart also suggests the expressions "conceptually driven" for top-down, and "data-driven" for bottom-up processing.
[149] Cf. also Gibbs, 33f.
[150] Cf. Rumelhart, 35ff.
[151] Cf. Cook, 80.

of characters even if they do not share these characters' scripts, provided they understand the more general plans or goals that motivate their actions.[152]

As indicated above, schema theory according to Schank and Abelson postulates the existence of so-called scripts, "that describe appropriate sequences of events in a particular context […] a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation" (41),[153] and which can be regarded as "socioculturally defined mental protocol[s] for negotiating a situation" (Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 77). There are three main types of script, i.e. situational, personal, and instrumental. In addition, each script may have different "tracks", i.e. "different but related instances of the same category" (Cook, 81) – for example, someone's situational script for being in a restaurant may have different 'tracks' such as being in a cafeteria, an Italian restaurant, a fast food restaurant, a pub etc. In literary discourse, each of these scripts has an "essential precondition" and a "main consequence", and a number of "slots […] whose realisation can be assumed unless there is information to the contrary" (Cook, 82), and which include a number of props, the roles of the participants, the entry conditions and results, and the usual scenes and their sequence.[154] It is important to note that scripts – like schemata in general – are based on personal experience and vary between individuals. Moreover, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that they "may be derived equally from texts representing events and from events themselves" (Cook, 82). In everyday life, these scripts are the underlying structures which allow us to function as social beings, and which also allow us to formulate assumptions and make predictions about what is going to happen in a given situation. However, it is also necessary to stress that our reading experience also leads us to develop scripts which are not applicable to our everyday experience: as Cook (84) notes, readers of Gothic fiction will, in time, come to develop a script for encounters with a vampire. In the same way, readers of Victorian or Victorian-centred fiction may, based on the descriptions they encounter in the course of their reading, come to develop situational and personal scripts that fit a typically Victorian context, such as taking tea with the vicar, talking to the cook, or being presented to the Queen, despite the fact that such situations do not form part of their real-world experience.

As readers, we draw on our scripts to project our schema-based expectations and assumptions into the text according to the 'headers' we encounter.[155] These headers consist of the preconditions, the instrumental function, or a location usually associated with the script, or of explicit mention of an occupant of one of the slots.[156] As Cook (82) points out, problems in text processing may arise from the activation of the wrong script due to the accidental appearance of another header in the text; the concurrent running of more than one script; the merger of two scripts (i.e. one script becoming part of another); ambiguous headers; obstacles which lead to the abandonment of the script, or necessitate the return to an earlier point in it; events which disrupt the script, which runs on after the obstacle is removed; and (sudden) movement from one script to another.

Experiences which are too novel to be dealt with on the basis of scripts are processed on a higher level of schematic knowledge, so-called 'plans'. These are less specific than scripts, and,

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[152] Cf. Cook, 80.
[153] Cf. Cook, 81.
[154] Cf. Cook, 82.
[155] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 77f.; Rumelhart, 38.
[156] Cf. Cook, 82; Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 78.

as outlined above, allow readers to understand characters' actions even when they do not share the same scripts. Plan-based interpretation involves greater imaginative effort than script-based understanding. In addition, it ought to be mentioned that repeated encounters with certain textual situations – such as the vampire encounter or the Victorian tea party – leads to the creation of the appropriate scripts; hence, it depends largely on the individual reader whether a given textual situation will be dealt with on the level of scripts or plans.[157] Since the projection of individually specific scripts or plans onto the text is a crucial feature of literary interpretation, different readers may arrive at disparate, but equally valid, readings of the same text.[158]

'Goals' (divided into 'sub-goals' and 'main goals') in turn form the next higher level above plans. The five main goals identified by Schank and Abelson are satisfaction, enjoyment, achievement, preservation, and crisis handling; like scripts and plans, however, these are again both individual and culture-specific. According to Cook, the most interesting feature in literature is the exploration of the relationship between these fundamental goals and the plans used to achieve them, as well as the description of departures from these 'default' goals listed by Schank and Abelson.[159] These main goals can, in their turn, be understood through so-called 'themes', which form the highest level identified by Schank and Abelson: role themes (i.e. being a laywer, being a garbage collector,…); interpersonal (rated on scales of positive/negative, intimate/distant, dominant/submissive; realized in relationships such as lover:lover, father:son, boss:employee); and life themes (under headings such as personal qualities, ambition, life-style, political attitude, approval, physical sensations; realised in such manifestations as being a communist, liking luxury living, wanting to become rich, being honest).[160] As will become apparent from the analyses contained in the present study, Victorian-centred fiction is particularly interested in the ways in which these themes are shaped by societal expectations, and how individuals whose life themes do not conform to the Victorian norm negotiate their interaction with a social system that was increasingly coming to be perceived as authoritarian and restrictive.

As demonstrated in this brief overview, schemata are essential to our understanding of spoken and written discourse. As Guy Cook (182f.) notes, however, it is also important to stress that schemata are not rigidly fixed and immutable structures, but are – and, in order to adequately fulfil their function must be – open to change and readjustment in the face of unfamiliar situations and events. Cook (183ff.) criticises that traditional accounts of schema change have tended not to distinguish between the role played by direct world experience and experience of the world through language.[161] Moreover, he points out that schema-based approaches to literature "have a tendency to regard schemata as static representations brought to bear upon text, and neglect ways in which certain texts may rebound upon the schemata used to interpret them, leaving those schemata radically altered" (181).[162] Like Iser, Cook draws on the notion of defamiliarisation introduced by

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[157] As Cook (84) points out, scripts and plans – like all schemata – are essentially individual, even though there may be significant overlaps between individuals belonging to the same culture.

[158] Cf. Cook, 85; also Iser, *Act*, 178.

[159] Cf. Cook, 88f.

[160] Cf. Schank and Abelson, 131–50; the examples are taken from Cook, 89f.

[161] For elaboration of this point, cf. Gibbs, 33f.

[162] Cf. also Iser, *Act*, 155.

the Russian formalists, who claimed that the primary function of literature is to "restore freshness to perception which has become habitual and automated: to make things strange, to make us see them anew" (131). In particular, he takes up Shklovsky's concept of 'impeded form', which refers to the fact that literature characteristically uses language in a way that slows down the process of perception, which is in itself regarded as an aesthetic end rather than a means towards discovering the 'content' of the literary work of art.[163] While the formalists tended to analyse this process on the level of form rather than content, however, Cook (132; 181) postulates that it can take place at three different levels, i.e. on the sub-sentential level (including even graphology and phonology), on the text-structural level, and on the level of world schemata. Both Schank and Abelson, and Bartlett point out that certain experiences have the ability to establish new schemata, or to change and refresh existing ones. However, these changes are viewed essentially as the by-product of experience.[164] In contrast, Cook postulates that some experiences might be actively sought out because of their schema-disrupting and -refreshing tendencies. Moreover, Cook (190) points out that there are three possible kinds of experience – direct experience unmediated through (but possibly containing) language, experience which is mediated through (written) language but represents, or is believed to represent, an independent reality, and written experience which presents a world which is independent from reality, or so far removed from the reader's immediate experience that it acquires the status of fictional reality. It is this last category which is most likely to act as a testing ground for new schemata, and for the disruption, refreshment and rearrangement of existing ones: "[…] it seems reasonable to identify a group of texts of no immediate practical or social consequence. I propose that the illusory experience offered by such texts provides the individual with the opportunity to reorganise schemata without the fear of unpleasant practical or social consequence" (Cook, 191).[165] Cook emphasises the importance of the word 'immediate', pointing out that in time, literary texts might very well have the result of changing our attitudes and values both on the level of real-world events and on the level of language and discourse.

According to this theory, there are three crucial aspects to schema change: the destruction of existing schemata, the creation of new ones, and the establishment of new connections between existing ones. All three of these effects are subsumed under the term 'schema refreshment', whose prerequisite is 'schema disruption'. In contrast, discourse may also be 'schema preserving', or even 'schema reinforcing'.[166] Cook (194ff.) argues that the ability to effect the refreshment of existing schemata is a property of (but not exclusive to) literature, and that literary texts are the main source of schema disruption on all three levels (i.e. language, text and world).[167] Indeed,

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[163] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 187f.. Unlike Cook, however, Iser criticises the concept of 'impeded form' as a means of 'deautomatising' perception, arguing that the process of perception, although prolonged, cannot be extended indefinitely, and that the 'impediment' presented by the literary text cannot prevent perception from becoming 'reautomatized'. In contrast, he proposes the notion of 'hindrance of image building' as a criterion for literary language use, because it leads to an infinite number of possible images, and continually forces the reader to confront and modify the images s/he has created in the process of reading.

[164] Cf. Cook, 182–9.

[165] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 61.

[166] Cf. Cook, 191.

[167] Cook (222) postulates that all three types of schemata are reader-specific, but that the greatest individual difference between speakers of the same language may lie on the level of text schemata: a text may appear highly original to one reader, but may strike another reader as highly unoriginal, depending on

schema disruption on one level often goes hand in hand with schema disruption on another: "as innovation in language use often accompanies innovation in content, the acceptance of new attitudes and subject-matter often entails acceptance of new approaches to language" (Cook, 194).

As Cook shows in his analyses of three 'canonical' literary texts, it is precisely this ability of occasioning changes on the world level through innovation on the level of language and text schemata that can implicitly function as a means of assessing the 'literariness' of a given text,[168] although Cook does in one instance add the caveat that the borders between literature and schema-refreshing discourse are neither precise nor "coterminous" (192). In addition, it must be emphasised once again that because of the essentially personal and individual nature of schematic knowledge, the 'literariness' (according to Cook's definition) of a given text depends on the assessment of the individual reader.[169] It is important to stress, moreover, that the close connection that Cook establishes between the perceived 'literariness' of a given text and its schema-disrupting potential is open to question. While the coincidence of schema-disruptive features on all three levels is certainly conducive to the canonisation of a given text, non-canonical texts may have an equally great – if not greater – impact on readers' world schemata; so-called 'light fiction' may often be a powerful vehicle for social change through its potential to appeal to the emotions rather than the ratio,[170] and its textual strategies which facilitate immersion.

Particularly in regard to the interwar period, excessive attention to schema-disruptive tendencies on the formal level has led to a noticeable lack of critical attention being given to texts outside the narrow confines of the Modernist avant-garde. In particular, it has distracted attention from texts which are conservative in form, but radically schema-disrupting in content: many women writers of the twenties and thirties did not use radical modernist techniques, and "saw nothing strange about presenting radical subject matter in old forms" (Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 6). As Cook (200ff.) himself notes, deviation on the level of language and text schemata is not in itself a guarantee for deviation on the third and highest level, that of world schemata; moreover, change on this last level may also be effected through texts which show no deviancies on the other two levels.[171]

Given the fact that the primary focus of this study lies on the ways in which Victorian-centred novels interact with readers' world schemata, it is useful to briefly consider a theoretical

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readers' individual reading experience and knowledge of similar texts. This draws on the idea that reading experiences that greater diversity exists between the individual choices of reading material of members of a linguistic community than between their everyday (world) experience. However, Cook (194) also stresses that this schema refreshing tendency of literature does not only depend on the individual reader, but also tends to change with temporal distance (i.e. texts which, at the time of their publication, were considered revolutionary and thus schema disrupting may in time come to be seen as schema preserving). For a roughly similar argument, cf. Iser, *Act*, 89, where it is pointed out that the 'poetic quality' of a text (Cook's 'literariness') is linked to its deviation from the expected norm, and thus depends on the individual reader's expectations.

[168] Cf. Cook, 3f.; 191f.; 199ff.

[169] Cf. Cook, 174.

[170] Cf. Maslen, *Political*, 7.

[171] As an example of the first, Cook (200ff.) cites a number of advertisements that are characterised both by linguistic deviation and even by unusual re-interpretations of the established text schema for advertisements, but are schema preserving in that they only add a new prop – the product that is being advertised – to an existing schema. On the other hand, there are literary discourses which are conventional both on the linguistic and on the text.-organisational level, but which are nonetheless revolutionary as to their content.

framework within which to assess the degree of world-schema disruptiveness displayed by a fictional text. Following de Beaugrande, Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 80f.) distinguishes between three levels of "informativity" as a means of assessing the divergence between the fictional reality as presented in the text and readers' world schemata: first-order informativity refers to ordinary things and situations (schema preserving or reinforcing); second-order informativity refers to unusual or relatively unlikely things and events, which are regarded as schema-adding; third-order informativity designates highly unlikely or impossible things and events, which disrupt existing world schemata and call for schema refreshment. However, as Stockwell goes on to demonstrate, even objects and events which are characterised by third-order informativity do not necessarily disrupt and refresh the reader's world schemata. Instead, Stockwell (again following de Beaugrande) postulates the existence of a 'literature' schema, which must be imagined as a higher-level conceptual structure (similar to Schank and Abelson's plans or goals), which offers the explanatory framework for the perceived anomalities and prevents them from affecting the reader's schematic knowledge of the world:[172] for example, in a science fiction novel, time running backwards, faster-than-light travel or the existence of several interconnected parallel universes (all of which represent instances of third-order informativity) would not occasion a radical refreshment of the reader's world schemata as s/he is aware that the story follows the 'science fiction' track within the 'literature' schema.[173] It seems likely, however, that the potential of literary texts to influence the reader's world schemata increases with the degree of realism displayed by the texts in question: the more closely the story resembles the real world of the reader, the more readily will schemata be transferred from one to the other.[174]

As has been outlined in the preceding chapters,[175] historical fiction exists at the interface between fact and fiction; its fictional recreation of a real past is often regarded as a factual account by readers, and the border between reality and invention becomes blurred. Its potential to affect the reader's world schemata becomes strengthened by the obvious fact that, from the point of view of the contemporary reader, the past is only accessible through texts, either 'factual' (historiography, autobiography, and biography) or 'fictional' (historical fiction). Whereas texts set in the present vie

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[172] The idea is also touched upon by Macherey when he states that "the act of reading requires a certain number of implicit and explicit presuppositions – most important, this is a book; failing this, we are no longer engaged in reading, but are dreaming, or bored. However, this attitude does not have to be consciously sustained; an implicit acknowledgement can suffice.[…] This arrangement makes everything possible, make the arbitrary true" (70), going on to stress, however, that the events of the book are true only within that context, not in relation to the real world of the author and reader.

[173] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 80f. It is perhaps worth noting that Stockwell is not quite consistent in his use of terminology; whereas in this passage, he refers to the "science fiction track within the literature schema", he elsewhere refers to individual genres as distinct schemata rather than "tracks" (cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 70, where he repeatedly uses the term "SF schema").

[174] For a similar argument, cf. Iser, *Act*, 132: "Through the experience of the text, then, something happens to our own store of experience. This cannot remain unaffected, because our presence in the text does not come about merely through recognition of what we already know. Of course, the text does contain a good deal of familiar material, but this usually serves not as a confirmation, but as a basis out of which the new experience is to be forged. The familiar is only momentarily so, and its significance is to change in the course of our reading. The more frequent these 'moments' are, the clearer will be the interaction between the present text and our past experience." Macherey also comments on this phenomenon, but characterises this transferral as a fallacy which can be avoided by "reading properly" (Macherey, 47). For a more detailed discussion, cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[175] Cf. ch. 1.1.

with the reader's direct experience of the world for the opportunity to affect existing schemata, texts about the past will more readily be accepted as the sole 'authority' on a reality that is no longer directly available to the reader; in many cases, this is strengthened by the presence of authorial notes which lay claim to scholarship and authenticity, or list relevant literature on the era in question. Unlike other literary works, historical fiction can be – and, indeed, is, as Radway's survey shows[176] – read as a source of information about the past; unlike the purely 'literary' texts discussed by Cook, historical novels can thus be regarded as having, in a sense, the "practical consequence" (Cook, 191) that Cook so emphatically rejects where literature is concerned.

At this point, it is perhaps important to stress once more that my analyses, though heavily indebted to Cook on the terminological and methodological level, are not aimed at establishing the literary status of the works presented in this study, nor of historical fiction in general. In contrast to Cook, I am concerned with an analysis of the bidirectional interaction between contemporary readers' schemata and these texts, focusing both on the schemata readers are (implicitly) encouraged to bring to the interpretation of these novels, and on the way these schemata may in turn be either preserved, reinforced, or disrupted by these texts. In order to avoid giving the impression of evaluative judgements of any kind, I have attempted to avoid the word 'literature' in favour of the more neutral term 'fiction', also adapting Stockwell's terminology accordingly and referring to a 'fiction' schema rather than a 'literature' schema. Moreover, it is also worth adding that I shall primarily focus on the level of text and world schemata. Few – if any – of the novels treated in this study show any degree of linguistic innovation or inventiveness, and deviation on the linguistic level is largely confined to the use of 'period' language in direct speech and (occasionally) in first-person narration. Where this does contribute to the overall effect of the work, the linguistic level will be remarked upon; otherwise, the analyses will focus on the other two levels.

As a final remark, it is important to emphasise once again that schemata are highly individual and depend on the reader's experience of the world as well as of other texts. On the level of text schemata, this means that the term is by no means synonymous with 'genre conventions', as text schemata operate at the level of the individual reader: it is therefore only permissible to assume that text schemata represent the individual reader's idea of the conventions of a particular genre, and are consequently dependent on her/his reading experience and knowledge of literature and literary history and theory.[177] For the purposes of my analyses, I have attempted to construct the text schema that the typical reader of these texts may have had, assuming a degree of familiarity with other texts from the same era and genre, i.e. with other Victorian-centred novels published at the same time, as well as with (historical) middlebrow novels in general. As outlined above, there is significant evidence that the readership of the novels discussed in this study was fairly homogeneous in regard to its social, cultural and educational background. Under the circumstances, it is possible to conjecture that certain features of the texts under consideration that deviate from the established conventions of the historical novel, or from the sub-genre of the Victorian-centred novel outlined in chapter 1.1, would have been perceived as schema disruptive

[176] Cf. ch. 1.1.

[177] For a link between text schemata and deixis in narrative, cf. Talmy's (441f.) remarks on prototypicality as a means of assessing the reader's expectations towards a given text.

by the majority of readers.[178] Whether or not text schema disruption on the level of the individual reader did in fact take place can, of course, not be ascertained. A similar caveat applies to world schemata, especially to the schema of the Victorian age that the 'average' contemporary reader may have had. Again, this varies between individuals, depending on the reader's exposure to information from various sources about the historical era in question; however, as mentioned above, significant overlaps in the world schemata of individual readers may – and will – be assumed.

1.4.2 Deictic shift theory

The concept of deixis (from the Greek for 'pointing') goes back to the Austrian psychologist Karl Bühler, who developed the idea in *Sprachtheorie: die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* (1934). The notion refers to the fact that some words do not have a stable semantic meaning, but are understandable only if the context of the utterance is known to the addressee. The most obvious example of this property of language is the sentence "I am here now", which can be understood only if the identity and location of the speaker (or writer) and the precise moment of speaking are known; moreover, the meaning of the sentence changes according to the identity of the speaker – "I am here now" means something different for me at the moment of writing this sentence than it does for the reader at the moment of reading it.[179] While not necessarily egocentric,[180] Bühler's 'Standard Account' of deixis presupposes a deictic centre (also referred to as *origo* or *zero-point*) that is indicated by the deictic terms *I*, *here* and *now*;[181] the concept of deixis is therefore closely linked to the notion of the embodiment of human consciousness.[182] In real-world interaction, these key terms are interpreted in relation to the context of the utterance, i.e. the speaker's and hearer's momentary environment and situation.[183] However, even in everyday discourse, our understanding of deictic terms is not limited to the origo of I, HERE and NOW; at the simplest level, we can 'project' a deictic centre by saying things like: "it's in front of you". On a more complex level, "the spatial centre of deixis is a location (either physical or psychological) with which the speaker identifies in the content of an utterance" (Zubin and Hewitt, 130).

It is this capacity for deictic projection that allows us to see things from another person's point of view in everyday discourse, and, as readers, to see the world, as it were, through the eyes of a character in a book.[184] As Mary Galbraith points out, Bühler's theory already takes into account the possibility of its application to narrative. Bühler distinguishes between *deixis ad oculos* (face to face interaction), *anaphora* (references to earlier passages in a text), and *deixis ad phantasma*, the process by which the body can become 'loosened' from its involvement in the HERE/NOW/I and

[178] This approach parallels that of Cook, who likewise points out that "hypotheses must relate to particular readers" (171).
[179] Cf. e.g. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 41; Zubin and Hewitt, 129f.; Green, 11.
[180] Cf. P. Jones, 36ff.; Monticelli, "Introduction", 9ff.
[181] Cf. Eschbach, 143, qtd. in P. Jones, 29; Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 43; Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 15f.; Monticelli, "Introduction", 9.
[182] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 41.
[183] Cf. Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 15.
[184] Cf. Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 14f.; Zubin and Hewitt, 130ff.

the real-world context recedes into the background.[185] The readers' consciousness thus "becomes available to translation into an environment we construct both conceptually and orientationally" (Galbraith, 24). This idea is, of course, not unique to deictic shift theory: as Georges Poulet observed in his 1969 article on "The Phenomenology of Reading", "[w]henever I read, I mentally pronounce an *I*, and yet the *I* which I pronounce is not myself" (Poulet, 56; qtd. in Iser, *Act*, 154). However, the aim of deictic shift theory exceeds that of its precursors in that it attempts to present a detailed description of the linguistic and textual features which trigger the imaginative act by which the reader "takes a cognitive stance within the world of the narrative and interprets the text from that perspective" (Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 15).

Deictic shift theory presupposes that readers create a mental representation of the fictional world of the discourse, the 'story world', by importing their knowledge of the everyday world and of other fictional worlds into the text.[186] The story world contains all people, objects, places and events whose presence is either explicitly mentioned or implied by the text.[187] Story worlds resemble the real world in that they have a timeline and in that events in the story stand in temporal, spatial, and causal relation to each other. (In this context, it is perhaps important to stress that events in the story world are assumed to occur chronologically, even if they are presented achronologically through the narration.[188]) Erwin M. Segal ("Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 71ff.) points out that the story world is also assumed to share the same characteristics as the real world in all other respects (i.e. events and objects have the same properties, characters behave in a psychologically consistent manner) unless this assumption is contradicted by the text and its underlying 'storyworld logic':[189]

> Every story world has a set of implicit constraints, rules or principles which dictate what can or cannot be the case within that world. These constraints serve as a storyworld logic, that specifies what the possible properties of objects are and what relations can exist among them. Knowledge of the storyworld logic constrains the interpretation and experience of the story. Because no story can completely specify all the constraints that are implicit in the relationships among its events, the reader must have some way of inferring what they are. The default condition is verisimilitude. If verisimilitude is not followed completely, the reader will try to infer the variations from it by striving to conserve coherence in the story world. As a genre develops and becomes established, the particular storyworld logic for the genre becomes established and can serve as the basis for story comprehension. (72)

The reader's difficulty in understanding the story world logic increases in proportion to the number of deviations and the speed with which they are introduced. As Segal ("Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 75) points out, story worlds are essentially individual mental representations of the fictional world presented by the discourse and may vary between readers; this is especially true in the case of less explicitly signalled deviations from the 'default' condition of

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[185] Cf. also Monticelli, "Introduction", 9.

[186] Cf. Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 13f.; Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 64ff.; Zubin and Hewitt, 130f. Iser anticipates this aspect of deictic shift theory when he points out that readers produce the reality of the text through their own imagination, and are in time absorbed into their own production: "But if we are absorbed into an image, we are no longer present in a reality – instead we are experiencing what can only be described as an irrealization, in the sense that we are preoccupied with something that takes us out of our own given reality" (*Act*, 140).

[187] For further comments on this topic, cf. ch. 1.4.1.

[188] Cf. Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 64ff.; Segal, "Narrative Comprehension", 13f.

[189] Cf. also Talmy, 430.

verisimilitude. Zubin and Hewitt (142) note that storyworld building is governed by the principle of textual economy in the sense that the text only explicitly mentions those details that the reader cannot infer from her/his world knowledge. In the case of narratives which feature a story world which departs significantly from the condition of verisimilitude, textual economy is often achieved by plunging the reader in medias res into a world of unfamiliar objects and characters which are linguistically treated as familiar, thus prompting her/him to construct a mental model of this world.[190] This strategy is of course closely related to the "technique of the aimless glance" outlined in chapter 1.1; in the example from Bentley cited on page 35, it will be noted that the consistent use of the definite article 'the' signals the focaliser's familiarity with his surroundings, while giving the reader a wealth of detail about the unfamiliar story world of the novel.

If the story worlds of historical fiction appear unfamiliar, however, this does not (primarily) lie in their departure from verisimilitude. Unlike fantasy and science fiction, historical fiction is not concerned with the creation of alternative worlds which deviate from that of the reader, but with the *re*-creation of a real past; the 'default' condition of historical fiction is verisimilitude in the sense of historical accuracy and authenticity, and its storyworld logic typically purports to reflect the social and material conventions and constraints of a 'real' historical epoch. In order to construct the story world of a historical novel, readers have to draw on their real-world knowledge of (or beliefs about) the past; on the other hand, the historical 'facts' presented in the novel may in turn contribute to the reader's knowledge (or, more accurately again, beliefs) about that past. As Rapaport and Shapiro (108ff.) point out, there has to be a 'semipermeable membrane' between the story world and the real world of the reader that permits the migration of knowledge from one world to the other, but keeps the two worlds clearly separate.[191] Real-world beliefs about the past are imported into the story world and are assumed to hold true unless this is clearly indicated by the text; in return, information about the past as presented in the text is integrated into the real-world knowledge of the reader, unless the historical 'facts' of the novel diverge from the reader's antecedent real-world historical knowledge.[192]

As stated above, deictic shift theory focuses on the imaginative act which allows the reader to take a cognitive stance within the story world that s/he has constructed from the textual clues. As Zubin and Hewitt explain,

> [j]ust as constructing a mental model of the story world involves importing world knowledge into the interpretation of fictional text, so the deictic construction of narrative is derivative of the reader's experience of deictic centering in the here/now/I/you of the everyday world. Our folk belief in the unitary nature of experience causes us to construct a deictic centre from which to view the unfolding story events, and we use this deictic center as we would use the "I" of face-to-face interaction to anchor our comprehension of the text. (130–1)

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[190] This technique is closely related to that of the 'aimless gaze' discussed in ch. 1.1.

[191] It is important to stress that Rapaport and Shapiro's theories were developed in connection with AI experiments aiming at the creation of a computational reader of fiction, and that the authors lay no claim to their applicability to human readers; nonetheless, some of their findings are obviously relevant to an understanding of human readers' responses.

[192] Cf. Rapaport and Shapiro, 116. Implicitly, this is also borne out by Macherey's (45) remarks on the topic, when he cautions against this "fallacy".

In contrast to everyday interaction, where the deictic centre is indicated by the use of the term 'I', fictional discourse allows it to be realised in a number of different ways, ranging from fictional first-person to impersonal third-person narration.[193] As Galbraith (46) points out, the deictic field of the text "is constructed through the linguistic specifications of the text", relying on markers such as verb tense and aspect, deictic pronouns, verbs and adverbs, expressive elements, experiental verbs, modals, argument structure and presentative structure.[194] According to Zubin and Hewitt, this transposition of the reader's deictic centre into the fictional world of the narrative opens a "window" into the story through which its contents are viewed, "constituted by the intersection of temporal, spatial and personal coordinates forming a *focalizing perspective*, or origin of view, from which the events of the narrative are made accessible to the reader" (131; italics in original). The idea is closely related to Iser's concept of the 'wandering viewpoint', and highlights the difference between literature and other works of art: "We always stand outside the given object, whereas we are situated inside the literary text. The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend. This mode of grasping an object is unique to literature" (*Act*, 109).

Like Iserian aesthetics, deictic shift theory highlights the reader's experience of 'moving' through the text as one of the central features of the reading experience, which contributes significantly to the illusion of inhabiting a fictional 'reality' that we frequently experience when reading a book:

> The dynamic interaction between text and reader has the character of an event, which helps to create the impression that we are involved in something real. This impression is paradoxical in so far as the fictional text neither denotes a given reality, nor caters overtly to the possible range of its reader's dispositions. It does not even have to relate to any cultural code common to itself and its readers, for its 'reality' arises out of something even more basic: the nature of reality itself. […] Reading, then, is experienced as something that is happening – and happening is the hallmark of reality. […] The text can never be grasped as a whole – only as a series of changing viewpoints, each one restricted in itself and so necessitating further perspectives. This is the process by which the reader 'realizes' an overall situation. (Iser, *Act*, 67–8)

Despite its obvious similarities with the 'deictic centre window' of deictic shift theory, Iser's 'wandering viewpoint' is roughly synonymous only with the personal aspect of deixis defined by Peter Stockwell and discussed at greater length below. While this constitutes also the primary focus of the analyses presented in this study, it is important to briefly outline the personal, temporal and spatial coordinates and their linguistic realisation as outlined by Zubin and Hewitt, since those map out the reader's perspective on the events, characters and objects of the story world. Moreover, by creating subjective contexts and perspectives on the story world, they provide the basis for determining the reader's affective response to the Victorian worlds evoked by the novels under consideration.

As theorised by Zubin and Hewitt, the 'deictic window' has four basic components, the WHO, the WHAT, the WHEN and the WHERE, each of which will be briefly discussed here. The first component, the WHO, basically refers to the character(s) on which the narrative is focused; in subjective contexts, it can be sub-divided into the *focalising WHO*, i.e. "the participant

[193] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 131.
[194] Cf. Galbraith, 46.

whose thoughts/perceptions are represented in the story text, or whose point of view is implicit in the description of the scene – who is at the origin of the deictic focalization (hence, a personal coordinate to the origin of the DC)" (Zubin and Hewitt, 134); and the *focalised WHO*, i.e. the character(s) on whom the focalising WHO is focused. The focalising WHO and the focalised WHO are usually separate characters; however, they can be identical in passages of self-reflexion by the focalising WHO. The focalised WHO is not an essential component of the deictic centre, as the focalising WHO does not necessarily always concentrate on other characters. In the course of the story, all WHOs acquire a history in that the reader keeps track of their characteristics and intentions, and their associations with particular scenes and times.[195]

The WHAT component of the deictic window refers to objects that are singled out and foregrounded from the current spatial scene of the narrative, especially by being independently active or handled by a character. Although WHATs may serve very important functions in regard to plot development, they represent a lower level than WHOs in that they cannot become the origin of the focalising perspective; neither do they have thoughts, feelings, or intentions.[196] In addition, the WHAT tends to change very rapidly (often between or within sentences, as a character touches or handles a number of objects). WHATs are less available for deictic tracking by readers than WHOs (i.e. they fade back into the spatial setting unless explicitly reactivated); however, like characters, they may acquire a history in the course of the story.[197]

The WHERE indicates the perspective from which the current scene is observed, and is usually identical with the position of the current WHO. In subjective contexts, however, the WHERE (like the WHO) is divisible into two separate categories: on the one hand, its *origin* is the place from which the events in the text are observed by the focalising WHO; on the other, its *content* is that of the focalising WHO's visual field.[198]

The WHEN refers to the temporal structure of the narrative. Once the reader has taken the past-tense convention of fictional narrative as a signal to shift into 'narrative mode', s/he constructs a NOW point for the current events of the narrative.[199] Typically, this NOW point is perceived as unconnected to the real-world temporality of the reader, and exists independently within the story world. Arguably, however, historical fiction presents an exception to this rule: as the past-tense convention of realist narrative and the subject matter of these novels coincide, the effect is not merely one of immersion into the story world, but that of 'time-travelling' to a setting and location distant from, but nonetheless connected to, the real-world experience of the reader which reinforces the blurring of the distinction between 'fictional' and 'factual' elements within this particular genre. In subjective contexts, the WHEN exhibits the same duality as the WHERE in that there is a focalising WHEN, i.e. the current time frame of the narration, and one or several focalised WHEN(s), which may lie in the past or future (i.e. flashbacks or flashforwards). In addition, multiple pasts or futures may be evoked, not necessarily in chronological order; nor does

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[195] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 134.

[196] As Zubin and Hewitt note, when an object plays an important and lengthy role in a given scene, readers tend to attribute "pseudointentional states" (135) to it.

[197] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 135.

[198] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 135. Zubin and Hewitt (136f.) also note that the WHERE is typically "path-connected" in the sense that most readers tend to construct spatial relationships between the scenes.

[199] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 136f.

the narrative always proceed chronologically. During her/his 'journey' through the text, the reader nonetheless acquires a sense of 'history', as past focalisers and contents of the deictic centre affect that of the current moment. Again, the idea is anticipated by Iser:

> The new moment is not isolated, but stands out against the old, and so the past will remain as a background to the present, exerting influence on it and, at the same time, itself being modified by the present. This two-way influence is a basic structure in the time-flow of the reading process, for this is what brings about the reader's position within the text. As the wandering viewpoint is not situated exclusively in any one of the perspectives, the reader's position can only be established through a combination of these perspectives. But the act of combining is only possible by way of the retained modifications in the many reading moments made articulate by the spotlighting process. (*Act*, 114)

In his discussion of deictic shift theory, Peter Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 45f.) introduces the terms 'spatial' and 'temporal deixis' to refer to the WHERE and WHEN aspects of Zubin and Hewitt's model, and subsumes WHO and WHAT under the heading 'perceptual deixis'. For the purposes of my analysis, I have essentially adopted Stockwell's terminology, but have retained Zubin and Hewitt's original differentiation between WHO and WHAT (and, more specifically, between focalising WHO and focalised WHO/WHAT) where this has proved useful for a more detailed analysis of the passages in question.

Perceptual deixis is marked through expressions which point towards the focalising WHO of the text, including personal pronouns, demonstratives, definitive articles and reference (including proper names), as well as verbs denoting mental states such as thinking or believing. Spatial deixis is signalled by spatial adverbs and locatives, demonstratives, and verbs of motion such as "come/go" or "bring/take". Temporal deixis is indicated by temporal adverbs and locatives (e.g. "in my youth") and tense and aspect in verb forms which indicate the difference between the NOW-point of the story and the 'now' of the narrator or reader.[200] Where the historical novel is concerned, however, the last category must be extended to cover a range of additional elements: dates; encounters with real historical personages (e.g. Thackeray, Browning, Caroline Norton, Queen Victoria or Prince Albert); references to real historical events (e.g. Queen Victoria's coronation, the First Peel ministry, the Chartist uprising or the Corn Laws), including the production of real-world works of art or the publication of real books (e.g. "Dickens's latest masterpiece, *Dombey and Son*"; "that new book everyone was talking about, *Jane Eyre*"); as well as references to other real-world phenomena which are clearly situated in time. Moreover, even oblique references to works of art or literature (i.e. without explicit mention of the title, e.g. when characters quote from or allude to real works of literature) can be regarded as indicative of temporal deixis, locating the deictic centre at some point in time after the publication of the work in question.[201]

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[200] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 45f.

[201] This inclusion of anaphoric expressions into the study of deixis abolishes the binary opposition between the two that has been postulated by a number of theorists (cf. Monticelli, "Introduction", 9f.). However, it is in keeping with Bühler's treatment of anaphora as a type of deictic phenomenon, and with Mihkelev's broad interpretation of deictic markers as "signs […] which connect the utterance with context (up to the widest sociocultural background)" (288).

There are four deictic operations that the reader performs in her/his interpretation of narrative text.[202] The first is the *introduction* of characters, objects, times or places into the narrative, either as actual or as potential WHOs, WHATs, WHEREs or WHENs. The second operation is that of *maintaining* the stability of the deictic centre. Its opposite is that of *shifting* the WHO, WHAT, WHERE or WHEN of the deictic centre. A special case of shifting occurs at the beginning of the narrative; introducing and shifting may be combined into a single operation. The fourth operation is that of *voiding*, which occurs when the component in question is not relevant to the narrative (i.e. the WHO and WHAT may be voided during a scene description, or when the focalising WHO loses interest in them.)

As Zubin and Hewitt (142) note, one of the central principles of the deictic centre is its 'inertia', i.e. its tendency to remain stable unless a shift is explicitly signalled by the text. The WHO and WHERE components, in particular, remain the same unless a change is explicitly indicated. The WHAT, in contrast, rapidly 'decays' (i.e. fades out of the reader's mental representation of the content of the deictic window) unless it is explicitly evoked in the text. In contrast to the WHO and the WHERE, which are characterised by 'stable inertia', the WHEN exhibits 'dynamic inertia', i.e. time is assumed to pass at the expected rate unless this is otherwise indicated by textual clues. In most cases, the WHO, WHERE and WHEN components of the deictic centre tend to be shifted together; however, this deictic synchronism may periodically be broken by voiding one of the components in question,[203] or by separating them. A shift in one component of the deictic centre may lead the reader to assume that a corresponding shift in other components has also taken place: for example, a shift in the WHERE may entail a shift to another WHO, WHAT and/or WHEN; a shift in the WHO may lead to an automatic shift in the WHERE.[204] In addition to morphological, lexical and syntactic devices, shifts in the deictic centre may also be marked by structural cues, such as paragraph breaks, blank lines, or chapter breaks. As Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 47) notes, story worlds can be imagined as consisting of one or more deictic fields, each of them constituted by those deictic expressions within the text which point towards the same deictic centre. Shifts between deictic fields are cued by the so-called 'edgework', i.e. the identification of the boundaries between individual deictic fields. The most obvious shift occurs at the beginning of the text; i.e. the point at which the reader 'enters' the fictional text (the edgework in this case consisting of the first page of a novel or first scene of a film).[205] Times during which the deictic centre is not clearly marked are times of confusion for the reader.[206]

Deictic shift theory presupposes a hierarchy of deictic planes. At their topmost level, there is the real-world reality of the reader, from which s/he enters the fictional world through the edgework. Within the world of the fictional text, there again exists a 'basic' level, which represents the 'reality' of the story world; below that, there are less available deictic planes, such as stories within the story, characters' thoughts and dreams, or flashbacks and flash-forwards;

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[202] For a detailed overview of the morphological, lexical and syntactic devices that prompt the reader to perform these mental actions, cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 144–52.

[203] For example, the WHO and WHEN are voided in scene descriptions; in contrast, in character descriptions the WHEN and WHERE are voided (cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 143).

[204] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 143.

[205] Cf. Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 75f.; Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 49.

[206] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 144; Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 77.

above it, there may exist the level of the narrator who presents the story to the fictional reader, or to another character. Mary Galbraith (47) introduces the expressions 'push' and 'pop' (taken from computer science) for, respectively, a shift to a less available deictic plane, and a shift to a more basic plane. As Galbraith notes, the most common 'pushes' are flashbacks and dreams, while the most common 'pops' (other than looking up from reading) are irony and narrator commentary.[207] Typically, readers will expect to return to the basic ontological level of the story world from these pops and pushes; levels which are introduced at the beginning of the narrative but are not re-activated during the story will eventually decay and fade from the reader's memory.[208]

It must be remembered, however, that deixis refers not only to "the encoding of the spatio-temporal context" but also to "the *subjective experience of the encoder* in an utterance" (Green, 11; emphasis added), and the creation of objective versus subjective contexts is one of the most crucial aspects of deixis in terms of the analyses presented in this study. While it has been shown above that deictic shift theory as outlined by Zubin and Hewitt does not take into account aspects of the focalising WHO's subjectivity such as voice, mind style, ideological point of view, evaluative judgements, or the relative social situations of narrators and characters in relation to each other, it can profitably be extended to cover all of these aspects.[209]

Drawing on the work of the German narrative theorist Käthe Hamburger, Mary Galbraith explains the fundamental difference between reality statements and fiction. In the former case, this involves a speaker and a real-world object about which the statement is made. In the latter case, in contrast, this referentiality is transferred to the objects and events of the imaginary story world, and the subjectivity of the speaker to that of a story world character. While both Käthe Hamburger and Ann Banfield concentrate on the *linguistic* differences between third-person narration and the communicative function of language in everyday interaction,[210] the Japanese theorist Kuroda goes a step further when he asserts that the linguistic structures characteristic of third-person fiction indicate the *epistemological* difference between communicative function of language on the one hand, and fiction on the other hand.[211] As Segal ("Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 69) and Galbraith (29ff.) point out, Hamburger's, Banfield's, and Kuroda's arguments abolish the traditional view of narrative as author–reader-communication, both on linguistic and, more significantly, on epistemological grounds. The communicative view of language stipulates that the speaker's assertions ought to be epistemologically justifiable by her/him, and open to verification by the addressee. In fictional narrative, however, this is

[207] For an example of irony as a pop to a higher-level deictic plane, cf. Iser, *Act*, 117, where he identifies Thackeray's ironical chapter titles in *Vanity Fair* as a sudden shift from the perspective of the characters to that of the narrator. I have adopted Galbraith's terminology, but taken over Stockwell's convention of lower-case letters for these terms (cf. Galbraith, 47; also Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 47f.).

[208] Cf. Galbraith, 47; also Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 47f.

[209] Cf. especially Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 40ff.; also McIntyre, 120ff.

[210] For a concise summary of Hamburger's and Banfield's arguments, cf. Galbraith, 25ff.

[211] Cf. Galbraith, 30.

impossible because these assertions refer to a fictional reality which is not open to justification or verification by real-world speakers or receivers, but is created through the act of narration.[212]

Deictic shift theory rejects the 'communicative' model of literature, and therefore also the a-priori assumption of the existence of a narrator that characterizes traditional literary theory. As Galbraith (42ff.) points out, where the presence of a narrator is not implied by the text, the linguistic choices and arrangement of the text, the articulation of the characters' subjectivities and the expression of attitudes through the language of the narrative must be attributed to the author of the work.[213] For the deictic shift model of fiction, this implies that the reader always creates a deictic field at the level of the story, but not necessarily on that of the narration unless this explicitly called for by deictic markers within the text.[214] As Galbraith (46) argues, without a corresponding deictic field, the events of the story cannot exist; the narration, originating from an author rather than a fictional narrator, however can, because it exists outside the fiction itself.[215] (Conversely, I would argue that the occurrence of deictic markers on the level of the narration can be regarded as indications of the presence of a narrator.) Even where a narrator is explicitly signalled by the text, however, it is important to note that it is the deictic level of the story world rather than that of the narration which stands in the foreground of the reader's consciousness; "the subject of lived experience, the person who constitutes the origo of the deictic field in fiction, is not the SPEAKER 'I' (real I-Origo, author, narrator) but, paradigmatically, a third-person character" (Galbraith, 25).[216]

Although in the absence of a narrator, the author must thus be regarded as the 'source' of the text, it is dangerous to confuse the "fictional epistemology of the novel with the real situation of the novel's creation" (Galbraith, 44); unlike the narrator, the author is not a fictional part of the novel, therefore it is unnecessary to justify how they came by their knowledge of the events of the story, or the thoughts and feelings of the characters; in other words, the author is not the *observer* but the *creator* of the fictional reality.[217] As Ann Banfield points out, "[a] fictional narrative statement is immune to judgments of truth or falsity; in fiction, [these judgments] are suspended. It is inappropriate to say that a fictional statement is false. Rather, it creates by fiat a fictional reality which can only be taken as fictionally true" (258).[218] It is important to note, however, that documentary fiction in the shape of first-person accounts or epistolary novels presents an

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[212] Cf. Banfield, 258; Galbraith, 29ff.; Hamburger, 136; Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 69; Wiebe, 269ff.; also Cook, 41. Similar observations were made by Iser (*Act*, 54ff.; 63; 66; 140; 166; 183), who likewise rejects the idea of literature as communication between author and reader, re-interpreting fictional discourse as reader-text communication and outlining its differences from social interaction.

[213] Iser (*Act*, 207) likewise admits the possibility of literary texts without narrators. Less radically, Talmy (450) argues that in the absence of an overt narrator, elements of psychological structure (such as affect or evaluation) must be attributed to the 'viewpoint'.

[214] For an overview of critical positions regarding the presence/absence of the narrator in third-person fiction, cf. Patron, ""Le narrateur et l'interprétation des termes deictique". For the purposes of this study, the position current in cognitive studies, which rejects the notion of the narrator unless this is explicitly signaled by the text, will be adopted.

[215] Cf. also Talmy, 450.

[216] For sustained discussion of this point, especially in regard to free indirect discourse, cf. Monticelli, "Some Ideas for a Textual Approach to Deixis".

[217] Cf. Galbraith, 44.

[218] For similar points, cf. Wiebe, 269; also Iser, *Act*, 181, and Macherey, 44, 59, and 71.

exception to this rule in linguistic terms. Following Käthe Hamburger, Mary Galbraith calls these narratives "feigned reality statement[s]" (34), pointing out that in texts of this type, the illusion of verifiability has to be maintained by linking the events narrated to the narrator's own experience.[219] As this observation shows, the linguistic and referential differences between fictional and nonfictional discourse can be combined in a number of ways in different types of discourse, resulting in third-person fiction (fictional linguistic structure and fictional referentiality), first-person fiction (non-fictional linguistic structure and fictional referentiality), reality statements (non-fictional linguistic structure with non-fictional referentiality), and – crucially within the context of this thesis – historical fiction (fictional linguistic structure with differing degrees of non-fictional referentiality).[220]

While "feigned reality statements" of the type discussed by Hamburger and Galbraith diverge from the norm of fictional discourse on linguistic grounds, historical fiction deviates from it in respect to epistemological considerations. Like authors of all other types of fiction, those of historical novels likewise create a world which must be taken as fictionally true; on the other hand, however, it is a world which also includes real-world historical personages, phenomena, objects and events, and which therefore lays itself open to "judgments of truth or falsity" (in the sense of historical accuracy and authenticity) as readers compare the historical facts presented in the novel to their own background knowledge. To some extent, historical fiction thus upholds the model of 'literature as communication' that deictic shift theory aims to deconstruct, establishing a framework of shared historical background knowledge between authors and/or narrators and readers which arguably facilitates both the establishment of a common evaluative framework (i.e. shared views about the Victorians) and the interaction between the readers' antecedent historical knowledge and the 'information' contained in the text, so that even historical 'facts' which are valid only on the level of the story-world 'reality' may be incorporated into the audience's beliefs about a real historical epoch, figure, or event.

In regard to the latter point, it is worth noting that authors of historical fiction often show a high degree of awareness of their uneasy position between fact and fiction, often including notes to authenticate the historical facts within their fictions through references to original documents or historiographical accounts of the era in question; others stress the difference between fictional and factual elements, signalling deviances from established historical facts in the historical events presented in the story, or pointing out that the plot and characters of the novel are imaginary, even though the setting is 'real'. Although historical novels, like all other works of fiction, create 'by fiat' a fictional reality which must be accepted by the reader (i.e. in which even elements which contradict the reader's antecedent knowledge of or beliefs about history must be regarded as fictionally true, if historically inaccurate), there appears to be general concensus among critics and readers that in order for a text to qualify as 'historical fiction', such deviations from real-world historical facts must be kept to a minimum, and, ideally, explicitly signalled by the author.

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[219] Cf. Galbraith, 34f.

[220] Cf. Galbraith, 35, who uses the term 'novelized history' for historical fiction. A similar point about the real-world referentiality of historical fiction is made by Richard Maxwell in his encyclodedia entry on "The Historical Novel". For a contrasting point of view, cf. Macherey, 45, who stresses that real-world events and persons must be regarded as purely fictional when they occur within the context of a fictional text.

As Cowart notes, history provides the "raw material" (25) for historical novelists to work on,[221] and as such may be reshaped to fit the artistic demands of the novel, but not altogether rejected in favour of an alternative storyworld reality.

Especially during an era which liked to emphasise the 'educational' appeal of historical writers, authors frequently show themselves aware of this perceived obligation. As Michael Sadleir points out in his author's note to *Fanny By Gaslight* (1940): "*Fanny By Gaslight* is a *novel*, with wholly imaginary plot and characters. But, because it is specifically dated and the events mainly take place in London, care has been taken to maintain period-accuracy and to give invention a basis of fact" (italics in original). In a similar vein, Phyllis Bentley, in her author's note to *Inheritance*, is not only careful to distinguish fiction from fact, but to lay claim to a different kind of historical verisimilitude: "Certain real incidents, persons and places of Yorkshire history put me in the mind to write this book, but as I have modified some details for the sake of unity, the whole must be regarded as fiction and not as fact, as what happened in my imaginary valley of the Ire, and not in the real West Riding valleys of Calder and Colne. I hope, however, that my fiction is symbolic and my valley typical." Even though her characters and the events of the story are fictional, it is implied, they are nonetheless true to history in the sense intended by George Lukács (37) when he insisted on the 'typicality' of the characters of historical fiction.[222]

While historical fiction thus differs from other genres by the (apparent) verifiability of its story worlds, it is important to note that the act of immersing oneself into a historical novel requires the same 'willing suspension of disbelief' as any other work of fiction, as readers have to accept departures from historical 'fact' as 'real' within the context of the fictional epistemology of the story world.[223] In contrast to the 'objective' reality of the story world, subjective sentences (i.e. "those whose content is mediated by the epistemology of a character, and is structured by the character's perceptions, thoughts, knowledge, intentions, goals, and other psychological attributes" [Bruder and Wiebe, 342]) may be questioned by the reader; unlike communicative statements, however, they are not open to 'correction' by recourse to shared beliefs, but only by contrasting the character's model of the fictional world with the reader's own.[224] Their content must be interpreted in relation to the judgment and experience of the character whose subjectivity is represented in the sentence, i.e. the *focalizing WHO* or *subjective character*.[225]

As Bruder and Wiebe (342) point out, this crucially affects a number of areas of narrative understanding: firstly, the content of subjective sentences can only be integrated into readers' image of the focalizing character's attitudes and beliefs, not into their own mental representation of the story world. As will be demonstrated in an analysis of Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953), this can be exploited to unsettling effect, when the only access readers are given to

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[221] Cf. ch. 1.1.

[222] Cf. also Wallace, 11.

[223] Arguably, however, it is worth speculating that the act of immersion is facilitated by the absence of elements which depart from historical reality, as these are most likely to cause the reader to pop out of the text in order to compare and contrast them to her/his antecedent world knowledge. This point will be raised in connection with historical romance fiction in ch. 5.2.1.

[224] Cf. Wiebe, 269ff.; Bruder and Wiebe, 342.

[225] Comparable to the SELF in Banfield's terminology.

the story world is through the highly subjective view of an unreliable focaliser.[226] Secondly, subjective sentences contain expressions of emotion which must be attributed to the focalising character rather than the author or narrator. Thirdly, these sentences often reveal information about a character's thoughts and intentions, and thus may be essential to understanding why s/he performs a particular action. Finally, readers' understanding of the psychological point of view affects interpretation of the relation of the sentence to those that precede it. In Victorian-centred fiction, this strategy becomes a means of portraying the "peculiarity of the age", permitting the reader to share the Victorian characters' ideological world views, attitudes, and motivations, and allowing her/him to assess the differences between their stance and her/his own. The effects produced on the reader range from a plea for comprehension to wholesale condemnation of the Victorians: by allowing the reader to access the minds of the Victorian characters, s/he may come to understand in what way they were shaped and limited by the constraints and conventions of their time, and were genuinely acting in the way that appeared to them the best and most honourable under the circumstances; in other instances, it serves to highlight the difference between the Victorians' self-perception and the way they are seen by the contemporary reader, showing up the gaps and blind spots that prevented them from recognising their narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy.

The issue of subjectivity within a text is also, as Galbraith (36ff.) points out, connected to the issue of voice (in the sense of the stylistic features that allow the reader to draw conclusions about the cognitive attributes and attitudes of the speaker). It is this area of investigation that provides one of the most important links between deictic shift theory and other cognitive approaches to literature, especially to Elena Semino's concept of 'mind style', which relies on schema theory, cognitive metaphor theory and blending theory.[227] The notion of 'mind style' was introduced by Roger Fowler "to refer to any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self" (103), and is used within the context of his work as a synonym for world view and point of view on the ideological plane.[228] As Semino ("Cognitive", 97) argues, however, it is useful to differentiate between those terms: while 'world view' refers to a character's view of the fictional 'reality' or 'text actual world', 'point of view on the ideological plane' denotes those social, cultural, religious or moral attitudes which are shared by individuals with the same social and cultural background; 'mind style', in contrast, is specific to the individual character and refers to views which are essentially personal and cognitive in origin, and are shared by people with the same cognitive characteristics (including the same stage of mental development during childhood and adolescence, or a similar mental illness). Semino ("Cognitive", 98f.) emphasises the importance of metaphorical patterns for analyses of mind style, as recurrent choices of the same source domain for unconventional metaphors reveal the character's experience, interests and preoccupations. All of these points are germane to a discussion of historical fiction, as authors attempt to reconstruct individual Victorian subjectivities and the corresponding voices, and to reconstruct not only the ideological point of view supposedly common to all Victorians, but also the individual mind styles of both stereotypically 'Victorian' and

[226] Cf. ch. 5.1.3.

[227] In a recent article, Semino ("Deixis", 418) likewise comments on the close link between mind style and deixis; her main focus lies, however, on the ways in which "marked patterns in the use of deicitic expressions in literary texts [...] can contribute to the projection of fictional minds that work in 'nonstandard' or 'unorthodox' ways".

[228] Cf. Semino, "Cognitive", 95; "Deixis", 419.

essentially 'un-Victorian' characters. As will be shown in the analyses presented in this thesis, however, historical fiction is notable for its insistence on the complex interaction between the subjectivity of individuals and the historical moment in which they live; as a consequence, the term will be used in the broader sense originally suggested by Fowler to include both Semino's definition of 'mind style' and that of 'point of view on the ideological plane'.

Spatial, temporal, personal deixis as well as mind style are of central relevance also to the concept of empathy. However, this aspect occupies a relatively marginal position within deictic shift theory, and bears amplification by recourse to other theoretical approaches.[229] In view of the metaphorical concept of the deicitic centre as a 'window' offering the reader a moving point of access into the text,[230] it appears not inappropriate to relate the concept of deixis to notions of empathy or identification that Murray Smith in *Engaging Characters* (1995) developed in relation to film studies.[231] Smith (82ff.) identifies the three key components of (readerly) empathy as *recognition*, *alignment* and *allegiance*. Recognition refers to the reader's act of identifying individual characters as discrete textual entities which describe "individuated and continuous human agent[s]" (M. Smith, 82). As a further step, "[t]he term alignment describes the process by which spectators are placed in relation to the characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel" (M. Smith, 83); a process, as Smith notes, is akin to Genette's term 'focalization'. Both of these terms are clearly inextricably bound up with deixis, as spatial, temporal and person deixis serve to mark a character as a discrete, human entity in space, whose individual point of view – in emotional rather than spatio-temporal terms – is revealed through relational deixis.

Smith (83) splits alignment into two complementary sub-functions, which he calls *spatio-temporal attachment* ("the way in which the narration restricts itself to the actions of a single character") and *subjective access* ("the degree of access we have to the subjectivity of characters"). In broad terms, these two functions relate to the division that Zubin and Hewitt postulate for the deictic centre, i.e. that into focalised WHO (mapping onto spatio-temporal attachment) and focalising WHO (subjective access). Smith's distinction is important, however, because it not only allows a detailed investigation of the way in which knowledge is distributed between characters, reader, and narrator in a text, but also because of Smith's emphasis on the relatively minor role that perceptual alignment (the spatio-temporal coordinates of the focalising WHO in Zubin and Hewitt's account) plays in triggering empathy.[232] This phenomenon will become of some significance in my exploration of the role of 'outsider' characters in Victorian-centred texts in subsequent chapters.

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[229] Cf. for instance Costello et al. (480ff.), who note that "[t]he reader of the story experiences emotion by identifying with what the protagonist is feeling", but provide no framework for the ways in which this identification is channelled beyond the (instinctively correct) assumption that the reader empathises with the focalising WHO. Along similar lines, McIntyre (123ff.; following Levinson) proposes the notion of 'empathetic deixis' to describe the aspect of deixis through which the reader gains access to the focalising WHO's world view and value scale, and suggests that these are adopted while the reader occupies this particular deictic field.

[230] Cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 132.

[231] Cf. also Gérard Genette's use of the term 'screening' to describe the amount of access to characters' thoughts and emotions that is afforded to the reader (cf. Genette, 162; also M. Smith, 83). Smith uses the term 'sympathy' rather than 'empathy'.

[232] Cf. M. Smith, 83f.

While recognition and alignment merely demand that the reader understands that a given set of thoughts and characteristics *make up a character*, allegiance goes a step further: "evaluating and responding emotionally to the traits and emotions of the character, in the context of the narrative situation" (M. Smith, 85), the reader enters into a sympathetic (or antipathetic) relationship with that character. This facet of readerly interaction with the text, which refers to the notion that is commonly understood by the term 'empathy',[233] again provides a link between deictic shift theory and schema theoretical approaches: it appears likely that readers most readily identify with that character with whom they share the largest amount of common ground in terms of scripts and schemata, unless this character displays personal or moral characteristics which make this appear undesirable from the reader's point of view. This takes into account both Cook's (84) assertion that script-based processing is easier and quicker than plan based processing (which means that the thoughts and actions of such characters will be more readily understood by readers) and the intuitive proposition that readers will most readily identify with those characters who most closely resemble themselves in terms of world knowledge and experience, and whose world view and personal attributes are to some degree attractive to them.[234] This is also borne out by empirical research carried out by Joe Bray (60ff.), who notes that empathy depends "less on the language of a particular passage [i.e. the deictic markers contained in it] than on a reader's assessment of the 'seriousness' of 'the situation', *and its relevance on his/her own life*" (66; my italics).

However, deixis also operates across the boundaries between the domain of the story world and that of extrafictional reality. As Peter Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 40ff.) shows, deictic shift theory can be extended to include two further aspects which are relevant to the analyses presented in this study. 'Textual deixis' refers to expressions which "foreground the textuality of the text" (46).[235] This includes chapter titles and paragraph breaks, anaphora, references to the text *qua* text or to the act of its production, poetic features which draw attention to the status of the text as an instance of written language, and claims to plausibility, authenticity and verisimilitude. Finally, 'compositional deixis' establishes the text as part of a literary tradition and locates it in relation to other works of literature. As Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 46) points out, however, this aspect in particular – similar to the related issue of text schemata – is dependent on the literary competence of the reader.[236] As will be seen in the analyses in this thesis, the latter two aspects of deixis introduced by Stockwell are of some significance to the discussion of Victorian-centred texts; as with schema theory, an intended reader with the appropriate literary competence will therefore be assumed.[237] In addition, compositional deixis – by emphasising the links between different works of literature – is also closely related to the notion of intertextuality.

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[233] Cf. M. Smith, 84. Smith uses the term 'identification'.

[234] For the latter point, cf. Stockwell, "Texture", 150f.

[235] The notion is to some extent anticipated by Talmy (453), who notes that "when the text calls attention to itself qua text", the viewpoint shifts through different domains, "entailing that the addressee loop his or her attention away from the contents of the text, through the self, and back into the text again."

[236] For text schemata, cf. ch. 1.4.1.

[237] An exception is presented by Shelley Smith's *An Afternoon to Kill* (1953), whose 'twist in the tale' is clearly intended for an audience which lacks the requisite knowledge of literary history (cf. ch. 5.1.2).

1.4.3 Intertextuality – a cognitive view

"The repertoire of a literary text does not consist solely of social and cultural norms; it also incorporates elements and, indeed, whole traditions of past literature that are mixed together with these norms" (Iser, *Act*, 79). This is particularly applicable to historical novels, which are frequently 'historical' also in the sense that they engage with literary history, often through intertextual allusions to other texts. This tendency is especially noticeable in the Victorian-centred novel, bearing evidence also to the "determined intertextuality" (Humble, 47) of middlebrow fiction from the 1920s to 50s.[238] Despite the fact that this has received very limited attention within the field of cognitive poetics, intertextuality – in the sense of overt or coded references to other texts within the text – has links both with schema theory and with deixis.

As far as the latter is concerned, valuable insights are provided by Arne Merilai and Anneli Mihkelev, who treat intertextuality as a deictic phenomenon. Mihkelev, in particular, comments on the function of direct quotations (especially when they are set off from the main text through quotation marks or other typographical signs) as markers of textual deixis. (An example of this function is provided for instance by the numerous italicised quotations in Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* [1938].) Moreover, she notes that quotations (either explicitly signalled or implicit in the form of intertextual allusions) connect the literary text to its context (288) and to other literary works (290ff.); as such, they fulfil a compositional deictic function (to follow Stockwell's terminology):[239] by referring to characters, episodes, settings or titles of other literary works, the author establishes her/his own work in relation to these other texts and signals her/his intention of engaging with and commenting on its literary precursors. In addition, they serve as shifters between deictic fields (that of the author/narrator/focaliser of the quotation and that of the surrounding text).[240] In terms of deictic shift theory, intertextuality, like irony, must moreover be regarded as a pop to a higher-level deictic plane, as the reader draws on her/his real-world experience to locate the source of the allusion.[241]

It is also worth noting that intertextuality also plays an important part in storyworld building. The introduction of scenes, settings or characters from other works into the text of a novel allows the author to observe to the highest possible degree the principle of textual economy, while signalling to the reader a departure from the 'default' condition of verisimilitude in favour of the adoption of a particular kind of storyworld logic: when Dorothy Hewlett, in *Victorian House*, describes the school to which her protagonist William is sent as "an establishment with a strong resemblance to Dr. Blimber's" (268), she signals to the reader that it is the story world of Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1846–48) which must be drawn on in order to create that of *Victorian House*, and that similar rules and constraints are likely to apply in both. Moreover, a variety of

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[238] For intertextuality in historical fiction, cf. Wallace, 4; also ch. 1.1; for intertextuality in the middlebrow novel in general, cf. Humble, 47ff.

[239] As Stockwell (*Cognitive*, 46) points out, this aspect of deixis serves to locate the text within a literary tradition in relation to other works which partake of the same genre conventions. Although Stockwell primarily refers to the importance of generic features (as they are recognised by readers with the necessary literary competence) as markers of compositional deixis, I should also like to highlight the significance of implicit or explicit intertextual allusions in relation to this particular aspect of deixis.

[240] Cf. Mihkelev, 299.

[241] Cf. Mihkelev, 287: "markers [of intertextuality] in the text function as deictics which connect the text and pre-text, and also the text and its context(s) of utterance."

intertextual allusions within one work allows authors to draw on various story worlds, and result in a rich and eclectic mixture of worlds within one text. The connection to schema theory is, of course, particularly apparent in this aspect of intertextuality, as the mention of "Dr. Blimber's" serves as a 'header' which instantiates the corresponding track of a particular type of Victorian boarding school through the reader's schema of such establishments.

The function of intertextual allusions as headers which instantiate certain schemata and can serve to comment on the plans and scripts associated with the texts evoked is explored by Cook (171ff.). However, recognition of these headers depends on the education and reading experience of the individual,[242] although there are, as Cook demonstrates, significant overlaps between individuals belonging to the same culture and age group. As a consequence, intertextuality – like schemata – must be described in relation to a particular reader or group of readers. As with text schemata,[243] I have attempted to construct an approximation of the 'average' contemporary reader, to whom I attribute a tolerable extent of familiarity with canonical works of Victorian literature, as well as with other contemporary Victorian-centred texts. In addition, the presence of these intertextual allusions is, in itself, an indication of the background knowledge that the intended reader would have been expected to possess: deliberately positioning themselves in opposition to the intellectually elitist Modernist movement,[244] writers of middlebrow fiction would have been unlikely to deliberately include obscure references which their readers could not have been safely assumed to recognise.

Given the fact that schemata may be formed by fiction as much as by direct experience, any schema instantiated by a given text may, in the mind of the reader, evoke intertextual connections to other texts. While this consideration is important especially when dealing with a genre that focuses on schemata connected to past epochs, of which the reader is unlikely to have any direct experience, it also lays itself dangerously wide open to being reduced *ad absurdum*, because even the most everyday description may, in the case of one or the other reader, evoke a literary rather than a real-world memory. As a consequence, a number of remarks on the type of headers classified as 'intertextual' will be given below; in addition, the link that intertextuality has not only to schema theory, but to the deictic aspects of fictional texts will be explored.

Somewhat paradoxically in regard to the importance of intertextuality (in the form of comparison to characters, settings or events from other books) to storyworld building, intertextual allusions may also be taken as indications of a particularly high degree of verisimilitude, implying that the same works of literature exist in the story world as in the real world. References to a character's reading of a particular work of literature thus provide a link between the reader and this character, implying the possibility of shared world knowledge between them. Moreover, a character's feelings about or reactions to a particular book also aid textual economy in characterisation, allowing the author to imply that the character in question subscribes to or rejects the attitudes and values expressed in that particular work; as such, intertextual allusions can be regarded as markers of relational deixis. The importance of intertextuality in understanding the mental make-up of individual characters is taken to the greatest possible length in D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!* (1933), where Fawkes' disjointed (mis)quotations from Shakespeare allow the

[242] For a similar point regarding the competence of the reader, cf. Mihkelev, 297.
[243] Cf. ch. 1.4.1.
[244] Cf. Humble, 11.

reader to construct an image of the madman's own world with a minimum of explanatory comments from the narrator.

As outlined above, explicit references to Victorian novels or other texts published during the nineteenth century also serve a more basic function as markers of temporal deixis: if the characters in a historical novel read or refer to a certain work, it can be assumed that the temporal setting of the story is some time after its publication; the same applies to those occasions where the narrator refers to a given book not having yet been published. The accuracy of such markers is of course enhanced when the work in question is referred to as 'new' or 'just published'.[245]

The particular relevance of this dimension of the texts under consideration is twofold: on the one hand, it confirms the assumption – outlined in chapter 1.1 – that Victorian fiction as much as historical works about the Victorian era contributed to the image of the Victorians. On the other hand, references such as the one cited above also permit speculation about the schemata the reader was expected to possess. Both of these observations bear out the assumption that readers (also authors as readers of other authors' works) draw on literary descriptions in order to form schemata of the Victorian age, and thus to some extent underpin the validity of the approach presented in this thesis, which focuses on the interplay between readers' (and authors') existing schemata of the Victorian age, and their presentation in the works under consideration.

[245] Cf. ch. 1.4.2.

2. The Public Legacy of the Victorians

It has been argued that the tensions of the late 1920s and 1930s resulted both in an "edgier literature devoted to social commentary" (Bloom, 91) and in an increasing demand for escapist fiction, especially historical novels, which coincides with a renewal of interest in history and biography during the interwar period. As outlined in the preceding chapter, however, these decades also saw a turning point in the development of historical fiction, which became – especially in the hands of women writers – a tool for exploring and commenting on the social and political issues of the day.[246] Victorian-centred fiction, in particular, presents a fascinating, because uneasy and at times self-contradictory, synthesis of escapist entertainment and socio-political commentary. As will become evident from the analyses presented in chapters two and three, both the contradiction and the Victorian-centred novel's predilection for social criticism survives well into the 1950s, becoming toned down, however, and tempered with an ever-increasing element of nostalgia as temporal distance increases.

The choice of the Victorian era as a setting for the novels discussed in these chapters reflects a two- or even threefold concern on the part of their authors. On the one hand, historical fiction has often been interpreted as a means of holding up a 'distant mirror' to the present,[247] providing a safe setting in which to explore pressing social issues and concerns while downplaying their topicality and avoiding censorship. "[M]atters which could not be located in contemporary Britain could reach readers if they were situated in the past, the future, abroad or in the realm of fantasy" (Maslen, *Political*, 4); as the intensely topical historical novels of Naomi Mitchinson and Sylvia Townsend Warner show, the past in particular provided a safe setting in which to overcome political, social and sexual taboos that were still firmly in place in nineteen-thirties Britain.[248] In addition, realist historical fiction, which presents the illusion of showing an empirical historical 'reality', is particularly rich in strategies for evading the "psychological blocks set up in a reader by social conditioning, which may act as a kind of internal censorship": "[w]riters of fiction [...] have the chance to set issues they wish their readers to explore within the context of a fictional world, where political or social comment may catch their attention once they have become absorbed by the stylistic texture of the narrative or by a lively plot" (Maslen, *Political*, 4).

On the other hand, many of these texts – especially those written during the interwar years – aim at showing the trajectory that led from the Victorian age to the problems of the present. They are thus 'historical' not only in the sense that they focus on a past era, but also in the more narrow sense defined for instance by Lukács, Fleishman, and Boccardi, as showing the workings of the historical processes that shaped the moment of their publication. The novels discussed in this chapter are symptomatic of the new-found consciousness of the way in which historical forces – in the guise of the 'Great War' – shape and influence the lives of ordinary women and men; a

[246] Cf. Hopkins, *English Fiction*, 95 and "Sylvia Townsend Warner", 118; Virginia Woolf noted that this shared commitment forged a bond between otherwise widely different women writers (cf. Humble, 27; also ch. 1.1); Gloria Fromm (294ff.), for instance, demonstrates that a significant exchange of ideas took place between writers as different as Virginia Woolf and Rose Macaulay.

[247] Cf. Cowart, 9ff.; also Hopkins, *English Fiction*, 97.

[248] Cf. also Wallace, 52ff.

development that parallels that which Lukács (15ff.) ascribes to the early nineteenth century after the fall of Napoleon, except for the fact that it for the first time includes both genders. Finally given access to the male sphere of business and politics through the combined influence of war work and the extension of the franchise in 1918, women in particular begin to show their awareness of their lives as "historical li[ves]" (Fleishman, 11). In many novels (mostly by women writers), this realisation manifests itself in the way in which a closer understanding of the past is presented as a crucial means of understanding the present.[249] In particular, this applies to the two greatest burdens that the Victorians were felt to have laid on the present generation: that of a capitalist economy visibly crumbling under the strain of the Great Depression, and that of Britain's involvement in the First World War, leading to a growth of pacifist sympathies among middlebrow writers and audiences, and prompting a re-evaluation of warfare, patriotism and the Victorian cult of military heroism on a more general level.[250]

In addition to these socially critical aspects, however, there appear elements of nostalgia for a lost golden age of imperial greatness and economic stability which lend further depth and complexity to what would otherwise have been merely polemic denouncements of the Victorian generation. As will be shown, the novels discussed in this section reside on various points on a scale demarcated by the two extremes outlined above: that of a historically accurate depiction of the Victorian age as a means of illustrating the historical process that led up to the present, and that of a re-shaping of the Victorian past, as contemporary concerns are transposed into a setting whose ostensible temporal distance allows the writers broader scope for analysis and candid commentary. Nor is the distinction between those different types in any way clear-cut. As I shall argue in this chapter, an interaction between the past and the present takes place in all cases, determining which aspects of the past come in for comment, and which are glossed over as devoid of interest. Even more crucially, this interaction also determines the evaluation accorded to these elements, and the ideological point of view mapped out for the reader. In consequence, even those texts whose overt aim it is to show "what in the past made the present" (Cowart, 7) reveal the influence of the very present that they aim to explain on the past that they depict. This is true to an even greater extent, of course, of the latter type of novel. In both cases, then, Cowart's "Ur-historical question" (7) can be – and, as I have argued in the preceding chapter, needs to be – reversed, and this reversal is one of the central aims of this section. Focusing on 'what in the present makes the past', I shall also investigate how the individual novels' depiction of the Victorian age reflects contemporary socio-political developments, how it interacts with existing views on the Victorians, and how authors set out to instantiate, affirm, or challenge and disrupt readers' schematic knowledge about the era.

In view of the complex web of connections that exists at any given point in human history between the 'public' issues discussed here, and the 'private' concerns treated in chapter three, and the particularly strong connection that all of them were during the first half of the twentieth century felt to have to the Victorian age, it is hardly surprising that most novels feature thematic elements which relate to all four of the subjects discussed in chapters two and three. Consequently, these two chapters must be regarded as two halves of a single unity: their structure reflects the main thematic

[249] Cf. Maslen, *Poltical*, 25.
[250] Cf. Maslen, *Poltical*, 63.

strands of a significant percentage of Victorian-centred novels; it does not, however, constitute an attempt at classification, nor do I want to suggest that a single thematic concern can easily be attributed to any of these works, or that they are easily divisible into 'public' and 'private' or domestic novels. On the contrary, the thematic subdivision of chapters two and three has been deliberately chosen to allow for the analysis and comparison of a wide range of individual themes without obscuring the strong links that these novels establish between them; as a consequence, several of the texts analysed here are discussed in two or more of the individual sub-sections. Given the fact that many of these novels have long been out of print and have so far largely escaped critical attention, short summaries have, where relevant, been included for the reader's convenience, occasionally at the price of briefly disrupting the main argument.

The individual sections of chapters two and three are arranged so as to give a broad overview of the treatment of individual themes (capitalism versus communism, war, patriarchy and childhood experiences) in Victorian-centred novels. Where applicable, the sub-chapters also illustrate the changes which the treatment of these themes underwent in the course of the first half of the twentieth century, contrasting texts from the 1920s and 30s with works from the post-World War II era, but also highlighting continuities.[251] In addition, in each section, a typical example has been selected for more detailed analysis, in order to illustrate the textual strategies used to channel the readers' response to the Victorian worlds presented in the novels, and to identify the contradictions underlying the overt ideological projects of these texts.

2.1 Inheriting the family business

> And so men turned from the totally unknown [i.e. the Paris revolution of 1848], which is always rather disagreeable to contemplate[,] and instead buried their minds in the Gorham controversy, in the plans for the Great Exhibition, the spread of Industrialism, and in that "advancement of commerce" which very nearly became the national religion, in spite of the flouts and jeers of the philosophers like Mr Carlyle, or Mr Ruskin, or the beautiful dirges of Mathew Arnold, or the spiritual appeals made by the little band of Christian Socialists, Frederick Maurice, Charles Kingsley, and Tom Hughes. (J.St.L. Strachey, 224)

The quote highlights one of the most prominent thematic concerns of interwar Victorian-centred fiction: the description of the effect the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism had on established social structures and practices during the Victorian age, and the way in which these changes paved the way for social and economic developments in interwar Britain. In this regard, Victorian-centred fiction is merely one example of a more general trend: the dire economic situation of the 1920s and 30s, manifesting itself in visible signs of economic hardship in many parts of the country, attracted the concern of a significant number of middlebrow writers in general, and of historical novelists in particular.[252] As the historical novel began to show a renewed interest in tracing the historical process that had led up to the present moment, it is

[251] As shall be argued below, World War II marks a clear break in the treatment of the Victorian age in Victorian-centred fiction; despite the fact that texts from the interwar era are by no means homogeneous, and further nuances can be distinguished from the early 1920s to the late 1930s, in most instances there is significantly greater overlap between these novels than between inter- and post-war texts. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, cf. ch. 1.3.

[252] For middlebrow fiction in general, cf. Joannou, "Woman Writer", 3, for 'regional' historical fiction, cf. e.g. Wallace, 63.

hardly surprising that the nineteenth century attained a new importance as a setting: it had seen in the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of the working class and the advent of Chartism and Communism, all of which were perceived as directly connected to the economic impasse of the present-day; in addition, it had given rise to a large number of social problem novels which, as shall be outlined below, continued to function as important sources of inspiration and intertextual references for twentieth-century writers. The proliferation of Victorian-centred novels which emphasise economic hardship, social inequality and problems of class, bears witness to the topicality of these issues in the interwar period; frequently, these novels address an overt political message to their readers.

The main focus of interest typically lies on the everyday lives of their middle- and working-class protagonists rather than on grand events or outstanding historical personages. In this regard, historical novels of the interwar period adhere not only to the tradition begun by Sir Walter Scott and his "middle-of-the-road hero[es]" (Lukács, 71),[253] but also show the influence of contemporary developments in historiography. The social and economic upheavals of the twenties and thirties gave rise to a new emphasis on socio-economic history, exemplified by the works of historians such as John and Barbara Hammond (*The Village Labourer* [1911]; *The Town Labourer* [1917]; *The Skilled Labourer* [1919]; and *The Age of the Chartists* [1930]), "the cumulative effect of [whose works] was to install the Industrial Revolution at the centre of Britain's historical consciousness" (Weaver, 30). One of their central tenets was that the Industrial Revolution had happened much too quickly and had needlessly destroyed many "cherished attitudes and traditions of the past" (Gardiner, 24).[254] These works bear witness especially to the reawakening of a sympathetic interest in the Chartist movement on the part of historians and Labour politicians, and to a general tendency to allocate the blame for present economic hardships to Victorian businessmen and business methods, which is reflected in many of the novels discussed in this chapter.

Not all Victorian-centred novels, however, were consciously and intentionally political according to a 1930s definition.[255] The first two sub-chapters of this section concentrate on works which show an overt political agenda, openly commenting on political issues and carrying a clear ideological message. In contrast, the third part of this chapter focuses on novels which ostensibly eschew political agitation in favour of 'domestic' romance and human interest stories, but which must be read as the politically conservative counterparts of texts featuring an explicitly left-wing agenda. In the analyses, particular attention will be given to the textual strategies employed to win readers over to the ideological point of view of the author, whether overtly expressed – as in the

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[253] For a discussion of Scott's heroes, cf. Lukács, 32ff.

[254] Cf. also Weaver, 29ff. As Gardiner (22) notes, denigration of the Industrial Revolution, while serving to lay the blame for present-day problems on the Victorians, is in itself a legacy of the Victorian age, harking back to pessimistic accounts of industrialisation which had finally given rise to government intervention during the Edwardian era.

[255] It has frequently been noted that many issues – most notably those concerning women's role in society – were not perceived as 'political' at the time; during most of the interwar era, 'political' was more narrowly defined as openly concerned with party politics, and used to refer mainly to the spate of left-wing novels written during the period, while 'domestic' novels were regarded as 'apolitical' despite their often deeply conservative ideological message (cf. e.g. Joannou, "Woman Writer", 7; Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 131; Maslen, *Poltical*, 6; Wallace, 53ff.).

case of the consciously 'political' authors of the left – or merely implied through the conservative value system that underlies the ostensibly 'apolitical' novels discussed in chapter 2.1.3. In addition, Macherey's theory of literary production, with its emphasis on the ideologically charged unconscious of the literary text, adds a further dimension through which ideological tensions and contradictions prevalent at their time of writing can be glimpsed.

As will be outlined in chapter 2.1.4, Victorian-centred fiction from the late 1940s and 50s continues to draw on the schema of the ruthlessly business-oriented Victorians established by the 'political' novelists of the interwar period. While the master narrative goes largely unchallenged, however, much of its emotional and political immediacy disappears as the influence of the Victorians on present-day economic concerns is superseded by the impact of World War II on the national economy. The nineteen twenties and thirties – at least until the Factory Act of 1937 – had seen little substantial improvement in working conditions for non-salaried workers,[256] so that criticism of Victorian business practices could in many ways be regarded as veiled commentary on present-day ills. In contrast, these issues lost much of their topicality due to the comparative affluence and virtually full employment in the decades following on World War II. As a consequence, psychologically accurate and politically engaged descriptions in interwar fiction are superseded by stereotypical portrayals calculated to lend a 'period feel' to novels whose primary interest lies elsewhere. Nevertheless, much post-war Victorian-centred fiction continues to pay lip service to the critical attitudes of its literary predecessors, and exploitative businessmen and down-trodden labourers continue to feature prominently in novels from this period. Increasingly, however, this stereotype begins to coexist uneasily with a re-evaluation of the nineteenth century as an era of benevolent patriarchal capitalism in contrast to the dehumanised form of the twentieth century; an evaluation which has its roots in the ostensibly 'apolitical', conservative historical novels examined in chapter 2.1.3.

What unites many of the texts discussed in this chapter is the strong link they establish between the fate of the working classes and of the female characters. This is the more remarkable in view of the fact that this connection between the political and the private, "theorised, widely discussed and popularised within the woman's movement and elsewhere" (Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 20) by the late 1960s and 70s, was still to some extent revolutionary in the 1930s. Writing about *The Three Guineas* (1938), Joannou contends that "[i]n 1938, the analogies between the patriarchal organisation of the family and the state that Virginia Woolf attempted to draw […] were too radical to be widely understood" (*'Ladies'*, 20).[257] The analogies between capitalism and patriarchy which appear so revolutionary in Woolf's text, however, were clearly in the air at the time of writing, and feature prominently – either implicitly, as in *The Inheritance* (1932), or explicitly, as in *Summer Will Show* (1933) – in novels which significantly pre-date Woolf's more heavily theoretical work. While a negative evaluation of Victorian business morality emerges as an almost universal attribute of politicised Victorian-centred fiction, attitudes towards female emancipation and gender roles show a much broader spectrum of opinions, but are often inseparable from the former. As a consequence, the topic, which will be discussed in greater depth

[256] Cf. Stevenson, 191f.

[257] For a more detailed analysis of this aspect of *Three Guineas*, cf. Joannou, *Ladies*, 174f.

in chapter 3.1, also needs to be touched upon here. Phyllis Bentley's *The Inheritance*[258] is a paradigmatic text for the complex and occasionally contradictory interweaving of these thematic strands in left-wing Victorian-centred fiction of the interwar era. Although aspects of this novel will be discussed in section 3.2.1 in connection with patriarchy, it deserves in-depth consideration in this chapter because of the way in which it engages with contemporary economic problems and class conflicts as the legacy of the nineteenth century.

2.1.1 Phyllis Bentley: *The Inheritance* (1932)

2.1.1.1 Summary

Bentley's novel presents a history of the Industrial Revolution and its economic, social and interpersonal consequences. A family saga that spans five generations of the Oldroyd family, it simultaneously chronicles the rise and decline of the Oldroyd textile mill (and with it that of the Yorkshire textile industry in general), and the ongoing struggle between mill owners and workers. Set in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the novel opens in the early nineteenth century and charts the development of an ever-widening gulf between masters and men up to the time of the book's publication.[259]

At the beginning of the novel, cloth manufacturer William Oldroyd decides to introduce water-powered frames into his mill, a move calculated to boost production, but one which also spreads fear and discontent among his workers, who regard the machines as dangerous rivals threatening their only source of income. William Oldroyd's son, also called William, is less enthusiastic about the frames than his father, but even more impatient to see them installed in the mill. This is due to largely personal reasons: he has been led to believe that once the new machinery is safely in place, his father will give his consent to his marriage to Mary, sister to Jonathan Bamforth, one of Oldroyd's most reliable and conscientious weavers.

The dismal economic situation of many mill workers, who have to sustain large families on a meagre wage, has led to the growth of Luddite sympathies in the era, fostered by secret cells of Luddite agitators. Faced with the threat of further loss of jobs, the Luddites conspire to smash the frames before they can be installed in the mill. Much against his will, Jonathan Bamforth is drawn into the plans by his neighbour George Mellor. When William Oldroyd foils the Luddites' scheme by secretly bringing the frames into his mill under military protection, the Luddites are outraged, and George Mellor, who feels that the lives of his whole family are at stake, hatches a sinister plan to frighten the manufacturer into submission. Again, Jonathan is unwillingly included in the foursome who sets out to wait for William Oldroyd at a secluded spot in the forest, even though his sympathies lie with his employer as much as with his fellow workers. Powerless to prevent the crime, he has to watch George Mellor shoot William Oldroyd, and is afterwards hung for the murder together with the other conspirators.

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[258] It is worth noting that this novel, which has received very little scholarly attention (it is mentioned in passing in Kevin Binfield's *Writings of the Luddites* [2004], in a footnote of Carolyn Steedman's *Master and Servant* [2007], and briefly discussed in Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel*), went through 21 editions in three languages between 1932 and 1987, and was filmed for television by Granada TV in 1967.

[259] Cf. Wallace, 64f.

Unaware that Mary Bamforth is pregnant by him, William junior jilts her in favour of Betsey Brigg, the daughter of a neighbouring mill-owner and the wife initially chosen for him by his father. The marriage is only a limited success, and deteriorates further when William is confronted by Mary, who tells him that she has borne him a son, Jonathan. Realising that he still loves his former fiancée, William feels relieved when his first wife dies of influenza and he is free to marry Mary. Despite their initial happiness, tensions within the family soon begin to mount. Jonathan, who has been brought up to consider William Oldroyd the cause of his mother's misfortunes, is unable to come to terms with the situation, and his antagonistic behaviour towards his father and his younger step-brother, Brigg, alienates the other family members, as do his sympathies with the workers' rights movement led by William Oastler.

Despite their difficult relationship, William Oldroyd repeatedly tries to effect reconciliation between himself and Jonathan. When he dies unexpectedly of apoplexy (brought on by a confrontation with a mob of protesting Oastlerite workers), his will bears testimony to this commitment, dividing the family business equally between Jonathan, Brigg, and Sophia, his daughter from his second marriage. However, the wording of the will, which distinguishes between "Jonathan Bamforth" and "my son, Brigg Oldroyd" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 302), and the ensuing quarrel between the two brothers which erupts at the reading drive Jonathan to reject his share of the inheritance and to dissociate himself from the Oldroyd family business, which is carried on by Brigg after Sophia has insisted on being paid out to finance the profligate lifestyle of her adored husband, Frederick.

As the nineteenth century progresses, the rift between the two branches of the family widens when they find themselves on different sides in the intensifying struggle between mill owners and workers. However, tentative reconciliation is achieved when Brigg's son, also called Brigg, makes the acquaintance of his cousins Henry (Jonathan's son) and Janey (Sophia's daughter, who was raised by the Bamforths after Sophia and Frederick's death in a train accident). For a time, an amiable rivalry develops between Brigg and Henry, both of whom are in love with Janey, and a rapprochement between the two families takes place. When Janey finally rejects Brigg in favour of the mill worker George Mellor (a descendant of William Oldroyd senior's murderer), however, contact between the families ceases once again.

History repeats itself when Brigg junior's son Francis has an affair with Janey's daughter Carmine: like his father before him, he feels duty bound to marry an 'unsuitable' lower-class woman because she is expecting his child. The marriage turns out to be a catastrophic failure, ending with the couple's separation on the eve of World War I. The breakdown of Francis's marriage parallels that of his business. Despite the brief improvement occasioned by the war, he is finally forced to declare bankruptcy in the nineteen twenties, and decides to leave Yorkshire for the South of England with his second wife and family. However, his son David, who has read up on the history of the district and on the role of the Oldroyd family within it, baulks at owning defeat: jumping from the moving train as the family makes their way to the South, he resolves to stay on in Yorkshire and continue the family business.

2.1.1.2 Schemata

When Bentley, in an author's note to *Inheritance*, writes: "I hope [...] that my fiction is symbolic and my valley typical", she emphasises a central concern of many Victorian-centred novels of the

interwar era, that of 'typicality', or, in other words, of constructing a distinctive 'Victorian' schema, and of identifying its constituent features. As becomes apparent in the course of the novel, Bentley lays claim to 'typicality' on two levels: the regional, as she hopes that the fictional Ire Valley of the novel will be understood as uniting the defining characteristics of the Yorkshire region; and the historical, as she sets out to identify the 'typical' features of Victorian capitalism that gave rise to the class conflicts and economic problems of the present day, inviting readers to draw parallels between the individual fates of her characters and British society in general.

The first of these concerns becomes evident through Bentley's own generic classification of her text, which she describes as a 'regional novel'. This sub-genre of historical fiction, which flourished in the interwar period, emphasised the distinct ways in which the historical process could be experienced in different parts of the country. For Bentley (*Regional*, 12f. and 38f.), the rise of the regional novel is directly connected to an increasing sense of regional solidarity especially in those eras in the North of Britain which were most heavily affected by the economic depression:[260]

> When a strong communal feeling of any kind is brought into being and grows in intensity, it naturally becomes shared by the community's artists, and thus finds expression. Nothing could be more natural, therefore, than the outburst of regional fiction in the period named [i.e. the 1920s and 1930s]; the writers of this fiction were impelled by pity, anger or admiration to record their native region's sufferings, and perhaps *to seek in the past some of the reasons for them*. Such writers were highly conscious of belonging to a given region, and consciously intended to depict it in their fiction. (Bentley, *Regional*, 39; my italics)

In *Inheritance*, this project is realised also through the way in which Bentley consciously draws on schemata which were shared between members of the community she portrays, but which were in all probability not available to the more general reader. The following sentence, which contains a number of headers pertaining to a 'cloth weaving' schema, may serve as a typical example of Bentley's technique: "He shook his shoulders impatiently, spoke a sharp word about the nap of a piece which was just coming off the raising-frame, and bade it be re-teazled" (*Inheritance*, 28). Bentley's use of technical vocabulary serves the double function of creating an in-group of readers with the requisite background knowledge (making it easier for the present-day Yorkshire reader to identify with the Victorians and to draw the parallels between then and now which lie at the heart of Bentley's political argument), and of lending a smattering of local colour to her narrative which can be appreciated by the general reader without detracting from the understanding of the main plot of the narrative, even though Bentley rarely gives explanations of the complicated cloth-weaving processes to which she alludes.

Given the regional novelists' interest in the genesis of the present moment, many of these novels – especially those of Bentley and her more famous role model, Arnold Bennett – show a profound interest in the Victorian era and its influence on the present day. As a consequence, *Inheritance* is also concerned with schematic knowledge about the Victorians on a much less specifically regional level. In this respect, Bentley's text is notable for the way in which it engages with preconceived ideas about the Victorian period and, as it were, anatomises the established schema by distributing its constituent features among a number of characters in an attempt to better understand the preceding generation.[261] In this regard, Bentley's novels exemplify the "horizontal"

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[260] Cf. also Wallace, 63.

[261] The same strategy is apparent in Bentley's later novel *Sleep in Peace* (1938), discussed in ch. 3.2.1.

presentation that Iser identifies as typical of fictional texts which aim at "depragmatising" conventions in order to transform them into "objects of scrutiny" for the reader: "We call upon a vertical convention when we want to act; but a horizontal combination of different conventions enables us to see precisely what it is that guides us when we do act" (Iser, *Act*, 61). Rather than using the strategy to force readers to critically engage with the society of their own day (as Fielding does according to Iser's opinion), Bentley transforms it into a tool for historical investigation, exploring the conventional structures which guided the Victorians' actions.

Presenting a range of Victorian 'types', the novel succeeds in highlighting the inherent contradictions within the notion of the 'typically Victorian' mindset.[262] When we learn that "[i]n the year of Queen Victoria's accession Jonathan [Bamforth] and Helena Singleton were married" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 275), we are given what appears to be a clear indication that the couple are to be read as epitomic of the new age: cold, prudish, self-satisfied moralists intensely aware of their own mental and moral 'refinement', they are ashamed of what they regard as Will Oldroyd's vulgarity. Although they are genuinely concerned about improving the condition of the workers, they are hampered by their own sense of superiority over them, disdaining those who fail to share their conception of active engagement in the Trade Union movement as a "moral duty" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 266) and seek only to improve their own condition by pushing for wage raises. Characteristically, however, Bentley eschews facile black-and-white characterisation, and later passages invite a much more positive evaluation of the Bamforths. In particular, we are given moving descriptions of the continuing affection that continues to exist between the couple as old age advances, along with accounts of the atmosphere of affection and open-minded intellectuality that characterises the Bamforth household. In addition, Bentley draws a favourable comparison between Jonathan's attitude towards the workers, whom he meets on equal terms and encourages in their attempts at self-education, and that of the mill owners, who reveal their snobbish sense of class distinction when they propose to "condescend" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 412) to negotiations with the weavers during a strike.

If Jonathan and Helena are typical because of their belief in philanthropy, self-education and the Arnoldian concept of culture as a civilising influence on the working classes, Brigg Oldroyd senior is presented as the (stereo)type of the successful businessman, whose narrow-minded approach to life excludes everything which is not directly connected to the furtherance of his own economic interests. Brigg junior, on the other hand, typifies the next generation of mill-owners, which seeks to ally itself with the gentry and is interested in the family business only as far as it provides the financial backing necessary for a life of leisured comfort. The transition from one class to the one above is completed in the next generation, as Brigg's son Francis has internalised the values of his mother's land-owning family:

> He believed in God and the King, the Conservative party – his father had changed his politics over the American tariffs, which though a joy to Charlotte had to be kept from old Brigg – chivalry to women, the weak and the aged, and the right of the gentry to lead England. (The Oldroyds and the Stancliffes were of course gentry.) He also believed in telling the truth, fair play, being a good loser, never giving in, never taking an unfair advantage, never betraying your feelings except to trusted intimates, and never letting anyone down. He rarely read anything except the newspapers, the Strand Magazine, and

[262] Bentley herself points to this project when she has David remark on it during his reading of Jonathan's family history later in the book.

> sometimes that new fellow Kipling; in his eyes Annotsfield and that terrible industrial Ire Valley were spoilings of the country landscape, and mill chimneys a necessity perhaps, but a misfortune. Yes, Francis was his mother's boy. (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 436–7)

Firmly convinced that business is "a nuisance" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 444), Francis has to be blackmailed by his father into taking classes at the Annotsfield Technical College. His lack of interest in and insight into the minutiae of the cloth-making business lose him not only the respect of his workers, but ultimately also lead to the bankruptcy of the Oldroyd textile mill. In Bentley's analysis of the historical process that culminates in the economic crisis of the present day, the penultimate representative of the Oldroyds embodies the outcome of a development through which not only the workers but also the employers have become alienated (in the Marxist sense) from the finished product.[263]

It is not only the men, however, who embody different types of the Victorian. Sophia, Brigg's extravagant and pleasure-loving sister, represents the "type [...] of the *nouveau riche*" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 585; italics in original), as her great-nephew remarks dismissively. A description of Sophia's house serves to underline the truth of David's assertion: "The rich carpets, the large pictures – very oily and coloury and bulging with naked limbs – the numerous brilliant jets of gas, the marble busts on columns, the fringe, the draperies, the heavy chenille curtains, the padded upholstery of the chairs – really it was quite overpowering" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 308). It also points to one of the constituent features of the 'Victorian' schema operative at the time of publication, namely the Victorians' lack of taste in art, architecture, and interior decoration – an element which, as shall be seen, occurs in numerous novels of the period and was firmly entrenched in the popular imagination.[264]

Janey, on the other hand, embodies the (exaggerated) sense of propriety which was often regarded as typical of the Victorian period, and which in *Inheritance* is more roundly condemned than any other aspect of the Victorian Zeitgeist. When her suitor uses the word "damn" in her presence, she is "deeply shocked and wounded by this breach of the manners of the day. That he should coarsely swear in her presence! By her standards it was unforgiveable; Janie coloured, outraged" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 415). Janey's keen sense of the proprieties is shown to be destructive of personal happiness: Brigg's emotional outburst causes Janey to reject his offer of marriage despite her love for him, and drives her into an unequal and unhappy marriage with a mill worker. Later on, her outraged and violent reaction when she learns that her daughter has indulged in pre-marital sexual intercourse frightens Carmine into a difficult and premature birth that causes irreparable internal damage and leads to her death in childbed when she becomes pregnant a second time despite her doctor's explicit warning.

Bentley's technique of distributing the constituent features of the 'Victorian' schema which she aims to construct among several characters allows her to present a multi-faceted picture of the Victorian mindset, which serves as the basis for her teleological understanding of history – a

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[263] Cf. Wallace, 65.

[264] Cf. Conekin, 43f.; also Gardiner, 28 and Hewitt, 92. The issue is of relatively minor relevance for Bentley; in other texts, however, attitudes toward Victorian aesthetics form an important touchstone of character (cf. ch. 3.3).

'history' schema that must, in itself, be regarded as a legacy of the Victorian age.[265] Focusing on the status of the present generation as the inheritors of the problems which accrued in the course of the Victorian era, *Inheritance* identifies the Industrial Revolution as the starting point of a historical process which led up to the political concerns and social tensions of the present moment. In terms of text schemata, *Inheritance* thus conforms to the sub-schema of the historical novel that Cowart (8) labels the "turning point"; the turning point being, in this case, the introduction of cloth-weaving machines into the Oldroyd mill. Its emphasis on social and economic history, and its assessment of the Industrial Revolution as a destructive process which lies at the heart of contemporary social and economic problems, is in accordance with historiographical developments at its time of publication.[266] In keeping with her teleological conception of history, however, Bentley also suggests that progress in the fields of psychology and political theory has finally given the present the means of rectifying the mistakes made by preceding generations, and to learn from the solutions offered, but not implemented, by the Victorians themselves.

In this regard, the 'teleological' track through the 'history' schema interacts with another conception of history, that of history as a series of cyclical repetitions, just as the 'turning point' track through the 'historical novel' schema interacts with another text schema, that of the family saga.[267] Bentley's achievement lies in her creative merger of two apparently conflicting text and world schemata: the 'cyclical' schema of history which underlies the 'family saga' text schema, and the 'history-as-progress' schema which informs the 'turning-point' track through the 'historical fiction' text schema. Adhering to the 'cyclical' text schema of the family saga which links up with the title of the novel, Bentley describes the reappearance of certain characteristic traits of the Oldroyd family (especially their wilfulness and irascibility, of which the throbbing vein on their foreheads is a physical sign); the names Will and Brigg; and the repeated failure of the male Oldroyds' personal relationships with women.[268] It goes without saying that the belief in the repetitiveness of history which forms the basis of the 'family saga' text schema is as old as historiography itself.[269] Typically, the 'cyclical' schema tends to go hand-in-hand with the sense that history is a source of guidance for the present moment, as knowledge about the past offers the possibility of foretelling (and forestalling) future events. Especially prevalent throughout the nineteenth century,[270] Bentley's conception of the didactic potential of histor(iograph)y can in itself be regarded as the inheritance of the Victorians.

It is the central paradox that underlies this schema – that knowledge about the repetitiveness of history may serve as a means of avoiding repetition – that Bentley invokes in order to reconcile two apparently conflicting tracks. It is not unimportant in this context that Bentley reinterprets the 'cyclical' schema in terms of a downward spiral: for much of the novel, history appears both repetitive and goal-oriented, albeit in a negative sense. In the final part of the novel, however, this

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[265] Cf. Evans, 181; also Gardiner, 107. While not an invention of the nineteenth century, the 'Whig interpretation of history' was nonetheless strongly endorsed in Victorian historical and historiographical discourses.

[266] Cf. Gardiner, 24.

[267] Cf. Wallace, 64; for the cyclical representation of history in family sagas, cf. Bridgwood, 178.

[268] Cf. Wallace, 64.

[269] Lowenthal (46) traces the notion of history as a series of cyclical repetitions back to ancient Greek historiography.

[270] Cf. Lowenthal, 47.

schema is finally overturned and replaced by that of 'history-as-progress', as David breaks through the established pattern and shows that learning about the past may serve to disrupt the cycle and achieve progress on the personal as well as the socio-economic level.

2.1.1.3 Deixis

The novel is marked by frequent shifts from one focalising character to the other, as Bentley attempts to convey the points of view of both sides in the conflict to the reader. In the last section of the novel, however, the deictic centre shifts almost exclusively to David, and the concluding chapters reflect his views, voice, and mind-style, thus highlighting the importance of his position in ideological terms.[271] It is this shift to David's perceptual deixis and the frequent pushes to the deictic plane of his thoughts that prompt the reader to identify with him, and to accept David's conclusions as a call to action in the same manner as the young man himself. The novel thus bears out Iser's analysis of the typical structure of the *roman a thèse*, as the reader is interpellated into the role the author maps out for her/him through the exclusion of other points of view.[272] As Diana Wallace (68) mentions in her analysis, the use of a young man as the focaliser at the end of the novel points towards the silencing of women in history; it is perhaps important to add that it also emphasises the silencing of the working classes. Despite the fact that David Brigg Oldroyd represents, as he himself realises, a synthesis of the two lines of descendants that branch off from the elder William Oldroyd, it is significant that he is a legitimate descendant of one of the mill-owning Oldroyds, not a working-class boy or a descendant of the illegitimate Bamforth branch. His symbolic position is legitimised by his position of "inheritor of Joe's sense of history" (Wallace, 67), and by the fact that he is not only descended from but identifies with both groups after reading Henry Bamforth's *History of the Ire Valley*. However, the choice marks one of the breaks in the text through which its conservative sub-current can be glimpsed, presenting as it does a symbolic validation of established discourses on male supremacy, primogeniture, and the superiority of masters over men. Essentially, Bentley's beliefs are not far removed from Francis' conviction in "the right of the gentry to lead England", although she insists that the ruling elite must first modify some of its personal, political, and economic convictions and must find more common ground with those whom it is leading.

Bentley's description of David reading his great-uncle's *History of the Ire Valley* is also significant because of its deictic aspects, as David, the focalising consciousness of the passage, gradually becomes immersed in the book. Reading one book, the reader thus follows the process of immersion and emotional identification with the characters in another book; the description of Bamforth's history and David's response to it thus becomes, in more general terms, a description of the act of reading. In addition, the strategy of the 'book within the book' allows Bentley to refresh the readers' memory about the most salient events of the story, putting them in a better position to appreciate the correctness of David's assessment. The parallels between Bentley's and Bamforth's accounts are highlighted as pops to the deictic level of the narration indicate to the reader which part of the story David has got to. It is evidently assumed that these clues are

[271] Cf. Wallace, 66f.
[272] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 190.

sufficient to re-create the story world within the story world; for the sake of textual economy, only contrasts between the two books are explicitly mentioned: Henry Bamforth's history, in accordance with Victorian views on the subject, glosses over the issue of Jonathan's illegitimacy, and does not contain any information about the personal lives of the Oldroyds or Bamforths. The description of the book within the book thus furnishes Bentley with an opportunity to emphasise the advantages of twentieth-century historical fiction over nineteenth-century historiography, as the former presents a fuller and, in a sense, historically more accurate picture. To a certain extent, the passage also becomes a meditation on the narratival shaping of history, highlighting the degree to which the emplotment of historical events depends on the personal, cultural, and ideological conditions of the writer:[273] Bentley's twentieth-century narrative contains a wealth of detail that the Victorian Henry, for reasons of propriety, decided to omit. In this regard, the passage can be viewed as schema-confirming, in that it conforms to readers' expectations concerning the Victorians' avoidance of 'indelicate' subjects, which is contrasted with David's "kindly tolerance" with which he reacts to the "touch of illegitimacy" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 571) that lies behind the vague account Henry gives of William senior's offspring.

Finally, the passage furnishes Bentley with the opportunity to justify the book's focus on the everyday lives of common people rather than on historical events and personages. Like David, the reader has to acknowledge that "[r]eally important things happen to real people in real places, and not to stage characters in velvet and ermine. And conversely, […] things that happen to ordinary-looking people in stuffy pubs may be very important" (*Inheritance*, 573). The description of David reading points towards the crucial role of hindsight in establishing a sense of coherence and causality, and argues in favour of the didactic potential of the past;[274] unlike Joe, who is too closely involved in the events of the narrative to see the wider perspective and determine on an appropriate course of action, David is able to analyse them in abstract terms and to draw conclusions from them:

> All human conflicts happened because people didn't understand each other; they didn't explain things to each other; they didn't interpret. Of course in the old days, mused David, when people didn't understand complexes and inhibitions and sex and all that sort of thing, there might be some excuse for them; but really nowadays, when all these things were mapped out and understood, there was no excuse at all for quarrels; all that old conflict nonsense must be thrown aside, they must arrange things in a new way altogether, there must be a new synthesis. The men skilled in compassion and life-development must be called in, and their advice taken; or perhaps, to put it in a better way, each person must listen to the compassionate side of his heart. (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 586–7)

The passage exemplifies David's mind-style and shows his belief in the superiority of the present (i.e. the 1920s or 30s) over the past, and his assumption that Freudian psychology is the solution to all present-day problems; arguably, however, this point of view may have struck the first readers of the book as much less naïve than it appears today, given the enormous popular appeal of Freud's theories in interwar Britain.[275] Bentley implies that through David's analysis of the story of the Oldroyds, readers arrive not only at a realisation of their own position as 'historical'

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[273] Cf. ch. 1.1.

[274] Cf. ch. 1.1.

[275] Cf. e.g. Humble, 227f.; Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 81 and Beauman, 148. Humble (228) and Beauman (148ff.) also remark on the frequency with which Freudian ideas feature in women's middlebrow fiction of the period.

individuals in the sense of their own lives being shaped by history,[276] but also of their power to shape history themselves. David's emotional investment in the story and his evaluation of the characters is likely to coincide with that of the reader. This has as its consequence an act of alignment that leads readers to identify with the young man and that acts as further encouragement to accept the validity of his interpretation. The parallel between David and the reader is emphasised by an element of textual deixis, as David himself begins to refer to his family history as a story, stressing that he does not "want the Oldroyd textile story to stop; I want it to *go on*" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 589; italics in original).

2.1.1.4 Intertextuality

While the novel depicts the present generation as the inheritors of the Victorians' damaging business attitudes, it also stresses the fact that the answer to present-day problems can also be found by turning towards Victorian literature for inspiration. Bentley's final argument, a plea for mutual understanding as a means of reconciliation between workers and manufacturers, parallels Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–5)[277] and is couched in the words of another Victorian writer, Thomas Hardy (albeit from a work published in 1904, *The Dynasts*). Moreover, David Oldroyd's realisation about the importance of the individual in history evokes the ending of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, with its emphasis on the importance of small, "unhistoric acts" (889). Bentley's strategy of merging insights from Victorian literature with contemporary left-wing political thought parallels David's assertion that "[t]he men skilled in compassion and life-development" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 587), who during the Victorian age were all driven out of business and into the humanities, must be called in again to remedy the dire economic situation of the present day: in order to rectify the mistakes of the preceding generation, the post-World War I generation must turn to the solutions that the Victorians had provided, but failed to implement.

In addition to these veiled allusions to Victorian novels, the novel also contains explicit references to a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers when David muses about the historical importance of "'real people in real places […] Well, we knew that before. *Zola. De Maupassant. Arnold Bennett*. […]'" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 573; my italics). It is interesting to note that even on this level, Bentley – perhaps inadvertedly – re-enacts the 'silencing' of women in history, as male authors are mentioned by name, whereas female writers – such as, for example, George Eliot – have to be supplied by the reader's literary background knowledge. On the other hand, however, there is also a subversive aspect to this apparently phallocentric enumeration, containing, as it does, an element of compositional deixis which locates Bentley herself as the female 'inheritor' of these male authors' sense of history, and as the apex of a development that leads to David's (and the reader's) realisation about the necessity of re-integrating the humanities into the sphere of business and the economy.

Only part of the solution to present-day economic problems is to be found in nineteenth-century literature. David's belief in the all-importance of Freud's theories in correcting the mistakes of the past echoes the increasing interest in Freudian psychoanalysis in nineteen thirties England; an

[276] Cf. Fleishman, 11.
[277] Cf. Wallace, 65.

interest that is reflected in a significant number of middlebrow novels.[278] In this sense, Freud's theories must be regarded as the most important non-literary intertext of *Inheritance*. In particular, Jonathan's attraction to the workers' rights movement – the driving force behind the division of the Oldroyd family into two distinct branches, and the (direct or indirect) driving force behind all further events of the novel – is implicitly linked to an Oedipal trauma: Jonathan wants to be the only man whom his mother loves, and wants to earn money for her and protect her. After her reconciliation with his father, Will Oldroyd, and their marriage, he resents Will's intrusion and what he perceives as his mother's betrayal, and seeks to ally himself with those fighting against mill owners like Oldroyd. Regarding Freudian theory as the antithesis to Victorian sexual repression, Bentley advocates its insights as the panacea to all inherited ills. David's conclusion – borne out by the events of the novel – that "sex and all that sort of thing" (especially the exploitation of women by the male members of the Oldroyd family) play as significant a part in the ruin of the family business as the conflict between the owners and the workers, is a peculiarly insightful one for a teenage boy, and shows to what extent David represents the point of view Bentley maps out for her intended reader. The validity of this interpretation is emphasised throughout the book,[279] and will be briefly outlined in the concluding section.

2.1.1.5 Conclusion

Although the book is, in Bentley's own phrase, a 'regional novel' set in the West Riding of Yorkshire,[280] the author's note at the beginning of the book makes it evident that Bentley lays claim to a more universal validity for her political message, especially her analysis of the damaging effects of the class struggle triggered by the advent of industrialisation. As outlined above, Bentley herself provides clear guidelines for the novel's interpretation when young David Brigg Oldroyd towards the end of the novel reads and reflects on a written history of the Ire Valley, which closely resembles the first part of Bentley's own book. After reading about the death of William Oldroyd at the hands of the Luddites, he interprets subsequent events as the progress of class struggle, playing itself out to its natural end and in the process crushing those who could have acted as mediators.

Throughout the novel, Bentley insists on the close connection between private and public issues, emphasising her message that the conflict can only be resolved once arbitrators without personal investment in the outcome have been called in. The importance of disinterested mediators is emphasised through the fact that in the novel, instances of conflict between masters and men are invariably shown to have a personal as well as a wider social dimension, as do quarrels within the Oldroyd family.[281] As outlined above, Jonathan's decision to take up the cause of the labour reformer and abolitionist Richard Oastler and his followers is personal as much as it is political. The rift in the Oldroyd family, and their taking up different sides in the class conflict, goes back to a quarrel between Brigg and Jonathan: the altercation begins when Brigg condemns the Oastlerites for murdering his father, and expresses his conviction that Jonathan will now give up his sympathies

[278] Cf. Humble, 227f.
[279] Cf. Wallace, 66.
[280] Cf. Bentley, *Regional Novel*, 40.
[281] Cf. Wallace, 66.

with them. Jonathan scandalises his family by his outspoken assertion that Will caused his own death by his exploitation of the workers. Deeply hurt by the wording of Will's will, he refuses to accept his share of the inheritance. The quarrel highlights to what extent family tensions are implicated in the economic conflict outlined by the novel: when Brigg calls Jonathan "a traitor to [his] family and [his] class" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 303) through his continued association with the Oastlerites, Jonathan points out that he belongs neither to Brigg's family nor to his class, being illegitimate and having been brought up as a factory worker. Other examples of class struggle in the book likewise blend personal and political issues: William Oldroyd's murder is caused mainly by his vacant threats of killing the Luddites uttered in a fit of rage initially brought on by his son's marriage plans, which the men misinterpret as an expression of his real intentions towards them. Similarly, the attack on his son Will by one of the Chartists (leading to Will's subsequent death of a stroke brought on by the shock) turns out to have a personal motivation.

The issue of Jonathan's illegitimacy is only one instance through which Bentley establishes a parallel between capitalism and patriarchal power structures within the family.[282] Significantly, the Oldroyds' first step towards industrialisation, and thus a division of society into two classes, that of the mill owners and that of the workers, is connected to Will Oldroyd's mistake of turning away from Mary Bamforth, daughter of one of his father's weavers, and instead marrying Betsey Brigg, the daughter of a neighbouring mill-owner. The decision is highly symbolic: while marriage to Mary would have indicated a reconciliation and synthesis with the workers, marriage to Betsey is a clear, if perhaps unconscious, act of siding with the masters against the men. Once William tries to rectify the mistake by taking Mary as his second wife, it is already too late: the rift between mill owners and workers has opened up, and the uneasy union of two classes within one family adds further impetus to the downward spiral that involves both the personal and the economic side of the Oldroyd story.

While the novel establishes a clear connection between the lot of women and the working classes, between patriarchy and capitalism, David's analysis not only fails to take this aspect to its logical conclusion, but actually fails to take it into account at all. Whereas a deeper understanding of the importance of cooperation and mutual understanding between mill owners and workers is emphasised as the only way out of the economic impasse of the present day, there is no indication that women are to take an active role in the re-ordering of society – it is the "*men* skilled in compassion" (my italics) whom David wants to see called in – nor is there a single female character in the novel who displays any amount of understanding of economic matters. (In fact, Sophia, the only woman theoretically in a position to actively take a hand in running the mill, nearly ruins the business through her love of luxury and lack of business sense.) Not only is the division between the masculine sphere of business and the feminine sphere of the home strictly upheld throughout the book; it is also left open whether drastic improvements in the former will have beneficial effects on the latter: the reader is free to assume that the "men skilled in compassion" will treat their wives differently from the Oldroyd patriarchs, but there is nothing in the text to substantiate this assumption.

[282] Cf. ch. 3.1.1.

In accordance with Bentley's analysis of the class conflict as an outcome of the Industrial Revolution for which both sides are to some extent to blame, her portrayal of the workers is at times as unfavourable as that of the mill owners, neither side being able to subordinate self-interest to the common good.[283] Bentley underlines the topicality of her description for a reading public confronted with the dire economic situation of the interwar years: "And so today, when a tremendous economic re-adjustment is required of the whole industry, they haven't the habit of co-operation, nor the pride of enterprise, to make it; masters and men are too busy attacking each other to work together to save the cloth trade; they can't see the world wood for the trees of self-interest, and so they're going down together in ruin" (*Inheritance*, 586).

Even though it is repeatedly emphasised that the workers' lack of education and hence lack of insight into their position is due to the conditions afforded by capitalist society which provides them with insufficient time and opportunities for education, it nonetheless legitimises the position of educated upper-class men as social reformers and leaders of society, at least at that particular point in history. At the same time, however, the novel makes it clear that the mill owners themselves are also unfit to occupy this position, showing them to be snobbish materialists who care neither for the lives of their workers nor for the quality of their wares. Bentley's message is elements of Marxism, highlighting the significance of the alienation of both workers and employers from the finished product,[284] and a humanitarian message that stresses the importance of compassion and mutual understanding in all human relations.[285] As has been shown, however, this conviction coexists and collides with the conservative substratum of *Inheritance*, which rejects Marx's call for a proletarian revolution and privileges the perpetuation of existing power relations. The thrust of her argument, with its insistence on the need for close cooperation between the two groups and her exceedingly positive evaluation of the brief period of unity inspired by World War I, when masters and men joined ranks to support the war effort, is that the two groups ought to come together under the leadership of an enlightened and impartial elite well-versed in history, and "skilled in compassion" and psychological acumen. It is an elite, however, that can – at least at that particular point in history – only be drawn from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, as the working classes have not been given the chance to acquire the requisite leadership skills and qualities.

2.1.2 Politicising the Victorians: the interwar years

As John Gardiner (24) puts it, during the thirties the writing of Victorian history inevitably became a political act; not surprisingly, the political potential of the Victorians frequently attracted writers seeking either to convey a political message by transposing contemporary concerns into the 'safe' distance of the nineteenth century (the past acting as a "distant mirror"), or to discover the "turning point" from which historical processes started to lead up to contemporary problems, often – as in *Inheritance* – with a view towards finding the means of reversing those processes. Almost invariably, these explicitly political works show marked sympathies with the political left; nonetheless, there is a considerable diversity of opinion in left-wing writing that Maroula Joannou ("Woman Writer", 4), drawing on David Margolies' study of

[283] Cf. ch. 2.1.2.

[284] Cf. Wallace, 65.

[285] This aspect of the novel parallels Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–5) (cf. Wallace, 65).

Left Review, *Writing the Revolution*, describes as typical of the period, and that is observable also in Victorian-centred fiction. In many cases, the novels bear witness to the extent to which "[t]he grim economic mood down to the Second World War continued to nurture resentment against Victorian industrialism" (Gardiner, 23). At the same time, however, they not infrequently draw on communist and socialist ideas – most notably the 'evolutionary' models of Christian socialism and Fabianism rather than revolutionary Marxism – which also date back to the nineteenth century. The texts are almost unanimous in depicting the Victorian era as a period that was predominantly – one might argue obsessively – concerned with the "advancement of commerce" to which the Victorians (according to Strachey's narrator, quoted at the beginning of this chapter) accorded near-religious status. As shall be seen, there are significant overlaps in their evaluation of this phenomenon, but depictions range from sympathetically critical commentary to scathing satire, not always, one suspects, entirely free from envious admiration.

As has been outlined in the preceding section, Bentley rejects the notion of a 'Proletarian revolution' as a viable solution to present-day economic problems. Drawing on arguments already advanced by the social novels of the nineteenth century, she exhorts her readers to work – along with her final focaliser – towards a more just social order based on mutual understanding and cross-class cooperation. In contrast, a much more overtly Marxist call to action is implicit in the ending of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936). The novel represents one of the most famous and most widely discussed examples of the politicised kind of historical fiction that flourished during the nineteen thirties. It is a re-writing of Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869),[286] in which upper-class landowner Sophia Willoughby follows her errant husband Frederick to Paris after the death of their children, falls in love with his mistress, the Jewish storyteller Minna Lemuel, and finally fights in the 1848 revolution on the side of the Communists.

The novel describes a Victorian woman's awakening into both sexual and political consciousness.[287] Most critics,[288] however, have tended to foreground either its lesbian or its Communist agenda, and have assessed its relation to history in accordance with their main area of interest: while Terry Castle, in her seminal essay on "The Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction" comments on the "superficial historicism of the narrative" (230), those who have read *Summer Will Show* predominantly as a Communist text have drawn attention to the historic specificity of the protagonists' mind style[289] and have regarded the text as deeply connected to the historical moment of its setting, emphasising the importance Marxist historiography affords to the events of the 1848 Revolution in Paris.[290] Harman, in particular, praises the novel for its absence of "quaintness" or

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[286] Cf. Wallace, 72; Castle, 224, and especially Petrey, "Ideology". In addition, Castle (223) identifies intertextual elements with a wide range of canonical Victorian novels, such as *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Felix Holt*, and *Mill on the Floss*, and Lecercle links the novel to Jane Austen's *Emma*.

[287] Cf. Lecercle, 296.

[288] Exceptions to this general trend are provided by Foster (531ff.) and Montefiore (177); the latter (212), however, concedes the impossibility of doing so. For comments on critical responses to Warner, cf. also Love, 132ff.

[289] Cf. D. James, 48ff.

[290] Cf. especially Caserio, "Celibate Sisters"; Lecercle, 299f. and Brothers, 263 and 271f. Both Brothers (262) and Lecercle (300ff.) note that Warner's view of the events is coloured by her reading of Marx's writings on the topic and the benefit of hindsight. While Lecercle regards Warner's text as a historical

"period feel": "there is a complete identification with the period chosen, a contemporary feel which goes far beyond the scope of historical accuracy to a sense of historical actuality" (150).[291] More importantly, however, Brothers observes that Warner uses the nineteenth-century setting to "mirror the sexism, racism, fascism, and economic and social elitism of the first half of the twentieth century" (264), noting that in all of these domains, twentieth-century Europe continued to be markedly influenced by nineteenth-century precedents. Nonetheless, Brothers's – like Lecercle's – emphasis lies on the importance of *French* history in the novel, while comparatively little attention is given to the significance of Sophia's Victorian background.

The novel presents a critical commentary on Marxist ideology, whose emphasis on the importance of class struggles obscures the fact that the history of all hitherto existing society is also that of gender struggles. It emphasises the fact that the status of women in nineteenth-century society depended essentially on that of their fathers before, and on that of their husbands after marriage – an observation that, incidentally, still held true for Warner's contemporary readers.[292] By leaving Frederick, Sophia not only loses all her possessions (which he decides to keep), but also her place in upper-class society.[293] When the revolutionary Communist Ingelbrecht (a fictionalised version of Engels[294]) compares Frederick's decision to keep Sophia's money and possessions to a 'lockout', her identification with the proletariat is made explicit.[295] In a sense, however, this parallel is anticipated already at the beginning of the text, when Sophia muses after the death of her children: "If I were a man, I would plunge into dissipation. What dissipation is to a man, religion is to a woman." (Warner, *Summer*, 66), bringing to mind Marx's statement about the role of religion as "the opium of the people" (Marx, *Hegel*, 131). Sophia, it is made clear, may be a member of the ruling class; as a woman, however, she is in the same position of dependency on upper-class men as the workers. Being denied agency, she is in need of an antidote; like Marx's ideal working-class reader, however, she rejects the false consolations of religion and instead turns to Communism. Unlike Flaubert's Frédéric, who retreats from the political events of the Paris revolution into the personal, Sophia finally transcends the personal sphere in order to take an active part in the shaping of history.[296] *Summer Will Show* constructs Victorian women's position as the antithesis to social, political, historical, and sexual awareness: her political activism only becomes possible once her sexual relationship with Minna has deprived her of her class position, has taken away both the need for and the possibility of conformity, and has awakened in her a sense of individuality that allows her to critically engage with ideas foreign to her Victorian background.

Wendy Mulford neatly summarises the novel when she states that its first part "sets forth the thesis of Sophia's need for liberation from the patriarchal family, the next section supplies the antithesis of

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novel in the Lukácsian sense, offering the prehistory of the successful Communist revolution of 1917, Brothers (somewhat pessimistically) connects it to Warner's anxieties about the outcome of the Spanish Civil War. Love (134) likewise comments on the Marxist significance of the date, but also links it to the "mid-century Sapphic writing" (135) of Baudelaire.

[291] Mulford (110) likewise praises the "solid reality" of the novel's setting.

[292] Cf. Wallace, 71f.

[293] Cf. Wallace, 72.

[294] Cf. e.g. Brothers, 272; Love, 140; J.L. Mitchell, 130; Mulford, 116.

[295] Cf. J.L. Mitchell, 130; Mulford, 116; Wallace, 72.

[296] Cf. Lecercle, 298.

her gradual recognition of her release through another woman, while the final section supplies the synthesis in which fulfilment comes in recognition and acceptance of political commitment" (112). Once Minna has served the function of separating Sophia from her upper-class associates and introducing her to Communism, she disappears from the text – replaced by Sophia herself, who has, as the plot unfolds, increasingly come to identify with her lover.[297] In the context of a love story (however unconventional), Minna's unlikely death at the hands of Sophia's illegitimate half-black nephew Caspar would indeed be, as Wendy Mulford contends, a flaw win the aesthetic make-up of the novel,[298] although it "may reflect the accidental and gratuitous outcome of so much political endeavour" (119). Mulford (120ff.) reads the ending as indicative of the author's own divided loyalties at the moment of writing the novel, when Warner was uncertain whether to devote herself to her writing or her political activism. Minna, symbolic of artistic creativity, has to be 'sacrificed' in order to free Sophia for active participation in the revolution. Mulford conjectures that the implausibility and bathetic melodrama of Minna's death is a sign that Warner's "unconscious was unable to consent to such a move" (121). In contrast to Mulford, Robin Hackett argues that the main aim of the novel is to present "an argument for an international as well as anti-racist approach to exploitation" (95). Within the context of this argument, Caspar's attack on Minna takes on a new significance. Hackett argues that his deed was in essence due to Sophia's failure "to make a political alliance with Caspar" (95); by failing to realise that he, as a member of a racial minority, is in the same position as herself and the workers, she has inadvertedly caused Minna's death. On this basis, Hackett reads the novel as a call to English workers and soldiers to make common cause with their counterparts in the colonies in order to further their common aim of a communist revolution.[299]

Both Mulford and Hackett, however, disregard the essential ambiguity of the novel's ending, with its frequent hints that Minna may, after all, still be alive.[300] Terry Castle, in contrast, emphasises this aspect and analyses it in terms of the novel's commitment to the presentation of a 'lesbian counterplot' that challenges the patriarchal power structures underlying the realistic mode of canonical Victorian fiction.[301] It is important to note, however, that the open ending also serves an important function within the novel's political framework: whereas Sophia had, up to this point, embraced Communism merely for her lover's sake, Minna's disappearance opens up the way for a rational engagement with Communist ideology through Marx's writings. While Minna's disappearance does indeed, as Mulford points out, free Sophia for active participation in the revolution, by removing the temptation of a retreat into domesticity with her lover that is frequently hinted at in the course of the novel,[302] it is also important to note that from a psychological point of view, the possibility of Minna's reappearance is of crucial importance for

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[297] Cf. Love, 140.

[298] Cf. Mulford, 119f.; also Wallace, 72 and Castle, 228.

[299] Along similar lines, Brothers (271) reads Caspar's fate as a comment on the British policy of using Indian soldiers to fight against other Indians during the Mutiny, and Beer describes Sophia's attitude towards the boy as "one of those fickle attachments with which the powerful […] seek to salve their consciences" (84).

[300] Castle (228) makes this point in regard to Mulford.

[301] Cf. also Wallace, 71f. For a detailed discussion of Castle's argument, cf. ch. 4.2.4.

[302] At the same time, however, the ambiguity of the ending avoids the reinscription of the dystopian plot of many contemporary lesbian novels, as exemplified by what was probably the most well-known work of lesbian fiction at the time, Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (1928). (For *Summer Will Show* as an optimistic rewriting of *Well of Loneliness*, especially through its use of metaphor, cf. Wachmann, 106ff.)

Sophia. Before she settles down to read, she reflects that without Minna, she would retreat into herself and her former class position; her hope for Minna's return, however, compels her to wait in the apartment, and to take up the Communist Manifesto to while away the time. It is only her gradual immersion into the text at the very end of the novel which suggests that by the time she has finished reading, she will have become convinced by Marx's arguments and continue the fight irrespective of Minna's reappearance. The open ending thus allows Warner to present her political message, without endangering the psychological credibility of her central character.

As Sophia reads the *Communist Manifesto* with increasing absorption, the novel ends with a reproduction of the first page of Marx's text, inviting the reader to read this text together with Sophia, and in conjunction with her story.[303] The anachronistic incongruity that results from the introduction of the 1850 English translation of the Communist Manifesto into the 1848 setting of the novel further underlines the transhistoric dimension of the ending, as readers are given not the text that Sophia would have been reading in the nineteenth-century story world, but the text they would most probably encounter in the real world. Just as Sophia has been introduced to Communism through the stories told by Minna about her youth, the reader is to be introduced to Marxist ideology through Sophia's story told by the author. At the end of the novel, the author's voice disappears as abruptly and inexplicably as Minna within the novel, to be supplanted by the voice of Karl Marx. Like Bentley, Warner focuses on the act of reading, using the reading character's responses to the *Communist Manifesto* as a foil for the real reader's responses; the novel thus becomes an implicit comment on "the power of narrative" (Wallace, 73) – both the impact of Minna's story of her Lithuanian childhood on Sophia, and that of Sylvia Townsend Warner's on the reader of her novel – to shape political opinions and events.[304] The last paragraphs of the novel enact a complete merger of the reader with the central character.

As David James points out, "*Summer Will Show* pivots on the axis of subjectivist and realist modes" (50), and can thus be regarded as a "corrective" to Lukács's dismissal of modernist techniques of introspective narration as "merely subjective" (Wallace, 71).[305] The rich intertextual dimension of the novel allows Warner "to question and parody the politics, 'history', and narratology of her predecessors" (Wachmann, 105), not only in terms of their evaluation of same-sex love, as Wachmann contends, but also in terms of their position towards Communist ideology. *Summer Will Show* must be seen both as an active dialogue with its literary predecessors and with contemporary readers, who are exhorted to (re-)read Marx's *Communist Manifesto* with the knowledge of what is unsaid in that text, i.e. the issues of race and gender – both legacies of the Victorians – outlined in Warner's novel.[306] "The novel ends with the defeat of the Paris revolutions but looks forward to the continuation of the struggle through the impact of its own narrative on the

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[303] Cf. Foster, 554; Wallace, 73.

[304] On the significance of Minna's narrative, cf. Mulford, 113ff. and especially *Montefiore, 168–*77.

[305] Hopkins, "Sylvia Townsend Warner", (124), in contrast, who argues that *Summer Will Show* "seems to belong to a nineteenth-century novel tradition [which is] strongly realist" and "adopts in many ways a nineteenth-century form of a kind which is in fact contemporaneous to its setting." Cf. also Lecercle (298f.), who regards the text as enacting a movement from early-nineteenth-century realism towards modernist introspection.

[306] Cf. Foster, 554; Wallace, 71 and 73.

reader" (Wallace, 73–4)[307] – a struggle that also involves overcoming the lingering remnants of Victorianism which denies women both political and sexual agency.

Warner's pro-Communist ideology stands in striking contrast to the more doubtful note struck by a number of novelists whose works depict socialist ideals foundering on the egotism of those most closely implicated in its success. In the course of *Inheritance*, the cause of the workers is taken up by various groups, ranging from the Luddites early in the nineteenth century, via the Oastlerites and Chartists, to the Power-Loom Weaver's Union at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite their surface differences, the novel highlights the amount of common ground shared by these groups, pointing out that each of them present, at one particular moment in history, the side of the workers against the mill-owners, thus repeating their precursors' mistake of putting the demands of one side in the conflict over the common good. The novel provides a number of examples of the workers' grasping selfishness, lack of discipline, and failure to work towards genuine social improvement rather than short-term benefits. They are repeatedly depicted as a mass of ignorant and self-serving men who follow their leaders not from political conviction but because of their hopes for personal gain: George Mellor, the local leader of the Luddites, is fond of "interlarding his conversation with high-flown political sentiments which made Joe feel sick because they were so obviously misunderstood quotations from somebody else" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 33). During the Chartist rally at York later in the novel, the workers can only barely be restrained from getting drunk and rioting instead of listening to the speeches of their leaders, and during the strike that takes place in the Ire Valley later in the novel, the reader is invited to share Henry's astonishment at the weavers' stupidity and lack of rational arguments for their rejection of the mill owners' new payment scheme.

An even more striking example of the workers' blind egotism and lack of solidarity occurs in Doris Leslie's *Concord in Jeopardy* (1938).[308] At a demonstration in Hyde Park, Labour leader Hugh Barford – a rare genuine example of Bentley's disinterested "men skilled in compassion and life-development" – enthusiastically maintains that "[t]he truth is that in the East End of London two million people have by this strike and agitation landed themselves on a higher *plane*, have sunk their petty vices and become morally and spiritually infused with an ideal they could not attain *without* a strike" (Leslie, *Concord*, 41; italics in original). However, Barford's idealistic views of the movement are brutally shattered only moments later, when the crowd riots in a struggle to steal the coins collected as strike relief for the workers, nearly crushing the eponymous protagonist and his mother.

While Bentley and Leslie show themselves deeply sceptical of the workers' commitment, other writers contrast the moral purity and uprightness of the working classes with the corruption of their leaders. Published in 1920, the year which saw the founding of the British Communist Party and the beginning of the rise of Labour, Maurice Hewlett's *Mainwaring*[309] presents a deeply negative account of the fictitious politician Mainwaring, using the Victorian age as a safe setting

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[307] It is perhaps important to stress that Warner's project failed to some extent, as the novel was not primarily seen as a political text by contemporary reviewers (cf. Harman, 149 and 156f.; Brothers, 263; Wallace, 74; Mulford, 105); Left-wing critics, among them the reviewer for the *Literary Digest* (17 March 1939), however, recognised it as "in a sense a parable of our own troubled times" (qtd. in J.L. Mitchell, 129; cf. also Mulford, 122).

[308] For a more detailed discussion of Leslie's novel, cf. ch. 3.2.2 and 4.1.2.

[309] For an in-depth analysis of *Mainwaring*, cf. ch. 4.1.3.

for negative commentary on Trade Unionism and organised socialist politics. Foreshadowing the General Strike of 1926 (which, in the novel, takes place in the 1880s) and Labour's rise to power (it surpassed the Liberals as the second most influential political party in the General Election of 1922 and formed the first minority government in 1924), Hewlett exposes Mainwaring as a self-seeking fraud who cares nothing for the cause of the workers (or the feelings of his working-class wife, Lizzy), using them merely as stepping-stones on his climb into the political establishment.

Mainwaring presents a compelling picture of the corrupting influence of political and social success on the eponymous protagonist. A brilliant orator and leader of men, Mainwaring quickly wins the workers' support, but merely utilises them for his own selfish ends. The implication, in this case, is not that it is Communist ideology which is flawed; rather, it is highlighted that it cannot be put into practice within the current political framework, as Mainwaring's success makes him a member of the moneyed elite which he sets out to fight. His working-class wife Lizzy is quick to see the danger that arises out of his association with the political hostess Lady Whitehaven and her circle. When the narrator suggests that Mainwaring is right to cultivate her acquaintance because "Lady Whitehaven can be very useful to him", Lizzy replies: "No […], he didn't go into Parliament to help her party. He went in to help the poor people. Only the poor can help the poor – I'm sure of it. He went in as a working-man, though he has never been one. She will put him in the wrong – or he will put himself there. You'll see" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 74). Mainwaring's overt desertion of the workers' cause in favour of his own political advancement finds a symbolical parallel in his personal relationships, as he gradually turns away from Lizzy and begins his frenzied and ultimately hopeless pursuit of the promiscuous Lady Whitehaven, whose infatuation with Lord Gerald Gorges precludes all hopes of the attainment of Mainwaring's wishes. In the novel, these two antithetical women are constructed as symbols of the phases of Mainwaring's career as a Trade Union leader and later as an M.P. Mainwaring's working-class wife Lizzy is to some extent a representative of the workers who placed their trust in Mainwaring, but who can neither share nor benefit from his political success. As in *Inheritance*, personal relationships become symbolic of deep-seated social ills.

Mainwaring combines anti-capitalist propaganda with a deep-seated distrust of the efficacy and trustworthiness of the Labour movement, and of political organisations and career politicians in general. The theme is quite typical of its time of publication, when the inclusion of Labour politicians into government positions after the outbreak of the war led many Labour supporters at grass-roots level to feel that party leaders were rapidly losing touch with them.[310] With its emphasis on the 'innate' moral superiority of the working classes and its insistence on the dignity of labour, the novel strikes the reader as deeply indebted to the tenets of early Christianity and late-Victorian Fabianism. Hewlett's romantic idealisation of the working class stands in stark contrast to the scepticism of Leslie and Bentley. Radical in its advocation of universal poverty, *Mainwaring* is deeply conservative as regards its presentation of (working-class) women, whom it depicts as angelic arbiters of morality, whose innate purity and goodness men ought to revere and protect from corruption. The tone of the novel, though chiming in with conservative views on women's roles which prevailed in the immediate aftermath of World War I,[311] may be indicative less of a general social trend than of the author's individual views on the subject: in a brief biographical sketch of the author, J.B. Priestley notes that

[310] Cf. Stevenson, 86.
[311] Cf. Gardiner, 39.

"[d]uring the last ten years of his life, Hewlett was […] what we may call, for want of a better word, a moralist" (73). The ideological message implied in *Mainwaring* is typical of Hewlett's later work,[312] and recurs in most of his later novels, as he himself points out: "I have my pet nostrums, of course. I believe in Poverty, Love and England, and am convinced that only through the first will the other two thrive. I want men to be gentlemen and women to be modest. I want men to work and women to have children" ("Preface", quoted in Priestley, 68).

In *Mainwaring*, Hewlett paradoxically both emphasises and rejects the connection between capitalism and patriarchy established in the work of Bentley and Warner. It is this aspect of the novel which sets it apart from other 'political' historical novels because it undermines its own symbolic equation of women and the working class. On the one hand, Lizzy's dutiful acceptance of her role as Mainwaring's neglected wife links her to the upholding of patriarchy. On the other hand, it is made explicit that it was Mainwaring's initial determination to fight for an overthrow of the established order which constituted his attraction for Lizzy. Lizzy herself emphasises both the need for change and the fact that this can only be effected by the workers themselves: "only the poor can help the poor". Through her, the narrator arrives at his realisation that the lives of the upper classes are not only useless and immoral, but unnatural:

> After all, you can do no more than to fulfil well the laws of your being. But if you pay other people to fulfil them for you, how are you and the world better for them? It is a belief of mine that, impalpably, imperceptibly, the nation, even the world, is the better for one family life lived piously and diligently. I would burn in defence of that. But to order your life by means of paid servants! You might as well hire a man to beget your children, as a nurse to bring them up, or a pedagogue to launch them upon the world. (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 191)

The ideological message of the novel is an unusual blend of patriarchy in the private and democracy in the public sector: as it emphasises the 'natural' duty of all men to work, and of all women to fulfil their role as wives and mothers, it challenges the established class hierarchy, but endorses that based on gender.

While *Mainwaring* stands out because of its evocation of a utopian socialist ideal not unlike that of William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (minus the emancipatory and medieval elements), other novels likewise merge visions of a more just social order with scepticism regarding the practicability or attractiveness of Communist ideology in theory, and the British Labour movement in practice. In *Sleep in Peace*, Bentley takes up the final argument of *Inheritance*, but brings it to a much more pessimistic conclusion. Both novels criticise the division of British society along class lines: "Union is strength," an enthusiastic Labour Union member thinks in *Inheritance*, "not perceiving that the textile industry was cut in half" (397); in *Sleep in Peace*, a similar lack of perceptiveness is evinced by masters and men alike: "If only they would *see*, if only they could *perceive* themselves, thought Laura; surely if they saw themselves, surely if they saw the West Riding as it is to-day, they would not make these terrible mistakes, they would co-operate, they would perceive their deep unity, the essential brotherhood of man" (463). However, Laura Armistead's attempts to alert both sides of the class struggle to the necessity for cooperation by means of her drawings, while bringing her fame and financial success, have no impact on the situation in her home district.

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[312] Cf. Priestley, 67ff.

In *Inheritance*, David Oldroyd, emblematic of a "new synthesis" between the Oldroyd will to power and the Bamforths' intellectual humanitarianism, is presented as the West Riding's source of hope for the future. In *Sleep in Peace*, in contrast, such a fusion is presented as impracticable: Laura's nephew and niece, Geoffrey and Madeline – like David the outcome of an uneasy union between representatives of industry and intellectuality, between working and mill-owning classes – both fail to provide a viable solution. Geoffrey wants to wrest sole control of the mill to himself and repudiate his grandfathers' scheme for sharing its profits with the workers; Madeline, on the other hand, severs all connection with her home district and the family business. In both novels, Bentley presents the reader with focalising characters in search of a more just social order; whereas in *Inheritance*, however, David seems likely to succeed, Laura (epitomic of a whole generation), in *Sleep in Peace*, is shown to have failed in her attempts to find "a system less thwarting than the old" (549), and her determination to try again is counterbalanced by the doubtful tone of the novel's concluding words, "if there was still time" (554). Even more explicitly than in *Inheritance*, the blame for the socio-economic impasse of the present is laid at the door of the Victorians: rapidly aging and losing hold on the reins of economic power, the Victorian generation needs strength and initiative from its children to counteract the economic depression after the war, but has deprived them of that strength and initiative through inhibitive upbringing: "Sow an over-scolded child, and you reap an inhibited neurotic" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 436). As in *Inheritance*, Bentley envisages a harmonious coexistence of working class and bourgeoisie under the leadership of the latter; as in her earlier novel, she insists on the implicit right of the middle classes to rule England, even though she demonstrates the present generation's inability to assume their responsibility.

By the end of the novel, Laura has come to regard the younger generation's misguided enthusiasm for authoritarian regimes and ideologies (whether Communist or Fascist) as inevitable, springing from

> an unstable present, an uncertain future, a lack of religious or ethical teaching given with conviction, in which they can believe, an abdication of leadership on the part of the previous generation, a despairing revolt against the petty meanness of modern industrial life. And so, a desire for the opposite of all these things: a desire for everything that is brightly coloured, high-sounding and dogmatic. Oh, yes; we have created them, thought Laura; we tried a path and failed, and they despise not only the failure but the path. (Bentley, *Sleep*, 517)

While Laura openly acknowledges the failure of her own generation to act as adequate role models for their children, it is once again the Victorians who are – this time indirectly – given the blame, as the novel makes it clear that it was they who deprived the subsequent generation of the means to counteract this alarming tendency in their children. While Bentley shows herself deeply concerned about the lot of the working classes and the unemployed and insists on the need for decisive action, she rejects the notion of a proletarian revolution and a reversal of power structures along Marxist lines. Her later novel presents a disparaging picture of Communism, as it pits the youthful enthusiasm of its most ardent supporter against the mature judgement of the focalising character. Laura compares Kay's glowing vision of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" to the "benevolent tyranny" of her Victorian parents: "You don't know what benevolent tyrannies are like, or you wouldn't want to plunge us into one. I do; I was brought up under a benevolent tyranny. The rejection of the benevolent tyranny is the achievement of our generation, and now you want to throw it away" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 548).

In striking contrast to Warner's enthusiastic endorsement of Communist ideology, Bentley – despite her intertextual borrowings from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*[313] – openly shows her reservations concerning Marxist ideology, highlighting its inherent connection to Fascism (by then perceived as a far greater threat than Communism, which some tended to regard as a welcome antidote to growing Fascist movements in England and, more crucially, on the continent) and other authoritarian ideologies (even though Bentley concedes that Communism is a "benevolent tyranny", it is a tyranny nonetheless). She stresses the fact that the solution to present-day economic ills lies not in a reversal of power relations within society, but on cross-class cooperation. Though less obviously imbued with the conservativism regarding issues of class and gender that characterises *Inheritance*, *Sleep in Peace* nonetheless privileges middle-class experience, implying that it is the members of this class who ought to have led the way towards a re-ordering of society, and whose responsibility it now is to make good their failure to do so.[314]

It is worth noting, however, that critical observations on Communist ideology feature in a wide range of Victorian-centred novels, even in those which are not, first and foremost, political in their focus and subject matter. John St. Loe Strachey's[315] *The Madonna of the Barricades* (1926) is one of the most scathingly satirical examples. This is despite the fact that it consists chiefly of a blend of romance and adventure, whose highly fantastic plot is anchored to an alternative version of the 1848 revolution in Paris (within the context of Strachey's text secretly masterminded by the Carbonari, a secret society devoted to freeing Italy from Austrian oppression). The text purports to be the memoirs of George Lord Chertsey, depicting his life between the years 1847 and 1849, but written forty years later and 'edited' by the author/frame narrator, John St. Loe Strachey. Having coincidentally made the acquaintance of the Count Arriva-Bene and his beautiful daughter Carlotta,[316] Chertsey joins the Carbonari and fights in the Paris revolution of 1848 on the side of the Communists, whom the Carbonari have decided to support not from ideological conviction, but as the candidates most likely to be favourably disposed towards Italian independence. Presented merely as unwitting pawns in the Carbonari's sophisticated strategy, the Communists are depicted as brutal adherents of a dehumanising ideology, notable mainly for their "willingness to suppress oppression by the use of more and greater oppression" (J.St.L. Strachey, 228).

The novel's portrayal of Marx and Engels, whom the narrator briefly meets on a visit to London, follows similarly damning lines. The former is depicted as a misanthropist enamoured of his own theories, but without real sympathies for the working classes. He appears to George like a "spoilt child" (J.St.L. Strachey, 220), as he peevishly complains that the Metropolitan police (i.e. the representatives of capitalist oppression) do not keep (working-class) admirers away from him to let him work in peace for the overthrow of capitalist oppression. Engels' main role is that of a nursery-maid as he attempts to soothe and distract his friend Marx from his tantrums. Even

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[313] Cf. ch. 3.2.1.4.

[314] It is worth noting, however, that *Sleep in Peace* features a female focaliser, and shows a more open-minded attitude towards the possibility of working-class characters' assumption of social and political agency than Bentley's earlier text (cf. ch. 3.2.1).

[315] John St. Loe Strachey (1860–1927), a cousin of Lytton Strachey, was first and foremost a journalist and newspaper proprietor. Between 1898 and 1917, he owned and edited *The Spectator* (cf. A.J.A. Morris, §1ff.).

[316] For a brief summary of the novel and detailed discussion of Carlotta's role, cf. ch. 2.2.3.

though the narrator appears to deplore that the "'advancement of commerce' [...] very nearly became the national religion" (J.St.L. Strachey, 224) during the Victorian era, the novel insists on the "inevitability of the bourgeois state" (Hughes, 43) that characterises the historical romance of the time. There is no point within the novel at which the reader is offered a perspective that is overtly critical of capitalist ideology. The narrator's critique aims not at capitalism or the 'advancement of commerce' as such, but only at its elevation to near-religious status during the Victorian era; a development that is shown to give rise to ineffectual expressions of distaste among artists and the intelligentsia (*vide* "the beautiful dirges of Matthew Arnold"), and to provoke ill-considered protest and rebellious tendencies among the workers and their leaders. Communism, as the only visible alternative within the context of the novel, is however presented as thoroughly unattractive. It is worth noting, in this context, that Strachey does not offer any valid theoretical counter-arguments to Communist ideology; his strategy for discrediting Communism is limited to disparaging comments about one of its greatest theorists and the way in which his theories are put into practice by his followers. By allowing the reader to share the narrator's position as eye-witness of Marx's childish tantrums and the Communists' violent excesses, however, the text offers little incentive for identification (or even critical engagement) with their point of view. The fact that Marx and his followers appear even in an ostensibly apolitical, escapist adventure novel bears witness to the topicality of, and the perceived need of formulating an ideological position on, the issue in a time of economic unrest and labour disputes, most notably the General Strike of 1926, the year of the novel's publication.[317] In addition, Hewlett's novel bears witness to the conservative ideological underpinnings of 'escapist' romance and adventure fiction noted by Iser and Hughes, thus bridging the gap between the overtly 'political' novels discussed here, and the ostensibly 'apolitical' texts of the next chapter.

2.1.3 The 'Romance of Commerce'

The conservative tendencies inherent in romance and domestic fiction show themselves most clearly in those texts which I have subsumed under the heading of the "romance of commerce", a phrase taken from D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!* (14).[318] Several novels of this type romanticise Victorian business values, constructing a binary opposition between the benevolently patriarchal attitude Victorian employers allegedly exhibited towards their workers, and the ruthlessly impersonal and money-driven approaches that – it is implied in these texts – prevail at the time of writing. Somewhat paradoxically, this approach – like the pessimistic interpretation of the Industrial Revolution found in Bentley's *Inheritance*, can be traced back to contemporary twentieth-century historiographic discourses. A roughly similar argument is put forward by J.L.

[317] The novel – like *The Spectator* during his editorship – closely reflects Strachey's own political opinions, which he described as "left-centre, the whereabout of the heart in the human and political body" (Kellett, 34; qt. in A.J.A. Morris, §4). His "uncompromising attachment to freedom and individualism" led him to object not only to Communism but also "to tariff reform, home rule, state socialism, and the Liberal government's welfare reforms" (A.J.A. Morris, §5).

[318] D.L. Murray may, in turn, have borrowed the phrase from H. Gordon Selfridge (founder of Selfridge's department stores), who in 1918 published a comprehensive history of commerce (from antiquity to the early twentieth century) under the same title.

and Barbara Hammond in their highly influential economic history textbook *The Rise of Modern Industry* (1925), as succinctly summarised by Stewart Weaver:

> [...] inexcusable poverty amid scandalous plenitude; a grave disproportion of political power; a general disposition to regard the working class as idle and profligate; the shameful extension of child labour; the corruption and deterioration of town life. [...] By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, however, the forces of Christian compassion, working-class Jacobinism and liberal humanism had combined to inspire the factory laws, the civil service, sanitary reform and municipal incorporation, and all those other 'contributions that England was to make to the task of creating a society out of this new chaos'. The curse of Midas had not been dispelled, but it was tamed and controlled, even weakened, by Victorian public spiritedness. And now, writing on the eve of the General Strike and amid industrial decline, the Hammonds hoped to recall that Victorian spirit and bring it to bear on the economic crisis of their time. (35)

Other texts depict Victorian business methods as questionable for the same reasons, but in the end forbear from calling them into question. Like the overtly political fiction discussed in preceding sections, the latter type of texts draws on and reinforces the established schema of Victorian business men as devoid of human decency and driven by greed and ambition. This is a 'Victorian' schema that, as will be shown in chapter 2.1.4, is typical of post-World War II Victorian-centred fiction, but has its roots already in earlier texts.[319] While criticism of Victorian business methods and employment practices occurs not infrequently, no link to present social ills is established, and criticism of the Victorians is muted in favour of romance and 'human interest' stories.

Written at different points during the interwar years as well as in the post-war era, these novels present an escapist fantasy in which economic problems are backgrounded, and an alternative set of values is implemented in order to measure 'success' in personal rather than financial terms. Drawing on conventional romance plots, they offer a consolatory message, implying that monetary hardship and economic crises – those of the Victorian age no less than those of the present – are of less importance than personal relationships. They reflect the conservative views on family and women's roles prevalent at the time,[320] and hark back to the Victorian era as the heyday of the nuclear family and stable matrimonial relationships, while at the same time criticising its business morality. Given that these texts draw on the same schemata and stereotypes as the politically engaged texts discussed in previous sections, particular attention will be given to the textual strategies that undermine the subversive potential of these descriptions, and to the tension between criticism of the Victorians and endorsement of the status quo that is typical of these novels.

One of the key points of reference in Victorian-centred texts is the changing relationship between masters and men. In *Ruffy and Son*s (1945), George Woden traces the widening gulf between factory owners and their workers that also forms one of the main themes of Phyllis Bentley's *Inheritance*,[321] but initially appears to arrive at a different interpretation. Whereas Bentley charts a gradual decline from the benevolent, paternal capitalism of the pre-Victorian era to the increasingly depersonalised, profit-oriented approach of William Oldroyd's Victorian successors, Woden, in contrast, locates the onset of this development much later in time. At the beginning of the

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[319] This extension of contemporary criticism of the early and mid-Victorian period over the whole era probably coincides with the extent to which people were coming to regard the Victorian period as a homogeneous entity, with 'Victorian' coming to denote the Zeitgeist of the mid-Victorian period in particular.

[320] Cf. Gardiner, 39; 71; and passim.

[321] For a detailed discussion of this aspect of Bentley's novel, cf. ch. 2.1.1.

novel (set in 1894), John Ruffy muses about the advisability of handing over the family business to his eldest son, Joe, but feels reluctant to do so because of his son's cold-hearted attitude towards the workers:

> You'll think it foolish of me, perhaps; Joe does; and his mother agrees; foolish and sentimental – ah, and old-fashioned, out of date. I look upon my men at Whitespring, and myself along with 'em, all one big family. I've got a duty to these men. But that's all wrong. Profit, progress, development, these things must come first, because our existence as a company depends on them. Joe will tell you. (Woden, 21)

The novel explicitly identifies the characteristics required in a successful *late* Victorian businessman on the eve of the twentieth century as "cunning, ruthlessness, sentiment, and a power of self-justification, aye, and hypocrisy" (Woden, 120) and contrasts them with the fatherly approach that has apparently lain at the heart of the success of the Ruffy family business for much of the Victorian period.

As the history of the Ruffy family unfolds in retrospect, however, it soon becomes apparent that this interpretation does not entirely match the facts, as John Ruffy's ambitious wife Joanna, from whom Joe has inherited his shrewd business sense and ruthless methods, has been the driving force behind the meteoritic rise of the Ruffys. However, at no point is the contrast established by the elder Ruffy between his own benevolently paternalistic approach and the money-driven ambition of his son explicitly challenged in the text. This underlying contradiction is obscured in later chapters, as the novel veers away from social criticism and the fortunes of the Ruffy family business to focus on the boyish adventures of Joe's nephew John, and the love relationships of various older members of the family. In the end, it is not the difference between the elder and the younger Ruffy's business methods but rather that between their attitudes towards their wives and families that is presented as crucial: Joe's (comparative) downfall is occasioned by his adulterous love affair with the wife of a neighbouring land owner, while his father dies happily and painlessly, secure in the conviction that his life with Joanna was a success; it is Victorian morality rather than Victorian business methods that the present is called upon to emulate.

A similarly romanticising approach is exemplified by Derrick Boothroyd's *Shoddy Kingdom* (1955),[322] which likewise shows superficial parallels with *Inheritance*. Like Bentley's text, it is set in the West Riding of Yorkshire and focuses on a prominent mill owner, Nelson Shaw. Like Bentley, Boothroyd includes an author's note which disclaims all references to real persons or events, but at the same time points out that the characters and their story are typical of the district. In contrast to Bentley, however, Boothroyd does not attempt a social history of the West Riding but focuses instead on the life and fortunes of a single man. The protagonist suffers from an unresolved inferiority complex (due to the fact that his father went bankrupt because his drinking habit made him unable to look after his business, and then committed suicide to escape his creditors). Convinced that he can only prove his worth to the people of the town (and thus to himself) by getting rich as quickly as possible, he nearly loses the love of his wife because he is too absorbed in his ruthless pursuit of 'brass'. In the end, however, he is 'reformed' from an ambitious businessman into a loving husband. While the novel privileges marital love over

[322] As the reader is told at the beginning of the book, the word 'shoddy' denotes a type of cloth made from reclaimed wool (i.e. recycled woollens). It is cheaper than woollen cloth, but not necessarily inferior.

commercial success, its criticism of Shaw's ruthless business methods remains ambiguous, as the narrator's negative evaluation is undercut by the perspective of the plot, which shows the success with which Shaw initially pursues his ambitious projects.

D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!* (1933) stands out amongst novels that draw on negative stereotypes of Victorian businessmen but steer clear of explicit social criticism or political engagement, due to the length and satirical explicitness of its depictions of Victorian business morality. In its scathingly negative portrayal of a typical Victorian businessman, it presents a contrast to Woden's and Boothroyd's texts; what it shares with these novels, however, is its focus on domestic and interpersonal concerns and its refusal to draw a parallel between the present and the past in its treatment of Victorian capitalism. Its protagonist, Mark Woodrofe, comes into contact with two very different Victorian businessmen during his brief stay in the metropolis. At the age of nine, he is taken on as an errand-boy at Mr Hepplewhite's drug warehouse. The first meeting between Mark and his future employer not only gives an indication of the heavily ironic tone of the novel, but also serves to characterise Mr Hepplewhite : "'If he [i.e. Mark] turns up at five tomorrow morning, to help the other boys take down the shutters and dust, I shall be quite satisfied. And we shall send him home most nights before nine. I don't hold with long working hours for children; it's not economic to tire them right out, […]'" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 15). From the very beginning, the Victorian spirit of commerce, epitomised by the drug manufacturer, stands condemned out of its own mouth; what looks like a glimmer of (comparative) humanity is at once recontextualised as a means of enhancing productivity: unlike the reader, Mr Hepplewhite (and, incidentally, also the other Victorian characters) remain serenely unaware of the irony not only of Mr Hepplewhite's attitude towards the children in his employ, but also of the incongruity (from a twentieth-century perspective) of his emphasis on the comparative shortness of Mark's sixteen-hour working day. Published at a time which had already seen a significant reduction in working hours and was to witness further protective legislation regulating working hours and conditions (especially for women and juveniles),[323] the novel implicitly stresses the amount of progress that has been made since the Victorian age, and the 'backwardness' of Victorian employers. While Mr Hepplewhite's self-satisfied display of unconscious hypocrisy makes his attitude particularly unpalatable to the twentieth-century reader, he is, as I have mentioned above, by no means an exception among businessmen in Victorian-centred fiction.

In contrast to Mr Hepplewhite, Mark's landlord, the toy maker Fawkes, remains impervious to the lures of financial success. Specialising in delicate hand-crafted toy theatres which feature scenes from Shakespeare and old English legends, he is proud of his handiwork, but evinces little interest in selling his masterpieces. The phrase which serves as the heading of this chapter is taken from the disparaging account Mr Hepplewhite gives of the old-fashioned subjects of Fawkes' toy theatres: "'Why don't you, Mr Fawkes,' I said, 'fit yourself for the Age – make plays about the romance of commerce, give us an arithmetical pantomime, celebrate the progress of machinery in a stupendous ballet?'" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 14). In the course of the novel, however, it becomes apparent that Mr

[323] Cf. Stevenson, 190ff. Hours of work had already been reduced significantly during the period of labour unrest following WWI, leading to the establishment of an average working week of 46.5 to 48 hours. Concern about employment conditions for women and teenage workers culminated in the Factory Act of 1937, which stipulated that young people under sixteen work no longer than forty-four hours a week, and young people from sixteen to eighteen, and women of all ages, no more than forty-eight hours a week.

Hepplewhite's analysis of Fawkes's waning commercial success – which makes it necessary for him to take in Mark as a lodger – is wrong, highlighting merely the drug manufacturer's lack of insight and imagination. The real cause of Fawkes's financial problems lies not in his inability to correctly assess and meet the demands of the market – indeed, he understands the tastes of his customers much better than the prosaic Mr Hepplewhite – but in his increasing reluctance to part with his creations, which moves him to actively dissuade customers from buying them and to scare away the children who crowd around his shop windows. However inappropriate as a subject for a toy theatre, Mr Hepplewhite's phrase provides an apt description of the generic category to which the novel, like *Ruffy and Sons* and *Shoddy Kingdom*, belongs, as the narrative veers away from a description of Victorian business practices to focus on the love lives of the protagonists. The book charts the development of the relationship between Mark and Fawkes's daughter Fancy, which is intimately connected to the commercial success (or lack thereof) of the two businessmen.

The novel implicitly contrasts Mr Hepplewhite and Oliver Fawkes, both of whom are, to some extent, presented in terms which highlight the absurdity of their respective positions in terms of business sense. However, the reader's emotional response to these two men is subtly influenced by the point of view from which they are depicted: seen through the eyes of his daughter Fancy, Fawkes is, despite his idiosyncratic behaviour and his mental illness, described as a loveable character. On the other hand, the reader comes to regard Mr Hepplewhite, whom he observes mainly from Mark's point of view, as an occasionally well-intentioned but thoroughly unsympathetic man, often blinded by his prejudices and personal vanity. Nonetheless, it is Mr Hepplewhite who in the end ensures Mark's opportunity for marriage to Fancy, his generous offer of a post on his country estate providing Mark with the means to support a wife and family. Once again, the ending of the novel runs counter to the overt criticism expressed throughout the text: Fawkes, who has turned his back on the commercially-minded attitude that the novel appears to disparage, nearly forces his daughter and grandson to starve in the streets; Mr Hepplewhite, on the other hand, may be vain, opinionated, lacking in taste and imagination, blind to everything except his own business interests, and ridiculous because of his attempts at social climbing (symbolised through his acquisition of a country estate and his new-found interest in fox hunting). However, it is precisely this last vanity – made possible by the huge success of his drug warehouse – which presents Mark with the wherewithal to rescue Fancy from a life of poverty.

Fancy's decision to reject her first husband Lord Blackwater's money and the social position as his widow is characterised by the same ambiguity. On the one hand, it is a decision for love rather than wealth and status, and as such in a sense a rejection of the preoccupation with money that lies at the heart of Mr Hepplewhite's world view. On the other hand, however, it also undermines the critical attitude expressed in the text, stressing that happiness can only be found within the boundaries mapped out by the prevailing class system, and lies in resigning oneself to one's social position. Moreover, it reveals a deeply conservative attitude towards femininity, as Fancy opts for love rather than social advancement.

Many of the novels which I have subsumed under the heading of 'romance of commerce' carry on the established tone of criticism of Victorian business methods. However, they largely avoid establishing clear connections between the past and the present, depicting Victorian business practices as an isolated historical phenomenon rather than as the precursor and precondition of the

present moment; Victorian capitalism is presented as a historical curiosity rather than a topical issue. This effect is often achieved through a shifting of narrative focus onto personal matters (exemplified here through *Shoddy Kingdom* or *Ruffy and Sons*). The inhuman business practices of Nelson Shaw and Joanna Ruffy are shown to be indicative of psychological problems rather than capitalist norms, as both of them crave commercial success to counteract feelings of personal inferiority.

Where explicit criticism does occur, it focuses on practices which are no longer in existence: the scathing satire of *Trumpeter, Sound!*, for example, mainly targets Victorian attitudes towards child labour. As a consequence, these novels – written and published at various points during the interwar years and the postwar era – present a conservative counter-current to the left-wing political novels discussed in the preceding section, suggesting that after the malpractices of the Victorian era have been abolished, nothing remains to be criticised in the capitalist economy that has grown out of the Industrial Revolution. The superiority of the present lies not in providing solutions to the problems inherited from the Victorians, but in abolishing their causes. Where a connection to the economic struggles of the present is established – as, for example, in *Ruffy and Sons* – this is presented not as the legacy of the Victorian age, but as a result of a departure from Victorian precedents, in the shape of the strict moral codes and social hierarchies of the nineteenth century. Determinedly conventional in their portrayal of gender roles and class structures, the ostensibly 'apolitical' romances of commerce carry deeply conservative ideological ballast that connects them to the more overtly pro-capitalist texts discussed in the next section.

This becomes particularly apparent in those texts which forbear from making the switch from business into the private domain. One of the most ambiguous novels of this type is Ralph Hale Mottram's *Our Mr Dormer* (1927), which charts the lives of a succession of 'Mr Dormers', all employed as head clerks in Doughty's Bank, and all direct descendants of each other.[324] The novel depicts a gradual process through which the successive Mr Domers become gradually absorbed into the bank, putting the interests of their employers before all else. Their private life retreats into the background, in their own view as much as in the reader's – it is only sporadically that we gain information on the wives and families of the Dormers, or on their feelings towards them. The history of the Dormers – and with it the history of Doughty's Bank – traces a development from the easy-going pre-Victorian days, when business, the reader is told, was still "a human thing" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 32), to the materialistic, money-grabbing attitudes that characterise the Victorians. According to Mottram, this is a process which sets in during the mid-Victorian period: "England was passing through a decade of crude materialism, and among all the vigorous weeds that shot up in the hearts of the men of 1860, there was none stronger than the cocksureness that ousted from Doughty Dormer's heart respect for tradition and scruple as to the means he employed to gain his ends" (*Mr Dormer*, 163–4). While the 1830s and 40s in the novel are presented as "the age of gentility" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 85) and refinement (symbolised by the second Mr Dormer, Stephen, marrying 'up' into the gentry), the final Mr Dormer – epitomic of the latter half of the Victorian era – displays a crude materialism and "a cheap vulgarity that was in neither of his

[324] As Stanley Weintraub points out, the novel is heavily autobiographical, the Dormer family being modelled on Mottram's own. The novel was written before, but could be published only after, the success of Mottram's war novel *The Spanish Farm* (1924) (cf. Weintraub, n.pag.). For notes on Mottram's biography, cf. also Trout, 51.

parents" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 208). By the end of the novel, Mr Dormer becomes the emblem of the Victorian age, symbolically representing "Queen and Empire":

> He was what they took him for – not the figure head – richer and more exalted men might be that if they liked – but the practical leader of the business life of a business town of the greatest business Empire that ever had been. If people added "or ever will be," Doughty Dormer bowed slightly, on behalf of self, Queen and Empire. He did not feel the statement to be extravagant. Least of all on that particular day [i.e. the Diamond Jubilee], the crowning day of the greatest business Empire, etc. (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 232).

However, for once his sense of self-assurance and security turns out to be unfounded, as the bank burns down during the following night. Severely injured in his attempt to prevent the catastrophe, Mr Dormer at length recovers to find that during his prolonged convalescence, an era has come to its end: Doughty's Bank has been taken over by its rival, and Doughty Dormer becomes branch manager of another larger bank – "an amorphous and distant entity which he had never seen, didn't want to see, and consequently didn't believe in" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 266).

The book combines the attitudes prevalent in the two types of 'romance of commerce' discussed above, disparaging Victorian business methods, but simultaneously lamenting their disappearance in favour of the depersonalised structures of the twentieth century. The paradoxical attitude expressed in the novel becomes particularly apparent in the last section, when an encomium on the integrity of the English Credit System and its unparalleled reputation throughout Europe is concluded and to some extent deconstructed by Dormer's realisation that "[t]he country was in a state of war. Nothing he or anyone else could do now undo what was done – the gradual culmination of the history of a century, in which Doughty's Bank had played its part, and was in the long run, implicated" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 283). Doughty Dormer, the last of a long line of bank managers, dies shortly after the close of the Victorian age.

For the final section, the deixis of the novel shifts to the portrait of the first Mr Dormer, so that the reader is given a curiously limited and distorted version of events as Mr Dormer is unable to see anything that happens outside the hall of the Bank, and is in many cases unable to grasp the significance of what he sees. Even more than the narrator's remarks, the shift highlights the fact that the Dormers – a product of the late eighteenth century which came into its own during the Victorian period – have lost their grasp on events, and that twentieth-century reality is passing them by. The novel ends with the refurbishing of the old banking house, in the course of which the first Mr Dormer's portrait is transferred to a Museum, to feature in a showcase interior of the "typical counting-house, Industrial-Commercial Era" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 297). The ending re-enacts the ambiguity which characterises Mottram's assessment of the period:

> And there Our Mr. Dormer remained, embalmed in those very scenes he had created, superseded, as all human creatures must be, by their own virtues, overcome by the superhuman – the effort of themselves to be something more than mere transitory human beings. In the case of Our Mr. Dormer, at least, the success was complete. (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 297–8)

2.1.4 After the war: capitalism triumphant

The diversity of opinions on radical left-wing ideology in texts from the interwar years is replaced by an almost unanimous scepticism in the post-war era, bearing witness to the disillusionment experienced by many even of the most ardent adherents during that time, especially after the

traumatic events of 1956.[325] As discussed in chapter 2.1.2, this disillusionment is to a certain extent foreshadowed already in novels written during the late thirties (most notably those of Phyllis Bentley), when Socialist and Communist ideas and successive Labour governments had shown themselves ineffectual in dealing with the dire economic situation. In the post-war period, Bentley's scepticism about Communism is taken a step further; many Victorian-centered novels subscribe to the notion of the "inevitability of the bourgeois [read 'capitalist'] state" (Hughes, 43) that Helen Hughes diagnoses as characteristic of the popular historical romance; a development that goes hand in hand with a shift away from the Victorian-centred problem fiction of the interwar period towards novels which present escapist fantasies focusing on the personal rather than the political sphere.[326] Overtly, these are the novels of a society which, as Davies and Saunders (20) argue, was no longer debating the relative merits of capitalism versus communism, but was merely weighing the relative merits of the Conservative Party versus Labour as administrators of the 'mixed economy' and welfare capitalism. Nonetheless, Victorian-centred novels – among them Betty Askwith's *Blossoming Tree* (1953), Catherine Harworth's *The Strangeling* (1954), 'Kathleen Kellow's'[327] *Lilith* (1954) or Anne Meredith's *Impetuous Heart* (1956) – show an almost obsessive return to the topic, suggesting that – by labelling Communism and its concerns 'Victorian' – they strive to confirm the idea of the present social order as the outcome of historical 'progress' and therefore actively decline all calls for further action. These are novels which not only follow the conservative pattern typical of historical romance fiction, aiming to discredit communism by associating it with naïve or unlikeable characters and offering explicit refutations of their arguments, or, more subtly, by emphasising the justness of the communists' concerns, but only *within their specific historical setting* and thus denying their applicability to the present.

In *Lilith*, the eponymous protagonist's twin brother, William, dies young before he can put his plans for social reform into action. However, it appears obvious from the outset that he would have had no hope of success even if he had lived:

> "He mustn't talk like that, though [i.e. about his socialist ideas]," said Amanda. "What if someone was to hear him and he were to be sentenced? What good would that do? What good did those men do?"
> "William says that everything that's done do leave its mark. He says they seem to fail and suffer terrible for failing, but people remember them. It's like as if they've made themselves into a sort of banner for them that comes after to follow. That's what it's like."
> "A banner!" said Amanda. "A banner that says: 'Don't you try. See what happened to us.'" (Kellow, 45; italics in original)

Upper-class Amanda and her lower-class friend and cousin Lilith (the daughter of an illegitimate son of Amanda's grandfather) agree that William, as a lower-class boy, has no hopes of transforming society. Neither of the girls shares Maurice Hewlett's conviction that "only the poor can help the poor" (*Mainwaring*, 74) or even Bentley's plea for a renegotiation of the existing

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[325] Cf. Davies and Saunders, 15; Gardiner, 68.

[326] Cf. esp. ch. 5.2.

[327] 'Kathleen Kellow' is one of the numerous pseudonyms of the prolific British writer Eleanor Hibbert; others include 'Elbur Ford', 'Eleanor Burford' (her maiden name), 'Ellalice Tate', 'Anna Percival', and most famously 'Philippa Carr', 'Victoria Holt' and 'Jean Plaidy'. *Lilith* was re-issued under the pseudonym 'Jean Plaidy' several times from the 1960s onwards, most recently in 1993.

social order under the leadership of a humanist elite; in their opinion, social reform can only be imposed from above:

> "[…] William ought to be a gentleman; then he could learn to talk proper and what he said wouldn't get him into trouble."
> Amanda said: "He can't be a gentleman because he wasn't born one, so because he's not a gentleman he ought to be careful what he says." (Kellow, 46)

William's own behaviour confirms this, as he tacitly acknowledges Amanda's social superiority and apologises for expressing revolutionary ideas in her presence, implying that even the reformers themselves subscribe to the notion expressed by the two girls that its lies with the upper classes as the natural rulers to determine the social order.

Even on an individual level, it falls to upper-class Amanda to grant him his wish for social equality in the shape of marriage to her – a wish she agrees to fulfil only because, having run away from home in the company of Lilith, William and the work-house boy 'Napoleon', she has already lost much of her social status; by marrying William, now terminally ill, she can at least nurse him without incurring the threat of further scandal. Moreover, she knows that he is dying: the marriage can never be consummated, and their brief married life belongs to a fantasy world which exists "not in reality, but in the mind" (Kellow, 156) and will therefore have no real consequences for her. In the end, William dies happy, despite having achieved nothing but a brief illusion of equality with Amanda and the "martyr's crown" (Kellow, 155) which the girls had predicted for him and for which he himself had longed.

Once again, the ideologically conservative message is reinforced through the implicit connection between the public and the private sphere. Just as William is unsuccessful in his attempts at social levelling, Lilith likewise fails to achieve her aim of subverting the social order through marriage. The extent to which Lilith controls the events of the plot creates the illusion that working-class characters can, after all, achieve a certain amount of social agency. While the reader is frequently led to admire her resourcefulness and unflagging energy in the pursuit of her elusive goal, however, her repeated failure to achieve her aims is presented as a form of poetic justice, punishing her for her dissatisfaction with her place in the social order as much as her transgressions against Victorian sexual morality. Throughout the novel, it is observable that Lilith's plans only succeed when they lead to the preservation of the social status quo. Though unable to bring off her own (socially unsuitable) marriage to her boyhood sweetheart and later lover Frith (scion of a landowning family whose estate borders on that of Amanda's father), she succeeds in arranging Amanda's match with Dr Stockland. Even though at the end of the novel Lilith brings off her ploy to ensure her son's marriage to Amanda's daughter Kerensa, this comes at an enormous price: realising that Lilith has tricked her into marrying David by withholding a written marriage proposal from Frith, the man Kerensa (like Lilith) truly loves, Amanda's daughter vows that she will do her utmost to destroy the close bond between David and his mother, and the reader is given every indication that she will succeed. Social change, the novel seems to imply, is largely an illusion and belongs – like Amanda's cross-class marriage to William – to the realm of fantasy, not real life, a message that Kellow underscores by reducing questions of social justice to the domain of personal relationships. Kellow's sympathetic portrayal

of the socialists is negated by the plot of *Lilith*, which – like that of *Trumpeter, Sound!* – shows that only submission to the existing social order can lead to personal happiness.

In Betty Askwith's *The Blossoming Tree* (1953), communism is likewise presented as a poor man's idealistic dream – a dream that is, moreover, unattainable because it demands sacrifices that most people are not willing or able to make, and unattractive because it would lead to the disruption of social harmony based on the prevailing order. As in *Lilith*, the political argument of the novel is inextricably connected to a love story, in this case that between the protagonist, Catherine (married to a well-off conservative MP) and her brother's Socialist friend, the Russian-French immigrant André Lesvignes. Though deeply attracted to André as well as to his Socialist convictions – depicted (and justified) as the consequence of harrowing experiences of poverty during his childhood – Catherine in the end decides not to give up her marriage and upper-class position. Her decision is endorsed by her brother:

> "I believe there are people, and perhaps you and I are among them, who are meant to stay on the beaten track. Not because they're cowards but because they're fundamentally too decent, too sensible, too law-abiding to break all the rules of this world. I used to think that the rules were all wrong, that one ought not to be bound by them. But now I don't know, you cause such a lot of misery and hardship by trying to be free of them, and when you've broken them all, you aren't free, because no one is. I've always remembered Henry saying one Christmas at Dacre: 'Live according to the lights of your times but live a little better than them. It's the misfits who cause the mischief.'" (Askwith, 218)

Other novels feature more overtly disparaging accounts of communism and communists. In Violet Dean's *Love's A Man of War* (1953),[328] communism is dismissed as a fashionable fad among the artistic set in which the protagonist's daughter briefly moves, and her communist acquaintances distinguish themselves mainly by their aversion to soap and water. More pertinently, *Impetuous Heart* contrasts communist ideology with a true desire to alleviate the poverty and miserable working conditions of the lower classes, and establishes a close connection between social and personal issues. The book is a family saga which spans five generations, unusual for its relative shortness of only 192 pages. The novel begins in the year of Queen Victoria's coronation, when nursery governess Milly Browne's "impetuous heart" leads her into a brief love affair with the son of her employer, resulting in her instant dismissal and the birth of her son Thomas, and ends in the early nineteen-forties, showing the fates of Thomas' children and grandchildren during World War II.[329]

In the first part of the novel, communist ideology is represented by William Bates, a highly unattractive character who lives alone with his daughter, Mary. In a correspondence with her future husband, Thomas, Mary points out that her father is correct in his assessment of the social situation, though undiplomatic in his arguments: "It's a sombre thought that we can't set a match to the fire or put on a shoe but we must beg pardon of some victim of exploitation. For my father's right in his faith, if his methods may be deplored" (A. Meredith, 41). Since Mary is the only human being who still is on intimate terms with William, the reader is invited to accept her evaluation of him unreservedly.

However, a highly ironic twist is added to this assessment when it emerges that Bates's communist activities in fact force Mary, on whose earnings he lives, to sell her wares at a lower

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[328] For a detailed discussion of Dean's novel, cf. ch. 3.2.3 and 3.2.4.

[329] For a more detailed discussion of Milly Browne, cf. ch. 4.1.1.

price than her competitors to overcome her customers' reluctance to buy from Bates's daughter. When Mary refuses Thomas's offer of marriage, she provides the reader with an insight into her father's character, pointing out that Bates will become less than human if he loses her. After the death of his wife, Mary is the only human being that he still regards as an individual, all others being to him simply the mass of workers. Mary Bates claims that communism denies men individual rights, and points out that without her, William "will be like a machine regulating other men's lives according to his beliefs, and when men reach that stage, they are on the borderline to insanity. You must allow men individual rights, and he denies them every day" (A. Meredith, 46). Like Hewlett's demoniacal political genius Mainwaring, he is prepared to sacrifice his family members to the cause: just as Mainwaring causes the death of his child by forcing Lizzy to share the dreadful living conditions of the workers during the strike at Culgaith, William Bates leaves his wife's death-bed in order to attend a meeting. That Bates, unlike Mainwaring, acts from genuine political conviction with no thoughts for his personal advancement is not presented as a mitigating circumstance, but merely as further evidence of the dehumanising effect of communism – a certain amount of healthy egotism, it is implied, would at least have furnished proof of Bates's essential humanity.

In the course of the novel, it becomes apparent just how "deplorable" Bates's methods are: in a strike in 1859, the workers find themselves caught between the ardent communist William Bates and the factory owner Henry Clifford, as Bates wants them to hold out for higher wages, while Clifford counts on them returning to work at the same low level of pay rather than letting their families starve. As the narrator points out, "[t]he early Trades Union was fighting for a foothold, and the men who denied it power were the workers themselves" (A. Meredith, 44). However, the workers' attitude is justified by the reminder that many of them are children of the 'hungry forties', and are afraid of their children going through the same ordeal if they lose their jobs. Finally, the workers show signs of acceding to Clipstone's wishes and turn against Bates. In contrast to Mainwaring, who knows that the only way to keep the workers on his side is by sharing their living conditions,[330] Bates eventually loses their support when they point out that unlike them, he still has food and a fire. To avoid the defeat of the Labour Union, he puts a radical end to the workers' dilemma by shooting the manufacturer. Although the culprit is never discovered and the murder can be regarded as a symbolic threat against other factory owners, the consequences of Bates's action – like those of William Oldroyd's murderers in *Inheritance* – for the workers are bleak: none of them is allowed to work at the factory while the investigation into the owner's death is in progress, and afterwards they have to return to work on the old terms.

In the second part of the book, William Bates's role is taken over by his grandson Willie, a communist agitator and conscientious objector during World War I, who spends most of his time rushing around Europe without any tangible results, refuses to fight in the war because, as he says, there is nothing to be gained from victory for the workers, who would be no worse off under German occupation, and finally succeeds only in ruining his sister Iris' marriage and bringing misery on his family before disappearing for several years. Willie's lack of a sense of public duty and patriotism is presented as a direct consequence of his communist convictions, as is his relative

[330] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 38.

indifference towards the common enemy – a stance that has a foundation in fact, given the pacifist convictions of Labour leaders like Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, who opposed Britain's involvement in the 'Great War'.[331] In the strongly anti-German aftermath of World War II, however, this attitude stands condemned out of his own mouth when he sets the German invaders on a par with the British capitalists.

Later on, he produces "a book that became an instant bestseller, a vituperative, brilliant, documented, fearless novel about war and peace. […] He became quite a lion, married and lost his wife within two years, she blowing off in a gale with another man, after which for a long while he didn't bother to obtain the Church's sanction to his unions" (A. Meredith, 155). The narrator makes it clear that Willie is nothing but a "trouble-maker" (A. Meredith, 146) of whose lax morals and lack of patriotic feeling the reader cannot but disapprove. He finally dies "abroad in faintly mysterious circumstances, with the shadow of the new war gathering thick and fast no one paid much attention to him, and by 1940 even his books were forgotten" (A. Meredith, 160).

However, the narrator also makes it clear that though not particularly likeable and misguided in his ideological convictions, Willie is not incorrect in his assessment that something is gravely wrong in British society as World War I causes a radical break with the past. The Victorian period implicitly presents a positive contrast to the new and alarming developments of the interwar era: after the war, Willie's brother-in-law becomes "one of the profiteers who were, promised the authorities, to be discovered and hounded down. […] But the hand of authority had lost its cunning, or else its will was weak. Certainly a few prosecutions took place. […] Small men were pulled into court, but the big operators soared over the head of the police" (A. Meredith, 153). The building boom produces "a rash of little new houses" (A. Meredith, 153) of sub-standard quality, many of the war marriages collapse in the first year of peace, while illegitimate children ('war babies') abound, those of mixed race often failing to find adoptive parents. Fighting men returning from the front are unable to find jobs as women are unwilling to relinquish their newly-found freedom and return to the domestic sphere, and are forced to find ill-paid and demeaning alternatives to their prior posts. As the old certainties of the Victorian era are superseded by the weakening of race, class and gender boundaries as well as moral precepts, communist ideology is shown to offer no viable solutions to the crisis.

The alternative to William's and Willie's firebrand socialism is presented by the self-sacrificing practical philanthropy of Jennie, William's great-granddaughter and Willie's aunt. Although Willie cynically regards the Settlement – tellingly, a remnant of the Victorian age – as a means of reconciling the lower classes to their fate instead of making them see that *they* are the true masters, Jennie soon realises that she can do real good through her work there. This is confirmed by the love the poor show her when she lies dying at the local hospital. The book ends on a highly sentimental note. The final passage appears like a strangely inverted echo of Bentley and Warner: at the end of the novel, we find Cyril re-reading Milly's journal, which has been continued by all following generations and now – like the novel in the reader's hands – contains the whole history of her descendants: "Feeling convinced beyond all future doubt of the

[331] Cf. Stevenson, 55.

deathlessness of love, no matter what form it might take, he closed the book and went up to have a bath before dinner" (A. Meredith, 192).

The message the reader is meant to take away from the book is clearly that of the victory of sentiment over political activism; moreover, it also stresses that enterprising people like Milly can make their way even within the framework provided by the existing social order, overcoming the constraints of class as well as gender. In contrast to Bentley, Meredith presents the Victorian age not as the cause of present-day problems, but as a lost golden age whose drawbacks could largely be overcome through personal initiative. The ending invites readers to lean back and relax, secure in the knowledge of the all-conquering power of love as a panacea against all social ills. The mundane conclusion contradicts all call to action that the more socially critical passages in the novel may have evoked: unlike the audiences of Warner and Bentley, the reader of this book is not exhorted to grapple with the ideological underpinnings of socialism or to take strenuous action to alleviate social injustice. In striking contrast to these earlier authors, Meredith advocates a retreat into the personal rather than an advance into the political sphere; history ceases to be a source of guidance and becomes an entertainment to be enjoyed during a half-hour before dinner, and socialism is relegated to the past, social reform (though repeatedly called for in the book's critical descriptions of interwar Britain) apparently having been made obsolete by the advent of World War II.

2.2 The Heroic Futility of War

In the aftermath of World War I, the enormous gap between the civilians' romantic imagination of warfare and the actual grim reality faced by the soldiers becomes one of the key themes of Victorian-centred fiction. While several novelists of the post-war era, among them Bernard Ash in *Silence for his Worship* (1953), Anne Meredith in *Impetuous Heart* (1956), and F.W. Kenyon in *Without Regret* (1957), directly address the issue in connection with World War I, earlier novels tend to transpose the theme into the Victorian era, thus using the Victorian age as a means of commenting on the more recent past.[332] An exception to this rule is provided by Phyllis Bentley in *Sleep in Peace* (1938), the earliest example of Victorian-centred fiction discussed in this thesis that explicitly analyses the Victorian age as the cause for World War I, and for the political climate of opinion that led up to World War II.

Rejecting Victorian notions of heroic patriotism and duty towards King and country, Victorian-centred novels of this type bear evidence to a general climate of opinion which established a direct link between "the complacencies of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War" (Gardiner, 19), and which shows itself in many Victorian-centred novels' rejection of "the bourgeois morality and the complacent materialism and the jingoistic patriotism" (Gardiner, 20) that had come to epitomise the Victorian era. By the end of World War I, anti-Victorianism had risen to such a pitch that Wilfrid Owen, for instance, wrote to his mother that he "did not covet the Victoria Cross on account of its title and the values for which it might be taken to stand" (Gardiner, 20). Hardly any Victorian-centred novels question the intrinsic value of personal courage or heroic self-sacrifice; what emerges, however, are profound doubts whether

[332] As Wallace (80) notes, the use of references to earlier wars as a means of commenting on present-day anxieties and concerns is a typical feature of women's historical fiction during World War II.

the wars which call forth these commendable demonstrations of individual virtue are, on the whole, justifiable as a means of resolving international conflicts. In addition, there are often hints that Britain's involvement (be it in World War I or in earlier wars) is largely due to an unbridled jingoism frequently associated with the Victorian period and increasingly coming under attack after the war. Moreover, there is a strong tendency in Victorian-centred novels to stress the bravery of the individual soldiers while at the same time highlighting the military incompetence (occasionally bordering on deliberate neglect and downright sadism) of their leaders, echoing criticism that was rife at the end of World War I. Moreover, there is a profound sense that soldiers, those of the Victorian age no less than those fighting in the 'Great War', have been embroiled in armed combat because they have been inculcated by their Victorian parents with a misguided sense of patriotic duty that blinds them to the real interests of their country. It is also worth noting that many novels show strong traces of the pacifist convictions prevalent in interwar middlebrow fiction, especially among women writers; in several texts – such as, for instance, *The Rebel*, *Trumpeter, Sound!* and, to some extent, *A Challenge to Sirius* (discussed at greater length below) – chart the protagonist's (and, by extension, the reader's) gradual education into pacifism.

While some of the texts discussed here directly grapple with the thorny issue of the Victorian equation of patriotism with a willingness to participate in armed conflict, and with Victorian military ineptitude (frequently exemplified by the Charge of the Light Brigade),[333] in other works the futility of war is expressed through the metaphor of Englishmen going off to fight on foreign soil, in wars in which they have neither personal interest nor patriotic duty to fight, and from which they return – having realised the futility of all warfare, usually through the loss of a woman they love or admire – to settle down quietly to married life. Novels of this type are Sheila Kaye-Smith's *A Challenge to Sirius* (1917), H.C. Bailey's *The Rebel* (1923), or John St. Loe Strachey's *The Madonna of the Barricades* (1926). Written during the last stages of the 'Great War' and in the years immediately following it, these novels bear evidence to the dramatic shift in public opinion as the patriotic enthusiasm of the first war years came to be replaced by disgust and disillusionment – a shift that is discernible also in many works that directly address the issue in connection with World War I, and in the type of fiction usually classified as 'war novels'.[334]

Bailey's *The Rebel*, set in the 1840s, is probably one of the most pessimistic depictions of misguided military endeavour and the gradual disillusionment of an initially enthusiastic protagonist in Victorian-centred fiction, and as such deserves to be briefly outlined here.[335] In the beginning of the novel, Arthur Beauforest comes home after a prolonged absence of fighting in the American Civil War to claim his inheritance, Warborough, after the death by drowning of his elder brother, Ralph. He is accompanied by his former commanding officer and friend, Colonel Justin, an Irish-American adventurer who regards Arthur's new-found wealth as the perfect financial backing for his martial schemes. Justin first convinces him to give him money to start an insurrection in Ireland; after this fails, they fight for Garibaldi in Italy, urged on by Justin's girlfriend Cecilia, who has dedicated herself to the cause. When Garibaldi is defeated, Justin convinces Arthur to move on to another conflict, fighting against the Prussians in France. After

[333] Cf. ch. 2.2.2.

[334] For the shift in public opinion and its influence on World War I novels, cf. Watson, 257.

[335] For a detailed discussion of women's roles in *The Rebel*, cf. ch. 2.2.3.

the Prussian victory, Justin wants Arthur to give him money to fight the French government, but Arthur, who realises that Justin cares nothing for the causes he fights for, is disgusted and decides to return home to try to improve living conditions for his tenants. Justin reveals that he has killed Ralph and thus paved Arthur's way to his inheritance, and attempts to blackmail him into staying at his side and supplying him with more money. When Arthur leaves, Justin follows him and tries to have him killed by National Guard soldiers. However, he is saved by Cecilia, whom the Parisians have learned to revere as "the little sister of the people" (Bailey, 272). When Cecilia dies in the melee, Justin is killed in revenge. Arthur hands over his estate to Martin Drayton, his cousin and next of kin. He then goes to live with the French peasant girl Marton, who has nursed him back to health after his involvement with the *francs-tireurs*, and whom he sees as a kind of earth goddess – the antithesis of war and of his former life.

However, not all depictions of warfare are as bleak as *The Rebel*. In many Victorian-centred novels, the futility of war in political terms is paradoxically coupled with an insistence on its enriching and character-forming personal dimension, as the protagonists witness not only the mindless brutality of armed combat, but are also forced to outgrow their own limits in terms of physical and psychological endurance. Presenting a consolatory vision of the individual benefits derived from harrowing war experiences, these texts also engage directly with the issue of narrativising and coming to terms with the past, thus providing an oblique metatextual commentary on the act of writing historical fiction. As shall be seen in the following chapter, Sheila Kaye-Smith's *A Challenge to Sirius* can be regarded as prototypical in its treatment of these themes.

2.2.1 Sheila Kaye-Smith: *A Challenge to Sirius* (1917)

2.2.1.1 Summary

A Challenge to Sirius[336] is set on the Isle of Oxney in the mid-nineteenth century. Its protagonist, Frank Rainger, grows up on the farm of Luke Coalbran after his father has left London and withdrawn from society because Frank's mother deserted him for another man. Frank is sent to the curate, Mr Bellack, for tuition, but otherwise allowed to spend his time with the farm children, especially Luke's youngest daughter, Maggie. Frank's father takes little interest in his son; he considers himself a failure and finally commits suicide when Frank is in his twenties. As Frank grows up, he falls in love with Maggie, but contemplates leaving her in order to go to London and fulfil his father's cherished ambition of his son becoming a writer. In a discussion between Frank and Mr Bellack, the older man formulates the question that is to become the key theme of the novel: "which is the best, happiness or experience?" (Kaye-Smith, 46).

Opting for experience rather than a comfortable life on the Coalbran farm, Frank decides on a literary career in London, despite Mr Bellack's well-founded conviction that he lacks literary talent. There, he has a love affair with Rita Simons, a Jewish woman characterised by her unconventional morals and exotic beauty. Rita is a gifted writer herself and believes in Frank's genius, but turns out

[336] The 1917 edition of the novel gives the title as "*A* Challenge to Sirius" on the cover, but as "*The* Challenge to Sirius" on the title page; moreover, the title of the second section of the book, "The Red *King*'s Dream", is probably a misprint for "The Red *God*'s Dream", as all references within the text are to a dreaming and bloodthirsty god.

to be mistaken. Frank breaks off the affair and decides to come home to work on Coalbran's farm after he finds out that Maggie has married a neighbouring farmer, Harman of Mockbeggar, having heard about Rita and being convinced that Frank has lost interest in her. Frank, who still loves her, resolves to be a platonic companion and comfort to Maggie, who regrets her marriage to the much older Harman, a domestic tyrant. Frank tries to persuade Maggie to run away with him, but realises that she cannot leave her children, and that she "is incapable of loving away from her instincts" (Kaye-Smith, 198): she has internalised the prevailing social code to such a degree that it has become second nature to her, and she accepts that she 'belongs' to Harman.

Frank decides to follow Mr Bellack's counsel to leave Oxney, and accompanies Maggie's brother Tom to North America, where they fight in the American Civil War on the side of the South. In a letter to Mr Bellack, Frank re-interprets the war in terms of a universal struggle between Nature and Civilisation:

> Also my eyes have been opened to a side of this war which was hidden from me at home. Then I looked on it as a slave war, or at best a political one; now I see that the issues are far bigger – that they are universal. This American war of secession is the inevitable clash between the free, pastoral South and the hard-headed, business-minded, money-making North. It is part of a fight which is being waged throughout the world – the fight between agriculture and commerce, manhood and machinery, nature and civilisation. I am on the side of nature and agriculture, though I know that civilisation and commerce will win, because they have more resources. The North wins throughout the world – but thank God I am fighting on the side of the South, for it is the side of nature and freedom and beauty. (Kaye-Smith, 231–2)

Frank, conceptualising his involvement in the war as a fight on "the side of nature and freedom and beauty", is initially convinced that he is fighting for a glorious and honourable cause, and that the act of fighting is therefore in itself glorious and honourable, made the more romantic by the adverse conditions experienced by the Southern army.

As the story unfolds, however, it becomes increasingly clear that the focaliser's point of view is open to question and reinterpretation in the light of subsequent plot events, which show that the war leaves both sides, North and South, ultimately in a worse position for having been involved in the conflict, and destroys the ideals of "nature and freedom and beauty" which Frank's side had ostensibly set out to preserve. The horror of war becomes apparent not only through the defeat of the South (symbolic of everything Frank believes in), but also on a much more personal level. When Tom dies, Frank is profoundly troubled by the incongruity of burying him in foreign earth, knowing how deeply rooted his friend was in the Isle of Oxney. However, he consoles himself with the thought that Tom has found adventure and romance in the South, and that he has died before either of these experiences could be spoiled for him.[337] The second and even greater loss that he sustains is that of Lorena, the young Southern belle to whom he has become engaged and who, for him, represents the ideal of womanhood: "she was a glorious unity of child and woman. She had all the innocence of the one, all the passion of the other; as child he reverenced her, as woman he loved her" (Kaye-Smith, 304). It is Frank's decision to fight for the South that wins Lorena's heart;[338] however, it is also the war which finally takes her away from him. When Maplehead, the estate on which she lives with her mother, is overrun by Union soldiers, Frank

[337] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 240f.
[338] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 303 and 308.

hastens to her rescue, but arrives too late. After having been raped by a black soldier, Lorena commits suicide, this being "the course that her honour and her love for him [i.e. Frank] demanded" (Kaye-Smith, 343).[339] It remains for Frank to bury her and her mother with the help of a Union soldier who has taken him prisoner in the garden of her estate.

Recuperating from an attack of brain fever brought on by his traumatic experiences, Frank experiences an epiphanic revelation, becoming convinced that God has created humans in order to vicariously live through them, and to acquire the experience of human emotions that is denied Him because of His omniscience and existence outside and above the world of man. The meaning of life, Frank realises, lies not in the pursuit of happiness, but in the acquisition of experience as a challenge to the 'divine indifference', symbolised by Sirius:

> He seemed to see the plan of the world, the Wheel, the grinding order of life. He no longer felt that he was part of a muddled dream, dreamed by a muddled God. Life was nothing so comfortable as a dream. There was Purpose in its ghastliness. He came with growing conviction to see himself not as a figment or a flame, but something which had its definite unhappy part to play. He saw the God of this world as a great curious greedy power, grabbing at matter, grabbing at experience. He saw Him feeding on the sin and pain of mankind as on the blood and smoke of a sacrifice. Every human twinge and throe brought the Great Unknowing nearer to its Knowledge. God was realising himself through man, gaining experience through him. And he, with all his hope and pain and purpose, was just the hand that God thrust into the fire, that He might know burning; and as the pain of a burnt hand is not in the hand but in the brain which informs it, so even Frank's pain and passion were not his own, but belonged to the Eternal Brain which decreed them – which felt and learned through him, and through him would grow and fulfil itself, and know and be, though he himself were consumed… (Kaye-Smith, 352)

After a period of emotional limbo which he spends working as a servant to a Roman Catholic priest, Father Christobal Sanchez, in a sleepy Mexican village, he finally recovers the strength to relive and come to terms with his traumatic experiences during the war. After the sudden death of his employer, he decides to return to Oxney, where he finds that little has changed during the fifteen years of his absence. Considered a failure by his Oxney acquaintances, who had expected him to return home a rich man, he settles down on the Coalbran farm to work for Maggie's brother, Dave. Despite the fact that Maggie is now widowed and they still feel attracted to each other, Frank dares not propose marriage to her, realising that she is now his social superior; however, in due course Maggie solves the problem by proposing to Frank. Finally united, the couple settle down to a peaceful old age full of shared memories; Frank in the end finds happiness not with the woman he loved most, but with the one he loved longest.

2.2.1.2. Schemata, plans, and themes

When Frank, in response to Mr Bellack's question, chooses "experience" rather than happiness, he inevitably opts for schema disruption and schema refreshment. However, Frank's initial schemata in their turn serve to confirm rather than disrupt the reader's schematic knowledge of the Victorian age; in other words, many of Frank's and the other characters' preconceptions and prejudices are designed to give the reader a closer insight into the typically 'Victorian' world view. Most significantly, this applies to Frank's attitude towards women, sexual morality and interpersonal relationships, issues which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.1.4. It is

[339] The deeply racist ideology that underlies this aspect of Kaye-Smith's novel will be discussed at greater length in ch. 2.2.4.

noticeable that the novel does not call the protagonist's attitudes towards women in question, but rather positions the reader so as to endorse Frank's opinions.

If Frank is conventional in his views on gender and sexuality, he is so to an even greater extent in his attitude towards war, and in his admiration of patriotism and bravery in combat. In this case, however, the reader is not necessarily placed so as to share Frank's original (mis)conceptions. To Frank, war initially appears "like a wonderful and delightful game" (Kaye-Smith, 225), despite the unfavourable conditions under which the Southern army has to fight, weakened by hunger, sickness and lack of sleep, and further hampered by an insufficient amount of weapons and uniforms, and lack of organisational skills on the part of the officers. He is aware that they will eventually lose the war;[340] nonetheless, he is enthusiastic about the patriotism that leads the Southerners to give their lives for their cause, and about their bravery in battle: "Many of the dead looked extraordinarily peaceful, as if they had been glad to give their country the sacrament of their body and blood – and those whose faces were convulsed with fear or agony gave oddly the impression that the contortion was a lapse, that they had been caught in their horror unawares, and would have died calm, and even smiling, like the others had they been allowed one second more" (Kaye-Smith, 227).

In passages not expressing Frank's subjective point of view, war is presented as destructive and dehumanising. On one occasion, for instance, Frank tramples the dead bodies of his fallen comrades:

> Dead men lay thrown about in all sorts of grotesque, muddled attitudes, like broken tin soldiers thrown away by a careless child. Sometimes a Yankee and a Dixie man lay in each other's arms, whether because they had perished locked in deadly fight, or remembered at the last moment that they were brothers, no one could tell. Frank scarcely noticed them, he trod on them with pretty much the same half-regretful feeling as he had occasionally trodden on graves in Wittersham Churchyard. (Kaye-Smith, 225)

The wording highlights the difference between Frank's perspective and that mapped out for the reader: while Frank remains nearly oblivious of the dead bodies he tramples, the reader is confronted with a detailed description, highlighting the limits of Frank's subjective view of story-world reality.

Initially, the emphasis in Frank's own written accounts lies on the gallantry of the soldiers under adverse circumstances, and on the heroism of the Dixie men:

> There is a dauntless spirit among us here, and you can scarcely imagine the hardships that the men of the South, and the women too, have endured for love of Dixie. If the Yankees have the advantage in men, guns and money, we have the advantage in courage, fortitude and enterprise. We also have the better generals. If we had not, we should have been wiped out long ago. […] We have been splendidly led, and we have splendidly followed. (Kaye-Smith, 230)

The reader, however, soon learns to distrust his enthusiasm, as further events reveal the "splendid" leaders to be inept and wasteful of human life and resources. As on the topic of women, Frank's attitude is designed to confirm readers' schema of the Victorians as deeply imbued with a spirit of patriotism and public duty.[341] True to its conservative agenda, the book does not call these values into question; nonetheless, it dwells at some length on the inadequacy of armed combat as a means of solving political problems, and on the destructive and

[340] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 230.

[341] In the course of the war, Frank comes to regard the Southern states as his home country.

dehumanising consequences of warfare for both sides in the conflict. Initially, Frank's attitude is deeply ambiguous, as war is presented both as "a wonderful and delightful game" which leaves Frank feeling "thrilled and exalted" (Kaye-Smith, 260) and as a horrifying nightmare dreamt by a bloodthirsty god.[342]

From the point of view of the Southern soldiers, the 'war' schema aiming at the execution of the plan of preserving the lives and livelihood of the Southerners is overthrown as Frank witnesses the destruction of Southern farms[343] and the loss of his fiancée Lorena, which finally wins the protagonist round to the point of view mapped out for the reader.[344] This closing of the 'gap' between protagonist and audience strengthens the readers' identification with Frank, making them more ready to concur with his subsequent interpretation of the meaning of war, suffering, and human experience in general. Once the reader has been given the feeling that s/he and Frank are finally of the same opinion regarding war, s/he may well be more likely to maintain the state of ideological harmony that has been established, and less willing to question Frank's unusual insights and conclusions. The novel thus presents an interesting variant of the typical *roman à these*: rather than mapping out a viewpoint for the reader that coincides with that of the focaliser and closing off all other perspectives, Kaye-Smith gives the reader the impression that the process has been reversed. Through the events of the plot, her protagonist comes slowly round to share the point of view mapped out for the reader, realising that his initial perspective of war as a delightful game has been closed off. Only then is the typical strategy taken up: having apparently followed the reader's example in deprecating war as a viable means of solving conflicts, Frank is allowed to take the lead in bringing the reader to a realisation that on a higher level, war is 'good' after all.[345]

On the level of goals, war is presented as a positive, because personally enriching, experience, that is, moreover, interpreted as a religious sacrifice. As the plan of preserving the South and its way of life is superseded by the goal of 'gaining experience', the horror of war becomes justifiable because it is only one aspect of human life:

> He [i.e. Frank] saw his life as good, because it had been full and rich, though its chief spoils were anguish and sorrow. Life justified itself. It might be cruel, treacherous, ironic, but it was life, and pain was as much a part of it as joy. The happiness of his love for Lorena and the sorrow of its ending were both equally life and equally good. (Kaye-Smith, 391)

The message of the book is thus both critical and ultimately consolatory: on the one hand, war is presented as a futile effort both for the soldiers on both sides and for Frank, who through the war gains Lorena's love, only to lose her in the end. On the other hand, however, its futility is enacted only on

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[342] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 220f. and 243.

[343] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 311.

[344] This impression is strengthened when the novel repeatedly questions whether the cause of the North is really worth fighting for: according to the value scheme of the text, "civilisation and commerce" (repeatedly shown to be destructive of mental, physical and moral health in the novel's depiction of Frank's London life) are of significantly less value than "nature and freedom and beauty"; in addition, the abolition of slavery, also presented as one of the main aims of the Northerners, is depicted as a misguided attempt to free a sub-human race incapable of taking on responsibility for themselves, and destructive of the very civilisation for which the Northern side had been fighting. The deeply racist ideology underlying this assertion is discussed at greater length in ch. 2.2.4.

[345] For the structure of the *roman à these*, cf. Iser, *Act*, 190.

the level of plans; on the higher level of goals – and on the thematic level of discovering the meaning of life – it is presented as positive, because, as the novel stresses, all aspects of life are "equally good."

In order to arrive at this realisation, Frank's – and, by implication, the reader's – 'God' schema has to undergo a number of disruptions and modifications, from a God who is indifferent to human suffering, to a cruel deity who thrives on it, to a merciful one who shares it. The strangely esoteric religious message that underlies Kaye-Smith's novel is in keeping with religious developments at its time of publication, as organised religion was rapidly losing its influence, and a large number of people were turning to "other forms of spiritual succour" (Gardiner, 27).[346] The novel sets out to fill the prevalent need for spiritual guidance at a time when the horrors of war were eroding faith in a just and merciful God through its re-interpretation of the divine.

Frank's return to his native island also shows that another of his schemata has undergone modification during his absence: when he returns penniless, he is regarded as a failure by the islanders, who measure success only in terms of material wealth. However, Frank's 'success' schema has acquired another track, in which money is replaced by experience, so that he is able to regard his life as successful – because rich in experience – despite his lack of material wealth.[347]

The novel is essentially schema-confirming in terms of the reader's world schemata, both as regards Victorian women and Victorian attitudes towards war. The text does not set out to challenge readers' assumptions about the Victorian era; nor does it question the continuing validity of many well-established Victorian attitudes and conventions for the present day. Throughout the text, Frank is presented as a typical exponent of the Victorian age, characterised by his belief in a strict division of spheres according to gender, in women's moral superiority but mental inferiority, in the 'sinfulness' of (extra-marital) sexuality, in patriotic ideals, and in the glory of martial heroism and heroic self-sacrifice. It is through him – and especially through the changes his schemata and ideological convictions undergo in the course of the novel – that the text maps out a position for the reader which concurs with many well-established Victorian tenets, but abolishes others. Most crucially, the novel interrogates established Victorian assumptions about heroism and patriotic duty, showing that war does not serve the nations involved in the conflict, and that the soldiers' heroic deaths therefore do not really further their cause. By attempting to disrupt and change the reader's 'God' and 'success' schemata, however, the novel aims at fulfilling an essentially consolatory function in a society confronted with the effects of the First World War, showing the protagonist's successful struggle to overcome the traumata sustained during wartime, highlighting the personally enriching and character-forming aspects of individual soldiers' experiences, and insisting on the positive aspect of suffering as a religious duty towards a God who has in turn suffered for mankind.

In terms of text schemata, *A Challenge to Sirius* draws not only on the textual conventions of the historical novel, but also on those of the Bildungsroman. To some extent, the novel may initially be regarded as text-schema confirming, as the plot follows the typical pattern of the genre, depicting

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[346] Cf. also Cannadine, 107. In addition, Frank's religious doubts and deliberations, and his attraction to Roman Catholicism, may also to a certain extent reflect Kaye-Smith's own preoccupations at the time of writing: married to an Anglican clergyman, the author converted to Roman Catholicism (together with her husband) in 1929 (cf. Beauman, 257f.).

[347] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 420.

a young man who leaves home, has a series of adventures and finally settles down, having found his place in the social order. Typically, the protagonist's development is also mapped out in terms of his relationships with women, which represent different stages on his journey towards the goal of social integration. *A Challenge to Sirius* also conforms to the text schema in that it displays the picaresque structure that is typical of many Bildungsromane. Moreover, the fact that Frank initially believes himself to be an artist is also in accordance with a particularly English track through the 'Bildungsroman' schema.[348] However, the ending of the novel contains a schema-disrupting twist, as the goal of Frank's journey turns out to be identical with its starting point, both in geographical terms, and in terms of his position as a farmer and Maggie's husband. The goal of the Bildungsroman is thus reinterpreted: Frank's search is not for his place in society, but for his ability to accept the place which he has held from the beginning. The novel thus enacts a fantasy that must have resonated powerfully with many soldiers returning home from the front: to learn to come to terms with the horrors of war, to recognise its supposedly beneficial effects in terms of individual growth, and to pick up life exactly where they left off before the war.

2.2.1.3 Deixis

Like many other historical novels, *A Challenge to Sirius* begins with a descriptive passage focusing on the spatial component of the deictic centre; it is only on the second page that the temporal aspect is introduced through mention of the date, 1840. Shortly afterwards, the protagonist's father, John Rainger, enters the deictic centre window as focalised WHO, to become the focalising WHO for the remainder of the introductory section. As the deictic centre shifts to John's perceptual and relational deixis, the reader is given a brief moment of insight into the thoughts and feelings of this solitary, embittered and disappointed man, and is thus better equipped to appreciate the contrast between John and his optimistic and exuberant son, Frank. As soon as Frank enters the deictic centre window, the shifting manoeuvre that follows his father's entrance is repeated, as Frank becomes first the focalised and then the focalising WHO. For most of the remainder of the novel, Frank is retained as the focalising character; however, there are brief passages of three or four sentences in length when the deictic centre shifts close to the minds of others observing Frank, such as his tutor, Mr Bellack, and his then fiancée, Maggie. In addition, a shift to Rita's deixis occurs when Frank receives her farewell letter, reproduced in full in the text, and a similar instance of deictic shifting occurs when Frank receives a letter from Lorena; however, these are immediately followed by a shift back to Frank's deixis.

The only longer passage that breaks the established pattern occurs towards the end of the "Red King" section, when Frank, injured, exhausted and disoriented after finding the body of his fiancée, stumbles upon the Union soldier who will eventually take him prisoner, Private Hiram Dankin. After more than three hundred pages during which Frank acts as a focaliser, the deictic centre suddenly shifts to Dankin, who sees "a man" coming towards him (Kaye-Smith, 343); later on, Frank is identified as "the Confederate", and later still as "his prisoner" (Kaye-Smith, 344). Without the benefit of insight into Frank's mind, the reader is better able to appreciate the oddness of his behaviour, as he forces his captor to accompany him to Maplehead and help him dig a grave for

[348] Cf. Maxwell, s.v. Bildungsroman.

Lorena and her mother. During the ensuing section, the focalising angle of the deictic centre switches frequently between the two men. Almost paradoxically, it is this technique which allows the reader to understand the state of Frank's mind, who in the aftermath of the shock he has sustained upon finding Lorena's body is evidently unable to fully comprehend what goes on around him. Just as Hiram becomes Frank's helper in burying Lorena, he also fulfils a similar function towards the reader, helping to reconstruct the experience of the ransacked estate and also to assess Frank's mental state. While this might also have been achieved by a pop to the level of the narration, the technique of shifting between these two focalising WHOs gives the reader an insight into the Union soldier's views on the atrocities committed by his comrades, and establishes his position as a complement rather than a contradiction to Frank's.

While the novel is relatively rich in pushes into Frank's dreams, memories and hallucinations, pops from the level of Frank's perceptual deixis onto the level of the narration are extremely rare and sometimes come as a surprise to the reader. After the narrator has signalled his presence by a number of evaluative and explanatory comments in the first section, s/he retreats into the background for long stretches of text, only reappearing again as the 'editor' of Frank's letters to Mr Bellack during the Civil War section. During the remainder of the text, passages which feature Frank as a focaliser alternate with sections consisting almost entirely of dialogue, often even without reporting expressions (e.g. "he/she said" etc.). The effect on the reader is to create the greatest possible impression of immediacy, as s/he is able to witness conversations and events unmediated by the narrator. In a sense, the editorial footnotes and comments in Frank's letters keep up the impression that the reader has 'privileged' access to Frank's thoughts (i.e. we are told more than Mr Bellack is); on the other hand, the reasserted presence of the narrator (who has long since decayed in the reader's imagination) is felt as something of an intrusion.

For most of the novel, the arrangement of deictic planes is fairly straightforward: from the basic ontological level of the story world – characterised mainly by Frank's perceptual and relational deixis – the reader occasionally pops to the level of the narrator (who, as outlined above, is otherwise allowed to decay for long stretches of text). There are several pushes in the form of flashbacks (Frank's memories about his childhood, about life on Oxney during the war, and about the war and Lorena in Mexico and back home in Kent), Frank's dreams and hallucinations, and occasionally shifts to the deixis of other characters (Rita's and Lorena's letters to Frank), all of which are followed by the expected shifts back onto the basic level. However, a more complex instance of deictic shifting occurs in the section "The Red King's Dream", when Frank begins to doubt the reality of his experiences in the war:

> Frank stood creasing the letter and frowning. So it was all a dream, that burning fiery furnace he had walked through for her [i.e. Lorena's] sake, and all his love and self-oblation, all his mistakes and despairs, all were equally the dim smoke of dreams, the mist that lies so thick at night upon the hill, and at daylight is gone, not to be seen again. And who was he who stumbled through these dreams, the lost traveller on this misty hill? Was he himself part of the dream, part of the mist that passes and fades away? – or was he the Dreamer, safe and at rest, troubled only for a few brief moments between two sleeps? … (Kaye-Smith, 243)

This takes up an idea already expressed in an earlier passage, and indicated by the heading of this section of the novel, "The Red King's Dream":

> But he could not sleep as he marched, for the rhythm of the march had a strange stirring effect upon his brain. The thud of feet was like a great pulse in the night, the drumming of some hidden heart in the body of the darkness. Perhaps it was the heart of the sleeping god who now dreamed of war as at other times he dreamed of love or pain or parting. And this devoted army which marched its ranks of youth and strength and life up to the shambles, was just the painful throbbing of a dream, which would pass and be as if it had never been. [paragraph break] The dawn began to break up the sky on the right of the marching army. (Kaye-Smith, 220–1)

The second passage quoted above represents a push into Frank's speculations/hallucinations about his position; after the paragraph break, a pop brings the reader (and the focaliser) back to the level of storyworld 'reality'. However, the deictic aspect of these quotes is somewhat more complex, as both the passages quoted above and the section heading imply the existence of a further deictic plane (i.e. that of the sleeping god) between that of the narrator and the basic level of storyworld 'reality', which is thus reconceptualised as part of dream, i.e. two pushes down from the level of the narrator. If the reader accepts Frank's hypothesis – corroborated on the level of compositional deixis by the section heading – the second quote presents not a push into Frank's thoughts, but a pop to a higher level which allows Frank to assess his position, before pushing back into the god's dream. In the first quote, the layering of deictic planes becomes even more complex: if Frank is, as he says, "part of the dream", the postulated hierarchy of deictic planes continues to hold good; if, however, he is "the Dreamer", this not only overturns the hierarchy of deictic planes, but also throws doubt on which parts of the narrative are, up to this point, 'real' in terms of the reality of the story world, and which parts belonged to the lower deictic level of Frank's dream. While this presents a very real dilemma for the protagonist, however, the reader is discouraged from speculation along those lines: as Frank recovers from the mental strain of his war experiences, these ideas are never again voiced, and must be understood as the focaliser's highly subjective impressions/delusions. The rearrangement of deictic planes thus remains purely hypothetical; by disorienting the reader, however, it reinforces her/his identification with the protagonist, briefly allowing her/him to experience Frank's sense of confusion and disorientation at first hand.

In addition to these pushes into Frank's delusional thoughts, the novel also features several flashbacks; interestingly, these often display an element of textual deixis (in the sense of explicit references to earlier stretches of text) which, somewhat paradoxically, reverses the direction of the push: as Frank remembers verbatim quotes from earlier letters or conversations, but sometimes cannot recall the occasion when he first heard or read them,[349] the reader pops out of the experience of reading the text to recall or look for the source of the quote. Moreover, on at least one occasion a push into Frank's dream also serves the function of foreshadowing: when Frank, after meeting Lorena, dreams about arriving too late to rescue Maggie from the horrors of war, and instead finding Lorena in her cottage, this foreshadows both the love he will come to feel for Lorena (which will replace his love for Maggie), and Lorena's death, which he will arrive too late to prevent.[350]

The choice of Frank as a focaliser also allows the author to present Frank's mind style, and the way in which this intersects with the ideological point of view of the other characters. Frank's love for the countryside and close emotional ties with nature become apparent in his choice of

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[349] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 58; 265; 409.

[350] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 258-9. Like many pre-WW II texts, the novel shows influences of Freudian ideas, especially in its treatment of dreams as indicators of (still) unconscious desires.

metaphor on several occasions, when the source domain of nature is mapped onto the target domain of human beings: "The men and women he passed, too, now struck him as yellow and wilted like the grass, the men shrivelled like July shrubs, while the languid women were like lilies past their prime, drooping on their stalks" (Kaye-Smith, 77). On the other hand, his thoughts about the Kentish countryside are often couched in vaguely romantic language, drawing on the conventional metaphor of 'the land is a woman'. Less conventionally, however, this metaphor is also reversed, as the target and source domains are exchanged: "Rita was like some eager foreign soil, bringing forth fruit luxuriantly out of its abundance, and Maggie was some slow-ripening Kentish field, where Nature gives only in piecemeal doles after infinite toil. … Maggie seemed to him now to stand linked up with the very niggard soil of Kent, from which he had impatiently turned to Rita's warm lavishness, there to bask until he was surfeited and pined for those grudging fields – too late" (Kaye-Smith, 123).[351] Although Frank takes the equation of women with nature and the land to greater lengths than most, it is also made clear that this is in some degree in keeping with the world views of his contemporaries.[352]

A Challenge to Sirius presents an interesting example of the complexity of temporal deictic marking in historical fiction, as well as displaying a peculiarity that ties in with the characteristics of the protagonist: as Mr Bellack repeatedly and exasperatedly points out, Frank is utterly incapable of considering anything from an abstract and impartial point of view; he can only write about things in terms of their effects on his own life. The novel re-enacts this criticism on the level of temporal deixis: it is only very rarely that exact dates are given (once at the beginning of the novel, and then only in Frank's letters to Mr Bellack). Instead, time is measured in relation to Frank's age: the novel begins when he is twelve, and, apart from a brief flashback to the time when he was eight (when his mother left his father), proceeds chronologically until he is in his sixties. The second aspect, which is peculiar to historical fiction, is the way in which references to real historical events and people serve as markers of shifts in temporal deixis. Again, this reflects Frank's own tastes and preoccupations rather than world politics; the only political events that are mentioned in the first part of the novel are the Crimean War (in which Tom fights) and the American Civil War. It is only throughout the section entitled "The Red King's Dream" (detailing Frank's fighting experience) that temporal deixis is marked through references to events in the Civil War, and through the dates given in Frank's letters to his former tutor. In the preceding section (focusing on Frank's life as a journalist and would-be author), however, temporal deixis is marked through references to works of fiction. Allusion to "the new novels everyone was talking about, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Mary Barton*, *Vanity Fair* and *Dombey and Son*" (Kaye-Smith, 21) establishes the year of Frank's arrival in London as 1848; when Frank returns to Oxney, the reader is able to infer the date when Frank buys a couple of books he has not read yet: *Esmond*, *The Virginians*, and *Denis Duval*, "by an author he had never heard of till then, George Meredith,

[351] Cf. also Kaye-Smith, 169: "He saw her with all her faults, as he saw the coldness and cruelty of the earth, but he loved her none the less, indeed he loved her for them – little Maggie who had always been so cautious and so obstinate like the soil he tilled, and yet could flower so sweetly, hold out such promises, and fulfil them so unexpectedly."

[352] Cf. e.g. Kaye-Smith, 198.

who wrote in a queer, vital, misty way that perplexed and delighted him after the slipshod heartiness of the giant and hero of his youth" (Kaye-Smith, 424).

The deixis of the novel, with its almost unbroken use of Frank as focalising and focalised WHO, is typical of the *roman à these* as analysed by Iser, and ideally suited to giving the reader a first-hand view of the Victorian frame of mind, but also – since the focaliser is, to some extent, a stranger to Victorian society because of his secluded childhood and unusual upbringing – an outsider's view of mid-nineteenth-century London. Brief shifts to the narrator's and other character's deixis, however, are also crucial in establishing or undermining Frank's credibility, and – especially in the beginning of the novel – in establishing the mental distance between himself and the reader. As discussed in the preceding section, however, this distance lessens as the plot of the novel unfolds, a fact that is observable also through minor details of the book's deixis. The temporal markers given above, which establish the setting of the action according to Frank's literary tastes, simultaneously indicate to the reader the extent of the protagonist's mental development as he casts off his admiration for Dickens, and discovers George Meredith – a move which reflects the opinion of early-twentieth-century critics of Dickens' work, who likewise did not relish his "slipshod heartiness", excessive sentimentality, and cumbersome length.[353] As in the case of schemata, the reader is given the illusion that the didactic element of the novel involves a process of give and take: the protagonist has slowly been persuaded to share the reader's more modern point of view on some matters (such as war, sex, and literature), while the reader has been persuaded to share Frank's on religion, the value of experience and the meaning of 'success'.

2.2.1.4 Intertextuality and the past

As outlined above, many of the intertextual allusions in the novel merely serve the function of establishing the temporal setting of the action; unlike Bentley and Hewlett, Kaye-Smith rarely uses intertextuality as a way of locating her work within a specific literary tradition or as a means of characterisation; the only exception is provided by the quote given at the end of the preceding section, in which the intertextual element endorses the teleological view of history which characterises the book. On the one hand, this applies to Frank's personal development, symbolised by his more sophisticated literary taste, and his increased powers of discernment which allow him to recognise the "slipshod heartiness" of his former favourites as affectation. On the other hand, it also situates Kaye-Smith's novel at the apex of a literary development which moves away from the "false" illusion of 'hearty' realism characteristic of mid-Victorian fiction.

The most important function of intertextual allusions, however, is to underscore the novel's argument about the benefits and burdens of the past; an argument that can be extended to cover not only Frank's individual struggle to come to terms with the war and the losses it has entailed, but more generally to the struggle British society had to face in regard to the experience of World War I and the historical development that had led up to it. Written in a climate of opinion that laid the blame for Britain's involvement in the war, which it was felt had taken too great a toll on the country, cost too many lives and had reaped too few tangible benefits, squarely at the door of the Victorian generation and clamoured for a radical break with some of its attitudes and values, the

[353] Cf. Gardiner, 30.

novel can therefore be read as a meditation on the most profitable way of coming to terms with a problematic national heritage as much as with personal traumata – the latter being of particular relevance to a time characterised by the return of shell-shocked soldiers from the front.

The most important intertextual element are the repeated allusions to the ballad 'Lorena',[354] with quotations from which the story is interspersed and which add a further layer of meaning to the text. On the first evening that Frank spends in Lorena's company, she sings the song for the guests assembled in her aunt and uncle's house. The song is described as 'her' song, not only because it bears her name, but because, as her aunt says, she "make[s] it come alive." The comment establishes the relevance of the song lyrics to Lorena's own life story. On the occasion of Frank and Lorena's first meeting, the final stanza already foreshadows the tragic ending of their love affair: "We loved each other then, Lorena, / More than our tongues could ever tell; / What might not we have been, Lorena, / Had but our loving prospered well?" (Kaye-Smith, 323). After Lorena's death, Frank usually remembers her in connection with the song lyrics, or re-imagines occasions on which he heard her singing the song. One of the stanzas acquires a wider significance as it expresses a change in Frank's attitude towards the past: "It matters little now, Lorena, / The past is the eternal past. And because it was eternal it could be forgotten" (Kaye-Smith, 410).

However, forgetting is only one step in the process of Frank coming to terms with his past experiences. In a sense, the benefits and burdens of the past are one of the themes of the novel. Unlike his father, who, unable to live down the past, finally commits suicide, Frank learns to live with the burden of the past, and to appreciate the benefits it bestows. 'The past' first becomes an issue for him after his affair with Rita, who begs him never to regret their shared past, even if it has brought him pain: "His debt to the past was not to regret it" (Kaye-Smith, 133). Even though he struggles to fulfil his obligation to the past (and to Rita), it is only his return to Oxney and his renewed acquaintance with Maggie that brings him a further step towards acceptance: "[…] he could no longer be jealous of the past, for the past made the present, and all that she [i.e. Maggie] had been made her what she was now" (Kaye-Smith, 180). Frank's uneasy acceptance of the past as the cause and necessary precondition of the present becomes problematic, leading, as it does, to a renewal of his and Maggie's love for each other, and thus to his renewed loss of her and to his exile from home.

Fighting in the Civil War, Frank arrives at the realisation that rather than stressing the links between the past and the present, he has to break free of it: "I feel that at last the past is really behind me, no longer clinging to my marching legs like a bramble, but really shaken off and trampled down" (Kaye-Smith, 283). If his past experiences with Maggie, however, can finally be "shaken off", forgetting Lorena proves much more difficult; even after he has recovered from the bout of cerebral fever brought on by her loss, he finds that the past has, once again, become a burden almost too great to bear. Knowing that he cannot confront the enormity of his loss and the suffering he has undergone all at once, he breaks off all ties with the past and voluntarily exiles himself to Mexico, where life consists only of "mañana" ('today'), and where he can slowly remember and come to terms with his repressed traumata. Once again, however, remembering is only one step along the road to forgetting: it is only when Frank feels that it is 'safe' to forget the past that he believes himself free. In the end, it is Maria, Father Cristobal's mistress, who forces him to take the final step

[354] The lyrics to this song were written by Rev. Henry D.L. Webster in 1856; during the American Civil War, the song was a hugely popular with soldiers on both sides.

towards acceptance of the past when she urges him to go home and take up his former life. Back on Oxney, Frank finally realises that the past – however harrowing and tragic – is a benefit rather than the burden he had believed it to be: "When he thought of those days with their slow fever, and the days that had followed them with their clash and despair, he knew that the best of his life was still to be. In the past he had experienced and experimented, adventured and suffered, but before him now lay the quiet days when he should sit in this pleasant place and count over the treasures he had won. The past was the one immutable treasure-house – the only place where neither moth nor rust corrupteth nor thieves break through and steal" (Kaye-Smith, 420). From being a burden that Frank strives to cast off, the past is transformed into a benefit, becoming a means of self-validation[355] for Frank in the face of his compatriots' perception of him as a failure.

Frank's struggle with the past – from trauma via repression towards remembering and final acceptance – also points towards the other latent intertext of the novel, the works of Sigmund Freud; even the curative effect of talking about past experiences is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel: Frank finally comes to terms with his loss of Maggie when he tells Lorena about her, and, conversely, he finds himself reconciled to his loss of Lorena when he talks about her to Maggie. Likewise, his telling of stories about his war experiences serves a therapeutic function, even though his listeners refuse to believe him. Frank's ability to talk about the past also marks his difference from his father, whose refusal to confront and verbalise the trauma of his wife's desertion drive him to suicide. If the argument is extended, once again to cover the national as well as individual past, it also serves as a justification for writing historical fiction: in this context, Kaye-Smith's novel (and the reader's immersion in it) about war and the Victorian era becomes a crucial step towards learning to accept both the Victorians and the recent war.

The importance of Freudian ideas in the novel also becomes apparent in the emphasis on dreams and dreaming: as Frank struggles to forget the past, he attempts to deny its reality by reconceptualising the war as a dream; inescapably, and in accordance with Freud's theories, the traumata that he has repressed resurface in his dreams. The significance of Frank's dream about Maggie merging into Lorena, however, not only invokes but transcends Freudian theories: on the one hand, the realisation that it is Lorena and not Maggie whom Frank has come to rescue alerts the reader to his love for Lorena, whom his subconscious substitutes for his first love in the dream. On the other hand, however, the dream also turns out to be prophetic, foreshadowing Lorena's tragic end and Frank's desperate and doomed rescue attempt.

The novel not only draws on Freud's interpretation of dreams and theories about repression and the subconscious, but also on his theories of child development. Pinpointing John Rainger's suicide as the decisive moment in which Frank reaches adulthood, the narrator describes growing up as "nearly always the loss of that trust in life which is characteristic of all young, normal creatures. When a boy begins to doubt his life, he has ceased to be a boy" (Kaye-Smith, 57). In his essay on 'The Uncanny', Sigmund Freud (357) expresses a similar notion, albeit without the hesitation of the qualifying 'perhaps': once a child has outgrown the phase of 'primary narcissism', its capacity for self-regarding develops into one of self-criticism as it learns to assess its actions in terms of their effect on society and thus develops a moral conscience. According to Freud, this is the moment

[355] For this aspect of the past, cf. Lowenthal, 44; also ch. 1.1.

when the child ceases to regard its own image – its "double" – as the guarantor of its own immortality, and awakes to the realisation that it will eventually die. Kaye-Smith's narrator refers to this double instance of doubt: it is at the moment when Frank begins to "doubt his life" – both in the sense of its goodness and of its continuance – that he has left his childhood behind him.

Another passage that invokes Freudian ideas occurs when Frank finally violates Victorian convention and takes Rita as his mistress: "He lost the vague torments of dissatisfaction, and with them much of his dreamy and romantic outlook disappeared. He became more practical and more material, and at the same time much happier. He now had a healthy and natural means of self-expression, and no longer had to seek it in his work – with the result that his work became a much simpler and mechanical affair" (Kaye-Smith, 102). The passage not only analyses Frank's psychological state, but by extension also criticises Victorian morality: once Frank has found a "healthy and natural" outlet for his sexuality in his relationship with Rita and ceases to sublimate it in work which, it is made abundantly clear in the novel, is not worth the amount of thought and effort that Frank expends on it, he finds happiness; the "romanticism" and "dreaminess" which characterised the Victorians as much as their prodigious literary output – often regarded as daunting by their successors – is thus re-interpreted as an 'unhealthy' and 'unnatural' side effect of sexual repression.

2.2.1.5 Conclusion

Cast in the form of a Bildungsroman, *A Challenge to Sirius* falls into the fourth of Cowart's categories of historical fiction, i.e. those works which use the past in order to comment on the present. Written and published towards the end of World War I, the novel takes up several topical issues of its day. Unlike later novels, it does not attempt to allocate blame for contemporary problems to the Victorians; rather, it uses the Victorian era as a 'safe' means of commenting on contemporary life. In its presentation of war as at once heroic and ultimately futile, it may well have echoed the feelings of many contemporary readers; however, it sets out to present a philosophical world view that argues for the acceptance of all experience, however harrowing and apparently meaningless, as positive and enriching.

In addition, it also addresses the question of women's role in society and, more specifically, in the 'masculine' sphere of work, arguing for a conventional separation between the genders. As such, it again engages with contemporary problems by transposing them into the Victorian era, as men returning from the front often feared to find their jobs taken over by women, whom the war had finally provided with an opportunity to break out of the domestic sphere. As the novel reminds the reader, however, "[a] woman may be able to do a man's work – for a time – but she never makes a career of it; it's her fate, and it's her nature" (Kaye-Smith, 93). A woman's career is marriage; any attempt to subvert the 'natural' order of things and reconcile marriage and work "wouldn't be fair on the man" (Kaye-Smith, 93) – an assertion that strongly reflects contemporary political and Trade Union propaganda to the same effect.[356]

Just as the novel does not attempt to portray the Victorian era as the source of present-day problems, it also eschews explicit criticism of Victorian conventions and restrictions. In its depiction of the Victorians, the text is essentially schema-confirming; all unexpected occurrences

[356] Cf. Plain, 28. Interestingly, however, several of Kaye-Smith's later novels feature "strong, defiant female protagonists [which] were admired by feminists" (Hammill et al., s.v. "Kaye-Smith").

are carefully connected to outsiders, marked as such by their status as artists and/or foreigners. The conservative ideology of the text is reinforced by the disruption of the 'Bildungsroman' text schema, which reinterprets this text type in terms of a cyclical narrative rather than as a goal-oriented progression: Frank's journey takes him back to the place where he started; happiness can only be attained through acceptance of the status quo. Nonetheless, however, his journey and experience of the war are presented as meaningful and enriching, as his past becomes a valuable source of self-validation.

In accordance with the pattern which Iser describes as typical of the *roman à thèse*, there are very few changes in the perspective offered to the reader. While it is initially the twentieth-century narrator whose evaluation of the plot and central characters the reader is invited to share, this very quickly shifts to Frank's viewpoint. As a consequence, the reader identifies with Frank's emotional and psychological growth, and is inclined to accede to his insights about religion, experience, and the benefits of the past, especially as these appear to be borne out by the perspective of the plot (in the sense that Frank in the end finds comparative happiness, while characters whose views differ markedly from his – especially his father – pay a heavy penalty).

As outlined above, however, there are subversive elements in the text which undercut the dominant message: not only is the text ambiguous in its portrayal of femininity, it is even more so in regard to its central theme, as Frank's experience in the war – his "treasure-house" – merely provides the raw material for stories which are disbelieved by everyone except the village children, and which has to be censored and partially cordoned off from his life with Maggie. The implication is, of course, that it is the Victorian villagers who are mistaken in their assessment; in a sense, the children's appreciation for Frank's stories might be interpreted as a sign that future generations will be better able to understand his point of view, thus again strengthening the twentieth-century reader's endorsement of Frank's interpretation. Nonetheless, the benefits conveyed by past experience are at best ambiguous: if the past provides an asset in terms of self-validation, this is also revealed to be a highly subjective evaluation which does nothing to improve Frank's standing within the community. In the end, his marriage, though harmonious, also emphasises this impression that the war has spoiled rather than enriched Frank's life: while he finds contentment with Maggie, he has lost the chance of an incomparably greater happiness with Lorena.

2.2.2 "Glorious madness": rewriting the Charge of the Light Brigade

A similar picture of the futility of war, along with a much more critical evaluation of the Victorian age in general, is presented in D.L. Murray's[357] *Trumpeter, Sound!*, already discussed at some length in chapter 2.1.3. Its protagonist, Mark Woodrofe, is the 'natural' son of Lord Blackwater and the gamekeeper Woodrofe's wife. The story begins in 1844, as Mark is taken to London to work at Mr Hepplewhite's drug warehouse. After a fight with another boy from his place of employment, he runs away to join the army. Mark's fascination with soldiers and the military – born mainly out of

[357] David Leslie Murray (1888–1962) wrote a number of historical novels and romances characterised by "a sense of period and an exuberance of style"(May, §3) which made them highly popular during the interwar period. He also wrote for, and between 1937 and 1944 was editor of, the Times Literary Supplement. His wife was Leonora Eyles, author of *The Woman in the Little House* (1922), a documentary study of working women's lives.

his admiration for Lord Nelson – is contrasted with the reality of army life which transforms his boyish enthusiasm into "that wooden impassivity under ill-usage that in the older soldiers amounted to a sort of mental hebetude or fakir-like insensibility" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 173). The squalid living conditions, lack of skilled medical attention and the meagre, unpalatable diet of the soldiers is contrasted with the comfort of the officers' mess, where Captain Shotter, who stands out as the only one of the officers who cares about the well-being of his men, or about the fighting ability of the British army, is ridiculed for this by the others.[358] Lord Blackwater sums up the officers' attitude when he explains his reasons for choosing a military career: "'[…] I might as well be wasting time at Ranalow, I suppose, as wasting it at Blackwater trying to understand Welsh peasants, or in Sussex trying to shoot English pheasants. The Mercuries aren't a bad club, a little less tedious than the Athenaeum, I fancy; […] Then the commission's an investment […] – £3,225 in the safest of funds is not to be sneezed at" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 179).

The book makes it clear that the officers' attitude verges on the criminal, as several of the soldiers die even in peacetime as a result of their commanding officers' negligence or downright sadism in dealing with their men. Escape, however, appears well-nigh impossible, as hardly any of the men possess the necessary means for buying their discharge, and the punishment for desertion – described in harrowing detail[359] – is such as to discourage all but the most desperate. The description of the court martial is heavy with irony, as what appears to be a sympathetic comment from one of the officers turns out to be merely another mark of their callousness: "'Cruel… too damned cruel, that's what it is! They've shortened Rainbow to a beggarly three to one… If she goes down to-day I'll have to sell my commission!'" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 195) – while the condemned soldier is nearly flogged to death, the officers discuss horse racing. The wide gulf between officers and men is highlighted again in a similarly ironic fashion when the court martial is followed by the announcement that Lord Blackwater is to be given six months' sick leave after having a carbuncle removed from his neck.

Mark's life in the military is further complicated by the fact that his commanding officer, Lord Blackwater, has realised that Mark is his illegitimate half-brother, and sets out to kill him. It is made obvious that the organisation of the military, and the lack of interest that the most senior officers take in the behaviour of their subalterns, creates an atmosphere in which personal feuds (such as that of Lord Blackwater against his illegitimate half-brother Mark) can be carried out under the guise of enforcing discipline.[360] Victorian military heroes are also given a thorough debunking, as Lord Cardigan is presented as vain, boastful, unable to enforce his authority as a senior officer, and cursed with a ridiculous speech impediment; moreover, he is clearly less interested in the regiment he is reviewing than in "a wubber or two" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 258) of écarté with the officers.

The depiction of an inept and inexperienced officer class out of touch with the needs and concerns of the common soldier forms a recurring motif in Victorian-centred novels in the interwar years and shows the extent to which the genre was used to comment on contemporary concerns. Murray's descriptions of the insufficient and often nauseating rations doled out to the

[358] Cf. Murray, *Trumpeter*, 174ff.
[359] Cf. Murray, *Trumpeter*, 192ff.
[360] Cf. Murray, *Trumpeter*, 265ff.

soldiers, the harsh living conditions and callous and uncaring attitudes of the officers echo those of H.G. Wells' 1916 bestseller about the first months of the war, *Mr Britling Sees It Through*:

> [...] all this business could be done far better and far cheaper if it wasn't left to these absolutely inexperienced and extremely exclusive military gentlemen. They think they are leading England and showing us all how; instead of which they are just keeping us back. Why in thunder are they doing everything? Not one of them, when he is at home, is allowed to order the dinner or poke his nose into his own kitchen or check the household books ... The ordinary British colonel is a helpless old gentleman; he ought to have a nurse ... This is not merely the trivial grievance of my insulted stomach, it is a serious matter for the country. (192)[361]

Unlike Kaye-Smith's novel, which depicts the ineptitude of the commanding officers only through the eyes of its protagonist, who, despite the shortage of rations, arms and equipment and the obvious blunders of the officers in charge, enthusiastically insists that "we have been splendidly led", *Trumpeter, Sound!*, charting Mark's gradual disillusionment, is vehement in its indictment of military conditions. The book focuses on the sordid reality of warfare in the Crimea, highlighting the dehumanising fighting conditions which the common soldiers had to endure, and presenting the campaign as a series of serious blunders resulting from lack of military expertise and personal animosities among the commanding officers.

Serving as a Trumpet-Major in the Mercuries, Mark is involved in the Charge of the Light Brigade under Lord Cardigan. In the story world created by Murray, this famous military debacle turns out to have been caused by a mistake in the command chain deliberately caused by Pauloff, a Russian spy who has bribed Lord Blackwater (easy prey because of his financial difficulties) into collaborating with him. As Murray recreates the confusion which surrounds the giving and delivery of the order to attack, it becomes obvious that the mistake could have been prevented despite Pauloff's intervention, if the officers had not been blinded by professional jealousies and private animosities, and in many cases lacking in all practical knowledge about warfare. Appalled at the consequences of his (in)action, Lord Blackwater, who has rescued his wounded half-brother from the battlefield, begs Mark's pardon and confesses his involvement in the deception, and his guilt in the death of so many British soldiers. After entrusting Mark with the welfare of Fancy Fawkes, the woman whom they both love and whom Lord Blackwater has secretely married (only to abandon her and turn bigamist when an opportunity to salvage his ruined fortunes by marriage to a rich heiress presents itself), he rides off to a hero's death in the battle.

In the most darkly ironic passage of the novel, Mark, returning from the Crimea to make enquires about Fanny at Mr Hepplewhite's firm, is confronted with his former employer's enthusiasm about the war in general, and the Charge of the Light Brigade in particular: Lord Cardigan and the soldiers he led to their death have become heroes, the most disastrous blunder in the whole war – "a mad-brained trick" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 380) in Lord Cardigan's own words – has become the "[m]ost glorious page in the history of England" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 410) in the civilian's imagination. Oblivious to the real conditions within the military, Mr Hepplewhite enthusiastically presents Mark with his analysis of the debacle, emphasising the importance of officers of noble rank as the natural leaders of the lower-class soldiery. When Mark voices a feeble protest, he is told that he does not "understand the spirit of the Army" (Murray, *Trumpeter*,

[361] Cf. also Beaumann, 15f.

412). The passage must have reverberated with particularly bitter irony for the contemporary reader, especially when Mr Hepplewhite stresses the importance of the Crimean War as "the war to end war" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 411), echoing World War I propaganda to the same effect.

The Charge of the Light Brigade, and more generally the war in the Crimea, also features prominently in Norman Tucker's *Jealous Goddess* (1954). There are strong parallels between this novel and *Trumpeter, Sound!* in the depictions of the British military as ill-trained and ill-equipped, and more concerned with military pageantry than tactics, as its protagonist David Dalby points out to his fiancée, Adelaide ('Laidie'):

> "It's very pretty to look at. They've had plenty of time to rehearse and the Queen is looking on. But how would they manage in a stretch of land where cholera is rampant and water scarce? Where is the transport? Where are the ambulances? Where is the medical staff? Where are the engineers? Do you know some of our regiments are still armed with the old Brown Bess? […] It [i.e. the parade] should impress foreign critics. But do you know, Laidie, we've only about three batteries in the country fit for action? And guns which won Waterloo lie rusting away out of sheer neglect. […] I must ask Henry what they think they have been doing." […]
> "They are charging a British square."
> "But they didn't touch the square."
> "Don't be foolish. You don't expect them to ride through our own men in a mock battle?"
> "No, I don't. But why do they undertake this futile make-believe?"
> "I should imagine it is to train the horses to charge a square. The cavalry must have practised it many times to be able to perform it so perfectly."
> "That's what I'm getting at, Laidie. But they are not teaching the horses to charge a square. […] They are teaching the horses to wheel to the right or the left, which is vastly different! And if the time ever comes and they do expect the horses to charge an enemy square, it is to be assumed that the horses will do what they have been trained to do – wheel to the right and the left. Which would serve to show that the horse, at least, is intelligent."
> "Dave, I never thought of that."
> "Oh, it doesn't concern me. We win by our blunders and one blunder is as good as another." (N. Tucker, 143–4)

The novel not only deconstructs the myth of the superiority of the British army, but also points out the dangers arising from undue enthusiasm on the part of civilians like Adelaide and Mr Hepplewhite:

> "[…] Confound those war-minded gentry, Laidie. I could stop war tomorrow if I had the power."
> "Is it a great secret?"
> "I'd banish all the gold braid, sashes, orders, medals, plumes and what-not and dress all generals like navvies." (N. Tucker, 143)

Less radical in its deconstruction of the heroic myth accruing to the Charge of the Light Brigade,[362] *Jealous Goddess* lays even stronger emphasis than *Trumpeter, Sound!* on the appalling medical conditions in the Crimea, and on the unfairness of forcing men to fight under these circumstances.[363]

Unlike Mark Woodrofe in *Trumpeter, Sound!*, the protagonist of *Jealous Goddess* is to some extent an outside observer of events in the Crimea, where he has been posted as a military correspondent, enabling him to comment on the "crass stupidity" (N. Tucker, 161) of the British commander Lord Raglan without fear of repercussions. However, it is the medical situation rather than the lack of military expertise which attracts his strongest disapprobation, and which he resolves

[362] Cf. N. Tucker, 182ff.
[363] Cf. especially N. Tucker, 177.

to bring to the notice of people at home. As David observes after some weeks at his post, "death was losing its novelty" (N. Tucker, 155) as the cholera kills more men than the enemy.[364] "It was a grim story he [David] told; of overworked doctors, male orderlies who carried out their hospital duties with drunken indifference, shortage of medical supplies, of appliances, of beds, of blankets. There were even insufficient spades for the grave-diggers" (N. Tucker, 156). The military hospital at Scutari (prior to the arrival of Florence Nightingale) is described as "a hell" (N. Tucker, 195), a place where there are no beds, no supplies, no nurses, and where the wounded and cholera cases lie next to each other on the floor.[365] When Edward Bellingham is wounded in battle, his only chance of survival lies in being taken *from* the hospital.[366] The novel implicitly contrasts the drunken male orderlies with the disciplined and efficient female nurses who, led by Florence Nightingale, arrive shortly after Edward's rescue from the "hell" of the military hospital. With the benefit of hindsight, the twentieth-century reader is fully aware that David is wrong in his assumption that the nurses will not stay, because no woman could stand the conditions that prevail at Scutari. Though erroneous, the assertion serves to highlight the enormous personal bravery and determination of these nurses – and, by extension, of all women who undertook nursing under wartime conditions. Through the examples of Jeannette, Florence Nightingale and the other British nurses, the novel sends a clear message to the vast number of female readers who had undertaken similar duties during World War II, highlighting the crucial importance of their contribution to the war effort. However, it also makes an important point at a time when nursing was one of the few professions which were not only open to women, but actively recruited female workers: showing that, like Adelaide, not every woman is naturally cut out to be a nurse, the novel presents a strong – albeit somewhat patronising – argument for the opening up of further professions to women.[367]

2.2.3 Women in wartime

Like *Jealous Goddess*, several of the novels discussed in this chapter feature female characters who transgress traditional gender boundaries in order to take an active part in the proceedings on the side of the men they love, or to urge men to fight for the cause the women themselves have embraced. Especially in the interwar texts, this concern is hardly surprising, reflecting the contemporary debate concerning the (ir)reconcilability of received notions of femininity and women's large-scale involvement in the war. At the outbreak of World War I, the British government and public opinion was deeply hostile to women who wanted to take an active role in the war effort; especially middle-class women found it difficult to find suitable outlets for their talents. Not only were women barred from active service in the military; even women doctors and female-staffed hospital units were turned down by the British commanders. (In many cases, these ended up offering their services to the Allies, and were enthusiastically received by the Russian, French and American armies.) Later on – especially after the introduction of conscription in 1916 – women were gradually accorded fuller scope for their activities, with middle class women acting as drivers, organisers and nurses, while those of the working classes flocked into munitions

[364] Cf. N. Tucker, 177.
[365] Cf. N. Tucker, 190.
[366] Cf. N. Tucker, 195.
[367] Cf. ch. 4.1.1.

factories and other jobs left vacant by the men who had gone to fight at the front.[368] Nonetheless, the issue of femininity – its preservation through the hardships of war, its reassumption in their aftermath, and its crucial role as providing men with something to fight for – continued to feature prominently in public discourse during both the major wars of the twentieth century.[369]

Not surprisingly, given the roots that the domesticated ideal of chaste and submissive womanhood had in the nineteenth century, Victorian-centred novels provide an ideal testing ground for the juxtaposition of new and old notions of femininity, and much scope for encomiums on the latter. The discussion repeated itself along roughly similar lines during the first years of World War II, as both sides employed almost the same arguments as had been voiced twenty years previously: speaking in 1939, Churchill found it necessary to urge employers to accept women employees as substitutes for the men who had been called to the front, highlighting the extent to which misogynist prejudice still prevailed. Throughout the war, women's magazines and government propaganda insisted that even women who had had to take up 'masculine' occupations for the duration of the war ought to be careful to preserve their feminine appeal – their primary function, it was implied, was to provide the men with an incentive to fight.[370] Especially in the case of World War II, the destructive force of war appears to provide a creative space in which existing gender hierarchies can be challenged, but works in fact against this dynamic: putting an end to the more radical movements of the thirties, it re-instates the old order in the name of national security and transforms (and affirms) it in the form of an effective war machinery: "War must be seen not as the demise but the rebirth of patriarchy" (Plain, 28).

It is worth noting, however, that this trend is symptomatic not so much of a conservative backlash as of a continuation of patriarchal ideals that feature prominently already in (men's) novels of the interwar period.[371] In particular, this becomes apparent in the depiction of women who overturn established gender hierarchies, taking the initiative rather than following male leads. When Ann Burcot in *The Rebel* answers her cousin Arthur's question "And you are all for order and the old proprieties?" with "I am a woman, Mr. Beauforest" (18) in one of the many unconventional dialogues of H.C. Bailey's novel, her statement shows the half-humorous resignation with which she accepts the status quo. In a sense, her attitude contrasts not only with that of women like Marton, Kaye-Smith's Maggie or Hewlett's Lizzie, who unquestioningly endorse the prevailing social order as the 'natural' state of events, but even more strongly with Cecilia, Colonel Justin's eccentric mistress. Ann, who knows that society interprets her womanhood not only in terms of acceptance of Victorian conventions, but in upholding them, is finally content to marry a man whom she can dominate because of her superior intelligence and force of character; like Phoebe in *Victorian House*, she embraces convention because she knows that she can secure a modicum of freedom for herself even within its rigid framework. In contrast, Cecilia's interpretation of what it means to be a woman is strikingly different:

> He laid his hand on her shoulder (he was fond of making an attitude). "You're a man among men, aren't you?"

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[368] Cf. Beaumann, 16f.
[369] Cf. Beddoe, 11ff.; K. Bell, 152; Maslen, *Poltical*, 146f.; Plain, 27f.
[370] Cf. K. Bell, 152; Maslen, *Poltical*, 147; Plain, 27f.
[371] Cf. also ch. 3.1.4.

> "Oh, my dear, I am what I was born. And with all my heart. It is an empire to be a woman."
> "To be such a woman," Mr. Beauforest corrected. "And she loves power, doesn't she?"
> "Why do you hold me, Arthur?" She looked down at his hand.
> "And why not? Do you feel that virtue has gone out of you – into me?"
> "You said it, not I. Is it so, then?" She smiled. It seemed to him that her face was no more eager, but of a beautiful calm. "An empire to be a woman – yes. I love power – yes again. But my empire is to give strength. That is the power I love. Why did you say I was a man among men? You feel me in you. You don't feel that I am a man."
> Mr. Beauforest let her go. "Do you happen to think that I am, I wonder?" he said.
> "But I like the woman part," she said. "Perhaps it speaks to the man in me, Arthur." (Bailey, 113)

Unlike Sophia Willoughby in *Summer Will Show*, who chafes at the knowledge that women can only exert their will through men,[372] Cecilia – like Rita Simons in *A Challenge to Sirius*[373] – relishes the feeling that she can "give strength" to men through her love. However, the passage also deconstructs her argument, proving to what extent strength and power (even Cecilia's 'womanly' type of power) is associated with masculinity: after she has explicitly laid claim to her femininity, Cecilia in the next sentence refers to the "woman part" in Arthur which attracts "the man" in her, implying that she knows herself to be the stronger and more courageous of the two. In a dialogue that in a somewhat surprising manner foreshadows a similar conversation in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1923), Cecilia counters Arthur's declaration of his love for her with: "what could you do with me? Of the two of us I am the man" (Bailey, 152).[374]

The juxtaposition of 'strong' women and 'feminine' men is encountered frequently in interwar fiction, not only in the context of the Victorian-centred novel, and reflects prevailing anxieties about the stability of gender boundaries: after World War I, the high number of soldiers suffering from shell shock – an affliction that was closely linked to the most 'feminine' of maladies, hysteria – had undermined the binary opposition of male-female with its corollary of strength-weakness.[375] A roughly similar situation occurs after World War II, when men returning from the front were frequently faced with situations likely to undermine their self-assurance, not only because women had had a further opportunity to prove that they were equal to doing most men's jobs.[376] In addition, many men were confronted with the fact that their marriages had broken up because their wives had found other partners or had given birth to illegitimate children in their absence, and divorce rates soared.[377]

Both Cecilia in *The Rebel* and Carlotta in *The Madonna of the Barricades* are followers of Garibaldi, and succeed in winning the support of their lovers for his cause. Unlike Lorena, who, in *Challenge to Sirius*, only incidentally presents a further incentive to Frank to fight for the South in the American Civil War, these women actively use their charms to enlist the help of their admirers – a difference that, as shall be seen, is crucial in the novels' evaluation of these women. Other women occupy a position in between these two poles: in *Jealous Goddess* and *Trumpeter*,

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[372] Cf. Warner, *Summer*, 47.

[373] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 103.

[374] A similar reversal of gender roles occurs, of course, in *Summer Will Show*, where Frederick is consistently described in terms that suggest his femininity (cf. ch. 4.2.4).

[375] Cf. Showalter, *Hystories*, 72ff.; Humble, 198f. ; Plain, 25f. and 41ff.

[376] Cf. Plain, 29.

[377] Cf. Haste, 109ff. For the large number of illegitimate children born to married women during World War II, cf. Haste, 109 and 128f.

Sound!, French women (the *cantinière* Jeannette and her unnamed counterpart, the *vivandière* in *Trumpeter, Sound!*) are presented as following the soldiers into battle and urging them on. However, their activities – cooking and nursing rather than taking up arms themselves, as Cecilia and Carlotta do – are more easily reconcilable with traditional notions of femininity.

Although there are differences both in the degree of transgressiveness displayed by these women, and in their evaluation, in the novels discussed here, the texts show marked similarities as regards some key features of these 'transgressive' women. In all cases, the women in question are foreigners, and thus present the antithesis of the British women to whom the heroes are attracted at home. While their (temporary) attraction lies in their 'unfeminine' qualities of courage and resistance to hardship, the novels make it clear that these are not the qualities that a man looks for in marriage: in *Trumpeter, Sound!*, Mark merely admires the French *vivandière* from afar; in *Jealous Goddess*, David rejects Jeanette's advances despite his attraction to her; he relies on her help in nursing his future brother-in-law and himself, but gives her nothing but "a heart-ache" (198) in return. Their Italian counterparts Cecilia and Carlotta are similarly unlucky: Carlotta, who has vowed not to marry before Italy has gained its freedom from Austrian oppression, dies alone in a convent while the man she loves marries his Oxford acquaintance Augusta Winterthorpe, and Cecilia is killed by the Parisian *Guard Nationale* in her attempt to save Arthur's life. Even Lorena, arguably the least transgressive of these women, having transgression thrust upon her by adverse circumstances rather than embracing it out of her own free will – she only breaks out of her traditional gender role when her survival depends on it –, finally dies at her own hand after being raped by a black soldier.

In portraying these women, the novels attempt an uneasy synthesis of the Victorian ideal of fragile femininity and these women's 'masculine' qualities of bravery and endurance, counterbalancing the latter with almost exaggerated displays of conventional femininity in other respects. In *The Madonna of the Barricades*, Carlotta argues in favour of the double moral standard that accords Victorian men more sexual freedom than women, pointing out that men must be given some compensation because they can never experience the joys of motherhood.[378] Moreover, after she believes George dead, she relinquishes the fight on the barricades and takes up the more 'feminine' occupation of nursing the wounded. Cecilia, the most 'transgressive' of the women discussed in this chapter, likewise gives up her attempt to fight alongside the men in the end (having had to be rescued from a battle by the protagonist) and devotes herself to looking after the poor during the 1848 revolution in Paris. In *Trumpeter, Sound!*, the French *vivandière* attracts Mark because of the same combination of qualities, as he admires both her courage and justifies her 'unwomanly' behaviour by comparing her to a mother looking after her children. Jeanette in *Jealous Goddess* plays a similar role as she follows the French army as a *cantinière*; a role that unites bravery with the nurturing role traditionally associated with womanliness. Her 'unfeminine' bravery is given a conventional explanation, as she makes it clear that she has joined the army in order to follow her boyfriend Raoul to the Crimea; because she is acting out of love, her action is reinterpreted as the most 'womanly' of choices.

[378] Cf. J. St.L. Strachey, 277.

Moreover, Jeanette's example also makes it clear that women, though suffered to follow men's footsteps in going into battle, are not expected to adhere to the male code of honour. As Jeanette leaves the army to nurse the wounded Edward, her behaviour – amounting to desertion – is commended and presented in the most positive of terms. The only occasion on which she resumes her uniform is when she is asked by David's photographer friend to pose for a picture, in which she "*looked* charming and businesslike in her brass-buttoned tunic" (N. Tucker, 192; my italics): her service in the French army is revealed as a mere masquerade, a ploy to be near the man she loves, and as such sanctioned in the eyes of the other men – especially so because it enhances her physical attractiveness. It is precisely this aspect of their characters which renders women like Jeanette, Carlotta and Lorena so alluring to the men they encounter, and accounts for the repulsion that Arthur at first experiences when he meets Cecilia. As George in *The Madonna of the Barricades* points out, men do not want women to be "angelic icicles" (364) and are ready to admire them for isolated feats of courage and incentive; what is important, however, is that these 'unwomanly' actions can be regarded as commendable exceptions to their otherwise 'feminine' behaviour, and that they are, moreover, to some extent at least motivated by love. The ideal embodied by Carlotta and Lorena in particular is precisely that of a woman who can be strong and brave, ignore all discomforts and do a man's work unflinchingly when in danger, but who immediately resumes her angelic pose of fragile femininity once that danger is averted:

> Really, sir, American women are wonderful. I have told you about Miss Middleton in the forest, how she swung alongside us and shared our hardships, and would not let us do anything to make things easier for her, for fear that we should find her a drag and an encumbrance – well, directly she was in Jackson, she was a fragile woman again, leaning on Zollicoffer's arm, her skirts let down and swinging round her feet, I carrying her coat … why, her very boots seemed to have grown small and feminine as she walked to the depot (Kaye-Smith, 280–1)

There is no irony in Frank's comment; later on, he stresses that it is precisely this ability of Lorena's to cast off convention when required, but afterwards to appear as "delicate" and "ornately civilised" (Kaye-Smith, 274) as before, which lays the foundation for his love for her.[379] To a lesser extent, this ability is shared also by Jeanette and Carlotta, both of whom reassume traditionally feminine roles by the end of the respective novels. Cecilia, on the other hand, lacks the crucial ability to assume the guise of conventional femininity and exasperates her admirer, Arthur Beauforest, whose tastes in women are fairly conventional: "Mr. Beauforest was the more inflamed. The woman must always be ruining herself. She was made for worship, a noble creature, and there she perched, swinging her legs" (Bailey, 147–8). Cecilia is considered "improper" even by the man she loves because she lacks the veneer of conventionality exhibited by the other women; as Justin points out, there is no need for Arthur to "waste politeness on her" (Bailey, 69). Her patriotism causes her to become a 'fallen' woman: according to Justin, she would sleep with any man in order to win him over to Garibaldi's cause.[380] When Arthur falls in love with her, Justin urges: "You play with her all you want, my son. I don't mind. You won't hurt her. She knows too much" (Bailey, 117). Unlike Carlotta, whom George admires for her vow to remain a virgin until Italy is freed from Austrian oppression, Cecilia fatally oversteps the bounds of convention and thus loses the respect of her male

[379] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 303.
[380] Cf. Bailey, 69.

co-combatants when she uses her body to win followers for her cause. Moreover, Carlotta's adherence to the cause of the Carbonari can be interpreted in terms of filial piety as much as patriotism; Cecilia is past redemption because, once her father has died, her patriotism lacks the sanction of a male precedent and supervision, and is interpreted by the men around her in terms of a hereditary defect rather than a virtue.[381]

As outlined above, none of the women stand to benefit from their heroism in terms of a conventional happy ending. In many cases, they are contrasted with more traditionally 'feminine' women whom the protagonists marry at the end of the novel. David, in *Jealous Goddess*, rejects Jeanette in favour of naïve and impulsive Adelaide, while George, in *The Madonna of the Barricades*, falls in love with Augusta, who, in accordance with conventional images of womanly occupations, nurses him back to health after his fight on the barricades. Most significantly, both Arthur in *The Rebel* and Frank in *A Challenge to Sirius* choose their wives precisely because of their difference from the heroic women they have come to admire: both Arthur's wife Marton and Frank's wife Maggie are described as simple, natural, and guided by their instincts, and presented as the antithesis of the complexities and dangers of the male world of war. In both novels, these 'womanly' women are metaphorically linked to nature and the land: Maggie seems to Frank "to stand linked up with the very niggard soil of Kent" (Kaye-Smith, 123); "[h]e saw her with all her faults, as he saw the coldness and cruelty of the earth, but he loved her none the less, indeed he loved her for them – little Maggie who had always been so cautious and so obstinate like the soil he tilled, and yet could flower so sweetly, hold out such promises, and fulfil them so unexpectedly" (Kaye-Smith, 169). In *The Rebel*, Arthur's thoughts about Marton run along similar lines: "But there was something elemental about her. A daughter of the soil, faith. The cornland of La Beauce, that was Marton. Not much like that fiery particle, Cecilia. […] A daughter of the soil? Lord, the creature was the very spirit of it. […] The spirit of the furrowed earth. […] The spirit of fertility. The earth-mother, strong, deep-bosomed" (239–40).

Despite their strength and apparent self-sufficiency – both women run their farms on their own after the death of their men –, they are quick to acknowledge the superiority of men over women. Unlike Cecilia, who laughingly rejects Arthur's advances, Marton stresses the importance of Arthur's masculinity, even though she is his superior in bodily strength and experience of farming. When Arthur regrets that he has so little to offer her, she indignantly replies: "'You are a man. […] There is that. A man is worth anything'" (Bailey, 281). In *A Challenge to Sirius*, Maggie overcomes Frank's conviction "that he could not ask this well-to-do, successful woman to mate with him, a failure, without a penny beyond his hire" (Kaye-Smith, 429) by insisting that she needs a man to help her run the farm, thus implying that for her – as for Marton – Frank's masculinity is an asset that outweighs all other shortcomings. In both texts, the prevailing social order is naturalised through the metaphorical connection of conventionally-minded women with nature and agriculture. As will be discussed in connection with patriarchy,[382] the depiction of women in these novels bears evidence to the extent to which 'Victorian' attitudes prevailed after World War I; despite wide-ranging criticism of Victorian prudery, hypocrisy and sexual repression, many other cherished attitudes about gender remained largely unchallenged except in

[381] Cf. Bailey, 69.
[382] Cf. ch. 3.1.4.

explicitly feminist discourse.[383] In addition, these novels offer a powerful consolatory message to returning soldiers during a time when the experience of shell shock (manifesting itself in symptoms hitherto associated with that most 'feminine' of maladies, hysteria), [384] was undermining traditional concepts of masculinity, showing that men, too, could allow themselves to be seen to suffer, to find themselves in positions of weakness and dependence on stronger women, and would still be assured by them that "a man is worth anything."

While these novels do not necessarily endorse a construction of women as the 'weaker sex', it is nonetheless important to stress that female strength is either depicted as the result of a temporary effort of will – as in Lorena's case – or finds its outlet in domains which are traditionally gendered feminine. This is made explicit in *Trumpter, Sound!*, which juxtaposes descriptions of the living conditions of Mark in the Crimea with those of Fancy in the London slums, as the deictic centre shifts from one to the other in mid-sentence:

> And all night long, another sound disturbed the soldiers' sleep: the cries of the stragglers coming into camp and shouting the numbers of their regiments…
> [chapter break]
> …Confused cries that rang in Fancy's sleep-laden head, till, as she opened her eyes in the misty September dawn, they spaced themselves out into the yawp of the milkman, […]
> As Fancy stared shivering, there broke again from above the kitchen the moaning sound of distress she had heard before…
> [section break]
> …A moaning sound, rising and falling, multiplied a thousand-fold, and commingled with groans, curses, chocking sobs, death-rattles and the swish of disabled men seeking to drag themselves through the grass to some place of relief. (334–8)

The transition from one deictic field to another without any obvious edgework[385] marks the similarity of Mark's experience in the Crimea and Fanny's as a seamstress in the London slums; the baby farm where she has to leave little Will is as horrifying and, as it turns out, as deadly a place as the battlefields on the Alma. Fanny's courage and endurance mark her as the ideal mate for the protagonist; importantly, however, her ordeal is located in the domestic sphere.

In accordance with the conservative ideology of these texts, conventional, 'womanly' women are 'rewarded' with conventional happy marriages, while those who transgress social boundaries are to some extent punished for their 'unfeminine' behaviour. While the more obviously transgressive women – Cecilia and the nameless *vivandière* – are killed on the battlefield, those who show stronger signs of their underlying 'femininity' are marginally more fortunate: Jeanette, who has renounced her service in the French army in favour of the 'womanly' occupation of nursing wounded soldiers, is finally reunited with Raoul; however, it is left open whether she will succeed in saving his life. Carlotta, who also has taken over the duties of a nurse after believing George to have been killed, is allowed to find peace in a convent, but loses the man she loves to Augusta. In both cases, their happiness is a matter of speculation. Lorena, ironically, is at the same time the most

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[383] Cf. Gardiner, 39, Light; *Forever*, 8ff.

[384] Cf. Humble, 198f.; Plain, 26.

[385] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 196: "The threads of the plot are suddenly broken off, or continued in unexpected directions. One narrative section centres on a particular character and is then continued by the abrupt introduction of new characters. These sudden changes are often denoted by new chapters and so are clearly distinguished; the object of this distinction, however, is not separation so much as a tacit invitation to find the missing link."

'feminine' of all the women discussed in this chapter, and the one who suffers the most tragic fate, as her honour prompts her to kill herself after being raped by a black soldier. There is, moreover, a tragic irony surrounding her death that is absent from the fate of the other women: within the context of Kaye-Smith's argument, Lorena's death simply serves to underline the futility of war, as it deprives Frank of the very thing he has been fighting for, a chance of peace and happiness with Lorena. In comparison with the deaths of the other women discussed in this chapter, however, Lorena's stands out because she is the only one among them that does not die as a direct consequence of her abnegation of traditional femininity – somewhat ironically, her death is due to her decision to resume her former role after her flight through the forest and re-enacts an age-old motif associated with idealised female purity. Kaye-Smith's novel subtly reverses the conservative ideology implied by the other texts: Lorena dies because of her adherence to the conventional stereotype; Maggie, who – in a much more homely context, taking over the management of her farm and finally proposing marriage to Frank – reverses gender boundaries, reaps the reward, but only at the price of handing the reins of her business over to Frank after the marriage, thus serving as a role model for British women in the aftermath of World War I.

Presenting women as the 'natural' antithesis of the masculine world of warfare, these novels enact a powerful consolatory fantasy, creating story worlds in which life, though interrupted by war, can be resumed largely unchanged in its aftermath. As mentioned above, it is also worth noting that the difference between the heroic women whom the protagonists admire and the 'womanly' women they finally marry is encoded in terms of nationality: foreign women are described as dazzling, exciting and sexually attractive; however, it is with their less unconventional British counterparts that the protagonists finally find peace and happiness. This holds true even in the case of Arthur, whose attraction to the French peasant Marton lies in her similarity to the tenants on his estate at home, and links up with issues of Britishness and patriotism which will be addressed in the following section.

2.2.4 Britishness, patriotism, and conscientious objectors

Written in an era characterised by two world wars and their aftermath, the Victorian-centered novels discussed here are intensely concerned with the binary construction of 'us' and 'them' that informs not only the immediate experience of warfare and armed combat, which spills over into the everyday life of civilian society, and whose impact often outlasts the duration of the war in its twin manifestations of (excessive) patriotism and xenophobia. Analysing the importance of popular novels and newspapers in creating national consciousness, Benedict Anderson argues that by presenting the actions of characters who may be largely unaware of one another, but who exist contemporaneously in the same "imagined world", novels construct a "sociological organism" moving through time that is "a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" ("Apprehensions", 72).[386] Anderson goes on to argue that novels which are clearly located in time and space "with a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" ("Apprehensions", 74) create 'imagined communities' by invoking readers' shared background knowledge – in particular of the spatial

[386] Cf. T. Bennett, 63f.

(and hence, to a degree, national) – setting of the novel. Historical fiction, as we have seen, distinguishes itself from other genres through the particularly close links it establishes to the real world of its audience, strengthening the communal bond created through shared knowledge of specific English locales by linking it also to a shared knowledge of British history.

In addition, these novels further underline the sense of community they establish among their readers by positioning as the joint inheritors of the Victorian past: as Tony Bennett (following Anderson [*Imagined Communities*, 15]) points out, "nations are best regarded as particular ways of organizing and representing bonds of solidarity among a people, forging a sense of unity between them by representing them as heirs to a common past and as sharing the same destiny" (63). Focusing on how the Victorian past shaped the present, the Victorian-centred novel is designed to draw readers' attention to these imagined "bonds of solidarity". What is of particular importance in this context is the contribution which the Victorians are shown to have made to these issues, and how novelists deal with the disruption or continuation of Victorian attitudes and values in the inter- and post-war eras. In particular, novels emphasise the link between Victorian imperial expansion and the growth of jingoism, but differ in their evaluation of this distinctly Victorian phenomenon.[387] In addition, particular attention deserves to be given to the dynamic shifting of in- and out-group boundaries, as texts on the one hand construct a binary opposition between 'us' of the twentieth century and 'them' of the nineteenth, and on the other hand strive to construct a stable image of the British national character that subsumes Britons of all classes, genders, and historical ages. While the topic is only loosely connected to the central theme of this chapter, it nonetheless deserves in-depth consideration here, as it touches upon the value scales and underlying motivations for Britain's participation in armed conflict, and the evaluation of patriotism versus pacifism.

Especially in regard to World War I, ideals of patriotism and public duty are perceived as intimately connected to the Victorian mindset – bourgeois morality, materialism, complacency, and jingoism – which were blamed for embroiling Britain in the war.[388] It is in this connection that the problematic of the Victorian-centred novel's efforts at identity construction is revealed. In a significant number of novels, the most admirable male characters (not infrequently the fiancés or close male relatives of the heroine) are killed directly or indirectly through the effects of the war. Like many novels from the period, Victorian-centred fiction reflects the pervasive sense of loss and the conviction that the war had killed the 'best' of the younger generation – a belief that is to some extent borne out by the fact that in terms of percentage, the officer class sustained greater casualties than the ranks.[389] "There was the conviction that it was the young officers, drawn from the universities, public schools and the upper classes, who had borne the brunt of the casualties, depriving the country of its future leaders" (Stevenson, 95). The prevailing belief that "those killed represented the flower of the generation" (Stevenson, 94) dominates the plots of several Victorian-centred novels, in which those most highly regarded by the focaliser and other characters die at the front, while those less 'worthy' of survival remain unscathed. War is thus

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[387] The term goes back to a 1878 music hall song by G.W. Hunt, performed by G.H. Macdermott – a.k.a. 'The Great Macdermott' – the chorus of which runs "We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do / We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too! / We've fought the Bear before and while we're Britons true, / The Russians shall not have Constantinople."

[388] Cf. Gardiner, 20.

[389] Cf. Beauman, 35; Stevenson, 53 and 95.

depicted as a process of 'unnatural selection' which, in a depressing inversion of (Social) Darwinism, leads to the death of the fittest.

Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* (1938)[390] presents a particularly striking case in point: Edward Hinchcliffe, eldest of the three Hinchcliffe children, is unanimously accepted by the other characters as the most promising member of the younger generation; not only is he his parent's favourite, but even Mr Hinchcliffe's business rival Mr Armistead unreservedly admires the young man and concedes his superiority over his own son, Ludo (when given the news of Edward's death, he even secretly wishes that Ludo might have been killed instead). Significantly, the older characters' judgement is endorsed by Laura, the focallising consciousness of the book, with whom the reader is clearly meant to identify. Simultaneously, however, the novel makes it clear that the blame for the war has to be laid at the door of men like Mr Armistead – one of "the jingoes [who] have pushed us into it"; moreover, the focalising character continually calls attention to the Victorian characters' flawed judgement. On one occasion, Laura muses that "while she had complete confidence in the tenacity and courage of her fellow-countrymen, she was rather dubious about their brains. […] Those of the older generation whom she knew seemed quite preposterously incapable – they never took a clear view of any situation, they never faced facts" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 280).

It must be borne in mind, however, that these men were the 'best' according to the very value system outlined above, heavily informed by the Victorian code of gentlemanliness, patriotism, and commitment to public duty; a code they themselves had embraced and which had prompted their decision to join the army. It is not, however, the death of these men which undermines the validity of the established values; such a conclusion would be unduly naive and is in no way borne out by their depiction as military heroes, and the presentation of their deaths as instances of heroic self-sacrifice for the good of their country. The contradiction evident in these novels is twofold: firstly, the same characteristics which appear praiseworthy in these young men – most notably their patriotic spirit, courage, and unswerving devotion to public duty – are at the same time called into question through their association with the Victorian political establishment that could and ought to have avoided Britain's involvement in the conflict. Secondly and by extension, the whole value system of the Victorian generation is exposed as hypocritical, authoritarian, and repressive, and is shown to be destructive – either in physical or psychological terms – of the rising generation. The reader is thus manoeuvred into the paradoxical position of sharing the positive evaluation of the dead heroes, which draws on the established value scale of the parental generation, and of condemning the very values on which that evaluation is based.

In the same novel, Bentley highlights the amount of pressure that was brought on young men to enlist. Too deeply entrenched in the Victorian values mentioned above, Frederick's family and neighbours are unable to understand his stance as a conscientious objector. Not only does his decision brand him as an outcast, it also causes the final breakdown of his marriage, as his wife is unable to come to terms with the shame of being married to a man whom the neighbours regard as an unpatriotic coward. Bentley criticises three aspects of the Victorian mindset at one blow: on the one hand, a narrow-minded interpretation of patriotic duty in terms of military service that leaves no room for

[390] For a detailed discussion of the novel, cf. ch. 3.2.1.

dissenting opinions on the justifiability of warfare and the best way of serving one's country; an exaggerated concern for the keeping up of appearances that Victorian-centred fiction frequently attacks as one of the most cloying facets of middle-class life during the period; and a social climate which allowed married women no room to formulate an identity in their own right, unconnected to the status and actions of their husbands. In contrast to the parental generation and her elder sister Gwen, who has internalised Mr Armistead's Victorian system of values, Laura – the main representative of the post-Victorian generation – is able to show a degree of understanding for Frederick's action. While she does not fully endorse his decision, she nonetheless draws readers' attention to the moral courage it takes to carry it through: "'Yes. I want to tell you, Frederick,' Laura forced herself to say in a high, strained tone, 'that though I don't agree with you at all – I think you're quite wrong; we must surely resist oppression and fight tyranny – though I don't agree with you at all, I honour and respect you with all my heart for being so faithful to your convictions'" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 323). Moreover, she hints at a tale of untold suffering in her oblique references to Frederick's imprisonment during the war – a tale that, however, is omitted from the novel, indicative of a social climate not yet ripe for the telling of these alternative versions of wartime experience.[391]

In contrast to Bentley's balanced view of Frederick's decision, conscientious objectors in post-World War II Victorian-centred novels tend to be treated with much greater harshness, leaving no doubt that their decision was prompted by cowardice and a lack of patriotic feeling, criticism of which is more or less openly endorsed by the novels. In F.W. Kenyon's *Without Regret* (1957), Christopher Lawson, the narrator's husband, is presented as truly despicable: a moral and physical coward, a war-time profiteer, and a philanderer who marries the narrator for the sole purpose of inheriting his uncle's business (which depends on his choice of a wife of whom his aunt and uncle approve), but nonetheless continues his long-standing affair with her friend Esther and later even seduces, impregnates and abandons his son's fiancée, Gloria.

A similarly scathing portrayal of men who fail to subscribe to the Victorian notion of patriotic duty occurs in *Impetuous Heart*: Willie is portrayed as an unprincipled good-for-nothing, whose decision to turn conscientious objector is mentioned almost in the same breath as his exceedingly short-lived brush with literary success and his failure "to obtain the Church's sanction to his unions" (A. Meredith, 155). As in *Sleep in Peace*, Willie's attitude leads to the break-up of a marriage – in this case, his sister's; whereas Bentley, however, presents an insightful analysis of the underlying psychological mechanisms, implying that Gwen might have been able to come to terms with her husband's decision in a more tolerant and open-minded climate and thus laying the blame at least in part on a society still imbued with the central tenets of Victorianism, Meredith commands little understanding for Willie's deliberately destructive action. His spiteful and irrefutable allegation that his brother-in-law might have shot his commanding officer whilst under fire from the enemy causes an irreparable rift in his sister's marriage, alienating the couple from each other and driving her husband to the brink of a mental breakdown. Moreover, Willie's contention that the workers of Britain would be no worse off under German occupation than under the British capitalists – an allegation clearly untenable in an era that had just witnessed the worst of Nazi atrocities – serves the

[391] For the negative stereotyping of conscientious objectors in post-WWI literature, cf. Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 112.

double function of discrediting the spirit of the Communist International and Willie's lack of patriotism as exceedingly short-sighted in political and humanitarian terms.[392]

The contrast between inter- and post-war novels bears evidence to a decided shift in public opinion: the interwar period – especially the years immediately following World War I – had seen an increase of pacifist sentiment in public and political discourse, and thus a greater amount of understanding for conscientious objectors that went hand in hand with a condemnation of Britain's involvement in the war as an instance of a brand of misguided military patriotism that had taken an excessive toll on the country. By the end of the nineteen-thirties, however, even late Victorian jingoism was beginning to appear attractive in the eyes of those who had come to regard appeasement as a shameful refusal on the part of Great Britain to stand up for basic human rights and liberties which were being violated by Fascist dictators in Europe.[393] It is this attitude that is carried over into the Victorian-centred novels of the post-war years which – temporally and emotionally removed from the damaging influence of the Victorians, and secure in the conviction that Britain's stance against Hitler had had been not only justifiable but inevitable – show a much more rigidly negative evaluation of men who declined military service on grounds of conscience. Unlike earlier novels, post-World War II Victorian-centred fiction is unambiguous in its endorsement of patriotism as a national virtue; conscientious objection is equated with a lack of patriotic feeling as well as personal cowardice, and as such roundly condemned.

In keeping with the increasingly patriotic climate of the day, 'Englishness' is a central concern of historical romances during the period immediately before and after World War II, and historical novelists frequently use the past to evoke feelings of pride and nostalgia calculated to build a sense of national unity.[394] This concern is observable in Victorian-centred fiction throughout the interwar era, and well into the nineteen-fifties, revealing it to be symptomatic of an era marked by two world wars in which the British had had to define themselves in relation to a foreign enemy. In regard to the Victorian age, however, the 'use' of the past to establish a sense of national identity shows a degree of complexity absent from texts set in earlier and less controversial periods of British history. To some extent, the complexity arises from two warring conceptions of the Victorian age: that of a shameful period of the recent past, marked by repressive social mores, hypocrisy, and a skewed value system, and that of an emergent sense of the Victorian era as a lost golden age of peace and stability that saw Britain's rise to a World Power. As discussed in the previous chapter, this latter view becomes especially important when people – faced with contemporary conflict and hardship – feel the urge to enhance their self-

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[392] Cf. also ch. 2.1.4.

[393] On 14 August 1935, *Punch* featured an E.H. Shepard cartoon entitled *The Awful Warning* showing personifications of England and France ("together?") singing to Mussolini "We don't want you to fight, / but by jingo if you do, / We will probably issue a joint memorandum / Suggesting a mild disapproval of you"; three years later, on 28 March 1938, it featured a cartoon by the same artist, entitled *The Old-Fashioned Customer*, in which John Bull asks a record seller (who looks like Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain): "I wonder if you've got a song I remember about not wanting to fight, but if we do . . . something, something, something . . . we've got the money too?" On the wall behind him hangs a portrait of Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister between 1885 and 1892 and again between 1895 and 1902, and a key exponent of jingoism and colonial expansion (cf. www.punchcartoons.com; for the latter cartoon, also Charmley, 61).

[394] Cf. on 'Englishness' as a theme in the historical romance, cf. Hughes, 65ff.; also Lowenthal's (44) comments on the uses of the past, discussed in ch. 1.2.

esteem by identifying with a successful national past, and the Victorian-centred novel of the inter- and post-war eras bears evidence to an ongoing and occasionally unsuccessful struggle to appropriate the Victorian age for this purpose.

In many cases, Victorian-centred fiction aims at the establishment and confirmation of an 'Britishness' schema which interacts with its construction of the typical Victorian, so that the constituent features of the one become overlaid with those of the other. In line with the patriotic spirit that imbues the historical romance as well as middlebrow fiction during the period, it constructs a notion of 'Britishness' designed to foster feelings of national pride, so that these qualities – marked not only as 'British' but explicitly identified as typical of the Victorian age – come to be presented as an inspirational and identity-constructing ideal. On the other hand, however, it also adheres to its deeply critical stance towards the Victorian period and its value system, leading to ideological gaps and contradictions in the texts which become apparent in their treatment of World War I. Before addressing this issue at greater length, however, a few remarks on the Victorian-centred novel's construction of typicality, and its aim to establish an ideal of the British national character as a source of pride and inspiration for its audience, are in order.

In regard to the former concern, it is worth noting that the schema of 'Britishness' instantiated by Victorian-centred fiction is heavily indebted to the text schema of the historical novel in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott. While the Victorian-centred novel frequently veers away from Scott's "more or less mediocre, average English gentleman" (Lukács, 32) in its choice of main characters, George Lukács' description of the typical hero of a Sir Walter Scott novel remains applicable to the prototypical model of Englishness in twentieth-century Victorian-centred fiction. In historical romance as in the Victorian-centred middlebrow novel, the qualities of the British characters are shown to be "unglamorous but effective" (Hughes, 81): they "generally [possess] a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a great cause" (Lukács, 32).

In the patriotic climate of an era marked by two world wars, it is hardly surprising that there is a strong tendency to foreground the positive aspects of the British national character, so that the schema is presented as a point of identification for the reader. Occasionally, however, descriptions strike a rueful note as they dwell on the decided lack of glamour that characterises the British of both sexes. A good example, which highlights the contrast mentioned in the preceding chapter, is provided by Michael Sadleir's description of an Englishwoman's attempt at emulating French elegance: "But the Parisian ensemble was damaged by the poor woman's intensely British face and mincing precision of speech. It was a shut-in, righteous, pale-lipped sort of face, with no gleam in the eyes and no real merriment behind the smile. […] Peake, on the other hand, though even more British than Miss Carver, had twice her liveliness, because she was content to be lively in the British way. She was a plump dough-faced girl, with a loud laugh and an utterly commonplace, often vulgar, mind but with plenty of good nature and the cheerful lack of imagination typical of Britons in every class" (*Fanny*, 106).

As Hughes, following Marc Girouard (62), notes, the ideal of 'Britishness' characteristic of middlebrow fiction in many ways goes back to the Victorians: "The Victorian chivalric ideal […] puts a high value on such qualities as generosity, care for dependants and the weak (such as

women), loyalty, and an unassuming bravery which is all the more real for being understated" (Hughes, 69). During the Victorian era and well into the twentieth century, this ideal – in itself informed by historical fiction and its idealisation of medieval history – is part of many Englishmen's self-perception, or, in other words, their world schema of 'Britishness': many upper- and middle-class men (and their female dependants) believed they held such values, and drew on this belief to justify a conscious sense of superiority over other nationalities.[395] The Victorian-centred novel draws on the same idealised image of the national character – an ideal that is shown to have already been attained – to achieve the same end: that of fostering a sense of patriotism and national pride in its audience.

In this context, it is worth stressing that the ideal of Britishness projected by Victorian-centred fiction was strongly influenced by its allegiance to middle-class values, and its perception of the Victorian age as the era of that middle class, so that the positive aspects of 'Victorianism', 'Britishness' and 'gentlemanliness' become virtually synonymous.[396] This trend – clearly observable in several Victorian-centred novels – is indicative of a development typical of the post-Edwardian era, when the middle class was becoming increasingly prominent in social and political terms. For instance, more than half the Cabinet posts between 1916 and 1935 held by middle-class politicians;[397] a political establishment that continued, moreover, throughout the interwar period to cling to its Victorian roots and traditional values.[398] The connection is traceable in Bentley's description of the values held by the gentrified late-Victorian scion of the Oldroyd family: "chivalry to women, the weak and the aged, and the right of the gentry to lead England [...] He also believed in telling the truth, fair play, being a good loser, never giving in, never taking an unfair advantage, never betraying your feelings except to trusted intimates, and never letting anyone down" (*Inheritance*, 436–7).

However, positive descriptions of 'Britishness' in middlebrow fiction do not only serve to reassure readers that their country is indeed deserving of their loyalty during wartime and times of economic hardship, but also to smooth over tensions within British society. As will be discussed in connection with the servant problem, those texts which do not fall into the category of the overtly political (in the sense of advocating radical political change) tend to "give a view of English society as essentially harmonious and sound" (Hughes, 67); other works – such as the novels of Phyllis Bentley – at least subscribe to the notion that this is a social ideal to which readers ought to aspire. Descriptions of 'Britishness' aim at constructing a homogeneous national identity that rests on the acknowledged 'public school' values of self-control, loyalty, honesty, courage and fair play. Adherence to the 'gentlemanly' code of Britishness is not, however, limited to the upper classes. The extent to which it is perceived as a phenomenon governed by nationality rather than class becomes apparent, for example, in Warwick Deeping's *Caroline Terrace* (1955), where a fight between cockneys on the beach ends in an invitation to a drink and a handshake – something, as one of the characters comments, "no dago" (183) would do. For women, too, the

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[395] Cf. Hughes, 69.

[396] For the quintessentially bourgeois nature of the British national identity, and its links to the Victorian ideal of chivalric masculinity, cf. also Hughes, 67ff.

[397] Cf. Stevenson, 61.

[398] Cf. Gardiner, 45ff.

definition of Britishness is informed by the ideal of womanhood characteristic of the Victorian middle classes, with moral purity, self-control and chastity, and common sense high on the scale of English womanly virtues. In many cases, these virtues are contrasted favourably with other assets – such as sexual attractiveness and feminine allure – that British women frequently appear to lack. Passages like that from *Fanny by Gaslight* (quoted above), however, do not only draw attention to the "unglamorous" down-to-earth qualities of British womanhood; they also, once again, emphasise the extent to which national characteristics – positive or otherwise – must be regarded as phenomena that cut across class boundaries: "the cheerful lack of imagination" displayed by Miss Peake is "typical of Britons *in every class*" (106; my italics).

As evident from the discussion of women in the previous chapter, Britishness, in Victorian-centred fiction, often relies on a comparison between British and foreign characters, and a determined othering of those traits perceived to be alien to (because undesirable in) the British character. While the juxtaposition of Maggie's and Amanda's down-to-earth qualities and the sexual allure of their foreign rivals Rita and Carlotta, or Sadleir's description of British womanhood, are hardly calculated to dazzle the reader, the plot lines of Victorian-centred novels are typically constructed to emphasise the English characters' superiority over foreigners despite their lack of surface glamour. There are frequent indications that foreign women – despite their undeniable attractions – are unsuitable marriage partners for English men. (The argument can not only be found in the war novels discussed in the previous chapter; a particularly striking example is also, for instance, presented in Eleanor Dunbar Hall's *Mine Is the Power* [1954].)

A prototypical example of the "unglamorous but effective" qualities of the British male can be found in 'Peter Piper's' (Theo Lang's) *Margot Leck* (1947), in which the narrator, William Montrose, and his ally, Henry Scourton, are pitted against the sinister Brandenfeldt family. Though not exceptionally clever – in point of fact, by the end of the novel his failure to see through the not-very-complex plot exasperates even his closest associates[399] – Montrose nonetheless shows himself superior to the German villains because of his tenacity and his commitment to bringing the criminal to justice. Scourton, in contrast, presents a more positive evaluation of Englishness: young, energetic, enthusiastic in the cause of justice and fond of outdoor activity and feats of bravery, it is he who in the end ensures the success of Montrose's investigation, exemplifying the national virtues which mark the English characters as superior over their foreign opponents – the 'wholesome' qualities of the young Englishman in the end winning over the brilliant but warped intellect of the aging German criminal.[400] Like other Victorian-centred novels featuring characters of German origin, *Margot Leck* reflects the strongly xenophobic tendencies observable in British society at the time.[401] Investigating the mysterious death of the German banker Hermann Brandenfeldt, Montrose uncovers a complicated web of

[399] For further discussion of the novel, cf. ch. 5.1.1.

[400] As an aside, it is also worth noting to what extent the novel re-enacts contemporary anxieties about masculinity at a time when women were, once again, breaking out of the domestic sphere to shoulder the burden of war work: reflecting the fears of a male establishment, it pits two quintessential examples of English masculinity against a female German criminal. (Incidentally, there are no likeable female characters in the book, the three other most important women being the double-dealing housekeeper at the Lowminnock Hotel, Hermann's mad wife Bertha, and the elusive, immoral and – when found – singularly uncooperative Margot Leck.)

[401] On the prevailing climate of xenophobia in inter- and post-war Britain, cf. Stevenson, 55ff.

internecine squabbles, lies and family intrigues, secretly masterminded by the matriarch of the Brandenfeldt family, Hermann's evil stepmother, Christine. She in the end commits suicide after causing the death of two of her sons – killed by her third son, Richard, at her instigation – in a complicated ploy to further the family's business interests. None of the German characters are depicted as in any way likeable; even those who are technically innocent – Hermann's cowardly brother Ferdinand, who is killed because he wants to turn traitor and betray family secrets to Montrose, and his mad wife, Susan, who has witnessed the murders, but is unable to communicate the knowledge – are deeply unappealing. The author's anti-Germanism shows itself also in the description of the Brandenfeldts' characters, but also extends to their surroundings: the Brandenfeldt mansion is described as a dark and claustrophobic, made threatening by the introduction of foreign elements out of tune with Victorian ideas of interior decoration (in itself already perceived as oppressive by twentieth-century standards).[402] Even Hermann's predilection for spicy central European food is depicted as unwholesome and suspect, especially as the paprika in his favourite dish serves to mask a lethal dose of poison. The novel bears evidence of the rampant anti-German feeling that had already characterised the interwar years, and which had not unnaturally been exacerbated by the Second World War.

Similar depictions of the Germans as menacing and evil occur also in other postwar Victorian centred texts: in Alan Kennington's *Dark Hour* (1953), nineteenth-century Germany is presented as a police state populated by spies and tell-tales, boorish drunks and a small number of political dissidents remorselessly hunted down by the government-controlled secret police. Arthur Nash's *Dangerous Haven* (1956) presents a similar, though less comprehensive picture of the negative sides of the German national character: Froben, a minor German character the narrator meets in London, is boorish, ill-mannered, and speaks with an unintelligible accent. Later on, a journey on the German ship *Franz-Josef* serves to undermine stereotypes about the German national character that otherwise go unchallenged in Victorian-centred fiction, such as their competence, courage, and impeccable organisation: the sailor ordered to fumigate the emigrants' quarters sets about his task so incompetently that he accidentally sets fire to the ship; faced with imminent disaster, cowardly Captain Ledermann loses his nerve and authority, and fights for a place in the life boats reserved for women and children; and the only friendly and competent steward on board turns out not to be German at all, but Austrian.

While Victorian-centred novels leave the reader in little doubt that the Germans are uniformly evil, it is also worth noting that there is a latent current of xenophobia that encompasses all non-English characters. Descriptions focus on the flamboyance of their dress and manner, their lack of comprehension for traditionally English customs, and their inability to fully conform to Victorian social rules. In passages of direct speech, they consistently reveal their imperfect command of the English language and their foreign accents, and tend to intersperse their sentences with exclamations in their native language, so that even likeable characters are rendered conspicuous and slightly absurd. A particularly striking example is Mikulsky in Doris Leslie's *Concord in Jeopardy*: not only does he look like the Pied Piper, drink enormous quantities of absinthe, and determinedly flaunt Victorian convention in his speech, dress and behaviour; he is also given long

[402] For in-depth discussion of this aspect of the novel, cf. ch. 5.1.1.

passages of direct speech remarkable for their lack of thematic coherence as much as for their ungrammaticality and interjections in French and German (the latter obviously included to enhance the 'foreign' flavour of his conversation at the price of logical consistence, as Mikulsky is supposed to be of mixed Franco-Polish descent). This is the more remarkable as Mikulsky is at the same time the most observant and psychologically astute character of the book, who offers the reader valuable insights into Concord's psyche through his observations. Not infrequently, elements of textual deixis, such as comments from the narrator or other characters, additionally draw the reader's attention to these linguistic irregularities: "Dario always seemed to leave idiomatic English better than he found it," the protagonist "reflect[s] happily" in Violet Dean's *Love's A Man of War* (1953) when her Italian lover tells her about the "piggery-jokery" (220) usually going on at the traditional horse races in Siena.

A similar trend is observable in the comparatively rare depictions of foreign characters of non-European origin, and in comments on non-European countries and ethnicities on the part of narrators and characters. As Maslen observes of British women's fiction from the period, "we regularly find in the nonfiction and novels dealing directly with non-whites that the stereotypes are still firmly in place, although whether this is the author's view or a character's is often hard to determine" (107). As has already been indicated above,[403] this certainly holds true of much Victorian-centred fiction, both from the interwar and the postwar period. Some instances – such as a passage from Violet Dean's *Love's a Man of War* (1953) – are indicative merely of an unthinking assumption of white superiority: reflecting on the mental state of a Victorian couple before their wedding night, the narrator remarks that "the combined ignorance of both on certain of the simple facts of life could have earned, had they but known it, a compassionate smile from any male or female member of a backward tribe in Darkest Africa" (19). The quote establishes a hierarchy of sexual knowledge that is perhaps slightly surprising in view of the typical association of sexuality with 'primitive' societies, but fully in keeping with contemporary assumptions regarding white superiority whose influence still made itself felt in conservative comments on the dismantlement of the British Empire in late-forties and early-fifties political discourse.[404]

Other novels, in contrast, are openly hostile towards non-whites. *A Challenge to Sirius* is particularly problematic in this respect, featuring glaringly racist passages – such as, for instance, a description of "darkies dressed up like monkeys in Federal uniforms, and fighting like monkeys with bites and scratches and kicks" (341). Couched in the mind-style of its protagonist, who, fighting for the South, is in favour of slavery, such descriptions – along with frequent references to "Sambos", "darkies", "negroes" and "niggers" – go unchallenged by narratorial comment. Moreover, racist attitudes are shared by all characters in the novel, even Frank's Northern captor, who muses dispiritedly that the black soldiers in the Northern army are like a crowd of unruly children who ought to have been left in the nursery a little longer. The perspective of the plot – with Lorena's brutal rape and the senseless destruction of her mother's estate by black soldiers – is calculated to bear out the white characters' assessment, and invites the reader to concur. This is

[403] Cf. ch. 2.2.1.

[404] Cf. Gardiner, 115. At the end of the forties, Prime Minister Atlee could still publicly argue in favour of decolonialisation because Britain had finally achieved her colonising mission and had thereby furnished its former colonies with the wherewithal to sustain self-government and independence.

the more noticeable in view of the fact that Kaye-Smith, in an earlier passage, shows her protagonist to be fully aware of the practice of blaming other nationalities or ethnicities for atrocities committed by American soldiers of both sides: "The Southern papers teem with horrible stories of northern atrocities, and the Northern papers, which we often see, are full of similar tales against us. It is rather amusing to watch each side attempt to clear itself of these charges which it apparently can't deny – the Yankees by blaming the Germans who swarm in their ranks, and we by blaming the Indians who helped us in the west" (212). While the tone of Frank's letter to Mr Bellack appears to imply that this practice does not fully conform to facts, however, the reader (having shared Frank's horror at the mindless destruction of Maplehead by black Union soldiers) is left in little doubt as to the justifiability of laying the blame for the worst atrocities at the door of runaway slaves and black soldiers.

In contrast to the facile racism of many Victorian-centred novels, Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* stands out for her complex treatment of the issue, in particular with regard to Sophia's half-caste nephew, Caspar. This character has attracted the notice of several contemporary critics, most notably Robin Hackett, who reads the text as a plea for interracial cooperation among the working classes within the British Empire,[405] and Elizabeth Maslen (*Political*, 107ff.), who suggests that Warner may be attempting to show that British women, despite their relatively powerless situation within a patriarchal society, cannot disclaim responsibility for the ravages of Imperialism on the colonies. Maslen highlights that Sophia's half-reluctant attraction to Caspar sets in motion a "freeing from convention" (*Political*, 107) that enables Sophia to form a relationship with the racial other Minna. Caspar, however, does not benefit from this. Having run away from the strict boarding school to which Sophia has sent him despite her initial misgivings, he fails to arouse her sympathy (even though Sophia herself is, at that point, in a similar position, having run away from her husband), and is handed over to Frederick, who presses him into service in the National Guard, on the side of the capitalist society that Sophia has renounced – a plot development that, according to Maslen (*Political*, 109) draws attention to the corrupting influence of colonialism deplored by Frantz Fanon.

While Maslen's and Hackett's readings are interesting in their attempts to uncover hidden currents of meaning beneath the surface of Warner's text, they tend to background the ambiguity that underlies Warner's depiction of the racial other. Dismissing Sophia as unsympathetic and therefore unlikely to serve as a point of identification for the late-twentieth or early-twenty-first-century reader, they downplay the extent to which the reader is invited to share her point of view and re-enact her ideological education towards Communism, which does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a more broad-minded attitude towards non-whites. While it is certainly true that her assessment of the Jewish storyteller Minna – initially distorted by anti-Semitic prejudice – undergoes a radical change in the course of the novel, no such shift is discernible in regard to her nephew. In addition, it may also be argued that the events of the plot confirm Sophia's initial apprehension that Caspar, despite his exotic allure, may turn out to be a destructive influence on those whom she loves.

[405] For a more detailed discussion of Hackett's analysis, cf. ch. 2.1.2.

While Victorian-centred fiction explores the validity of Victorian notions of patriotism and public duty, it simultaneously reflects the continuance of Victorian attitudes towards other races and nationalities, and bears witness to xenophobic tendencies within a society that aimed at a definition of itself both in opposition to its Victorian predecessors and its foreign enemies.

2.3 Conclusion

Focusing on the 'public' legacy of the Victorians – i.e. the ways in which particularly Victorian policies and attitudes led up to the most pressing concerns of the present day, that of the Great War and the economic crisis of the interwar period – the novels analysed in this chapter despite their diversity share a number of distinctive features. First and foremost, it must be stressed that all of the texts discussed here are concerned with 'typicality', constructing and confirming a particular 'Victorian' schema marked by constituent features comprising (excessive) patriotism, materialism and a devotion to public duty. In addition, there is a strong tendency to assume that these attributes of the Victorians are already known to the reader, inviting the conclusion – borne out by evidence from newspaper articles, interviews, autobiographical writings and archival material – that these properties were already well-established as 'typically Victorian' within popular discourse. Particularly in texts form the interwar era, this is corroborated by a marked absence of explanatory detail, suggesting that readers were assumed to be reasonably familiar with the subject matter and possessed the requisite background knowledge pertaining to the Victorian age – an assumption that, given the relative temporal nearness and the likelihood that a significant percentage of fiction readers had a degree of personal experience of the (late) Victorian era, hardly comes as a surprise.

Even in texts from the post-war era, however, explanatory commentary on Victorian manners and attitudes is kept down to a minimum, pointing towards the fact that by then, a standard 'Victorian' schema could already be assumed to exist in the readers' minds. At the same time, however, there is an increased amount of explanation of objects, particularly dress and household items, with which readers could not necessarily be expected to be familiar: while Doris Leslie, writing in 1940, could still refer to "the shams which hid their mothers' frilled hypocrisies" (*Concord*, 307) and expect to be understood, Violet Dean, in her 1953 novel *Love's A Man of War*, devotes a lengthy explanatory passage to this particular household item.[406] At the same time, however, there is also a perceptible increase in commentary which highlights the difference between the Victorians and the present generation of readers as time increases, pointing out changes that have taken place in dress, manners, and attitudes towards a wide range of issues. (In this regard, the novels discussed here differ markedly from those treated in chapter four, which focus on 'Unvictorian' subjects and deliberately set out to disrupt readers' schematic expectations, often explicitly signalling their intention of doing so.)

If novels are fairly unanimous in their definition of the 'Victorian' schema that underlies these texts, however, they are by no means so in their evaluation of its constituent features. In his perceptive study of changing attitudes towards the Victorians, John Gardiner remarks that "the 1920s became the zenith of what we might call anti-Victorianism" (21), following a tradition of

[406] For a detailed discussion of this novel, cf. ch. 3.2.3 and 3.2.4.

denigrating the Victorians which had been begun already by Oscar Wilde during the 1890s, and which had received added momentum from Lytton Strachey's magnum opus: "*Eminent Victorians* was one of the clarion calls that martialled the reaction against the past at the end of the First World War. By that point anti-Victorianism had a definite momentum. In the generation that followed critics were able to draw upon a tradition of denigration which had been developing for a number of years, and which had been emphatically endorsed by the senseless carnage of the war" (Gardiner, 37). At the same time, however, it is also worth noting that the attitudes expressed by Bloomsbury and the 'Bright Young Things' were not those of the British mainstream: "what we find in 1918 is a world shocked and saddened by war, but not one severed from its past. Traditional outlooks and habits survived the war, and in some respects may even have been intensified by it" (Gardiner, 39). Although "[i]t is difficult to say with absolute certainty how conscious ordinary people were of the Victorianism of their attitudes" (Gardiner, 39), it is certainly observable that many Victorian-centred novels expect their readers to be in sympathy with at least some of the tenets of Victorianism, frequently attacking one particular aspect of the Victorian mindset while more or less openly endorsing others. In particular, this becomes apparent in texts which connect 'public' concerns – such as capitalism and the class struggle – with the 'private' issues raised by patriarchal family structures: as outlined in chapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, both Phyllis Bentley in *Inheritance*, and Sylvia Townsend Warner in *Summer Will Show* highlight the connection between these topics; only Warner, however, takes it to its logical conclusion.

As has been outlined in this chapter, the authors of Victorian-centred novels – particularly during the interwar period – show themselves committed either to tracing the historical developments that led towards the political and economic problems of the present day, locating the "turning point" at the beginning of the Victorian age, or to commenting on present-day problems and concerns by locating them at a 'safe' temporal distance. In both cases, however, the above-mentioned concern with 'typicality' – the construction and confirmation of a 'Victorian' schema that stresses that period's difference from the present of these novels' publication – emerges as the most characteristic feature of these texts. It is worth noting, however, that writers use different strategies to achieve this effect, especially when it comes to focalisation and deictic centering. Despite the different narrative situations of these texts, ranging from first-person to third-person authorial or figural narrative, there is a marked tendency to position the reader so as to enable her/him to share the thoughts of one or several of the Victorian characters, presenting an intensely subjective account of the Victorian age that nonetheless serves as the basis for generalisations about the period, and about its influence on the present day.

In *Mainwaring* and *Madonna of the Barricades* – arguably the most conservative of the novels discussed in this chapter – this is achieved through the use of Victorian narrators, whose deixis – primarily in terms of perceptual and relational deixis, but also in tempo-spatial terms, as the deictic centre quickly shifts from the twentieth-century frame narrative back to the nineteenth century – the reader shares, and with whom s/he is invited to identify also in terms of ideological world-view. These texts map out a point of view for the reader which coincides with that of the narrators, conforming to Iser's analysis of the *roman à thèse* in the sense of precluding – or severely limiting – other perspectives. In contrast to these first-person narratives, others – such as Sheila Kaye-Smith in *Challenge to Sirius* and Sylvia Townsend Warner in *Summer Will Show* –

rely on a different strategy to achieve the same effect, using Victorian characters as focalisers in third-person narratives of the period. Once again, however, the reader's deixis is mapped onto that of a single character, giving the reader access to their subjective world view and inviting her/him to share that character's evaluations of the Victorian period.

It is only in *Inheritance* that we find what initially appears as a deviation from the established pattern. Bentley's 1932 novel features frequent shifts in focalised and focalising WHO, locating the deictic centre within or near the minds of nearly all of the more important characters to allow the reader to experience, as it were, the workings of the Victorian mind and psyche at first hand. By the end of the novel, however, the deictic centre has settled on David, through whose perceptual and relational deixis the reader experiences the final section, and whose conclusions about the preceding episodes s/he is invited to share. As in the other texts, Bentley presents a highly subjective view of the Victorian period, which nonetheless serves as the basis for generalisations about its implications for the present, a characteristic feature of many Victorian-centred novels which bears evidence to the fact that readers – drawing on antecedent schematic knowledge about the period – were expected to perceive the individual fates of these novels' protagonists as typical of their day and age.

In contrast, postwar Victorian-centred texts tend to feature focalisers who are presented as atypical of their day and age, often – as in the case of *Lilith* and *Impetuous Heart* – at odds with the central tenets of Victorianism, or at least – as, for instance, in *Jealous Goddess* – severely critical of some of its features. In addition, many of these novels include a further deictic layer absent from earlier texts, increasing the sense of temporal and emotional distance from the Victorians through the introduction of twentieth-century narrators who draw the reader's attention to the differences between the present and the past.

As has been outlined in this chapter, many Victorian-centred novels belong to the group of texts described as "the distant mirror" by Cowart, as contemporary issues and concerns are discussed in the relatively safe context of the Victorian period setting; others depict the Victorian age as the "turning point" at which a particular feature of twentieth-century society (most notably capitalism and the growth of the urban proletariat) came into being. In their treatment of these issues, many of the novels written during the interwar period show a keen awareness of the present generation of readers' position as, in every sense, the inheritors of the Victorians, frequently meditating on ways of reaping the benefits and dealing with the burdens of the past. Despite their emphasis on the negative aspects of the Victorian age, there is little evidence of wholesale condemnation of the period; in many Victorian-centred novels from the interwar years, there is a strong emphasis on the psychological motivations behind the Victorians' (arguably misguided) actions and attitudes. Frequently, the narrative aims both at explanation – in the sense that the reader becomes privy to the Victorian characters' thoughts and feelings – and on interpretation, as twentieth-century narrators or focalisers offer additional insights influenced by the teachings of Marx and Freud. While apparently fairly open-minded and balanced in the way in which these texts allow the Victorians to speak for themselves, the attitude mapped out for the reader is nonetheless tinged with a certain degree of superiority: while s/he learns to appreciate why the Victorians were the way they were, there is the underlying sense that this marks them as inferior to the present generation.

The insistence on the superiority of the present increases in texts from the post-war period. While continuing to use the Victorian age as a "distant mirror" reflecting topical concerns, these texts rarely trace a direct connection between the Victorians and the present day, reflecting the extent to which World War II had destroyed any sense of continuity with the period.[407] Many issues which were regarded as topical during the interwar years – most notably the condemnation of Victorian business practices – are relegated to the status of historical background colour; others, such as patriotism and the capitalist economy, are openly endorsed, as the conservative climate of the 1950s, coupled with a sense of having been freed of the burden of the Victorian past by the recent war, leads to a more positive re-evaluation.

It is also worth noting that the 'political' themes addressed in the novels discussed here – capitalism and warfare – are almost invariably presented as inextricably connected to issues of gender and to the psychological damage inflicted by the Victorians on their children; it is these issues which form the 'private' legacy of the Victorians which will be discussed in the next chapter.

[407] Cf. Gardiner, 54.

3. The Private Legacy of the Victorians

While many authors analyse the most pressing political issues and public concerns of the twentieth century in terms of their connection to the Victorian period, it is observable that they frequently do so in relation to private issues, most notably Victorian family life and the role of women in society (not then perceived as a 'political' issue in the same way as matters of international relations or the national economy[408]). Indeed, for most writers of the interwar period, many of them born in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the first exposure to Victorianism had "occurred within a family setting" (Gardiner, 36); as a consequence, it is this setting which comes to be perceived as the one most suited to a depiction of the quintessence of Victorianism, and to its evaluation. Given the personal nature of many authors' engagement with the Victorians, their evaluations differ both in emphasis and in the degree of disaffection with the Victorians that is expressed.

As has already become apparent from the analyses in the preceding chapter, the concerns addressed by contemporary writers were manifold. The issue of gender, and especially of women's roles within and outside the home, has already been touched upon in connection with discussions of the close link between patriarchy and (Victorian) capitalism, but will here be explored in greater detail. However, the thematic concerns of the novels discussed here is by no mean limited to women's experience within a rapidly changing socio-political environment. As shall be seen, different writers foreground different facets of Victorian (family) life and offer comments on aspects as diverse as religion; art, architecture, and interior decoration; fashion; food; Victorian literature; household management; childcare and education; or attitudes towards servants and the lower classes – anything, in short, that formed part of the experience of growing up in a Victorian household, or could conceivably be encountered in such a setting.

In contrast to the 'public' and 'political' concerns foregrounded in chapter two, this chapter focuses on the 'domestic' aspects of Victorian-centred fiction, exploring presentations of Victorian family life and its effects on the generation which followed upon the Victorians. These effects are not only presented in terms of their consequences for the individual, but are frequently analysed as the underlying causes of the wider-reaching socio-political problems addressed in chapter two, so that these two chapters must be regarded as closely connected (a fact that will become apparent also from the recurrence of several titles in both chapters). In particular, a tendency to show how intensely political the personal could be in relation to the (negative) formative effects of a Victorian upbringing is observable in the works discussed in the second part of this chapter, which foreground the process of 'outgrowing the Victorians' as their protagonists make the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. It is this type of text which most closely exemplifies Gardiner's assertion that "[t]he reaction against the Victorians began at home" (36), but also shows that it did not end there: offering scathing criticism of Victorian family life and childrearing methods, these novels frequently also catalogue the effects that a Victorian upbringing had on its recipients' actions in the public sphere.

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[408] Cf. e.g. Joannou, "Woman Writer", 7; Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 131; Maslen, *Political*, 6; Wallace, 53ff.; also ch. 2.1.

The novels discussed in the two sections of this chapter, while taking up the same themes, are nevertheless markedly different in the use they make of the Victorian age. Many of the works addressed in the first section – most notably Dorothy Hewlett's *Victorian House* (1939) – combine the two most distinct and apparently contradictory of Cowart's categories, that of the "Distant Mirror", which transposes contemporary issues into the past so as to disguise topical social commentary by locating it at what appears at first sight to be a 'safe' historical distance, and "The Way It Was", with its focus on an authentic recreation of a past ostensibly distinct from and unconnected to the present. Novels which privilege authentic recreation over socially critical re-invention are, however, as firmly anchored to their historical moment as those which use the Victorians to 'mirror' contemporary society: apparently 'authentic' accounts often tend to veer towards a celebration of the twentieth century's superiority over the nineteenth, and frequently exhibit a marked tendency towards 'othering' the Victorians, offloading contemporary problems on them and thus denying their existence in the writer's own day.[409] As in the preceding chapter, the analyses presented here contrast texts from the interwar period and the post-war years, exploring to what extent increasing temporal and emotional distance to the Victorians informs depictions of their private life, and to what extent the schemata constructed by older novels are affirmed or disrupted by later works.

The second part of this chapter concentrates on texts which unite features of historical fiction with those of the Bildungsroman, focusing on the early life of their protagonists – typically born towards the end of the Victorian era into 'respectable' middle-class homes – and charting their struggle to outgrow their Victorian upbringing in order to find their place in contemporary twentieth-century society. In doing so, these novels offer explorations of those aspects of the Victorian age which shaped (or, as many of them seem to suggest, deformed) the present day; in these texts, the Victorian age is neither primarily a historical curiosity nor the mirror image of modern society, but the necessary precondition of and thus a crucial key to understanding the present. This concern is reflected in the timeline of these novels, which chart the transition from the Victorian age to the inter- or post-war period, and use contemporary settings to highlight the continuing influence of the Victorian era, even when they draw attention to the enormous changes that have taken place.

3.1 Patriarchy in practice: Victorian family life

As indicated above, the anti-Victorianism often regarded as characteristic of the 1920s and early 1930s also finds its expression in contemporary literature and autobiography. Works like Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) or Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) had already gone a long way towards establishing a schema of Victorian family life as restrictive, oppressive, and emotionally suffocating,[410] and there were many voices who took up the tone of these memoirs: "much anti-Victorianism was the response of sensitive, articulate, usually middle-class observers who had grown up in such a climate and found reasons for disliking it" (Gardiner, 31). Personal motivations of this kind may well have been a factor in determining the interest that

[409] Cf. Moore, "Reworkings", 140.
[410] Cf. Gardiner, 32; for the influence of Butler in particular, cf. Mason, 8ff.

writers such as May Sinclair, Phyllis Bentley, or Dorothy Hewlett took in Victorian family life.[411] In addition, their novels bear evidence to a deep-seated need to understand the Victorian parental generation as a means of finding the key to contemporary concerns and tensions; history, in this sense, becomes an important "means whereby the present can know itself" (Cowart, 27). From a present-day perspective, however, the representation of history in these novels also becomes a means through which the present-day reader can come to know the moment of their publication,[412] as the issues that are foregrounded and the parallels and contrasts which these texts establish with varying degrees of explicitness afford valuable insights into how the Victorians were seen at that time, and, even more crucially, into what aspects of the preceding era were regarded as relevant to readers of the day.

The historical novels discussed in this chapter, though undoubtedly drawing on their authors' personal experiences of Victorianism, are less intensely personal and highly emotionally charged than the autobiographical writings of Butler and Gosse, or the determinedly anti-Victorian works of the Bloomsbury Group. Instead, they aim at a balanced picture that sets insights about the psychological damage done to Victorian children against detailed and largely unpolemic analyses of their parents' underlying motivations. Often drawing on Freudian theories about repression and the unconscious, these texts also bear witness to the extent to which psychoanalysis featured in popular discourse during the interwar period. Largely shorn of its complexities, it became one of the staple ingredients of middlebrow fiction, so that many novels show the "understanding of family dynamics casually informed by the increasing popularity of the ideas of Freud" that Nicola Humble (163) observes in Rachel Ferguson's *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* (1931).[413]

Despite their awareness of the potentially damaging effects of patriarchal tyranny, many authors of the interwar period inclined towards an attitude of fair-minded criticism rather than wholesale denunciation of Victorian fathers. Nonetheless, "anger and ambivalence", identified by Gardiner (39) as the keynotes of early anti-Victorianism, are also discernible in the emotional substratum of many of these texts. While descriptions of the patriarch are often psychologically credible and acknowledge the amount of social pressure that was brought on men to conform to the expected role of *paterfamilias*, the picture that emerges is nevertheless often that of hard, self-

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[411] This assumption also underlies the approach chosen by biographers of May Sinclair. In *May Sinclair – A Modern Victorian* (2000), for instance, Suzanne Raitt analyses Sinclair's novel in connection to the writer's own life history (for a critical analysis of and alternative to this approach, cf. Pease, 168f.). Bentley and Hewlett, on the other hand, have so far largely escaped scholarly attention; comparison with Bentley's autobiography, *O Dreams, O Destinations* (1962), however, suggests that many of the events and experiences described in *Sleep in Peace* were, in fact, based on personal experience (cf. Mullin, n.pag.).

[412] For literature as a key to understanding and reconstructing the ideological climate of a past era, cf. Iser, *Act*, 74; also Cowart, 14f. and Light, *Forever*, 2.

[413] Despite the widespread fascination with psychoanalysis, Freud's ideas were not universally popular among novelists. In *Told by an Idiot*, Rose Macaulay – characteristically quick to notice and ridicule the preoccupations of her fellow authors – casually debunks the prevailing preoccupation with the Oedipus complex: "[...] sons often have a natural leaning towards their fathers, and frequently grow up with no more than a careless affection for their mothers; for, contrary to common belief, the great affection felt by Oedipus for his mother is most unusual, and, indeed, Oedipus would probably have felt nothing of the sort had he known of the relationship. It is noticeable that sons usually select as a bride a woman as unlike their mothers and sisters as possible. It makes a change" (50–1). Virginia Woolf and Frank Swinnerton, amongst others, likewise deplored the trend towards excessive psychoanalysing in contemporary fiction (cf. e.g. Beauman, 149f.).

satisfied, and (unconsciously) hypocritical tyrants. As shall be seen in the last part of this chapter, it is this schema which, once time has attenuated the emotional impact of the Victorians, leads to the formation of the stereotypical, clichéd notion of the tyrannical father which features prominently in post-World War II Victorian-centred fiction.

Despite the fact that the Victorian period is usually, in the popular imagination as much as in secondary literature, associated with patriarchal power structures which ensured male dominance even within the allegedly 'female' sphere of the home, it is early-twentieth-century novels which focus on mother-daughter relationships which have, so far, attracted the largest amount of critical attention.[414] In contrast, popular novels dealing with the role of Victorian fathers in shaping their children's lives – despite the prominence of such figures – have largely escaped scholarly notice. While briefly touching upon the most important novels which thematise (post-) Victorian mother-daughter relationships, the main focus of this chapter is therefore on the figure of the Victorian *paterfamilias* in Victorian-centred fiction.

As outlined above, Victorian-centred fiction from the interwar period bears witness not only to a profound interest in patriarchal structures within the family and their influence on women's lives, but also extends its focus to a wider social context and thematises women's position in the public sphere. Although the issue will be addressed in much finer detail in the following subchapters, it is important to stress at the outset that many of the novels discussed in this section were written by female authors under social conditions which still bore the imprint of the Victorian era.[415] This applies especially to the position of women, both within the narrow confines of the family cycle, and in their attempts to emerge into the hitherto predominantly masculine world of science, commerce, and politics. Alison Light, in her monograph on *Femininity, literature and conservativism between the wars*, attempts to show the extent to which the era differed from the preceding one in its evaluation of the domestic sphere:

> Even if [...] the idea of a private life received a new enhancement, nevertheless it was not the same old private life – the sphere of domestic relations, and all which it encompassed, had also changed. And even if a new commercial culture of 'home-making' was conservative in assuming this to be a female sphere, it nevertheless put women and the home, and a whole panoply of connected issues, at the centre of national life. (10)

In doing so, she draws attention to one of the central paradoxes of the period, which united anti-Victorianism with a reluctance to abandon the well-established correlation between femininity and domesticity – a paradox that is observable also in the way in which these issues are approached and evaluated in Victorian-centred fiction. This renewed interest in the domestic sphere both in public discourse, as noted by Light, and in middlebrow fiction accounts for the large number of Victorian-centred novels with an exclusively domestic focus and setting, a selection of which will be analysed in this chapter, along with novels which, as stated above, attempt to trace the connection between patriarchy and wider socio-political concerns.

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[414] Cf. especially Heather Ingman's *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (1998).

[415] Cf. Gardiner, 53.

3.1.1 Introducing the patriarch

At the beginning of this chapter, it is useful to go back once again to *The Inheritance*, already analysed at some length in chapter 2.1.1. Juxtaposing 'public' and 'private' events, the novel offers an insight into the extent to which these two spheres were paradoxically perceived both as inextricably connected, and at the same time – still harking back to the Victorian era – as clearly distinct from each other. While Phyllis Bentley (like many of her contemporaries) emphasises that Victorian family structures are best understood in the light of Freud's theories, the main focus of her novel lies on the connection between the topic of patriarchy and gender roles and issues of class and capitalism. The novel repeatedly attempts to bridge the gap between the two issues; both the success of its attempt to derive economic insights from its psychological observations of family life, and its failure to reverse the process, deserve closer scrutiny.

In this regard, Diana Wallace's argument that *Inheritance* adheres to the conventions of the family saga in its cyclical representation of history[416] is compelling, but not entirely accurate. As I have argued in chapter 2.1.1, the line of the narrative resembles a downward spiral rather than a cycle: just as the Oldroyds' relations with their workers deteriorate in the course of the nineteenth century, each marriage turns out worse than the preceding one. At the beginning of the novel, Will Oldroyd is genuinely in love with Mary Bamforth, daughter of one of his weavers, and is determined to marry her even against the wishes of his father. Having "anticipated" (Wallace, 66) the wedding night (a scene that is presented as near rape in the novel, to which Mary, however, seems to submit), he is determined to act according to his conscience and marry Mary as soon as possible, until he discovers that her brother – although innocent of the crime – is one of the four Luddites accused of killing his father. When he meets Mary again after several years, he is shocked to discover that unbeknownst to him she has borne him a son, Jonathan, and retrospectively feels appalled at his decision to break off the engagement. After the death of his first wife, Will marries Mary. The marriage turns out to be a reasonably happy one, even though Jonathan's resentful attitude towards his father puts a severe strain on the whole family, and Mary feels out of her depth as Will's wife:

> Then too, at first after her marriage she looked very much out of place amid the comparative splendours of New House; her new clothes seemed to hang uncouthly upon her, she looked uncomfortable in them, like a serving girl dressed up. In the course of time her clothes came to fit more naturally, but she never acquired the manner suitable to the wife of Mr. William Oldroyd, and consequently there was little company at new house. […] But after all, Will always concluded, what did it matter? (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 208)

In the next generation, history repeats itself when Brigg – Will's son from his first marriage – has an affair with one of his workers' daughters, Polly Thorpe, and decides to marry her when he hears that she is pregnant. However, the wisdom of this generous impulse is somewhat doubtful, as Polly remains a misfit in the Oldroyd household, being mistaken for a maidservant by Jonathan and treated as such by her husband and son, who are embarrassed of her lower-class origins and lack of refinement:

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[416] Cf. Wallace, 64; for the cyclical representation of history in family sagas, cf. Bridgwood, 178.

> His mother was one of the awkward places of his life; his father was not proud of her, nor was he. The erstwhile Polly Thorpe remained very handsome in looks – Brigg was well aware that to her he owed his fine complexion – but her speech was in Brigg's opinion quite dreadful and her manners worse, and it made things awkward with, for instance, the Stancliffes. Brigg was fond of her, he supposed; but he often wondered why on earth his father had married her – or rather he knew only too well, and was ashamed of the knowledge. (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 351)

If Brigg senior lacks his father's generosity, his attitude towards his wife nonetheless compares favourably with that of his grandson: two generations later, a similar situation develops as Brigg junior's son Francis considers himself honour bound to marry Janie's daughter Carmine Mellor when he learns that she is expecting his child. Unlike Brigg senior, however, who appears reconciled if not overjoyed at the idea of marriage to Polly, Francis is determined to go through with it because of his sense of honour, but regards it as a somewhat unpleasant duty: "What a fool I've been! What a mess! […] He wished [he had never seen her], but a man did not say those things to a woman in Francis's code, especially to a woman who had given herself to him" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 479–80).

In its depiction of the two sides of the Oldroyd story, the novel "connects the capitalist ownership of property and male 'ownership' of women's and children's bodies" (Wallace, 66). However, Will Oldroyd shows himself unable to realise this aspect of capitalist society, and this failure is repeated through generations of male Oldroyds and contributes to the ever-widening gulf between manufacturers and workers, and between the two branches of the family. In contrast to Will, his illegitimate son, Jonathan Bamforth, is quick to perceive the connection, regarding the mill owners as exploitative both towards the workers and the women of the working classes, "great powerful men who left one's mother in poverty and distress" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 185).[417] (As outlined in chapter 2.1.1, Jonathan's decision to take up the cause of William Oastler is presented as the result of a complex interplay between his conscious socio-political convictions and the unconscious effects of an unresolved Oedipal trauma.)

A dialogue between Carmine and Francis highlights the parallel between the Oldroyds' workers and wives. Observing the lack of understanding between her husband and his employees, Carmine criticises Francis for acting as if he were doing the workers a favour by employing them, reminding him that it is as much to his own advantage as it is to theirs. When Francis in turn complains that "it's the same thing here [i.e. at home] as it is in the mill" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 511–12), i.e. that his wife's behaviour towards him is as ungrateful and grudging as that of his workmen, Carmine points out the connection between the two: she stresses that he treated her just as he treats the workers when he told her he would marry her to save her from scandal and expected her to be grateful, not taking into account that it was as much his fault as her own that she got pregnant. As one generation of Oldroyds succeeds the other, the relationship between the workers and the mill owners deteriorates, as do the relationships between the male Oldroyds and the working-class women they marry.

As becomes evident through Bentley's description of these relationships, however, it is not only the widening gulf between the workers and the Oldroyd family which lies at the heart of the failure of these marriages, but the change in social climate with its increasing emphasis on gentility and

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[417] Cf. Wallace, 66.

respectability which crucially influences the Oldroyds' attitudes towards their lower-class wives: Mary is loved by her husband, Polly is merely tolerated, and Carmine, finally, is treated with barely disguised resentment. The generation gap between the Victorians and the preceding generation first becomes apparent in the relationship between Mary and her daughter-in-law Helena, whom Jonathan – significantly – marries "in the year of Queen Victoria's accession" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 275): "[…] Helena would never forget that Mary had allowed herself to be seduced, and Mary never remembered it" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 277). Later on in the book, Francis's mother Charlotte deplores that Carmine is not the "lofty match" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 489) that she had envisaged for her son, but also – in a brilliant example of the double standard often presented as typical of the Victorians – comments disparagingly on her "morals" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 489) because she let herself be seduced by her son. As Carmine is rejected by Francis's mother and her Stancliffe relations, and aware of the fact that Francis no longer loves her, the marriage turns into a catastrophic failure and ends in the couple's separation. The most damaging example of Victorian morality in practice occurs, however, when Janie Mellor – raised according to Helena's strict moral standards – frightens her daughter Carmine into premature labour when she realises that Carmine's child was conceived prior to her marriage.

The break-up of the penultimate Oldroyd marriage on the eve of World War I is symbolic of the damaging effect the Victorian way of life has on human relationships, as social conventions and a mistaken sense of duty force Carmine and Francis into an uncongenial union. Ironically, it is the same social framework that prevents the ill-matched couple from discovering a *modus vivendi*: having forced Francis into an 'unsuitable' marriage, society leaves him and his wife no opportunity to forget its unsuitability; nor does it provide them with a socially acceptable way of dissolving the bond. It lies with Francis and his second wife (significantly younger than him and therefore less tainted by Victorianism) to overcome the legacy of the Victorian age. What is significant, however, is that the novel never criticises patriarchal family structures as such, nor implies that wives might profitably be educated into a more democratic conception of marriage. Rather than criticising patriarchal family structures, the novel aims its criticism at the way in which the 'benevolent' patriarchy of pre-Victorian times (like their 'paternal' capitalism) has become tainted, in the course of the nineteenth century, with typically 'Victorian' attributes, such as hypocritical morality, a mistaken notion of duty, an obsession with 'respectability' and an exaggerated sense of class consciousness that obscures individual merit.

In keeping with its covert streak of conservativism,[418] the novel largely uncritically depicts a family that is oriented along strictly hierarchical lines: the oldest Oldroyd's word is considered law by his descendants. Failure to adhere to the decisions of the head of the family leads to ostracism, as becomes apparent when Jonathan Bamforth ventures to defy his brother Brigg after his father's death. *Inheritance* also emphasises the extent to which the patriarch retains control over the fates and fortunes of his descendants even posthumously: it is the unhappy wording of the younger William Oldroyd's will that causes the ever-widening rift between the Oldroyds (the legitimate descendants of William Oldroyd) and the Bamforth family (the offspring of his illegitimate elder son, Jonathan). As far as the former ar concerned, however, the novel makes it clear that the fault lies not with William for exercising his patriarchal prerogative, but with the

[418] Cf. ch. 2.1.1.5.

social conventions that thwart his generous impulse of leaving his two sons (and, incidentally, also his daughter Sophia) equal shares in the mill, by forcing him to distinguish between "Jonathan Bamforth" and "*my son*, Brigg Oldroyd" (Bentley, *Inheritance*, 302; my italics).

Inheritance is not the only text that links patriarchy to the issue of legitimacy and addresses the way in which the inheritance law of a strictly patriarchal society affects the lives of the inheritors. It is remarkable, however, in its relatively positive depiction of the Oldroyd patriarchs. The arbitrary cruelty of Squire James Ruan in F. Tennyson Jesse's *Secret Bread* (1917),[419] who exploits Victorian inheritance laws to deliberately sow discord among his offspring, provides a much more critical instance of the way in which a patriarchal society accorded men the right to shape the lives of their children according to their whims. Again, however, the emphasis is not on the action of an individual – indeed, the reader learns next to nothing about Ruan's personality or the motivations underlying his last decision – but on the social and legal framework that permitted such a move. Unlike Bentley's Oldroyds, however, Jesse's protagonist (Ruan's youngest son) undergoes a process of personal development that allows him to regard his wife as his equal, to accept more unconventional relationships as a viable alternative to marriage, and finally to accept his first wife's illegitimate son as his heir.

While Jesse merely charts the posthumous influence of Squire Ruan on his youngest son, other authors provide psychologically insightful depictions of Victorian family life, exploring and exposing the subtle and occasionally unconscious means by which Victorian fathers shape and control the lives of their children, and showing themselves deeply critical of established family structures. Writing on the eve of World War I, May Sinclair, Brontë expert,[420] "feminist philosopher and woman of letters (Gough, 14)[421] and between 1910 and 1920 considered by some critics Britain's most important living woman novelist,[422] in *The Three Sisters* (1914) had already drawn a deeply disturbing picture of a patriarchal tyrant intent on running (and ruining) his daughters' lives which may well have served as a prototypical example for later writers of Victorian-centred fiction. Several critics have pointed towards the Brontë sisters – about whom Sinclair had published a study, *The Three Brontës*, in 1912 – as historical models for the three Cartaret women;[423] it is important to stress, however, that the latter lack the emotional and intellectual outlet that the Brontës found in their writing, so that their lives, heavily circumscribed by social constraints and paternal tyranny, are characterised by enforced idleness and boredom.[424] Sinclair's family drama, played out in the lonely Yorkshire village of Garth, shows the effects of

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[419] The work is discussed at greater length in ch. 3.2. The 'secret bread' of the title refers to "the knowledge of death that rounds all" (Colenbrander, 101), and which finally allows the protagonist to overcome his 'Victorian' views on illegitimacy.

[420] Cf. Wilson, "Woman Reader", 369.

[421] Suzanne Raitt (*May*, 42) also observes that Sinclair, apart from her literary achievements, was probably England's only female philosopher of note at the time.

[422] Cf. e.g. Zegger, 9; Pease, 168; Llantada Díaz, 61. Famously, May Sinclair also coined the phrase "stream of consciousness" in her essay "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson" (cf. e.g. Forster, 100).

[423] Cf. e.g. Radford, "Introduction to *The Three Sisters*", v; Llantada Díaz, 70; Suzanne Raitt points out that although "the parallels with the Brontë family are slim [...], the title is an obvious reference to *The Three Brontës*" (140).

[424] For an in-depth discussion of the theme of boredom in May Sinclair's novels, cf. Pease, "May Sinclair, Feminism, and Boredom: 'A Dying to Live'".

Mr Cartaret's autocratic behaviour on his daughters, who react – according to their different temperaments – with outward shows of submission (Mary), open rebellion (Gwendolen), or a retreat into illness (Alice).

Sinclair shows herself keenly aware of the subtle power dynamics that exist within the Carteret family; particularly of the struggle of wills that goes on between the vicar and Gwendolen. What is of particular significance in this regard is the extent to which Mr Cartaret initially underestimates his second daughter, believing himself secure in his position of authority. In regard to family prayers, the reader is told that their successful performance depends largely on Gwendolen's tacit submission to her father's will. Mr Cartaret, however, is serenely unaware of his daughter's hidden strength, just as he is to some extent unaware of his own motivations:

> But of the clemency and generosity of Gwendolen's attitude Mr. Cartaret was not aware. He believed that the custom of prayers was maintained in his household by his inflexible authority and will. He gloried in them as an expression of his power. They were a form of coercion which it seemed he could apply quite successfully to his womenkind, those creatures of his flesh and blood, yet so alien and intractable. [...] to emerge from his study inevitably at ten o'clock, an hour when the souls of Mary and Gwendolen and Alice were most reluctant and most hostile to the thought of prayers, and by sheer worrying to round up the fugitives, whatever they happened to be doing and wherever they happened to be, this (though he said it was no pleasure to him) was more agreeable to Mr. Cartaret than he knew. (Sinclair, *Three Sisters*, 133)

In its exploration of Mr Cartaret's unconscious motivations in dealing with his daughters (most of which the narrator traces back to his sexual frustration after having been left by his third wife), its depiction of repressed sexuality as the cause of Alice's illness, and its frequent insistence that the characters are not fully aware of their own motives and emotions, *The Three Sisters* shows Sinclair's profound interest in Freudian psychology.[425] Using Rowcliffe, the new village doctor, as an outside observer of the Cartaret sisters, who are perpetually at the mercy of what Gwendolen euphemistically describes as her father's "funny" behaviour, Sinclair highlights the dangers inherent in his authoritarian attitude: "Rowcliffe had seen women made bitter, made morbid, driven into lunatic asylums by fathers who were as funny as Mr. Cartaret" (Sinclair, *Three Sisters*, 100).

When an opportunity of escape from home in the shape of the eligible bachelor Rowcliffe presents itself, all three sisters immediately lay plans to ensnare him, but only Gwendolen appears likely to succeed. She realises, however, that Alice's only chance of retaining her mental and physical health lies in marriage and escape from Mr Cartaret. Much more strongwilled and resourceful than her two sisters, she decides to take on a post as companion-secretary to a rich lady friend of her former stepmother so as to leave the road open for a romance to develop between Alice and Rowcliffe. However, her plan fails to work out: Alice unexpectedly falls in love with one of the local farmers, and Rowcliffe seeks solace for Gwendolen's desertion in marriage to her motherly elder sister, Mary.

After her sisters' marriages, Gwendolen remains the only family member willing to take care of her aging father, apparently reduced to meek helplessness after suffering an apoplectic stroke. Nonetheless, he remains the controlling factor of his unmarried daughter's life: her existence is circumscribed by his needs, rendering escape from home finally impossible. In addition, she has lost all chances of emotional fulfilment by giving up Rowcliffe. Like the eponymous heroine of

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[425] Cf. Pease, 169f.; Llantada Díaz, 61ff.; Forster, 100.

Sinclair's later novel *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922),[426] she is faced with the futility of her sacrifice and its disastrous consequences: marriage to Mary having put an end to his professional ambitions, he gradually settles into a life of material comfort and depressing routines, and Gwendolen has to watch helplessly as he slowly but surely forgets their mutual love, a source of delightful anguish to them both during the first years of his marriage. Despite Gwendolen's attempt to "set [her intellect] deliberately to fight her passion" (Sinclair, *Three Sisters*, 352) and find relief through a course of voracious reading, by the end of the novel "the sense of isolation, entrapment and monotony is overwhelming, and functions as a powerful indictment of the patriarchal social order" (Miller, 198).[427]

With similarly sinister overtones and an equally ironic touch, Sylvia Townsend Warner likewise demonstrates the near omnipotence of Victorian fathers, but also its final overthrow. Where Sinclair's emphasis lies on the psychological underpinnings of Mr Cartaret's behaviour, and Bentley's on the connection between capitalism and patriarchy, however, Townsend Warner adds a further dimension, exploring the extent to which Victorian society exerted pressure on the individual male to conform to the established patriarchal pattern. In *The Flint Anchor* (1954),[428] she introduces the reader to John Barnard, perhaps the most tragic of all domestic tyrants, who, thwarted in his quest for love and personal happiness, yet doggedly determined to do what he believes to be his duty, drives his wife to alcoholism and ruins the lives of his children. The most elaborate – and thus, it may be argued, potentially the most schema-constructing – image of the tyrannical father appears, however, in Dorothy Hewlett's darkly ironic portrayal of a Victorian family, which will be discussed at greater length below, and in which the author combines psychological analysis and social criticism.

3.1.2 Dorothy Hewlett: *Victorian House* (1939)

3.1.2.1 Summary

Dorothy Hewlett' s novel of Victorian family life opens with the image of the patriarch, a figure of almost god-like authority, who rules his household with an iron fist: "He came like all-conquering Jove, the head of the house, father of a family; usually in cloud and often with thunder" (11). This description of Mr Pratt in *Victorian House* (1939) is emblematic of all such domestic tyrants, as, indeed, Dorothy Hewlett intends him to be: the general wording of the title indicates the typicality of Amber House and the Pratts. Along similar lines, Mr Pratt is introduced not merely as father of *the Pratt* family, he is "father of *a* family" (my italics) in general. However, the ironic presentation of the initial scene serves to undercut his authoritarian attitude, as he is implicitly compared to his youngest daughter Helena Augusta, who drums on the table with a spoon during dinner: "'Keep that child quiet!' Mr. Pratt growled. A scared nursery maid snatched the spoon from a dimpled fist. Helena roared. Mr. Pratt roared" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 11). While the narrator and readers of the book are in the safety of the twentieth century allowed to share a joke about the head of the household, no such levity is tolerated from his

[426] For further discussion of this novel, cf. 3.2.2.
[427] Cf. also Wilson, "Woman Reader", 369.
[428] The novel is discussed at greater length in ch. 4.2.4.

children, as becomes evident from the harsh punishment meted out when one of them dares to laugh during dinner.

Like Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor*, the book charts the influence of a father's favouritism and irascible temper on the various members of his large family, especially his elder children George, Adelaide, Charlotte, and William, and his ward Phoebe Miller. His wife, a weak and simple woman, has long ago given up her attempts to oppose her husband's will; having abdicated all individual agency, she is presented in terms of a large, placid and fairly stupid animal. She enjoys the "physical side of motherhood" and always has "abundant milk" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 19), but loses interest in her children as soon as they are weaned, leaving their care in the capable hands of Nurse Emmet.

The novel makes it clear that patriarchal ideology is connected to the issue of class, and is essentially a middle- and upper-class phenomenon. It is Adelaide's meek submissiveness and unquestioning acceptance of social conventions which makes her Mr Pratt's favourite daughter, and which secures her social advancement; however, it is also this characteristic that destroys her hopes of personal happiness. Having internalised the current ideal of femininity, Adelaide presents a pattern of refined elegance and ladylike behaviour which attracts the admiration of her future husband, Lord Charles Berridge (nicknamed 'Carlo'). Adelaide is in love with Henry Thorpe, who, however, appears to have transferred his attentions to Phoebe; consequently, she accepts Carlo's proposal, knowing her father to be in favour of the match for mercenary motives, and herself also attracted by the idea of marrying into the aristocracy.

The marriage turns out to be a miserable failure, as Adelaide is shocked by her husband's brutish sexuality as much as by his lack of education and taste. After several years of married unhappiness (during which she bears Carlo a son, Charlie), Adelaide meets Henry Thorpe again, and eventually yields to his entreaties to leave her husband. Unable to divorce Carlo, she attempts to convince him to agree to a separation. However, Carlo is violently opposed to the idea, and puts pressure on her by keeping her from seeing her child. Realising that she cannot win because Victorian marriage laws were made by men for men, she finally decides to abandon her son in favour of her lover, and plans her escape from the town house in which her husband keeps her captive. In the end, however, nature conspires with Victorian social conventions to defeat her: a few hours before she is to meet Henry in order to accompany him to America, she discovers that she is pregnant by Carlo, whereupon she decides to remain with him.

Adelaide's younger and much less beautiful sister Charlotte is also described as having internalised patriarchal ideology. Trying to comfort herself for her joyless existence in Mr Pratt's house and her future as an old maid by reading the works of her favourite poet, she is forced to conclude that "Mr. Tupper was a man and had probably never been forced to endure monotony and boredom, dependence, and a lack of personal freedom. Escape from her present life by her own initiative would not have occurred to her. *She had her dreary duty*" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 432; my italics).

Phoebe, less inculcated with a patriarchal version of "duty", represents the unconventional side of Victorian womanhood. Brought up by her eccentric grandfather after the death of her parents, she has been given the same education as boys of her time, and has been encouraged to form and express her own opinion on all subjects. In order to accompany her grandfather on his geological

excursions, she has even been allowed to wear trousers. However, she has been taught none of the usual feminine accomplishments such as music, drawing and needlework, and is awkward and unpolished in her manners, having lived a sheltered, secluded life until her arrival at Amber House. In spite of Adelaide's attempts to inculcate in her a sense of due feminine modesty and ladylike behaviour, she remains apt to commit social blunders of varying magnitude, and chafes at the restrictions placed upon her. Having been brought up outside the constraints of Victorian society, her outsider's perspective makes her quick to realise that the Victorian ideal of femininity is an artificial construct imposed on women by men, who find submissive wives more convenient.[429]

Despite her lack of 'polish', her beauty and vivacity attract a number of admirers, among them Henry Thorpe and George Pratt. The latter is encouraged by his father, who believes Phoebe to be the heiress to her grandfather's fortune; for this reason, he is willing to overlook her unladylike behaviour and tolerate her repeated challenges to his authority. George, on the other hand, is genuinely attached to Phoebe, who accepts his proposal of marriage, but asks that the engagement be kept secret from his father for a few more days. However, matters come to a head after little Albert, the most sensitive and unhappy of the younger Pratt children, jumps to his death from an upstairs window while sleepwalking, having been frightened into a state of nervous prostration by his father's rough treatment. Phoebe blames herself for his death because she has briefly left Albert's room, believing him to be fast asleep, to spend a few minutes with her fiancé.

A second catastrophe occurs at roughly the same time, when Mr Pratt learns that Phoebe's father, Peter Miller, is alive and thus the heir to her grandfather's fortune. When Phoebe overhears Mr Pratt's outburst at the news, she resolves to leave home, convinced that George, whom she loves but knows to be lacking in strength of character, will break off the engagement under pressure from his father; she even begins to doubt his affection and to suspect that her inheritance was her main attraction for him. Arriving in London with the firm intention of earning her own living, she encounters enormous difficulties on a market overcrowded with 'superfluous' women. Believing that she has finally found a job as a governess, Phoebe is soon forced to realise that her 'employer' is a brothel keeper who abducts her and imprisons her in a run-down hovel, intending to make her a prostitute. After escaping with the help of a number of slum children, Phoebe, who has contracted cholera by drinking tainted water during her imprisonment, is taken in and nursed by the kindly washerwoman Martha Taylor, who has a predilection for outcasts, also harbouring a number of illegal immigrants in her house.

Phoebe recovers under Martha's care and due to the attentions of Dr Jim Harrington, who has lost his practice and place in respectable society because of his addiction to opium, a drug he initially started taking for his heart condition. However, she turns out to have lost significant parts of her memory to the extent that she cannot remember her name, calling herself by her childhood nickname 'Matty'. Perceiving that 'Matty's' beauty and childlike openness in her dealings with men attract unwelcome attention from the refugees, Martha – to whom Phoebe's forthright behaviour towards her male lodgers suggest that she is no longer a 'respectable' young woman – decides to offer her the best sort of 'protection' that she can by finding her a position as a rich man's mistress. Once again, this provides the opportunity for a condemnation of Victorian

[429] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 367.

society, whose restrictive legislation on divorce enforces immorality and hypocrisy: Phoebe's prospective lover/client is a likeable young man, who would never have contemplated taking a mistress if his wife had not developed an incurable mental illness in the first year of their marriage. Unable either to live with her or to divorce her, taking a mistress is his only chance of attaining some small degree of happiness. The plan is foiled, however, when Phoebe recovers her memory during a visit to Vauxhall Gardens.

After Martha has been arrested for selling stolen goods, Phoebe works briefly as a teacher at a ragged school and as a governess, but gets into trouble because of her independent but extremely successful teaching methods, which bring her into conflict with her narrow-minded superior. When she is pursued and sexually harassed by a male admirer, 'Gypsy' Ryman, she is unexpectedly rescued by William, Mr Pratt's second son, who has run away from home because he wants to become a doctor against his father's express wish. Having lost his money by apprenticing himself to a quack, William ends up working on the Crystal Palace as a painter, while Phoebe, who has made her home with him, teaches night classes. In the daytime, she dresses as a boy and roams the London slums in search of her father, who is eventually discovered close to death from alcoholism. Persuaded by Dr Jim to make a will in favour of Phoebe, he includes a clause that places her money under the guardianship of Mr Pratt for four more years because of her impetuous and unfeminine conduct. At the end of the book, an uneasy family reunion takes place, and Phoebe gives up her plans of emigrating to Australia with William in favour of marriage to George.

3.1.2.2 World and text schemata

As has been outlined at the beginning of this chapter, *Victorian House* aims at establishing itself as a description of typicality. As such, it can – depending on the reader's familiarity with the Victorian era – be either regarded as a schema-constructing or a schema-preserving (or even -reinforcing) text, and one that ultimately leads to the establishment of the stereotypical notion of the Victorian father as a patriarchal tyrant that emerges in post-World War II Victorian-centred fiction.

The extent to which the Pratt family are to be regarded as epitomic of the Victorian era is signalled by the "royal" names of the Pratt children: after the elder children George Augustus, Adelaide Amelia, Charlotte and William Henry comes Alexandrina Victoria, "born, to his wife's gratification, on the date of the accession of our Queen. Victoria Adelaide Mary had been born in the same month as the eldest Princess and Albert Edward, Alice Maud, Alfred Ernest, Helena Augusta and the baby, Louise Caroline, had all come loyally in yearly coincidence with royal births" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 17). In addition to their 'Victorian' names, the sheer number of the Pratt children also marks the family as typically Victorian, and radically different from contemporary twentieth-century trends in this regard, when the two-child family was rapidly beginning to establish itself as the norm.[430] A further element of schema confirmation is added through the Pratt family's loyalty to and fascination with their Queen.

It is also worth mentioning that Mr Pratt himself is deeply concerned with typicality and conformity, especially to the manners of those whom he calls "the people of *haut ton*" (D. Hewlett,

[430] Cf. e.g. Benson, 99, following Weeks, *Sex*, 202; Stevenson, 149ff.

Victorian House, 17). In his horror of anything that he perceives as *bourgeois* – symptomatic of his attempt to forget his middle-class origins – he falls into the very trap that he is trying to avoid: with the exaggerated zeal of the *nouveau riche* – ridiculed in *Our Mutual Friend* – Mr Pratt exceeds even Dickens's Veneerings in his acquisition of "bran-new" (*Our Mutual Friend*, 7) furniture and his desire to re-model Amber House in accordance with the taste of his times. The description is deeply ironical in several respects: when it is pointed out to him that the original decorations in the library (which he has had removed in order to make room for something more "modern") were by Robert Adam, he reveals his lack of taste as much as his lack of education (which sets him apart from the upper classes he is trying to emulate) by joking that "[t]hey certainly did date from before the Flood" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 27). The joke, of course, depends on the reader's familiarity with Georgian art and architecture, which, given the taste of the times, could safely be assumed.[431] His preoccupation with fashionable appearance over function (and, incidentally, once again his lack of education and interest in literature) is ironically foregrounded when it is revealed that his library – his *sanctum sanctorum* and the only room he had money enough to furnish fully in accordance with his wishes – lacks bookshelves, so that a small adjoining storeroom has to be dedicated to the function of 'book room' as an afterthought. Moreover, his expensive "modern" furniture – described in all its ostentatious and, to a twentieth-century observer, incongruous detail in the novel[432] – turns out to be extremely uncomfortable, so that he has to retain one of the original Georgian chairs for his own use, well hidden behind his desk.

Much of the irony of the description comes, of course, from the implicit contrast between Victorian and twentieth-century taste; as such, Mr Pratt's attempts at interior decoration can be regarded as schema-confirming in several respects, reinforcing the reader's schematic knowledge of the Victorians as extremely class-conscious, and almost obsessively concerned with propriety and appearances. Mr Pratt is also shown as typical of his age in his obsession with modernity and "be[ing] in the van" regarding interior decoration: "design, designer […] where rapidly becoming fashionable words" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 26), and "[m]ost people were glad to clear out that eighteenth-century stuff" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 29); in its insistence on the typicality of Mr Pratt's choices (praised as the epitome of "modern" taste by his designer friend Wyndham), the book also confirms the reader's schema of the Victorians as lacking in artistic and architectural taste.

Mr Pratt's notions of children's upbringing and education are as typically 'Victorian' as his taste in furnishings. From the beginning of the book onwards, his patriarchal tyranny is presented as the normal way of life in Victorian families; if his behaviour is in any way unusual, it is merely because it exceeds the norm in degree, but not in substance. If Mr Pratt is a domestic tyrant, however, the book also makes it clear that it is not solely his own fault, but that of a society which sanctions such behaviour, and which colludes in Mr Pratt's self-deception that he is doing the best for his children by his authoritarian attitude. He even goes so far as to justify his behaviour to himself as a contribution to the stability of that society, which he – like many Victorians – regards as grounded in patriarchal authority within the nuclear family. The blame for a state of events in which a man like Mr Pratt can exert his influence unchallenged is seen as resting not with the

[431] For the popularity of Georgian architecture and interior decoration during the interwar period, cf. Gardiner, 28.
[432] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 26ff.

individual but with Victorian society, which aids and abets Mr Pratt's sadistic streak while allowing him to conceal it even from himself.

While novels of the interwar period not infrequently poke fun at Victorian fathers' attempts to harden their children's constitution by rough treatment,[433] Hewlett sets a much more critical tone than most of her contemporaries: Mr Pratt's experiment in the efficacy of cold-water baths leads to the death of his delicate youngest son. True to the maxim 'spare the rod and spoil the child', Mr Pratt is moreover fond of administering corporeal punishment, believing himself to be acting in his children's best interests by doing so. Drawing on Freudian psychology, however, Hewlett also hints at a more sinister side to Victorian nursery discipline: "Stealthily, with cat-like tread, he moved over to the table, opened a drawer and took out a cane, the large cane for the older children. He ran his finger down as he had tested the carving-knife at table, savouring the split end of it. He bent it back, moistening his lips with his tongue. Mr. Pratt, excellent parent as he was, would have shuddered if he had been told that he enjoyed caning his sons" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 30). The Victorian age is not only presented as an age in which "[p]arental authority was yet in fashion" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 30), but also as one which has an almost infinite capacity for repressing feelings which are not considered socially acceptable. The passage simultaneously displays Mr Pratt's anticipatory pleasure at having to cane William, and his inability to admit this pleasure to himself. Much less 'Victorian' than his father and consistently described as a misfit at Amber House, William – who in the ensuing scene turns the tables on his father, wrenching the cane from his hand and in his turn administering a savage beating – does not share his father's inhibitions, openly laughing in triumph at the reversal of roles.[434]

William, however, is clearly marked as an exceptional and atypical character, as is Mr Pratt's ward Phoebe Miller, the only other household member who occasionally shows a spark of defiance. As the father of the family, Mr Pratt regards it as his sole privilege to determine their lives, both present and future: not only their upbringing and educational opportunities but also their professional careers and choice of marriage partners are governed by his will. Transgressions against the parental law – such as William's insistence on a medical career – are possible, but only at a price, as Phoebe and William find out when they opt for exile from home and a life of unaccustomed hardships in the London slums. The way in which fathers rule their children's – especially their female children's – lives is reinforced by the decision Phoebe's father takes on his deathbed. The episode also serves to reinforce the reader's schema of Victorian marriage as a hierarchical institution, in which the husband succeeds the father as figure of authority and the wife is relegated to a state of child-like dependency: the only means by which Phoebe can circumvent her father's decision is through marriage, when control over her money will automatically pass to her husband. This ties in with the other descriptions of Victorian marriages in the book: Mrs Pratt has long given up the attempt to stand up to her husband; Adelaide, trapped in an unhappy marriage with Carlo, likewise sees no other option but to resign herself to her fate.

The novel is schema-reinforcing in its depiction of the restrictions which impinge on women's personal freedom, highlighting the extent to which a patriarchal society colludes in the attempts of

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[433] Cf. Humble, 163.

[434] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 33.

individual men to keep their wives and daughters in submission: when Adelaide tries to leave her husband, it is within his legal rights to withhold her money from her, to bar her from seeing her child and to deny her plea for a separation. Victorian law is thus shown to sanction not only economic pressure but also emotional blackmail. Repeatedly emphasising the unfairness of Adelaide's situation, the novel gestures towards the amount of progress that has been made since the Victorian period: in 1924, the Guardianship of Infants Act allocated guardianship of children jointly to both parents. Moreover, it gave women the same rights as men to appoint guardians for their children after death, and in case of divorce to bring disputes about guardianship into court for settlement.[435]

Shy and bookish Charlotte, described as the least good-looking of the Pratt sisters, has no option but to accept her future as an old maid, this being the fate decreed for her by her father. Although she is in love with Lord Cardell, she has been brought up to accept the passive role that Victorian society demands of Victorian women in matters of courtship. When the novel does, against all expectations, hold out a happy ending for her, this comes as a surprise to the other characters as much as to the reader: it is obvious that her courtship and marriage are not to be regarded as typical of the age, but rather as an ironic comment on her relatives' disparaging attitude towards her. The episode can be read as a deliberate play upon the by then well-established text schema of the historical romance, which frequently features passages in which the heroine reflects on the similarities between her own adventures and the stock events of historical romance fiction.[436] Charlotte in her turn reflects on the dissimilarities – only to find that romance does, after all, play an important role in her life, albeit with a man who is far removed from the stereotypical hero of her favourite books.

Typically 'Victorian' attitudes to women's education are likewise commented on in connection with the Pratt girls: the only one of them who gets a real chance is Victoria, because her father has come to the conviction that this will increase her eligibility. It is made obvious that her father regards Victoria as a possession which, in due course, he wants to sell to another man; Victoria's wish to study with Mr Carhew is granted only because Mr Pratt is determined to "provide the material for an ideal wife" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 430), having become aware that there is a 'demand' for brains as well as beauty on the local marriage market. That a sound education along the same lines as that of a Victorian boy is not, *per se*, an asset to a woman is made clear by the example of Phoebe: she is unable to find work as a governess on a market overcrowded with superfluous women; moreover, her unusual, 'masculine' education and lack of 'accomplishments' make her unsuitable for the education of girls, whereas her gender prevents her from being employed to teach boys. By providing her with advantages that the society of her day does not recognise as such, Phoebe's grandfather has made it more difficult for her to find her place within that society. While depicted as 'typically Victorian', Phoebe's problems must have resonated with many young women readers during the thirties. Transposing the issue into the nineteenth century, Hewlett is able to verbalise the "still covert dissatisfactions of several generations of women whose new social, physical and educational freedoms were not matched by

[435] Cf. Dyhouse, 195; Stevenson, 169.
[436] Cf. Hughes, 41.

their employment prospects: women who were all hyped up with nowhere to go" (Humble, 5) in a society that still regarded the home as women's primary sphere.[437]

The least cowed and most enterprising of the Amber House women, Phoebe is continually thwarted in her attempts to break out of the conventional mould, not only by her guardian, but also by many other characters she comes into contact with, even those who believe themselves to be acting in her best interests: Martha (who advises her against social intercourse with her other lodgers, this being regarded as immodest behaviour in a young woman), Dr Jim (who talks to Phoebe's father about her behaviour, resulting in the alteration of Peter Miller's will), William (who objects to her cross-dressing, which gives her greater freedom to roam the London slums in search of her father), the matron of the ragged school (who dismisses her because of her unconventional, albeit very effective, teaching methods), Aunt Pursey (who persuades her to come to live with her instead of William after she has been 'found' by her guardian) and finally Mr Miller (who places her under Mr Pratt's guardianship for another four years, regarding her as incapable of looking after herself). Moreover, her attempts to shape her own destiny by disregarding social norms repeatedly bring her into grave danger, as she is first kidnapped, and later stalked by her sinister admirer, 'Gipsy' Ryman. Even her cross-dressing exploits end in near catastrophe as she narrowly escapes a beating from an irate neighbour, who believes her to be a slum urchin trespassing on his property. The ending of the book underlines the need for conformity for Victorian women, and thus further serves to reinforce the reader's schema: unlike William, who adheres to his decision to emigrate to Australia, Phoebe opts for marriage to George, very conventionally deciding in favour of love rather than freedom.

In terms of text schemata, the text can be read as a double Bildungsroman, with both Phoebe and William as its protagonists. In this respect, it can to some degree be regarded as schema-disrupting, both as it follows the development of *two* protagonists, and as it eschews the sense of closure typical of the genre, with the protagonist attaining his proper place in society, in favour of a relatively open ending. While the female half of the Bildungsroman exhibits an atypical, cyclical structure as Phoebe returns to her former place in the Pratt household, the novel leaves William, in the most literal sense of the word, hanging in the air: perched on one of the rafters of the Crystal Palace's roof, he muses about his future and the people he sees below him. In regard to Phoebe's story, the schema-disrupting structure is, however, in itself typical of the established text schema of women's historical romances from the 1920s onwards, which "foreground[s] the roles of women in society, seeing this as a problematic area, but offering resolutions which suggest inconsistent apprehensions of female needs: the heroine is allowed to question the conventions of society, but only within limits, and in the end is forced to conform – and to enjoy conforming" (Hughes, 42).[438]

3.1.2.3 Deixis

In order to present the effects of Mr Pratt's domestic tyranny on the Pratt children and Phoebe, the text consists of a dense network of deictic fields. Shifts from one focalising WHO to the next usually follow the same pattern: the focalising WHO is first introduced into the deictic centre as

[437] Cf. also e.g. Pease, 170.

[438] As will be outlined in chapter 4.1.1, this schema – and even more so the underlying socio-political questions and concerns which led to its formation – also had a significant impact on historical middlebrow fiction.

the focalised WHO. This is immediately followed by a number of subjective sentences reflecting the character's own attitude and voice, before a shift to another focaliser or a pop to the level of the narration occurs. Quite frequently, these pops take the form of verbal or non-verbal irony, as exemplified by the quote given at the beginning of the preceding chapter. The key focalisers are indicated by means of textual deixis in the form of the chapter headings, which, with few exceptions, consist of the name or names of the character(s) whose perceptual deixis governs the chapter. Occasionally, a pop to a higher-level deictic plane occurs as the narrator comments on the character's thoughts and actions, or on future events which, unknown to the characters, lie in store for them; these interludes are, however, always fairly brief, and are immediately followed by a push to the deixis of one of the characters.

Whereas the narrator enjoys the privilege of hindsight and has access to the characters' conscious thoughts, the unconscious motivations underlying their actions are presented in terms of conjecture rather than as statements of fact.[439] Unlike the voices of the Victorian characters represented in the novel, which are characterised by 'period' language and reflect the attitudes and prejudices current of their day and age (especially where women are concerned), that of the narrator is a twentieth-century voice, and the origo of the deictic centre of this level of the narration is clearly located in the twentieth century. This becomes apparent in passages such as the following, where a sudden switch from past to present tense signals the narrator's temporal location in the original readers' present:

> But Adelaide was no mere stitcher of canvas, or passer of vacant hours. If instead of a needle a brush had been her implement, she would have been considered an artist of quality. But her work, being only wrought with the needle, is unsigned and unrecognized except by a few feminine connoisseurs. Two of her pieces are in museums and some are treasured by her descendants; others, during the many long years when work in wool and canvas was out of fashion, have fallen a prey to moth and damp in cobwebbed attics. (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 40)

Throughout the novel, the reader is invited to reflect on the differences between the present and the past, especially where the fate of women is concerned. It is typical of Dorothy Hewlett's novels[440] that the 'silencing' of women under patriarchal authority is not merely presented and commented upon, but also re-enacted through the selection of focalising WHOs, and the 'disappearance' of female characters from the scene once they are happily married. While independent, strong-minded women like Phoebe act as the main focalisers for whole chapters, the voices of meek, subdued women like Mrs Pratt and her lady-like elder daughter Adelaide are rarely heard. Moreover, they are also quickly dropped as focalised WHOs. Mrs Pratt, in particular, disappears from the story for several hundred pages at a time; even when she is explicitly mentioned, she is often relegated to the status of an object, becoming a focalised WHAT rather than a WHO, before being allowed to fade out of the scene again. Like the characters in the story, the reader experiences that she is "fatally easy to forget" because she "seem[s] to melt into the background" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 120). The same applies to Adelaide after her marriage to Charles Berridge; it is only when their marriage runs into

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[439] Cf. e.g. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 218: "There was *perhaps* in this vanity a deeper psychological root" (my italics).

[440] Cf. also *Flowing Tide*, discussed in ch. 4.1.1.

difficulties and she contemplates an elopement with Henry Thorpe that she re-enters the deictic window of the narration.

A similar move occurs in relation to Phoebe at the end of the novel, as the deictic centre shifts to William and Phoebe is abandoned first as a focalising and then as a focalised WHO. The problematic of the text is thus also enacted through the aspect of relational deixis: at the moment when Phoebe's fortunes appear to have reached a happy ending, she disappears from view, giving way to William and his plans for the future. This adds a further level of complexity to the ideological message of the novel: as has been shown above, the story of Phoebe, initially an account of a strong and unconventional woman who makes her way despite the restrictions placed upon her by Victorian society, in the end invites the reader to abandon the critical position s/he has been led to assume through various comments on the part of the narrator and the focalisers, as Phoebe finds happiness in submission to the very norms and conventions the reader has been invited to criticise. The deictic aspect of the text, however, deconstructs this apparent ideological reversal, revealing a further layer beneath even the 'subconscious' of Hewlett's text: as the text once again re-enacts the silencing of women by shifting the deictic centre to William, the reader is given a critical view of the apparent 'happy ending' and invited to share William's attitude of disparaging scepticism.

As has been discussed in connection with text schemata, the text also features elements of compositional deixis which locate it within the tradition of the popular historical romance, while at the same time disclaiming this allegiance. In particular, this applies to the Charlotte episode, when she – before her marriage to Lord Cardell – muses on the difference between her own life and that of the heroines in her favourite romances, only to find that real-life events can be quite as implausibly romantic as their plots – a point that will be discussed at greater length in connection with the intertextual elements of Hewlett's novel.

3.1.2.4 Intertextuality

Intertextual allusions in *Victorian House* usually take the form of explicit mention of Victorian authors or book titles, as Hewlett uses these as a means of characterisation. Most importantly, this applies to Charlotte and Victoria, the two most studious and literate characters in the book. Charlotte, who because of her shyness and lack of physical attractions appears destined to be an old maid, attempts to console herself by reading the works of "her favourite, Martin Tupper" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 432), a minor Victorian poet whose highly conventional, moralistic blank verse is quoted in the novel and serves to emphasise Hewlett's description of Charlotte as lacking in self-confidence and initiative which perforce lead her to conform to the role mapped out for her by her father and society in general.

As mentioned above, another important intertext is provided by the romances that Charlotte reads in order to escape the tedium and disappointments of her solitary home life, strengthening the reader's impression of Charlotte as dreamy and romantic. It is perhaps not unduly far-fetched to speculate that Charlotte's unlikely romance with Lord Cardell, which parallels the unrealistic plots of the romances she herself delights in reading, has been deliberately included to provide a sly riposte to the age-old allegation – increasingly often voiced during the twenties and thirties by critics like Queenie Leavis or writers like Storm Jameson – that excessive and indiscriminate

reading of escapist fiction (especially on the part of middle-class women) gave rise to unrealistic expectations and led to maladjustment in actual life.[441] In addition, it also takes up another element of the 'historical romance' text schema, which delighted in intertextual allusions to other texts of this genre, or, on a more general level, on its generic conventions – usually in the form of a heroine speculating that her experiences are like those in a romance.[442]

Phoebe's choice of reading material – recommended by Dr Jim – is equally characteristic, as her down-to-earth realism and concern for the London poor draws her to Dickens's works. Charlotte's pretty and bookish sister Victoria, on the other hand, feels drawn to much more adventurous novels, admiring especially the works of Sir Walter Scott, scenes from which she re-enacts with her sister Mary. While Charlotte and Edward Cardell's love affair serves as a way of exemplifying in what way literature can influence life to the good (it is Browning's "Song" which finally gives them the courage to confess their love for each other), Victoria and Mary's enthusiasm for *Ivanhoe* has fatal consequences: when little Albert watches their re-enactment of the scene in which Rebecca defends her virginity at the window, threatening to jump out of it if molested, he afterwards jumps to his death from his bedroom window while sleepwalking.[443]

Hewlett's text is not, however, free from self-ironical reflection on her technique of characterisation through reading matter: in the case of Lord Cardell, Charlotte's shy and diffident suitor, she playfully subverts the established pattern by crediting Cardell with reading preferences which are wholly, as it were, 'out of character'. In contrast to Charlotte, Lord Cardell disparages "our good Laureate" and "watery L.E.L.". Somewhat incongruously, he confesses himself an admirer of Robert Browning, whom he regards as the most 'masculine' of Victorian poets and recommends to Charlotte as "tough, meaty, and full of intellect" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 442) – qualities which (with the exception of the last one) are conspicuously lacking from Cardell's own character.

To a more limited extent, intertextual allusions also facilitate the task of storyworld building for the author: a comparison between Ground's Academy (nicknamed 'Grind's' by the pupils) and Dr Blimber's school in *Dombey and Son* (1846–8) immediately gives the reader an idea what the former establishment was like. Rather than describing Ground's in detail, it only remains for Hewlett to point out the differences between the two schools.[444] Somewhat unusually at a point in time when Victorian literature was frequently disparaged as "pink pills for pale people, a tissue of hypocritical compromises and evasions; it was smugly materialistic, smugly optimistic, mawkish, sentimental, timid, prudish, untrue to life" (1930s literature critic Douglas Bush, qt. in Gardiner, 30), the novel thus affirms Dickens's position as a source of factual information on the Victorian age. More in keeping with the spirit of her times, however, Hewlett also uses intertextuality to provide ironic commentary on Victorian literary tropes. When Mary, the least popular of the children at Amber House, is hugged by her cousin Phoebe, the description echoes and ridicules Victorian tales of conversion:

> She [i.e. Mary] was swept up into the warm, comforting arms, weeping. Mary was never caressed, being cordially disliked by most of the household and only tolerated by Vicky because they were

[441] Cf. Humble, 22; Beauman, 175.
[442] Cf. Hughes, 41.
[443] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 147.
[444] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 268. Ground's, in contrast to Dr Blimber's, is cheap.

> thrown together as being two little girls of about the same age. Her heart softened and from that day she became a nicer child; whereas she had been spiteful at least once every other day, she was now only venomous on average once a week. (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 116)

3.1.2.5 Conclusion

As has been shown above, Dorothy Hewlett's novel aims at a sustained criticism of Victorian society, especially as regards its attitudes on issues of class and gender, concentrating particularly on patriarchal structures within the nuclear family, but also commenting on the position of women in the public sphere, Victorian hypocrisy regarding poverty as well as sexual mores, and Victorian taste. In order to present the consequences of Mr Pratt's authoritarian attitude on the lives of his wife and children, the novel employs a quick succession of changing viewpoints, so that the reader occupies the position of almost all the characters in turn; even Mr Pratt, ostensibly the 'villain' of the piece, is treated with a modicum of fairness in this respect. Regarding events from his point of view, the reader comes to realise that despite his many shortcomings and his utter lack of self-knowledge, he is a genuinely well-intentioned (if thoroughly misguided and hardly very likeable) man. While the reader is given a chance of seeing things through Mr Pratt's eyes, as it were, the novel is notable also for the way in which it re-enacts the silencing of women in Victorian society, consistently denying the most submissive characters (Mrs Pratt and her eldest daughter, Adelaide), a place in the deictic centre. While, on the one hand, this draws the reader's attention to the issue, it is also a highly problematic aspect of the text, which – by almost entirely excluding these characters' point of view – colludes in the very project it appears to criticise.

Hewlett uses Adelaide's, Charlotte's and Phoebe's stories to condemn the restrictions of women's lives during the Victorian era, especially the enforced ignorance on sexual matters which, at best, impairs women's chances of married happiness, and at worst makes them easy prey for sexually predatory and promiscuous men like Adelaide's husband, Carlo. The theme in itself was common in novels from the 1890s onwards, along with demands for female sex education; an early example is George Egerton's "Virgin Soil" (1894, in *Discords*), which like *Victorian House* shows an innocent girl as a victim of exploitative marriage.[445] While the New Woman writers of the *fin de siècle* presented the issue in terms of a call to action, Hewlett's position is potentially more ambiguous. On the one hand, it lays itself open to interpretation either along the same lines as that of earlier writers: as Szreter and Fisher point out, "British society and popular culture during the first half of the century was constructed so as to exclude as far as possible all explicit references to sexual intercourse from both public and even private discourse within the family" (63), and many female respondents to contemporary surveys emphasise their ignorance on the topic prior to marriage.[446] On the other hand, the novel's indictment of Victorian parents might also be regarded as a yardstick against which to measure contemporary progress, as the 1930s were constructing a self-image of sexual open-mindedness in contrast to Victorian prudery and repression.[447]

The book also conforms to contemporary criticism of the Victorians in its assessment of the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity, aiming to expose the myth of women's greater 'purity' and

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[445] Cf. Dyhouse, 159.

[446] Cf. Szreter and Fisher, 65ff.; on the refusal of parents to provide information on the subject, cf. ibid.74ff.

[447] Cf. Gardiner, 27.

moral superiority as unnatural and unfounded in fact, and as a (self-)delusion women were forced to collude in so as to conform to the expectations of Victorian men.[448] Apart from Phoebe, the most unconventional character in the story is Mr Pratt's Aunt Pursey, a relic from Regency days whose frank comments shock the younger members of her family. When she hears that Adelaide's marriage is not a success, she immediately counsels her to take a lover, stressing that "men and women are men and women still" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 358) and that sexual fulfilment is a basic human need. The events of the story leave the reader little choice but to agree with Aunt Pursey's assessment, as Adelaide's 'lady-like' frigidity, which has led her to reject sex with her husband as "animal" and "revolting" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 389), is revealed as a façade which crumbles when she discovers her sexual attraction to Henry Thorpe. Aunt Pursey's comments also provide a contrast to and commentary on Victorian hypocrisy, especially in relation to the double standard that allowed men much greater sexual freedom than women: "'[…] It seems that you may do anything so long as nobody knows. […] That's the cardinal sin of today – being found out'" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 109).

In connection with the covert dissatisfactions of marital sexuality, Hewlett also touches upon the related issue of unwanted pregnancy. Both of these concerns must have struck female readers of the thirties as highly topical, and served to create a bond between Adelaide and themselves. In *Love's A Man of War* (1953),[449] a nineteen-thirties young woman argues that "there's no excuse for 'disastrous mistakes' [i.e. unwanted children] today. Enlightened people have children because they want them" (198). While it is certainly true that by that time, reliable contraceptive devices were widely available and birth control clinics were offering advice on family planning, it is almost impossible to assess with any degree of certainty how many middle-class couples made use of these opportunities.[450] As Kate Fisher's interviews with nineteen-thirties couples show, contraceptive devices were often associated with illicit sexuality and prostitution (a link strengthened by the distribution of condoms to soldiers during World War I to prevent an epidemic of venereal disease through intercourse with prostitutes). For that reason, many couples were reluctant to introduce them into their marital sex life, preferring to rely on more traditional and less reliable methods, or on total abstention.[451] The extent to which the fear of unwanted pregnancy featured in interwar women's lives, and severely curtailed their enjoyment of sexual relations even within marriage, was noted by contemporary observers and has become an object of scholarly attention during the 1990s.[452]

In the event of an unwanted pregnancy, Hewlett's contemporary readers would have found themselves in roughly the same position as Adelaide in the novel: legalised abortion was still a thing of the future (introduced by the 1967 Abortion Act). Women who found themselves with unwanted pregnancies could either resort to a wide range of folklore methods for inducing abortions (ranging from violent exertion, very hot baths, gin, turpentine, pennyroyal, veterinary medicines or a controlled fall down a flight of stairs) – all of which were dangerous and hardly very efficacious.

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[448] Cf. Gardiner, 26f.

[449] Cf. ch. 2.3.4.

[450] Cf. Beaumann, 135.

[451] A number of sociologists and historians have speculated on the effects these had on marital relations and marital happiness at the time; cf. e.g. Fisher, 134f. and 170ff.; Szreter and Fisher, 259ff.

[452] Cf. Beddoe, 105; Dyhouse, 153; Fisher, 210; Szreter and Fisher, 259ff.

'Backstreet abortions', available in the twentieth as well as in the nineteenth century, were expensive and, likewise, extremely risky.[453] In addition, the legal situation in the interwar years was still roughly similar to that of the Victorian era: the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (§58) had made abortion punishable by penal servitude for life.[454] This was largely confirmed by the 1929 Infant Life (Preservation) Act: "any person who, with intent to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive, by any wilful act causes a child to die before it has an existence independent of its mother, shall be guilty of felony, to wit, of child destruction, and shall be liable on conviction thereof on indictment to penal servitude for life" (§1).[455]

Like her depiction of Victorian sexuality, Hewlett's portrayal of Victorian marriage and divorce laws can likewise be read as an acknowledgement of contemporary progress as well as a demand for further legal measures. This aspect must be seen in relation to radical changes in divorce legislation that preceded the publication of Hewlett's novel: after 1923 a Private Members' Bill (passed as the Matrimonial Causes Act) had made it easier for women to sue for divorce, which was now possible on grounds of adultery only, without the need to additionally prove cruelty or neglect on the husband's part.[456] By 1934, even women found guilty of adultery were given access to their children as of right. The year 1937 finally witnessed the introduction of a new law which permitted divorce for a wider range of reasons, such as drunkenness, insanity (as in the case of Phoebe's prospective lover) and desertion.[457] However, Hewlett's depiction of Carlo's and Adelaide's marriage, which fails because of the mutual incompatibility of the marriage partners rather than through one individual's culpable behaviour, must also be regarded as a call for further action on the part of legislators. Depicted as hopeless in Victorian times, her situation would have been little better in 1939: when *Victorian House* was published, the most crucial change in divorce legislation in Great Britain still lay some thirty years in the future. It was only in 1969 that the Divorce Reform Act allowed each marriage partner to file for a divorce after a separation of a given number of years even without the consent of the other partner, and which enabled couples to divorce if a marriage had irredeemably broken down without either of them having to prove fault. By juxtaposing the fate of Adelaide as Carlo's wife and Phoebe's danger of being sold as a prostitute, Hewlett establishes a parallel between the two fates, implying that both represent different but complementary aspects of female slavery. Again, Hewlett picks up an idea that goes back to New Woman writers; whereas however Olive Schreiner, for instance, had highlighted the similarity of married women and

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[453] Cf. e.g. Hammill et al., s.v. "Abortion"; Beddoe, 109; also Ingman, 17.

[454] Cf. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/section/58#commentary-c563688 (accessed on 4 June 2012).

[455] Cf. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1929/34/pdfs/ukpga_19290034_en.pdf (accessed on 4 June 2012). A child was regarded as "capable of being born alive" after the 28th week of pregnancy. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, however, every child below the crucial term of 28 weeks would likewise have been regarded as being capable of being born alive, illegalising abortion in the absence of medical evidence. The act did, however, allow for abortion prior to the 28th week of pregnancy in case of medical necessity, such as imminent danger to the mother's life. The words "penal servitude for life" were later changed to "imprisonment for life", also Beddoe; 109.

[456] Cf. http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/changesindivorce/ (accessed on 20 November 2011).

[457] Cf. http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/19/divorce-law-history (accessed on 20 November 2011).

prostitutes in terms of their status as social and economic parasites, Hewlett focuses on the lack of personal freedom that both of these roles leave to the women concerned.[458]

A further aspect of Victorian society that comes in for double-edged critical comment is the question of women's education and employment. Phoebe's 'progressive' education proves useless when she attempts to find a job to support herself. Mr Pratt's second daughter Charlotte is discouraged from reading because, her father believes, bookish women do not attract men; however, she makes the most brilliant (in social and financial terms) match of all the sisters when she marries Lord Cardell, as quiet, physically unprepossessing and socially awkward as herself. When Mr Pratt later in the novel overhears a conversation between his young neighbours, some of whom argue that an educated woman is a more interesting companion and thus more attractive as a wife, he decides to let his younger daughter Victoria indulge her love of learning, realising that this might after all be an asset on the marriage market. Despite the fact that this is, in the end, in Victoria's interest, the passage makes it clear that both the young men and Mr Pratt debate the issue of women's education only in relation to the benefits that they stand to derive from it for themselves; Mr Pratt clearly regards his daughter as a product which must be shaped according to the demands of the prospective buyers. The situation appears to have been remarkably similar for British women at that time, and even during the early post-war period. In the introduction to her monograph on *The Woman's Novel 1914–1939*, Nicola Humble (born in 1944) comments on "the paradox that our parents rarely envisaged more for us than a home-based existence (even if we were thought liable to 'get in' to university, that was three years of respectable pleasure rather than a stepping-stone to a career)" (2).[459]

As outlined above, the text also thematises the 'silencing' of women through patriarchal tyranny, and the lack of appreciation for the work of female artists like Adelaide, whose beautiful needlework goes unvalued because it is merely considered one of her feminine accomplishments. Those of her works of art that are handed down to her children, however, fare little better, being denied their rightful place in museums along with the works of male artists. Again, what appears to be pointed criticism levelled at the Victorian era turns out to have a wider application, targeting the continuing existence of 'Victorian' practices and prejudices in the twentieth century.

As indicated above, the novel makes it clear that Victorian hypocrisy extends not only to attitudes towards women's artistic production, sexuality, and gender roles, but also towards the lower classes (especially servants) and the poor. The narrator comments extensively on Adelaide's and other upper-class women's lack of consideration for their servants.[460] Even Adelaide's eight-year-old sister Mary knows how to exploit her position as one of the daughters of the house in order to blackmail the twelve-year-old maid (who, we are told, has had to work for her living since she was Mary's age) into giving her a biscuit. The power which employers held over their servants is exemplified by the fate of Abby, the washerwoman who is dismissed because Mr Pratt suspects her of being involved in Phoebe's disappearance, and whom Phoebe and William eventually discover living in London in abject poverty, sewing shirts under intolerable conditions for a meagre wage. *Victorian House* is only

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[458] For Olive Schreiner and other New Women writers on the similarity between marriage and prostitution, cf. Dyhouse, 155.

[459] Cf. also Ingman, 6f. For a contemporary feminist view on the subject, cf. Judith Hubback's *Wives Who Went To College* (1957).

[460] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 46.

one among many of the novels which bear witness to the "intense preoccupation with servants and their treatment in the culture and literature of the years following the First World War" (Humble, 114). Having experienced the relative freedom and firmly regulated working hours in the ammunitions factories during World War I, many working-class women were reluctant to return to domestic service in the interwar years. Finding (and keeping) good servants became one of the more pressing practical concerns of middleclass housewives. It does not come as a surprise when the blame for this development is allocated squarely to preceding generations of employers, whose exploitative and inhuman treatment of their domestic staff was seen as the main reason for the radical loss of popularity of domestic service as a career option for lower-class women.[461]

Another facet of the gulf between upper- and lower-class women emerges when Phoebe finds that Dr Jim's attitude towards her changes as soon as he discovers that she comes from an upper-class family: young ladies must be protected from life and treated like bits of china, since they were believed to be unable to bear the things to which lower-class women are exposed.[462] As outlined above, Hewlett stresses the unfairness of this attitude not only to lower-class women, as upper-class girls' sheltered upbringing is insufficient preparation for the realities of life. When Phoebe discards the confines of respectable society, however, she finds that she also loses the protection that these would have afforded her, and exposes herself to the unwelcome advances of 'Gipsy' Ryman. On the one hand, the book appears to present a strong case for female emancipation; on the other, it contains a number of contradictions which reveal its ideologically conservative subtext. While Phoebe's attempt to break out of the mould of Victorian femininity is viewed with sympathy and attracts favourable comments from the twentieth-century narrator, it is also worth noting that it is not dissatisfaction with her role as an upper-class woman that triggers her flight from Amber House: having lost her fortune and thus her privileged position in Mr Pratt's household, she struggles through a series of adventures to regain her former life. Her waiving of her guardian's authority and rejection of the role assigned to her on the basis of her class and gender in the end leads to the discovery of her father and the securing of her inheritance, and thus ultimately enables her to re-assume the role she had initially discarded. Moreover, Phoebe's revolt against patriarchal authority repeatedly leads her into dangerous and difficult situations from which she has to be rescued by men;[463] in this sense, the perspective of the plot contradicts that of the narration, and the critical perspective mapped out for the twentieth-century reader. In the end, Phoebe's unconventional exploits secure her not personal freedom, but merely a conventional happy ending and re-integration into her social position.

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[461] Cf. Beddoe, 51ff.; on the Victorians' perceived contribution, cf. Humble, 114; on the 'servant problem' in women's literature, cf. also Beauman, 107. Phyllis Bentley makes the same point in *Sleep in Peace*, where an unfeeling attitude towards the servant class is presented as a sign of the lingering traces of Victorianism in the protagonist's home town. Of her neighbours, she observes: "Of servants they spoke with a callous inhumanity which made Laura writhe. Not that they were unkind to their servants; on the contrary. But they regarded them as sub-human, of different clay from themselves. That servants should love, should desire pretty clothes and enjoyment, should resent an insult, seemed to them not so much wrong as absurd" (393).

[462] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 211.

[463] Helen Hughes (105ff.; esp. 113) notes that this is typical of historical romance fiction, as women are portrayed as too weak to combat social forces without male assistance.

The contradictory presentation of cross-dressing as a means of discarding and re-assuming class and gender roles must be seen in the context of the novel's publication on the eve of World War II. Novels featuring cross-dressed heroines were popular during the war, and implicitly comment on contemporary discussions about femininity and the suitability of women undertaking war work. As Kathleen Bell (152ff.) shows in her analysis of Georgette Heyer's regency romances, female protagonists who despite their successful cross-dressing show themselves ineffective in their male roles and remain largely dependent on men served to allay male fears at a time when women were seen to be encroaching on traditionally male domains. Phoebe's decision to pose as a boy – and role in which she remains inferior to the adult men around her – is also in keeping with this programme. Like her reliance on male support in case of danger, her unconventional, asexual relationship with her male protectors William and Dr Jim and her eccentric upbringing by a male relative are also typical of the cross-dressed heroine of World War II novels.[464] Her transcension of class barriers and the easy camaraderie between upper-class characters like William and Phoebe and their new-found lower-class friends are likewise in accordance with the prevailing climate of opinion at the time of the novel's publication, when patriotic propaganda stressed the need for cross-class cooperation in wartime.[465] In this context, Phoebe's temporary waiving of class and gender boundaries that ultimately allows her to reassume rather than transcend her old role carries a highly attractive message for readers during World War II, implying that a willingness to abjure middle-class comforts and cast away convention in times of crisis will eventually lead to the reestablishment of the pre-war status quo.[466]

Simultaneously, however, this message undermines the feminist slant of many passages dealing with female experience in the Victorian age. Unusually in the context of Victorian-centred fiction, Hewlett shows herself to some extent aware of this inherent contradiction, and counterbalances it by a final twist, as the reader is invited to share the point of view of William, the most self-confident and least conformist of the Pratt children, who fails to understand Phoebe's decision in favour of convention rather than freedom. What might have been an opportunity to reinforce the overt message of feminist social criticism, however, turns into a surprising endorsement of the conservative undercurrent of the novel, as the book unexpectedly ends with an outburst of patriotic feeling and a panegyric on the Victorians as "a vigorous people, proud in their wealth and the heritage of England" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 534), triumphantly singing the Hallelujah Chorus at the opening of the Great Exhibition – an evocation of England's (former) greatness that once again is best understood in relation to the date of the novel's publication on the eve of World War II.

3.1.3 From type to stereotype

In interwar Victorian-centred fiction, the image of the patriarchal tyrant coexists with other versions of Victorian fatherhood, in particular with that of the 'absentee' father, who – though possessed of all the power accorded to him by a patriarchal society – wields it only sporadically and from a distance: "This [Sunday between Sunday school and afternoon tea] was the only time

[464] For this aspect of World War II romance fiction, cf. K. Bell, 157f.; for a similar plot element, cf. Alice Harwood's *The Strangeling*, in which Michal Charteris is brought up by her unconventional grandfather.

[465] For cross-class cooperation in wartime, cf. K. Bell, 157.

[466] For a similar point about World War II costume fiction, cf. K. Bell, 158.

one saw much of Father, in point of fact; at all other times he was either out at the mill or at a committee meeting, or, if at home, was busy at his desk writing letters or buried behind his newspaper. He did not interfere in family life unless the noise became too great, when he sometimes rushed wrathfully into the study, and smacked anybody whom he happened to get hold of" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 54). While establishing a contrast to fathers like Mr Cartaret or Mr Pratt, whose oppressive presence overshadows almost every moment of family life, there is little in these descriptions to disrupt the established schema of authoritarian fatherhood: even though the 'absentee' fathers may choose not to wield their authority on every occasion, that authority *per se* is never called into question, and they may appear at any moment to exert it.

In contrast to most other texts discussed in this chapter, Rose Macaulay's *Told by an Idiot* (1923) contains a rare example of a deliberately schema-disrupting account of Victorian family life, providing a wealth of clues as to the schemata it sets out to parody and disrupt.[467] In its portrayal of Aubrey Garden (modelled on Thomas Arnold[468]), the mildest and most tolerant of Victorian fathers, and his wife, it is a determined attempt to undermine the existing stereotype:

> Modern writers say that Victorian parents did believe in parental tyranny. There is seldom any need to believe modern, or any other, writers. What they seem sometimes to forget is that Victorian parents were like any other parents in being individuals first, and that the sovereign who happened to reign over them did not reduce all Victorians to a norm, some good, some bad, as the Poet Laureate of the day had put it, but all stamped with the image of the Queen. (211–12)

The novel satirises the great religious debates of the last decades of the nineteenth century as Aubrey constantly changes his religious beliefs, and the circumstances of his family's life. Although deeply (if temporarily) convinced of the rightness of each of his chosen creeds, Aubrey is adamant in not attempting to persuade his six children to follow his lead, insisting that they choose their own way and determinedly waiving his right to exert parental authority on this (or any other) matter. The Garden family, however, remains something of an exception in Victorian-centred literature. Not surprisingly, later depictions of Victorian family life and the role of Victorian women follow the pattern outlined by Hewlett and the vast majority of Victorian-centred texts; however, as interest in psychological motivations of the 'father' characters declines, the stereotype of the domestic tyrant becomes one of the stock characters of Victorian-centred fiction, and the tyranny of Victorian fathers is assumed as a matter of course.[469]

Kathleen Kellow's *Lilith* presents a paradigmatic example of the way in which post-war novels recycle the stereotype of the tyrannical father, while at the same time subverting its potential for social criticism. Like *Inheritance*, *Lilith* emphasises the parallel between upper-class women such as Amanda and the lower-class characters, as both groups are kept in submission by upper-class men. The novel focuses on the unusual friendship between Amanda Leigh and the kitchen maid Lilith Tremorney, the illegitimate granddaughter of Amanda's grandfather. Leigh House is dominated by Amanda's narrow-minded and deeply religious father, who is "so good

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[467] Cf. also ch. 3.2.4.

[468] Cf. Guerinot, 126.

[469] Incidentally, the extent to which this schema persists to the present day is observable in the index to Kate Fisher's *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918–1960* (2006), in which the entry for 'authoritarian husbands' redirects the reader to 'Victorian husbands'.

that almost everyone seems to him very bad" (Kellow, 31), and who conveys his conviction of his own infallibility with icy civility to all members of his household, providing an opportunity for elaborate displays of stilted 'period' language and manners. Amanda's mother Laura to some extent resembles Adelaide in *Victorian House*: like the latter, she is a gentle, submissive creature trapped in a loveless marriage who has internalised the Victorian code of propriety and femininity; unlike Adelaide, however, she is portrayed in deeply ironic tones and presented as a thoroughly unsympathetic woman, as the more ridiculous aspects of her idea of 'ladylike' behaviour are foregrounded:

> But for that [i.e. her inability to bear Mr. Leigh a son] she would have been rather proud of her delicate state of health. It was, after all, rather lady-like to be delicate; she followed the fashion of her day, eating very little at mealtimes, and often having trays sent up to her room, for eating was a most disgusting habit and should, she believed, be performed only when necessary and then in private. Her daughter was a problem. The child had an excellent appetite; […] (Kellow, 18)

Eating, however, is not the only physical pleasure that Laura considers unladylike; her attitude towards sex appears to be similar, and she only accepts her husband's advances because she knows that after two miscarriages and Amanda, she has to fulfil her duty of producing an heir for Mr Leigh. After a further miscarriage, Laura begins to contemplate the idea of running away from her husband, but, again like Adelaide, is all too conscious of the restrictions placed upon women by Victorian society: "But how could she leave Paul? She would be penniless. The little fortune which had been hers when she married was his now. Life was so unfair to women. Why should marriage put a halter round a woman's neck? Why should she not, if she found it intolerable, be able to go away from it?" (Kellow, 78).

While in *Victorian House*, however, the reader is positioned so as to critically engage with the unfairness of Victorian marriage laws, Kellow's attempt at social criticism remains half-hearted: on the one hand, Laura's despair is understandable, especially if her aversion to sex (her main reason for wanting to leave her husband) is considered against the background of her repeated miscarriages. On the other hand, however, it is presented as the irrational outburst of a hysterical and largely unsympathetic character, to whose point of view the reader is given little motivation to subscribe. Divorce, in *Lilith*, is not presented as a bid for personal freedom and emotional fulfilment, but merely as an escape from a specific problem that is connected to the limitations of the Victorians' medical knowledge rather than their attitudes towards gender roles in marriage. Describing Mrs. Leigh's predicament – and thus her wish for a divorce – as a peculiarly Victorian one unlikely to affect contemporary readers, the novel endorses conservative views on marriage prevalent in the post-war era, when a drastic increase in divorce rates had in some circles given rise to vociferous demands for measures to counteract this trend.[470]

Mr Leigh's religious zeal and his wife's no less zealous observance of the rules of propriety and ladylike conduct combine to make Amanda's life miserable and imbue her with a permanent sense of her own inadequacy as she fails to live up to their standards. Not surprisingly, Lilith's envy for Amanda is transformed into pity when she realises that life at Leigh House is like a prison, with her parents and her governess acting as "her jailers" (Kellow, 32). Moreover, Lilith soon begins to feel

[470] For the perceived need to 'rescue' marriage after World War II, cf. Humble, 243.

superior over the upper-class girl, because Amanda's sheltered life and 'respectable' education have left her ignorant of so many of the basic facts of human existence; unlike Lilith, she knows nothing "about birth and death and love" (Kellow, 34). Lilith's education by her grandmother Lil strengthens her sense of independence and lack of regard for conventions and conventional morality: "'Oh, they say the wages of sin be death; but 'tain't so. My wages of what they do call sin was a full belly'" (Kellow, 39), Lil tells her, encouraging her to follow in her footsteps and take as many upper-class lovers as she can. However, Lilith is far more ambitious than her grandmother and dreams of social advancement rather than mere comfort, and insists that their shared grandfather makes Amanda and her social equals.

After Amanda has run away from home to escape the tyranny of her father, who wants to force her into an uncongenial marriage with her cousin, she and Lilith encounter their childhood friend Frith, now a fashionable dandy and man-about-town. Frith epitomises Victorian double morality and patriarchal oppression: while in love with lower-class Lilith, he nonetheless proposes marriage to upper-class Amanda. At the same time, he declares his intention of keeping Lilith as his mistress. He genuinely believes that he is doing what is best for all of them, rescuing both women from poverty and offering Amanda his protection, as her sheltered upbringing (in his opinion) makes her unable to cope with the realities of life. He is astonished that the women reject his plan. Throughout the novel, gentle, naïve and submissive Amanda and bold, unconventional and energetic Lilith are presented as opposites, and it is usually Lilith who helps Amanda out of her difficulties. However, it is Amanda who finally achieves a measure of happiness in her marriage to the man she loves, while Lilith has to realise that her attempts to go against convention have resulted in nothing but a Pyrrhic victory, leaving her lonely and isolated.[471]

Lilith thematises many of the issues that Hewlett takes up in *Victorian House*, such as the restrictions of women's lives, the drawbacks of keeping women in ignorance about sex, women's 'invisibility', especially after marriage (Mrs Pratt and Mrs Leigh, whose only role is child-bearing), the lack of opportunities for middle-class women outside marriage, female 'slavery' (as prostitutes, mistresses and wives) and the marriage market; class differences; Victorian hypocrisy (both sexual and social); Victorian religion, which in both novels is presented as (arguably) admirable but not likable; and poverty, vice and prostitution. To an even greater extent than *Victorian House*, however, *Lilith* displays an ideological counter-current to its ostensibly critical attitude, highlighting that it is conformity rather than rebellion that secures happiness. Moreover, Kellow is at some pains to emphasise that the significance of this message transcends the Victorian setting of the novel, and is applicable to the present as much as to the past. Throughout the novel, she invites the reader to identify with Amanda (a misfit in her disagreeably Victorian family and the only thoroughly sympathetic character in the book, whose deixis dominates the narrative) rather than with the eponymous co-protagonist, and to establish parallels between the Victorian past and the present of her audience. In particular, this becomes apparent when Amanda's elders, at the beginning of the novel, deplore her inability to learn history because she continually mixes it with contemporary life. Since at that point it has already been firmly established that the reader is meant to side with Amanda, the implication of this passage – which has no further bearing on the plot – is clear,

[471] Cf. ch. 2.1.4.

highlighting the fact that this blending of past and present is to be regarded as highly desirable, and that no clear distinctions are to be drawn in terms of ideological value scales.

A similar conflict between divergent attitudes becomes apparent in Shirley Darbyshire's *Journey to Melbury* (1953), which likewise portrays the fate of Victorian women under the rule of a stereotypical patriarch, Thomas Arbuthnot. The focus, in Darbyshire's novel, however lies on his wife Janet. Many of the concerns touched upon by Darbyshire coincide with those of Hewlett's and Kellow's novels, and there are strong parallels between the fate of Mrs Leigh in *Lilith* and Janet in *Journey to Melbury*. Both women are married to Victorian patriarchs obsessed with the desire to produce an heir, are worn out by successive births or miscarriages, and finally die in childbirth. While the descriptions of both of the older Leighs in *Lilith* adheres to stereotypical images to an extent that borders on caricature, and offers the reader little incentive to sympathise with their concerns, Darbyshire's depiction of Janet is calculated to awaken the reader's sympathy. As in Norman Tucker's *Jealous Goddess* (discussed below), there is a strong sense that the author uses the Victorians to comment on contemporary issues, especially in its repeated endorsement of contraception and family planning. While strongly disparaging Thomas Arbuthnot's selfish obsession with producing a son and heir as well as his unbending adherence to Victorian tradition in all other respects, the novel is nonetheless deeply conservative in its evaluation of marriage and female domesticity.

Patriarchal tyrants also feature in several other novels, such as Margaret Archer's *Gull Yard* (1947), Shelley Smith's *Afternoon to Kill* (1953), Janet Whitney's *Quaker Bride* (1954), and Nina Warner Hooke's *Darkness I Leave You* (1956), in which Beth Deverill's father (egged on by her evil Gipsy stepmother) imprisons her in his house in order to prevent her from marrying her childhood sweetheart Hilary and inheriting her aunt's fortune.[472] All of these texts draw on readers' schematic knowledge of the typical Victorian husband and father in order to authenticate otherwise somewhat unlikely plots; it is presented as a well-known 'fact' that Victorian men were despotic tyrants and made their families' lives miserable.[473] Like many of his contemporaries, Norman Tucker takes up the theme of parental tyranny *Jealous Goddess* (1954). The novel pits the protagonist, David Dalby, and the younger generation of the Bellingham family (George, Henry, Edward, William and Adelaide) against their respective tyrannical fathers. Richard Bellingham "reigned in his rustic kingdom with that mild autocracy which comes to those whose wishes are never disputed. His wife and his domesticated daughter Caroline were schooled to obedience" (N. Tucker, 13), and even though his less "domesticated" younger daughter, Adelaide, may grumble, she too has to abide by the "parental law" (N. Tucker, 15) laid down by her father. Despite the fact that it is highly conventional in its depiction of Victorian family life, in other

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[472] For discussions of *Gull Yard*, and of *Quaker Bride* and *Afternoon to Kill*, cf. ch. 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 respectively.

[473] Incidentally, moreover, *Afternoon to Kill* and *Darkness I Leave You* also introduce the figure of the evil step-mother who seduces the patriarch, and thus usurps his position of power, ruling unchallenged because there is no rival figure of authority within the family circle once the head of the household has been conquered. In both texts, this usurpation of patriarchal authority – even more detrimental to the health and happiness of all family members than unchecked patriarchal rule – is explained through recourse to another well-established 'fact' about the era: by presenting the Victorian age as the era of prevailing sexual boredom and prudery, the novels argue that Victorian men become easy prey for alluring and sexually experienced women. The texts thus subscribe to the narrative of historical progress "from Victorian delusion to contemporary knowledge" described by Jonathan Loesberg (363); cf. ch. 1.1. and 4.2.

respects the book presents a conscious exercise in schema disruption. Not only does it present the 1850s as a time of female emancipation, it also depicts the Victorian era in general as an age of progress and enlightenment, without the undercurrent of irony that characterises similar passages in other novels.[474]

As both David and Adelaide defy their fathers and are consequently cast off by them, the book develops into a discussion of women's role in the world of work, and a critique of the Victorian division of spheres according to gender. The controversy is presented in terms of a generation conflict, as the older Bellinghams and Darbys (Adelaide's "domesticated" mother and despotic father, and David's equally authoritarian parent) are forced to acknowledge that times are changing, and that their children have to make their own way in life: as David explains to Adelaide, "[y]our father belongs, not merely to a different generation, but to a different age. So, alas, does mine. They are men who cannot appreciate that their offspring have a right to develop personalities of their own" (N. Tucker, 69). The ending of the book, however, reveals its conflicted approach to its central issue: while the older generation of patriarchs finally comes to realise the error of their authoritarian ways and apologises to its children, Adelaide and David's marriage shows no departure from patriarchal power structures. Freer than her mother because of David's more progressive views on women, Adelaide's position as David's wife is nonetheless defined according to a strictly hierarchical conception of marriage. The conventional 'happy ending' of the novel thus reaffirms patriarchal ideology, revealing its critique to have been directed at Victorian fathers' way of wielding their power, but not on gender-based power relations as such.[475]

3.1.4 The Victorians are dead – long live patriarchy!

As has been shown in the preceding sections, a large number of Victorian-centred novels, while ostensibly disparaging Victorian patriarchal practices, nonetheless reveal a conservative sub-current that runs counter to their overtly critical message. The veiled conservativism of these texts stands in contrast to the ideological message of a smaller number of texts – most of them dating from the late 1910s and early 1920s – which openly express their support of Victorian values and views on gender. While the conservative tendencies of early Victorian-centred fiction have already been discussed in connection with depictions of women in wartime, the issue nonetheless deserves more in-depth consideration in this section, exemplifying, as it does, the continuance of 'Victorian' attitudes well into the interwar years.[476] Particularly striking examples of this trend can be found in Sheila Kaye-Smith's *A Challenge to Sirius* (1917) and Maurice Hewlett's *Mainwaring* (1926).[477]

In *Challenge to Sirius*, the mid-Victorian protagonist Frank Rainger subscribes to the prevalent ideology of his time, which regarded women as at the same time more 'moral' than men, and more closely connected with nature. Moreover, he also insists on a strict division of spheres: a woman like his Jewish mistress Rita, who transcends gender boundaries by pursuing a career, strikes him as unnatural and as a potential threat to his male ego: "He stood looking down at her, that little thing in furs, that soft exotic woman of doubtful virtue, who had done better than

[474] Cf. e.g. N. Tucker, 55.
[475] For a more detailed discussion of the novel, cf. ch. 4.1.1.
[476] Cf. Gardiner, 39ff.
[477] For in-depth analyses of these novels, cf. ch. 2.2.1 (*Challenge to Sirius*) and ch. 4.1.3 (*Mainwaring*).

he with his manhood and integrity" (Kaye-Smith, 91). Incidentally, the quote also exemplifies the young Frank's naively Victorian belief in virtue as its own reward, and as being rewarded in terms of worldly success: because he leads a more 'moral' life than Rita, a "woman of doubtful virtue", he believes he should be rewarded with greater literary success than she. His maleness, his Britishness (in contrast to Rita's "exotic" Jewish ancestry), and his adherence to conventional morality combine to bolster up his feeling of superiority and to strengthen his perception of Rita's success as something 'unnatural' and therefore to be condemned.

This ideology is shared by all other characters in the book, even by Rita herself, who repeatedly stresses and laments the fact that women "unsex themselves" (Kaye-Smith, 90) by becoming writers. Rita herself expresses the opinion that women should only write about 'womanly' subjects, and emphasises that in order to achieve a degree of literary success, women writers have to 'ape' manliness.[478] Writing is thus confirmed as an essentially masculine occupation; in order to become a successful writer, a woman has to go against her 'nature' and pretend to be a man. In a conversation about her career in which Frank takes the role of *advocatus diaboli* and argues in favour of Rita's literary ambitions, the ambiguous nature of her feelings becomes obvious:

> "I don't see why you shouldn't have a career – just like a man," he said jerkily, realising that this was not really at all what he wanted to say. "You do a man's work."
> "A woman may be able to do a man's work – for a time – but she never makes a career of it; it's her fate, and it's her nature. Very few women want a career – why, I sometimes think that even I don't really want one. I may love my work, and talk big about it, and all that, but, Frank, I've an idea that I shall end up the same way as hundreds of other women, who've not written a line – I mean, marry and have babies, and never have time to read, let alone write."
> "I don't see why you should – I mean why you should stop writing."
> "Oh, but I will. I shouldn't marry unless I meant to give up my writing – it wouldn't be fair on the man. Besides, in time I expect I shall be tired of the dusty street." …
> She leaned back, and stared dreamily into the fire. "This intellectual bohemianism, it isn't a life for a woman. Every woman who's more than half a woman wants to be loved and taken care of, and as long as she has sense, she's better without brains. Oh, God! I wish I was a man." (Kaye-Smith, 93)

Following the pattern set by Victorian fiction, Victorian convention is presented as a natural law, a notion which the novel's early-twentieth-century audience is clearly intended to endorse. Rita's tragedy is presented as lying in her 'unnatural' desire for a career, which is at war with her 'natural' urge "to be loved and taken care of". Because she is an intelligent and ambitious woman in a society in which intelligence and ambition are advantageous only to men, and because she, too, has internalised an ideology which regards men as superior to women, she constantly projects her own potential for literary success onto the men of her acquaintance, to whom she casts herself in the 'womanly' role of their muse, mistakenly persuading herself that greatness lies in store for them.[479] In her attempts to uphold the conventional idea of male superiority, however, Rita is always prepared to cast aside convention on minor issues: "boldly picking aside decorum" (Kaye-Smith, 102) she sets out to seduce Frank, convinced that she can ensure his literary fame by becoming his mistress. Sharing Frank's deixis, the reader is invited to disapprove of her conduct; the misguidedness of her actions becomes apparent not only through Frank's comments, however,

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[478] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 90.
[479] Cf. Kaye-Smith, 103.

but also through the events of the plot, which show that Rita was consistently mistaken in her assessment of the literary talents of her protégés, none of whom achieve any success.

When Frank finally rejects Rita in favour of Maggie, she gives up her attempt to reconcile the two sides of her personality. In a final letter to him, she explains this choice in terms of acceptance of the inevitable, 'natural' course of events in a woman's life: "… my career was loving, and my work got in the way of that. […] How much better for me to be a real woman, since I can't be a man. Up till now I've been half, a kind of shandygaff, and one side of me has always stood in the way of the other. Now the author-side of me is dead, and I'm just a comfortable Jewess, who means to be a happy wife and mother" (Kaye-Smith, 126). The letter makes it clear that Rita has become reconciled to the fact that a woman's career is "loving" rather than "writing", and that she can be "comfortable" and "happy" only when she stops denying her "nature" and becomes a "wife and mother".

As already noted, the conservative perspective of the novel is in keeping with the ideological climate of its day. "Traditional outlooks and habits survived the war, and in some respects may even have been intensified by it. Women who had been 'liberated' by work among the shells and gun parts were sent packing when their husbands came home. Those men remained markedly conservative" (Gardiner, 39); as the novel shows, male conservativism was shared by a not inconsiderable part of the female population as well.[480] The ideological backlash that followed upon the brief period of comparative liberation during World War I, when women's work was regarded as a patriotic duty and commendable contribution to the war effort, becomes apparent especially from attitudes towards *married* women's work, in the novel as much as in real life. Rita's automatic assumption that marriage would signal the end of her career is in keeping not only with prevailing attitudes, but also with the legal situation in 1917. Before World War I, women in government employ were forced to leave their jobs upon marriage; in all other areas of employment, women were at least expected (and often pressurized) to do so. It was only in 1919 that the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act took a step towards removing the 'marriage bar'; nonetheless, as late as 1926, three-quarters of local authorities in Britain still adhered to the practice of dismissing female workers upon marriage.[481] Despite the fact that Rita, as a 'self-employed' writer, would have been under no tangible legal pressure to relinquish her career, she has internalised the prevailing assumption that women's 'natural' employment lies in the home, regarding her writing as little more than a stop-gap activity designed to while away the time until she finds a suitable husband.

Only the ending of Rita's letter unexpectedly strikes a somewhat subversive note: "Excuse me writing as if I was on my deathbed. I'm going to be married, which perhaps comes to the same thing" (Kaye-Smith, 126). However, the potential of the sentence to undermine the ideological message of the Rita episode is deconstructed when Frank later on in the novel learns that Rita in her marriage to a prominent member of the London Jewish community has indeed found comfort and happiness. It is left open whether Rita was correct in her assessment that part of her has to 'die' when she opts for marriage rather than a career; if so, however, the further course of events implies

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[480] On the conservative backlash after World War I, cf. Beddoe, 13ff. On the conservative attitude prevalent among women in the interwar years, cf. Dyhouse, 73. The issue will also be addressed in connection with Victorian mothers in chapter 3.2.

[481] Cf. Dyhouse, 77ff.; also Beddoe, 61.

that she has been right in 'killing' the 'unnatural' side of her character. The novel leaves the reader little opportunity to align her/himself with the subversive perspective implied by Rita's letter, mapping out a conservative position that coincides with that of the plot and of the main focaliser.

Frank's (and the novel's) conventional view of women becomes especially apparent when he compares Rita with Maggie, who is "simple and womanly and good" (Kaye-Smith, 94), in a telling combination of adjectives: in order to be 'womanly', a woman has to be 'simple' and 'good' (especially in terms of conventional morality); in order to be 'good', i.e. perceived in positive terms by men, conversely, she has to be 'womanly' and 'simple'; finally, simplicity, in the sense of an almost child-like naïveté, like moral uprightness, is identified as one of the positive constituent features of 'womanliness'. However, Frank's ideal of womanhood – his 'ideal woman' schema – undergoes a slight process of addition during his courtship of the Southern belle Lorena Middleton; it is an addition, however, that brings the central character even more closely in line with mainstream Victorian ideology, while enhancing the attractiveness of the Victorian ideal for the twentieth-century reader by adding overtones of sexual attraction by highlighting the resemblance between Lorena's and Rita's 'exotic' allure. Unlike Rita, however, Lorena conforms to the Victorian ideal of the 'Angel in the House', combining beauty, simplicity and virtue in a way that moves Frank not only to "love her" but to "reverence her" (Kaye-Smith, 304). She fulfils both Frank's yearning for beauty and the exotic (with its connotations of sexual passion) and his desire to regard women as an object of worship:

> Her pale, delicate beauty had that exotic touch which he had already noticed in the women of the South, but it had also about it a kind of romantic purity which fixed a gulf between her and that other exotic woman whom he had loved long years ago. Dignity, remoteness, a kind of delicate shyness were cut out on that small classical profile, shadowed in the black ringlets that fell on the olive cheeks. Her eyes were mysterious, witch-like, the wide red mouth and softly darkened upper lip spoke of a capacity for passion, and yet there was something about her which would never let him think of her but as a young girl; no bloom had been rubbed off her virginity, her innocence was as deep as her adaptability to experience. He felt almost awed by her, abashed – she was like a woman in a holy book, in a dream following mass. (Kaye-Smith, 255–6)

Lorena thus presents a perfect blend of Rita and Maggie: "beautiful and exotic as Rita Simons, but without her vividness or her voluptuousness; simple and fresh as Maggie Coalbran, and yet somehow imperious in [her] shyness" (Kaye-Smith, 234). Lorena's "dignity" and "imperious […] shyness" set up an illusion of inaccessibility which heightens Frank's attraction to her, while at the same time removing the stigma of immorality from his love, which he reinterprets in terms of religious worship.

Like *Challenge to Sirius*, *Mainwaring* takes up the notion of 'natural' femininity and sets it against the 'artificial' allure of women who transgress established gender boundaries. Hewlett's novel contrasts Lizzie Mainwaring, the epitome of all that Frank in *Challenge to Sirius* regards as "simple and womanly and good", with Lady Whitehaven, a dazzling but morally corrupt society beauty:

> Lady Whitehaven was a delicate-looking blonde, with the most enchanting air of naiveté upon her that I have ever seen in a woman. It was no less enchanting for being a deliberate work of art. Of course nobody was ever so innocent as Lady Whitehaven looked. She was by no means what she appeared, neither delicate (but on the contrary, of perfect health), nor naïve. But she had not been given Greuze eyes for nothing, and like all women of the world she had made it her early business to find out what suited her. She was naïve to perfection, just as she was always perfectly dressed […] (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 27)

In contrast, the narrator's admiration of Lizzy is based on her 'naturalness' and lack of artificiality:

> It was her whole allure: she was beautiful; she was unfortunate; she was out of my world altogether. Yet she was intensely a woman, and made me feel intensely a man. She was, in fact, an elemental – and before her mere humanity the trappings of my caste fell from me. I stood, man, before her, man's mate, in the primeval wild. (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 61–2)

In order to understand this statement, however, the reader has to have access to the narrator's 'man' and 'woman' schemata. Indeed, his ideal of womanhood is referred to throughout the text and is represented by Lizzy's 'natural femininity'. The birth of her child is described as "[t]he great event of her life, that for which Nature made her" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 54). In the course of the novel, 'Nature personified' comes to be identified with Lizzy, who is also explicitly connected to the divine: she is "a goddess" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 35). To reinforce the equation of Lizzy with nature, she is compared to "a thrush in winter, frozen tame, crouched against the wall, waiting bright-eyed for death" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 59) during the strike at Culgaith, and later to "a home-making bird" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 76). That her husband Mainwaring uses metaphors from the field of art to describe her – he calls her a "masterpiece" and compares her to the "Venus of Milo" (M. Hewlett, Mainwaring, 34) – can be seen as an early signal to the reader of his failure to understand his wife, as schematic knowledge from a wildly inappropriate source domain is mapped onto Lizzie.[482] In keeping with her allegorical status, she is fascinated by a fritillary which she sees growing on the edge of the lawn, but repelled by the hot-house orchids during a visit to Kew.[483] These novels stand in direct opposition to the majority of Victorian centred works, which stress that Victorian men prefer women to behave with conventional modesty and decorum, [484] but present Victorian femininity as essentially performative – and, more significantly, as a performance devised by men for men, and adapted primarily to their own needs. As Phoebe succinctly remarks in *Victorian House*: "It's more convenient for men to keep women under, and so they invent a lady-like conduct" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 367). Sylvia Townsend Warner, in *Summer Will Show*,[485] and Maurice Hewlett, in *Mainwaring*,[486] likewise emphasise the way in which Victorian femininity is a disguise that can be assumed and discarded at will, and is worn mainly to attract men.

As in *Challenge to Sirius*, in *Mainwaring* the narrator's views, in their deviation from the contemporary reader's schemata, are schema confirming in regard to the Victorian era, marking him as a typical Victorian. This is made evident when he states that "I could not have made Lizzy Mainwaring a sinner, or been a sinner myself with her. That is no virtue in me, but of the nature of her being. […] She stood in her modesty, beauty and truth for the Moral Law" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 185), and again when he comments that he knows that there are thousands of

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[482] For the importance of schematic knowledge in understanding metaphors, cf. Lakoff and Turner, 60ff.

[483] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 157f.

[484] In *Victorian House*, men tend to prefer Adelaide's ladylike behaviour to Phoebe's 'immodest' way of looking men in the face when speaking to them; in *A Challenge to Sirius*, Rita's sexual pursuit and seduction of Frank is unfavourably compared to Maggie's reserve; and in *The Rebel*, Arthur likewise resents Cecilia's lack of feminine modesty.

[485] Cf. ch. 4.2.4.

[486] Cf. ch. 4.1.3.

women as pure as Lizzy, but that he wishes that there might be as many as three men.[487] The narrator's view of women as 'by nature' superior to men is that expressed by Ruskin in *Sesame and Lillies*, and is reiterated throughout the Victorian age. It must be stressed, however, that the point of view exemplified in the quotes above constitutes not merely convincing period detail, but is central to the ideological message of the novel, explicitly spelled out by the narrator:

> After all, as I have said, and insist, you can only fulfil the laws of your being. If you defy them you are a monster; if you obey them, you justify Nature. And what are the laws of being? I know but two. To work and to have children. Fulfil those faithfully, and you are beautiful. And woe to who hinders you! (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 232)

The ending of the novel invokes this passage and reiterates the point, as the narrator tells Lizzy that she can pay off her debt to him (he has given his fortune to settle Mainwaring's debts after his death) "to me and my [i.e. our] children" and that he has come to love her and to work alongside her, rhetorically asking "What else am I here for?" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 298).

In the narrator's eyes, Lizzy stands "in her modesty, beauty and truth for the Moral Law" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 185), while Lady Whitehaven represents everything that is corrupt and perverted in Victorian society. As Avrom Fleishman points out, Hewlett's novels, like those of Ford Maddox Ford and George Moore, often depict "lovely womanhood cruelly broken by the force of historical movements and men" (Fleishman, 208). Even though the narrator's friendship and Mainwaring's timely death prevent this fate from falling on Lizzy, it is made obvious that she would and could not have averted it of her own accord; indeed, her passivity makes her a willing accomplice to Mainwaring's strategy for keeping her in submission. Like Lorena, who commits suicide once she has lost her 'purity' (albeit without her consent), Lizzy embodies the self-destructive tendencies of women who aim to live up to the Victorian ideal. Despite their overt endorsement of traditional constructions of femininity, the plot lines of these texts thus unconsciously invite subversive readings which highlight the damaging consequences of subscribing to the very ideal they overtly lead their readers to approve.

3.2 Outgrowing the Victorians, 1870 to the present

Cowart (7) argues that "the more self-consciously historical novelist sets out to deal directly with the Ur-historical question: What in the past made the present?" A similar notion is expressed by Jerome de Groot when he states that the historical novelist, like the historian proper, often tries "to explain the transition between these states [i.e. the past and the present]" (3). Given the relative temporal nearness to the Victorian age and the intensely personal dimension the issue had for writers and readers alike, this aspect features with especial prominence in a large number of Victorian-centred texts from the end of World War I onwards.

Written mainly by women authors, these novels tend to focus primarily – but not exclusively – on female experience, depicting protagonists who struggle to outgrow their limiting Victorian surroundings and find their place in the more open-minded society of the twentieth century. In the preceding chapters, I have tentatively applied the label of the 'Victorian-centred Bildungsroman' to these texts which chart the lives of their protagonists from the moment of their birth in the mid-

[487] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 150.

to late-Victorian era into the twentieth century, depicting the main characters' attempt to cast off the fetters placed upon them by their Victorian background. These often include the stereotypical tyrannical fathers who have come to epitomise Victorian patriarchy, but also encompass poverty; lack of educational opportunities, especially for women; and a certain narrowness of vision, materialism, and overweening concern for 'propriety' which either breaks young peoples' spirits or drives them to open rebellion against their elders.

It is important to note, in this context, that the term 'Bildungsroman' is problematic in its application to female experience, as fictions of "progressive development" and "coherent identity" (Fraiman, x) are only limitedly available to women, but nonetheless – or, perhaps, for this very reason – highly attractive to female writers and readers. As a consequence of this inherent difficulty of appropriating the male-dominated text schema of the Bildungsroman to female experience, the genre becomes open to ironical treatment and reinterpretation by female authors who envisage "the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as the endless negotiation of a crossroads. Women take various routes depending on what class of woman they are; each woman, at the same time, is divided among several routes, so that she lives her gender as a continuous movement in contradictory directions, some more sanctioned than others" (Fraiman, x).[488]

Written at a time which saw far-reaching changes in gender roles and social morality, the twentieth-century texts treated in this chapter convey, to an even greater degree than the earlier Victorian and Georgian texts discussed by Fraiman, "a sense of how painfully confusing it is to apprentice for womanhood: the mixed signals one receives, the double standards for women in different social positions and for the same woman at different times, the residual criteria for femininity at odds with emergent ones" (Fraiman, x). It is precisely this gap between residual and emergent notions of femininity, between the demands of a traditionally-minded parental generation and the wider possibilities for personal and professional development that were opening up for women, that these texts explore in terms of a space in which young women are free to cut loose from restrictions imposed upon them and find individual ways of expressing their selfhood. The need for radical changes in this domain was enhanced by demographic factors. By 1911, large-scale emigration of young men had led to a 'surplus' of 1.3 million women of marriageable age; by 1921, partly due to the devastating effects of World War I, the number had risen to 1.7 million, and public debate was raging about the possible fate of these nearly 2 million 'superfluous' women.[489] Of particular interest is the way in which even the most 'progressive' texts bear witness to the co-existence of new and traditional notions of femininity, often displaying a conservative undercurrent radically at odds with their ostensible aim of showing new definitions of womanhood.

That the relevant Victorian-centred literature from this period is clearly feminocentric is hardly surprising: on the one hand, women's roles had undergone a much more radical change than those of their male contemporaries, with wider social and educational opportunities, greater independence and the added experience of war work widening the gap between daughters and the parental

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[488] For a sustained analysis into the competing role models open to girls especially during the 1950s, cf. Stephanie Spencer's *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*.

[489] Cf. e.g. Beauman, 41; also Joannou, *'Ladies'*, 77f.; Beddoe, 26f. However, Stevenson (147f.; also 163) asserts that the percentage of married women was actually higher in the 1920s and 30s, and the number of eligible men greater – despite war casualties – than before 1914, because World War I had put a stop to large-scale emigration.

generation;[490] in addition, the demographic imbalance between women and men entailed different life choices for women who might otherwise have settled down into traditional wife- and motherhood. On the other hand, the recent war was regarded as a more formative experience on the lives of many young men, making their Victorian upbringing appear of less immediate importance. Finally, it must also be borne in mind that middlebrow literature was increasingly coming to be aimed at a predominantly female readership.[491] Nonetheless, it is worth noting that there are a number of middlebrow novels by women writers – such as Doris Leslie's *Concord in Jeopardy* (1938) or Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* (1932) –, which bypass the issue of World War I in order to focus on the emotionally crippling effects of Victorian family life on male protagonists.

Most interwar Victorian-centred novels tend to foreground the younger generation's inability to fully achieve independence and overcome the legacy of their Victorian parents, mapping and explaining their comparative failure to do so.[492] More than any other type of text discussed in this thesis, these novels bear out the assertion that anti-Victorianism was merely "a particular version of that universal phenomenon of inter-generational tension" (Gardiner, 32), but exacerbated by the length of the Victorian era: lacking the consolation of 'un-Victorian' grandparents to look back to, young people tended to regard their Victorian homes as especially "suffocating" (Gardiner, 32). This sense of emotional and mental suffocation clearly informs not only the more pessimistic texts discussed in this chapter. However, it is perhaps worth stating from the outset that few of the novels under consideration are purely judgemental or unequivocally anti-Victorian; rather they attempt to re-create and understand the spirit of the Victorian age, while highlighting also the enormous generation gap between the 'purely' Victorian elders and their late-Victorian children, whose lives mark the transition from the past to the present: "What a change from the day of her birth, thought Laura, from that various but homogeneous Victorian world! Was this a particular moment in the world's history, or did the generations always repeat this pattern of mutation? Always to some extent, she judged, rarely to so great, so overwhelming, an extent as now to-day" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 553–4).

In this respect, too, Rose Macaulay's *Told by an Idiot* (1923) presents a notable contrast to other works of middlebrow fiction,[493] emphasising that each generation has struggled to free itself from parental influence, and has positioned itself in opposition to that which has gone before, and that there is nothing remarkable about the intergenerational tensions between Victorian parents and their children:

> The New Young Woman. Bold, fast, blue-stockinged, self-indulgent, unchaperoned, advanced, undomesticated, reading and talking about things of which their mothers had never, before marriage, heard – in brief, NEW. (To know all that the mid-Victorians said about modern girls, and, indeed, about modern youth of both sexes, you have only to read certain novelists and journalists of the nineteen twenties, who are saying the same things to-day about what they call the Young Generation.)

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[490] Cf. Ingman, 8.

[491] Cf. e.g. Beauman, 3.

[492] Cf. ch. 3.2.2.

[493] As in the case of May Sinclair and Sylvia Townsend Warner, the status of Rose Macaulay between the Modernist elite and popular middlebrow fiction is hard to define, and has given rise to some scholarly debate. As outlined in the introduction, recent work on early-twentieth-century women writers has tended to include these writers in a newly formed female Modernist canon, despite the obvious differences between their work and the established Modernists.

> […] And had the young, both men and women, always believed that they alone could save the world, that the last generation, the elderly people, were no good, were, in fact, responsible for the unfortunate state in which the world had always up to now been, and that it was for the young to usher in the New Day? Well, no doubt they were right. The only hitch seemed to be that the young people always seemed to get elderly before they had had time to bring in the New Day, and then they were no good any more, and the next generation had to take on the job, and still the New Day coyly refused to be ushered in. Except that, of course, in a sense, each day was a new one. But not, alas, much improvement on the day before. (13–5)

In contrast to Bentley, for instance, Macaulay emphasises that each generation rebels against its parents, holding them "responsible for the unfortunate state in which the world had always up to now been". In a similar vein, she objects to any attempt at categorising and defining the Zeitgeist of a particular epoch:

> Well, the Edwardians, like the Elizabethans, the Jacobeans, the Carolines, the Georgians, the Victorians, and the neo-Georgians, were a mixed lot. This attempt to class them, to stigmatise them with adjectives, is unscientific, sentimental, and wildly incorrect. But, because it is rather more interesting than to admit frankly that they were merely a set of individuals, it will always be done. (Macaulay, *Idiot*, 185–6)

It is, however, the prevalence of this attitude in the fiction of her contemporaries that gives rise to Macaulay's criticism and denial of its validity. While she may be right in principle, her caustic remarks highlight the fact that, contrary to her own assertions, she was indeed writing at a time when the younger generation was seeing itself as more widely different from their parents than ever before – a view that, as will be shown in this chapter, had a crucial influence on popular perceptions of the Victorians, and on contemporary authors' presentation of their protagonists as either victors over, or victims of, the preceding generation.

In contrast to the post-war accounts of women who successfully transcend the social constraints of the Victorian era (to be finally rewarded with more or less conventional happy endings) discussed in the latter part of this section, novels from the interwar period present a much more ambiguous picture. In 1938 – one year after Virginia Woolf's *The Years* – Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* provides an ambitious and insightful description of the tensions and frustrations of late-Victorian family life, and the only partly successful attempts of the younger generation to outgrow their Victorian roots.

3.2.1 Phyllis Bentley: *Sleep in Peace* (1938)

3.2.1.1 Summary

The story traces the fortunes of the Armistead and Hinchcliffe families (especially the younger generation, Edward, Frederick and Grace Hinchcliffe and Gwen, Ludovic and Laura Armistead, born during the 1880s) through the close of the Victorian era, World War I and the interwar years. At the beginning of the novel, Mr Armistead and Mr Hinchcliffe are joint owners of a textile mill in the West Riding. Mr Armistead has inherited his share of the business from his grandfather, Spencer Thwaite; Mr Hinchcliffe, in contrast, comes from a working-class background and has earned his share through determined and conscientious effort. There is little love lost between the two partners (in point of fact, the partnership is dissolved at one point in the novel, only to be resumed later on), and consequently little enthusiasm on the part of the older generation when Laura Armistead and Grace Hinchcliffe strike up a life-long friendship.

Grace's family life, presided over by the strict but kindly Mrs Hinchcliffe, is contrasted with the motherless Armistead household. When Mrs Armistead dies shortly after Laura's birth, Gwen at a very early age takes on responsibility for her two younger siblings, whom she raises in accordance with the strict Victorian precepts laid down by her father. Brought up in the true Armistead spirit that places propriety, conventionality and the keeping up of appearances before all else, marriage strikes her as the only 'respectable' option for a woman, and she is violently opposed to her younger sister's desire for higher education and a career. When Edward Hinchcliffe, the man she truly loves, turns out to be indifferent to her, Gwen accepts a proposal from his younger brother, Frederick. The marriage, unhappy from the outset, founders when Gwen's husband decides to declare himself a conscientious objector at the beginning of World War I. Unable to face the social stigma that adheres to his decision, she opts for the lesser of two evils in terms of social consequences and returns home with her two children, Geoffrey and Madeline.[494]

Gwen's conventional world view, in which femininity is equated with domesticity, is contrasted to Grace's and Laura's determination to do something useful with their lives. Given the restrictions – both ideological and economic – imposed on them by their respective families, this course turns out to be fraught with difficulties. According to both the Armisteads' and the Hinchliffes' otherwise very different value scales, girls are of less account than boys, and are treated accordingly. Nonetheless, Grace has the advantage of more open-minded parents; despite initial opposition, she manages to pursue her academic interests and becomes a history teacher. Laura, on the other hand, is at a double disadvantage: firstly, her father does not approve of higher education for women; secondly, Gwen's marriage to Frederick Hinchcliffe has left Mr Armistead without a capable housekeeper – a role he now expects his second daughter to fill. Thwarted in her desire to study at the prestigious Slade School of Art in London by her father's determined opposition, she finally gains his reluctant consent to attend the local art school, on the provision that she does not neglect her house-keeping duties. She is finally liberated, however, by her sister's return after the break-up of her marriage.

Intelligent and ambitious, both girls achieve a fair amount of success in their chosen professions; Grace becomes headmistress of a prestigious teacher-training college, and Laura gains renown and financial success as a commercial artist and illustrator. Nonetheless, there is a sense of opportunities lost that overhangs the careers of both these women: Laura, it is implied, could have become a much better artist had she managed to overcome her family's opposition and been allowed to study at the Slade. Grace, for her part, is depicted as an able history teacher who kindles her pupils' enthusiasm and remains victorious in her tussles with school authorities and the Board of Education, who tend to disapprove of her advanced teaching methods. However, the reader is also aware that she initially dreamed of pursuing a career in Law (impossible at a time when there were still no women barristers or judges).[495] Moreover, she has also failed in another of her youthful ambitions, that of uniting marriage and a career, to "establish women's right to both work and children", or, in Laura's words, "to prove that a married woman needn't necessarily be like Gwen" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 264). Both Laura and Grace

[494] Cf. ch. 2.2.4.

[495] Women's entry into the legal profession was finally granted by the Sex Disqualification Removal Act of 1919 (cf. Beddoe, 50).

remain unmarried – the men they loved both having been killed in the War – and childless. In contrast to the postwar novels discussed below, however, there is no hint that in doing so, they have lost a vital element of their lives, showing the extent to which Bentley was attuned to the social realities of an era of 'superfluous women'.

As it turns out, Grace and Laura – despite the ostensible disadvantage of being female – are more successful in their attempts to escape the constraints of their Victorian homes and forge their own ways than their brothers. After finishing school, the sons of the two families are expected to work at the mill alongside their fathers, in spite of the fact that none but Edward display any ability or interest in the cloth-making business. Frederick dreams of going to university to study literature; Ludo, deprived of all self-assurance and initiative by his sister's constant nagging and his father's lack of confidence in his abilities, voices no preferences, but is happy only when he escapes his home to train with the local militia. At the outbreak of World War I, both Ludo and Edward enlist immediately; Frederick, on the other hand, turns conscientious objector, and spends the duration of the war in prison because he refuses to enter the army even though his claim is disallowed by the authorities. After the war, he decides not to return home, and succeeds in making a career as a literary editor and critic in London. His elder brother is killed at the front; Ludo survives and returns home to re-enter the family business. His period of active service, however, is somewhat inglorious, culminating in his demotion when in his position of commanding officer he inadvertedly gives several of his men permission to desert.

The extent to which Victorian standards of morality prevail after the War is revealed when Ludo discovers that Edward – whose parents are consoled for their loss by the fact that he died a hero's death – has fathered an illegitimate son, Kay Byram, before going off to fight overseas. Well aware of the importance that Edward's untarnished reputation has for his parents, Ludo, recently returned from the war, spontaneously decides to accept responsibility for the boy, convincing the child's mother to collude in the deception. Ludo's decision can be seen as one step towards the rejection of a society for whose survival he has fought, but in which he cannot carve out a place for himself; unable to shake off the constraints of his Victorian upbringing or to come to terms with the changes that manifest themselves after his return from the front, he finally finds peace in a life as an Anglican monk.

The final part of the novel focuses on Gwen's children, Geoffrey and Madeline Hinchcliffe, and Edward's illegitimate son, Kay Byram. Observing them through the eyes of their aunt Laura, the novel highlights the enormous generation gap that exists between the children of the Victorians and the next generation. Geoffrey is fascinated by the Fascist movement of Sir Oswald Moseley; Kay Byram, on the other hand, is an ardent Communist – a predilection for authoritarian regimes on the part of the rising generation that Laura notes with horror, and that she ascribes to the failure of her own generation to impress its values of tolerance and democracy on its children. At the end of the novel, Geoffrey is on the verge of taking over the family business on his own after the death of Mr Hinchliffe and the retirement of Mr Armistead. His sister Madeline, on the other hand, has apparently turned her back on Yorkshire and most of her family. Living in London with her father Frederick, who has long ago severed all contact

with his relatives, she is determined to become a painter and is "'[...] considering marriage. Only considering, you know'" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 545) with Kay Byram.

3.2.1.2 Schemata

Like Dorothy Hewlett's *Victorian House* and Bentley's earlier novel *Inheritance*, *Sleep in Peace* aims to discover the typical features of Victorianism, and, by extension, its effects on the author's generation. The author's note declares Bentley's intention in writing the novel, and is worth quoting at length:

> All the figures in this panorama of a generation, as seen through the somewhat ironical eyes of one of its members, are composite portraits, intended to be typical of their place, their class, *and especially their time*, but in no sense derived from single originals. This generation (which was mine) made the transition from Victorian England – industrially expanding, pious, a Great Power and proud of it – to the confused revolts and uncertain loyalties of today. A transition so notable invites attention to the generation which made it; the conditioning of that generation – why it was what it was and did what it did – seemed to me especially inviting to the novelist's probe. (my italics)

The novel reveals that the constituent features of Victorianism identified by Bentley – industrial expansion, piety, and patriotism – have a negative side to them that took a heavy toll on the generation that had to make the transition from the Victorian age to the present day, and identifies aspects of the Victorian mindset which were less openly embraced by its exponents, but which nonetheless play an important role in its mental make-up. In *Sleep in Peace*, Bentley follows the same strategy as in *Inheritance* of dividing traits perceived as typically Victorian among different characters. Like the Oldroyds and Bamforths of Bentley's earlier novel, the Armisteads and Hinchcliffes embody different tracks through the Victorian schema: Mr Armistead (a widower living alone with three children) is depicted as gentlemanly, sociable, very conscious of 'what people will say', and enamoured of respectability and propriety.

Like Hewlett's portrayal of the Pratts in *Victorian House*, Bentley's description of the Armistead family highlights the close connection between Victorianism and the middle class – the class which most eagerly embraced the values later regarded as typically Victorian, and whose views, on the other hand, most crucially informed later perceptions of the era. Mr Armistead's middle-class values are accepted unquestioningly by his oldest daughter, Gwen, who finds herself in charge of her younger siblings after the sudden death of her mother shortly after Laura's birth. Her concern that Ludo and Laura should be exactly like other middle-class children and her abhorrence of those traits of behaviour which to her "almost seemed common" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 48) becomes understandable in view of the fact that she had to take on responsibility for them at a very early age: "And there was nobody to put it right, nobody to look after them, save Gwen – who after all, thought Gwen pityingly, was only fifteen years old" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 48). After the death of her mother, she is left without a female role model; in its absence, she relies on codified notions of propriety and the opinion of her middle-class neighbours – of supreme concern also to her father – for guidance. For the younger Armistead children, the most crippling facet of Victorianism is the exaggerated concern for propriety and conformity to established social standards. The question that Carmen asks herself in Violet Dean's *Love's A Man of War* (1953) might well have been voiced by Ludo and Laura:

> In this Middle Class of which I am a member, [...] is any single quality held to be of value for its own sake? Is my mother's insistence on the virtue of endurance due to the fact that it is a splendid thing in itself or is it merely conditioned to what the neighbours think? [...] Does she like these palms and silver ornaments and china for themselves or only because every other drawing-room in Highgate has them? Does she think of father and herself, of Lovell and me as real people, or only as Mrs Trotter sees us? And if she does – and all the others do – see us as something to be cut to standard, what can be the meaning of life? (Dean, 86).

Like many of her contemporaries, Bentley takes up the theme of the 'daughter-at-home' sacrificing herself for her family; analysing the complex motives – compounded of love for her father, consciousness of her family's social status, an ingrained notion of duty, and a selfish predilection for the martyr's role – that underlie Gwen's decision to take the responsibility for the Armistead household on herself rather than accept the help of her grandmother. The main focus of the novel lies, however, on the consequences that Gwen's unquestioning acceptance of her father's Victorian values, and the inflexibility with which she clings to obsolescent notions of respectability, have on her siblings, her own life, and her children.

Gwen's notion of duty is similar to Charlotte's in *Victorian House*: as a woman, it is her duty to limit her activities to the 'womanly' sphere of the home; as a daughter, she has a duty to follow the wishes of her parents. As in *Victorian House*, it is a duty defined and enforced by her father. When Gwen leaves the family home to get married, he expects his second daughter to take her place as a matter of course; Laura's desire for a career strikes him as an utterly selfish dereliction of duty: "A good, well-brought-up girl like you, wanting to neglect her home and go gadding about the country. I'm disappointed in you. I thought you'd more sense of duty. What's the good of making such a fuss as you and Ludo do about going to Church before breakfast and all that sort of thing, if you've no more sense of what's right than to want to leave home and neglect your family? There's your sister, too – she needs you with her just now. And you want to go off on a selfish whim of this kind! Besides, I can't afford it" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 229). While a woman's duty is thus clearly defined by and in relation to her male relatives, the novel also shows the extent to which ideals of dutiful womanhood are endorsed by Victorian women, and transmitted to their daughters, or, in Gwen's case, to her younger sister.

The Armistead family is initially contrasted unfavourably with that of Mr Armistead's business partner, Henry Hinchcliffe. The Hinchcliffes, like the Bamforths of *Inheritance*, are religious, hard-working teetotallers, with enormous respect for education and book-learning, and a strict sense of morality founded on their non-conformist religious convictions. Unlike the Armisteads, they prize intellectual achievement and moral uprightness over social advancement, and disparage Mr Armistead's attempts at social climbing. Despite the fact that the intellectually tolerant climate of the Hinchcliffe household is presented as more attractive than the restrictive atmosphere that prevails at the Armisteads, it is later revealed to be just as oppressively Victorian, albeit in a slightly different manner. Whereas the restrictions imposed on the young Armisteads are founded in Gwen's and her father's strict adherence to the middle-class code of conduct, the prohibitions of the Hinchcliffe household are grounded in Mr and Mrs Hinchcliffe's stern religiosity. The similarity is explicitly spelled out to the reader when the two girls compare their problems at home; a realisation on the art of the two girls that is presented as a key moment in their break with Victorianism:

> "Everything that's fine and beautiful, or jolly," cried Grace, "they look down their noses at and say it is against religion. I don't believe God's like that at all! As Frederick says, why should God be bound by the creed of a back street of Hudley in 1879? Father's ideas haven't changed since then, he says – they're a blight on our lives!"
> "With me," said Laura in a trembling tone, "it's Gwen."
> There was a pause; a hush; for indeed something epoch-making had been spoken. (Bentley, *Sleep*, 131)

While Gwen forbids her siblings to participate in any activity that she considers 'common', Grace's parents frequently forbid even the most innocent enjoyments on principle as irreconcilable with their religious beliefs: not only are drinking, gambling, and the theatre out of bounds, even gymnastics and school dancing lessons are considered problematic.

However, Bentley does not establish a clear-cut distinction between the religious Hinchcliffes and the worldly Armisteads; indeed, a certain degree of religiosity is one of the key components of her 'Victorian' schema. This becomes clearest when one considers that the constituent features of the novel's 'Victorian' schema are most easily identifiable as comprising those things that Grace and Laura rebel against: "'I must tell you, Grace,' said Laura presently, 'that I'm beginning to lose my religion.' 'Oh, Laura, I'm so glad!' cried Grace, bounding joyously. 'Of course I wouldn't for the world have said anything to influence you, but I began to lose mine the first year I went to college. It's really impossible to believe in those old myths nowadays'" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 260). Ludo's deep religiosity and his decision to become an Anglican monk are presented as indicative of his inability to outgrow his Victorian childhood. It reflects the plight of a generation of young people who, kept down by their Victorian parents, have grown up unwilling or unable to accept responsibility and assume social leadership; having escaped the "benevolent tyranny" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 548) of his elder sister, he deliberately places himself in a similar situation by entering a monastery: "Well, Ludo is safe here, thought Laura, [...] he has found the moral security he always lacked, he's no longer afraid; he is a man under authority, happy and at peace" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 529).

The novel also reveals the extent to which the Victorian generation uses religion to bolster up arguments that serve essentially selfish ends. When Mr Armistead exhorts Laura to stay at home as his housekeeper, he invokes religion; in the same vein, Mr Hinchcliffe justifies his decision to sever the partnership with Mr Armistead – a move highly advantageous to him in financial terms – by invoking his religious scruples against associating with a 'gambler', having discovered that his partner has been speculating at the stock exchange. The generation gap between them and their children is highlighted by the latters' ability to see through their motives, and by their disdain for the Victorians' self-serving conception of religion: "'*Hypocrisie anglicaine*,' contended Frederick. 'The English always put their hand in their pocket to find their religion'" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 85). In the case of the Hinchcliffes, moreover, their conception of a religious life is revealed as not only hypocritical, but excessive in its strictness: Grace is even reprimanded sternly for her efforts to teach her brother to dance.

Even though the strictly religious but on the whole intellectually more open climate of the Hinchcliffe household is shown to be less harmful than the narrow-minded respectability enforced by Gwen and Mr Armistead, the novel shows that the Hinchcliffes' sternly religious brand of Victorianism can be damaging for those unable to live up to its rigid standards. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the novel the author's sympathies clearly lie with the

Hinchcliffes: alternatingly using the youngest daughters of the two families as main focalisers, Bentley implicitly contrasts Laura's "painful, tiresome, dull" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 66) home life – continually hemmed in by her father's and sister's class consciousness and insistence on 'proper' behaviour – with that of Grace, who is free to develop her individual tastes and intellectual abilities. However, the strict gender hierarchy that characterises both households finds its expression in the amount of money spent on their education, the demands made of them by their parents in terms of household activities, and constant reminders of their 'natural' inferiority to their male relatives.

While the main focus of *Sleep in Peace* lies on Laura and the other female characters, however, Bentley also makes it clear that women were not the only victims of Victorian upbringings. Just as Ludo Armistead's self-confidence is irrevocably damaged by his sister's constant criticism and his father's lack of confidence in him, the sensitive poet Frederick Hinchcliffe suffers the inhibiting consequences of his father's constant unfavourable comparison between himself and his more down-to-earth brother Edward, whose help soon becomes invaluable at the mill. In addition, there are repeated hints that Frederick suffers also from the constant bickering that goes on between the three Hinchcliffe children, and that their parents tolerate as a sign of the outspokenness that the inhabitants of Yorkshire pride themselves on. Not surprisingly, it is Edward Hinchcliffe, brought up in a climate of intellectual freedom and encouraged to think for himself on all except religious matters, secure of his parents' affection and his younger siblings' respect, who finds the courage to rebel by tearing the teetotalling Pledge he has signed as a child – "'The twentieth century [...] casting the shackles of the nineteenth!'" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 119), as his brother comments.

However, some of the shackles of Victorianism refuse to be cast off so lightly. For the men, in particular, it is the ingrained notion of patriotic duty – another key feature of the 'Victorian' schema – that has the most disastrous consequences. After the outbreak of World War I, both Edward Hinchliffe and Ludo Armistead yield to social pressure and enlist; Frederick, in contrast, tries to reserve the right to think for himself and refuses to fight for a cause in which he does not believe, but can do so only at the expense of destroying his marriage – while he finally finds the strength of character to dispense with considerations of 'what the neighbours will say', his wife is incapable of doing so, and unable to face their disapproval of her husband. To a large extent, the blame for the final break-up must thus be laid also at the door of Gwen's inability to conceive of herself as a person in her own right: what drives her away from Frederick is not merely the neighbour's low opinion of him as a conscientious objector, but the way in which their disapproval reflects on herself as his wife.

The obsessive status-consciousness characteristic of middle-class Victorianism links up with the petty materialism that characterises Hudley society, where individual worth is assessed on the basis of household expenditure. Unlike other novelists, Bentley does not draw the established connection between financial ostentation and lack of aesthetic taste that otherwise abounds in Victorian-centred fiction; instead, she emphasises that even elegantly expensive items, such as the clothes Gwen orders for herself and her children, are 'vulgar' because they are indicative of the skewed value scale of a society unable to transcend the narrow-minded materialism that forms one of the key constituents of Bentley's 'Victorian' schema.

3.2.1.3 Deixis

Early sections of the book closely resemble the deictic technique of Bentley's earlier novel *Inheritance*, which relies on frequent shifts of the focalising WHO in order to convey the world view and mind style of the individual characters. In *Sleep in Peace*, however, the technique is abandoned after the introductory chapters; moreover, the function of focalising WHO is from the beginning confined to the younger generation of Armisteads and Hinchcliffes, who observe and evaluate the behaviour of their elders. Unlike *Inheritance*, which allows the reader an inside view of the Victorian patriarch, *Sleep in Peace* focuses on the effects of his behaviour on his children. Gradually, shifts from one focaliser to the other are limited almost exclusively to Grace and Laura; during the latter part of the novel, the origo of the deictic centre remains mainly located in (or close to) Laura's mind. There are, however, some notable exceptions: when Laura attempts to commit suicide on the top of the Ellistone, the deictic centre abruptly shifts to Frederick, who – having received a telepathic warning of her intention in a dream – rushes out to rescue her. In a similar manner, a shift to Ludo's deixis occurs during the brief episode which leads up to Ludo's court martial for allegedly encouraging his men to desert. On several occasions, the reader is given glimpses of Grace's teaching career, using her as the focalising WHO and allowing the reader glimpses of her mind style. These passages – usually only a few paragraphs in length – are invariable followed by a return to Laura's deixis; moreover, the shifts from her to another focaliser appear also to be conditioned by the amount of empathy she feels for the characters in question. As a consequence, shifts to her beloved brother Ludo and her close friend Grace occur far more frequently than shifts to Gwen's deixis (which cease altogether after she marries and later leaves Frederick, much to Laura's disapproval), or to that of Frederick, with whom she has a more distant relationship. Grace's eldest brother, Edward, whom Laura admires but fails to understand, is virtually excluded from the role of focaliser. More significantly, this also applies to members of the parental generation, as well as to Laura's nephew and niece, highlighting the impression of a generation caught between two eras and cut off from its parents as much as from its children.

Bentley's almost exclusive reliance on a single focaliser to keep track of the life stories of "a dozen principal characters" won her the praise of a contemporary reviewer, who commented that "Miss Bentley maneuvers [sic] them in and out of Laura's vision with an adroitness so competent as almost completely to conceal itself" (Jones, 3). Moreover, it also serves the same function as Bentley's shift to David's perceptual deixis does in *Inheritance*, namely that of encouraging an act of alignment on the reader's part and mapping out a point of view concurrent with Laura's. Both novels adhere to the structure of the *roman à these* identified by Iser,[496] which has to establish a link between its thesis and the "expectations and dispositions" of its readers and which, for that reason, "can help a great deal in reconstructing the history of the perceptive modes, feelings, norms, and dispositions of the intended reading public" (*Act*, 190). What is remarkable, however, is the contrast between the optimism of *Inheritance*, published in 1932, and the pessimism of *Sleep in Peace* (1938), whose ending reflects the tone of much middle-brow fiction of the late thirties as it focuses on Laura's realisation that her generation has failed to transmit its values – constructed in conscious opposition to the Victorian value

[496] Cf. Iser, *Act*, 190.

scale of its parents – to its children, and has paved the way for ideologies which take the "benevolent tyranny" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 548) of the Victorians to new extremes.

3.2.1.4 Intertextuality

Like many other Victorian-centred novels, *Sleep in Peace* bears witness to the "determined intertextuality" (Humble, 47) of interwar middlebrow fiction, as becomes apparent especially through Bentley's choice of title and chapter headings. The title of the novel is explained through the book's motto, a quotation from Lion Feuchtwanger's historical novel *The Ugly Duchess Margarethe Maultasch* (1923): "Sleep in peace, father! I will be different from you." The choice reflects the clear anti-Fascist stance of the novel, as well as functioning as an element of compositional deixis locating the work in the same generic tradition as Feuchtwanger's historical novel. Given the essentially pessimistic tone of the novel, however, it is also a deeply ironic choice, as none of the generations presented in the text will be able to "sleep in peace": while the two younger generations portrayed in the novel have certainly succeeded in their aim of being "different" from their parents, the ending is pervaded by a sense of doubt whether the change has not been for the worse.

A similarly ironic tone is evident in some of the chapter headings chosen by Bentley, especially those set off by quotation marks. "'Heaven lies about us in our infancy...'" and "'Shades of the prison house...'" both invoke Wordsworth's *Ode* on "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", whose glorification of childhood happiness contrasts sharply with the experiences of the young Armisteads, pitting the poetic ideal against Victorian reality. Other chapter headings are similarly ironic, such as "'Lofty designs...'" (from Browning's *A Grammarian's Funeral*) for the chapter in which Frederick has to give up his hopes of going to university, or "'Those friends thou hast...'" (from Polonius' advice to his son Laertes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) for the chapter in which Laura makes friends with Grace in direct opposition to her father's wishes.

Other chapter headings – in contrast to the consciously ironic ones listed above – are less clearly marked as quotations, and stand in a more straightforward relation to the content of the respective chapters; nonetheless, they also derive from clearly identifyable sources. These include "The importance of £500" (invoking Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for a chapter in which Mr Armistead 'borrows' his eldest daughter's inheritance of £500 in order to keep his business afloat), "Marriage *à la Mode*" (from Dryden, about Gwen's 'fashionable' wedding and the failure of her marriage), "The Tents of Kedar" (from Psalm 120:5, to describe Laura's despair about her life in Hudley after her return from war work in London), and "To each according to his ability" (from Karl Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, for the chapter describing the effects of the economic depression on the Armistead family and their home town).

In addition, the novel is rich in intertextual elements in the form of direct quotations in the speech of several characters, first and foremost that of the bookish Frederick (who quotes eclectically from, amongst others, Shakespeare, Johnson, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Proudhon, Browning, and Whitman), and of his father (who frequently quotes the Bible), but also that of Grace and Laura, who have read widely for educational and escapist reasons. Despite the large number of quotations and direct allusions, however, these are merely incidental to the story; unlike Dorothy

Hewlett, Bentley does not use them as a means of characterisation, even though the characters' choice of reading matter is usually in keeping with what the reader has before been told about them. There is only one brief incident which directly connects a character's choice of reading matter to the plot of the novel, namely when Frederick's enthusiastic endorsement of H.G. Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909) brings him into conflict with his scandalised father. However, the row blows over under Edward's calming influence and serves only to underline the fact that the members of the Victorian generation "don't regard sex as one of the eternal verities" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 148). (Incidentally, this is also the only occasion on which an intertextual reference serves as a marker of temporal deixis, indicating that the temporal setting has shifted to the year 1909 or slightly later).

3.2.1.5 Conclusion

The extent to which Bentley succeeded in her attempt to depict the typical experience of a member of the generation that made the transition from the Victorian age to the twentieth century is evident in a contemporary reviewer's assessment of the book as "a human document of considerable significance" (H. Jones, 3) and "one of the more impressive books of 1938" (H. Jones, 4), featuring "one of the most successful evocations of a Victorian childhood anywhere in fiction" (H. Jones, 3).

The book insists that the generation gap between those born in the 1870s and 80s and their children is exceptionally large. Inhibited by their Victorian upbringing, members of the older generation fail to bridge the emotional gap between themselves and their grown-up children, and are unable to do themselves justice in the eyes of their own or the younger generation. In turn, this has problematic consequences also for the offspring of these late Victorians: faced with a parental generation struggling to free itself of its in-bred complexes and a Victorian value system which it recognises as obsolete and psychologically damaging, but cannot replace with an alternative set of values, members of the younger generation lack guidance and are too apt to choose role models whose values differ radically, but are equally threatening to social stability and individual freedom: Geoffrey turns to Sir Oswald Moseley, whose rigid set of Fascist principles obviously provides him with a sense of security and purpose; Kay, in contrast, believes that society can be salvaged by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Somewhat ironically, Laura reflects that the Victorians' authoritarian childrearing method – so forcefully rejected by her generation – would be "probably the only one useful in the circumstances" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 517).

It is in this regard that the book's clear-sighted exploration of the crippling heritage of the Victorian age on the preceding generation coexists with a tinge of nostalgia for a sense of security that appears to have been irretrievably lost: "Mr Armistead's generation had been able to cherish an ambition, and to succeed in it after twenty or fifty years of work; Edward's generation had cherished ambitions and had them blown to bits; Geoffrey's generation expected to be ruined or blown to bits, and so could not cherish an ambition at all" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 504). Among the members of the first non-Victorian generation, it is only Madeline, who radically breaks with her family and its values, who appears undamaged by the legacy of the Victorians; rejecting Victorian notions about legitimacy as well as the unspoken rule that women have to decide between marriage and a career, Madeline – a gifted painter who looks down on her aunt Laura's commercial art – becomes engaged to Kay Byram after destroying her shares in the family business and embarking on her artistic career.

By the end of the novel, Laura comes to terms with the fact that each generation must reject the values and ideals of its parents, but thinks that her own generation has not had the courage to show its ideals clearly enough to its children. Her generation's attempt to "cast the shackles of the nineteenth [century]" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 119) has evidently failed – Edward's rebellious gesture of tearing up his teetotalling pledge has to be repeated in a much more drastic manner by his niece Madeline: "The twenty-first century casting the shackles of the twentieth" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 533), Frederick comments when she tears up her shares in the family business, emphasising both the cyclical nature of each generation's revolt against its Victorian legacy, and the much more radical nature of Madeline's action. Over Laura's resolution to try again "if there was still time" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 557), however, there hangs the threat of impending war, and the realisation that her generation is slowly getting past its prime and will soon have to hand over the reins to its children. Bentley's novel reflects the pessimistic tone characteristic of much interwar fiction, which bears witness to a "profound anxiety about a problematic present and an uncertain future" and combines "ominous prophecy with pleas for change" (Plain, 43). While the novel to some extent endorses Dorothy Hewlett's view that by the end of the nineteenth century, "doors had been opened" (*Flowing Tide*, 303), it also highlights the fact that many of those born towards the end of the Victorian era did not dare walk through them, or were actively kept back by their parents. The fact that the reader is given access to the minds of the late-Victorian characters, but not to those born in the twentieth century, further underlines the lack of understanding that prevails between the generations. The use of Laura, rather than one of the younger Hinchliffes or Armisteads, as the focalising consciousness of the book serves to underscore the pessimistic tone of the novel, inviting readers to align themselves with the world view of a member of the 'lost generation' rather than the more optimistic outlook of characters like Madeline.

3.2.2 The Victims of the Victorians

Even though Victorian-centred fiction shows a certain preoccupation with authoritarian father figures, it is not only Victorian fathers whose baneful influence blights the lives of their children. When Rose Macaulay states that "[m]odern writers say that Victorian parents did believe in parental tyranny" (211), she is referring not primarily to Aubrey, but to his wife, Anne. Especially during the interwar years, patriarchal power in Victorian-centred fiction is not only enacted through the figure of the tyrannical father; not infrequently, the focus lies on mothers who have internalised the dominant ideology and perpetuate it through their influence on their daughters. Many of these texts are heavily indebted to psychoanalytical theory; there are traces not only of the revision of Freudian theory to integrate women's experiences which took place during the twenties and thirties under the influence of female psychoanalysts Helene Deutsch (1884–1982), Karen Horney (1885–1960), Anna Freud (1895–1982), and Melanie Klein (1882–1960), but also – especially in the earlier novels – explorations of mother-daughter-relationships which anticipate Freud's theorisation of the mother in his 1933 lecture on "Femininity" as a regressive influence.[497]

In spite of changing demographic trends and widening occupational opportunities for women, there were still a large number of unmarried women living at home with their aging parents; and

[497] For the emergence of female psychoanalysis, cf. Ingman, 24ff.; for Freud's theories on the mother, cf. Freud 22:134 and Ingman, 22f.; for their influence on interwar women's fiction, Ingman, 30.

increasingly, the lives of these women were becoming the subject of fiction: "Novel after novel written by women in the inter-war period demonstrates sympathy for the dutiful daughter trapped at home and castigates the selfishness of parents who keep her there" (Ingman, 8).[498] Unlike most of the novels discussed here, many of these texts have during the last decades been rescued from the critical oblivion that has been the fate of much Victorian-centred fiction: works like May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919), Winifred Holtby's *The Crowded Street* (1924), Lettice Cooper's *The New House* (1936), Radclyffe Hall's *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), or E.M. Delafield's *Thank Heaven Fasting* (1932), which focus on the stunted lives led by these 'daughters-at-home', have been republished by feminist printing houses (most notably Virago) in recent decades, and are beginning to attract a fair share of scholarly attention, not least because of their psychologically insightful and formally innovative approaches to the topic. Given the wealth of literature on this topic, I will only touch briefly upon two of the most well-known examples, May Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922) and *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919).

Mary Olivier: A Life "narrate[s] the experience of being mothered as crippling and destructive" and demonstrates the "gap between idealisations of motherhood and the lived experiences of women" (Phillips, 129). Whereas Harriett is ready to submerge her own identity in that of Mrs Frean, Mary from her earliest childhood onwards is shown to be fighting a losing battle, simultaneously competing against her brothers for her mother's love, and rebelling against the restrictions placed upon her, thus further losing her mother's affection and approbation. The novel demonstrates to what extent Victorian mothers propagated established gender stereotypes: when Mary expresses a desire to learn Latin like her brothers, her mother is scandalised and adamant in her refusal. Mrs Olivier only shows her daughter the affection she craves when Mary conforms to accepted notions of femininity: "Why do you always look at me kindly when I'm sewing?", Mary – not used to kindly looks from her mother – on one occasion feels compelled to ask. "Because I like to see you behaving like a little girl, instead of [...] trying to do what boys do" (Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 70) is her mother's characteristic reply.[499] The novel reveals that Mrs Olivier, though outwardly conforming to the Victorian ideal of the meek 'Angel in the House', is in fact a strong-willed and power-hungry woman, who rules her household and family with an iron fist. Her refusal to let Mary transgress gender boundaries – even on relatively minor issues, such as her desire to learn Latin – shows the extent to which she perceives her growing daughter as a threat to her authority, fearing that the acquisition of 'masculine' learning will tip the power balance in Mary's favour.[500] While Mary, to some extent, succeeds in 'outgrowing' her mother, this assertion of her individuality comes at a heavy price: having internalised the division between the 'feminine' sphere of emotion and sexuality, and the 'masculine' sphere of learning, she later breaks off her relationship with her lover Richard Nicholson ostensibly because she cannot leave her aging mother, but in reality, the reader senses, because she is subconsciously convinced that marriage will entail the final renunciation of the intellectual side of her nature.[501]

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[498] Cf. also Beddoe, 27.
[499] Cf. also Phillips, 130.
[500] Cf. Phillips, 131.
[501] Cf. Phillips, 134.

While in the case of Mrs Olivier, as in that of most Victorian fathers, the psychological damage is wrought by the unthinking cruelty and emotional coldness with which they treat their offspring, most other Victorian mothers exert a much more subtle tyranny: in *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, Harriet's life is determined by the excessively close emotional bond she develops with her mother. Attempting to live up to her mother's expectations – especially as regards her notion of 'moral beauty', which shows itself in dutiful and self-effacing acts – Harriett inadvertedly spoils the lives of those who come into contact with her through her needless sacrifices. Having "learn[ed] from her mother a code of conduct based on mere surface appearance" (Phillips, 135), Harriett lacks understanding and consideration for the feelings of those around her; her dutiful adherence to the moral code ingrained by her upbringing is revealed as a selfish preoccupation with her own facade of 'moral beauty'. The novel "outlines the emptiness of a life half lived from infanthood to death, a female life constrained by the narrowness of middle-class snobbery and social strictures" (Forster, 112). "Harriett evinces not so much a willingness to imitate her mother, but an inability to think of herself as separate from her" (Phillips, 136); her mother's death plunges her into a crisis of identity, forcing her suddenly to acknowledge that "she was not there. Through her absorption in her mother, some large, essential part of herself had gone. It had not been so when her father died; what he had absorbed was given back to her, transferred to her mother. All her memories of her mother were joined to the memory of this now irrecoverable self" (Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 79). The novel relies exclusively on Harriett's subjective perceptions to present a psychologically accurate portrayal of the way in which her mental and emotional make-up has been warped by her Victorian upbringing and pre-Oedipal attachment to her mother; a fact noted and severely criticised by a contemporary reviewer, who asserted that "[s]uch a story needs to be told from the point of view of an exceptionally intelligent third party, or else in the old way by the omniscient author" (Mortimer, 533; qt. in Forster, 113). Despite the book's unenthusiastic reception by contemporary reviewers, Sinclair considered it "one of the best books I have done" (Boll, 143) – a view that is shared by many of her late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century critics.[502] Concentrating on the fate and psyche of an individual, Sinclair manages to convey a message of more universal validity, exposing the psychological mechanisms by which Victorian mothers effectively prevented their daughters from successfully developing independent personalities.

In later novels, however, the dutiful, self-effacing 'daughter-at-home' is given a more sympathetic evaluation: while novels of the interwar period frequently stress the fundamentally egotistic desire for self-imposed martyrdom that lies at the heart of their decision, Sylvia Arbuthnot in Shirley Darbyshire's *Journey to Melbury* (1953) – though superficially reminiscent of Harriett Frean and Gwen Armistead – is frequently commended for her utter unselfishness. Although secretly engaged to the son of her mother's best friend, she breaks off her engagement after her mother's death, feeling that her duty to her family is stronger than her duty to her fiancé. The sequel to Darbyshire's novel, *The Years at Melbury* (1953), traces the consequences of her decision as she gradually gives up her own life and bows to the egotistical wishes of her father despite her younger sister's warnings: "'Father!' said Frances, 'you go on and on about him as if he were sacrosanct.

[502] Cf. e.g. Saunders, §6; Forster, 113.

He's not. He's monstrously selfish. And if you are not careful he'll eat you up completely. You'll never have a life of your own and poor Charles will simply go whistling down the wind'" (21).

Defending her father's decision to forbid her engagement to Charles, the novel provides an opportunity for Sylvia to present her own point of view: "She [Frances] thinks Papa is hard and selfish […] and he isn't. […] And because I can help him and he relies on me you must see I owe him a duty – […] He has always been a kind and generous father to me. He has given me love and companionship; we have always been very close to one another, you know that. So I must consider him – it is only fair" (Darbyshire, *Years*, 37). After waiting several years, Charles finally accepts her decision and – unlike Harriett Frean's lover – finds happiness in marriage to another woman. While Sylvia, like Harriett, gives up her fiancé from a sense of duty, there is no indication that her sacrifice has negative consequences for him, or indeed anyone other than herself. Moreover, the novel also shows a shift of emphasis that takes place in post-war Victorian centred fiction, as it is the stereotypical tyrannical father, no longer the mother character, who is responsible for Sylvia's plight.[503]

While a certain branch of interwar middlebrow fiction focuses on the stifling effects of the excessively close mother-daughter bond forged by Victorian childrearing methods, and on the selfishness of elderly middle-class mothers who hold their grown-up daughters in an emotional stranglehold, other authors concentrate on the crippling consequences of Victorian mother-son relationships whose influence prevents young men from 'outgrowing' their Victorian homes, establishing lasting relationships to younger women, and successfully integrating themselves into twentieth-century society. Whereas mothers of daughters mar their children's lives by their insistence on the traditionally 'feminine' virtues of self-effacement and dutiful submission to patriarchal power structures, Victorian mothers of sons tend to err in the opposite direction, showering them with affection and allowing them too much of the freedom for which they themselves long. Geoffrey, in *Sleep in Peace*, (like Roy in Violet Dean's *Love's a Man of War*, discussed below) is cursed with "an adoring mother who allows him to do precisely as he likes" (516) and a father who takes no hand in his upbringing. The consequences are disastrous not only on the personal but also, as Phyllis Bentley implies, on the political level: while Roy is merely driven to look for a surrogate mother figure in his wife, Geoffrey – emblematic of a whole generation of young men – finds a surrogate father figure in the British Fascist Sir Oswald Moseley.

Doris Leslie's[504] *Concord in Jeopardy*,[505] in particular, presents a sustained exploration of a mother's formative influence on her son's life, contrasting Concord's own impressions with insights gleaned from Freudian psychoanalysis: "Concord always emphatically denied that his mother's domination was more than a temporary influence in his early life" (44), the reader is

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[503] Cf. also ch. 3.1.3 and 3.2.3.

[504] 'Doris Leslie' was the pseudonym of Lady Fergusson Hannay, née Oppenheimer (1891–1982); the name under which she published her novels was that of her first husband, the actor John Leslie. She wrote several popular novels which achieved a limited amount of critical and commercial success during the 1920s and 30s. During the 1940s, she finally established a reputation for herself as a historical novelist and writer of fictional biographies, starting with *Royal William* in 1940. She moved within Modernist cycles (she was close friends, for instance, with H.D., who used her as the model for Ermy in "Murex" and "The Unusual Star"), and occasionally drew on 'highbrow' techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, in her novels (cf. Kibble, 21f.; also Doris Leslie's anonymous obituary in the *New York Times*).

[505] The novel is discussed at greater length in chapter 4.1.2.

told. But even though the narrator concedes that "[h]e may have been right and we wrong..." (Leslie, *Concord*, 44), the novel does not make this appear particularly likely. *Concord in Jeopardy* is interesting because of, rather than in spite of, the fact that Leslie "unsuccessfully attempted to psychologize Concord and make him a symbol" (Ashley, §3): her frequently simplistic and unsubtle attempts to uncover hidden psychological 'truths' about Concord's Victorian childhood and its after-effects serve to emphasise those aspects which she wants readers to regard as the most crucial and most typically Victorian.

During his youth and well into his twenties, Concord struggles to free himself from his mother's overprotectiveness and continuous interference in his life: "'You want to keep me in a cradle,' he muttered. 'And what if I do? It's only natural.' 'It's not natural. That's what's so wrong about it. It's *not* natural. It's suff...ocating'" (Leslie, *Concord*, 132).[506] As Concord fights to assert his will against that of his resolute mother, who strongly objects to his desire to become a painter, having envisioned a glowing academic or political career for her son, he is continually confronted not only with her disapproval, but with his own sense of ingratitude and inadequacy: Esther misses no opportunity to remind him of the numerous sacrifices she has made for the sake of his education, and to stress her low opinion of his work and his chosen career. His ambiguous relationship to his mother, characterised by resentment for her self-imposed martyrdom and an unnaturally close tie forged during his fatherless childhood, crucially influences his later relationships with women, as does his typically Victorian tendency to elevate women to near-godlike status. This becomes apparent in his relationship to Brenda Frost, the older woman who will later become his wife:

> He could not realize it even yet, that she should stoop to him. Sometimes at the height of his fulfilment he experienced a strange and terrible revulsion of doubt and remorse. The inhibitions of his youth, his mother's puritanical restraint, persisted, a dim, disturbing ghost to stab his conscience and to mar his joy in her and in himself. What had he done – he questioned, what right had he to force his love upon her? Why should she honour him? She, who was so wonderful – to honour him!" (Leslie, *Concord*, 225)

His idealisation of women blinds him to the crucial faults in Brenda's character which will eventually lead to a life of married misery and artistic paralysis. His inability to see Brenda as she is – an avaricious, cold-hearted, scheming woman out to exploit Concord emotionally and financially – is exacerbated by his unconscious perception of her as a surrogate mother: in a flash of Freudian insight during a fever delirium, Concord himself realises that his desire for her is an indication for a desire to return to his mother's womb. Later in the novel, Mikulsky, Concord's outspoken and psychologically astute Polish friend, unequivocally reiterates the point in a conversation with Concord's older friend and mentor, Barford:

> "[...] *I* do not love this woman. But *he* love her. Because for *him* she is his mother. Listen! I will explain. ... All his life – you understand – he has a mother who *con*trol him. She rule his life – this mother. *Alors*! When she die and he is left without this mother – then he cry for her. He cannot live unless there is some woman who will domin*ate* him. And soon – or late, he will fight this domination, but he must *have* it. Something in him *ask* for it. He have it with his mother and she die. Now he have it with his wife. For him his wife is now his mother. That is my idea. It is original idea. I think so. Not?"

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[506] As in her earlier novel *The Starling* (1927), Leslie uses the unsubtle means of a nervous stammer to underline the protagonist's sense of inadequacy and lack of self-confidence (for a brief discussion of *The Starling*, cf. Kibble, 28ff.).

> By all means not, mused Barford [...]. Some similar idea was attributed two thousand years ago to ... Oedipus. (Leslie, *Concord*, 259–60; italics in original)

Concord's futile struggle to free himself from his mother's influence is given a wider dimension when the novel repeatedly stresses the extent to which Esther personifies the essence of Victorianism. When Concord's brilliant school friend Huckaby declares his aversion against the Victorian frame of mind – which he labels 'The Obvious' – Concord immediately associates this with his mother: to him, she represents "the quintessence of The Obvious" (Leslie, *Concord*, 52), epitomising the materialism and intellectual narrowness which Huckaby regards as typical of Victorian society. Her predilection for ostentatious self-sacrifice in the name of womanly duty (a trait exhibited also by Gwen Armistead, Mrs Olivier, or Harriett Frean) is likewise identified as typical of Victorian womanhood. Esther's symbolic position is underlined in the narrator's description of her last illness and death, which coincides with that of Queen Victoria, and during which depictions of Esther's suffering alternate with reports of the Queen's health. At the end of the novel, history tragically cuts short Concord's attempt to free himself of his mother's lingering influence through a relationship with a younger woman, which goes hand in hand with a period of intense creativity and artistic achievement. However, no happy ending is possible for the victims of the Victorians: just as Concord begins to cast off the shackles of Victorianism in his private life, World War I – presented as the result of the Victorians' failure in the public sphere – cuts short his brief period of happiness and finally kills him.

The novel also highlights the extent to which Victorian mothers, denied educational and professional opportunities by established class and gender roles, tend to project their ambitions onto their sons, attempting to force them into careers unsuited to their interests and abilities. Victorian-centred texts of this type (frequently featuring lower-middle-class families) show that the consequences of these mothers' attitudes are doubly damaging: where sons are successful in fulfilling their mothers' ambitions – as in, for instance, Joe Ruffy in *Ruffy and Sons* or John Barnard in *The Flint Anchor* – this frequently causes a permanent rift as they transcend class barriers and seek to conceal their humble origins; where they fall short of their mothers' expectations – as in, for instance, Bernard Ruffy in *Ruffy and Sons*, Ludo Armistead in *Sleep in Peace*, David Howard in *Sew A Fine Seam* or Alexander Concord in *Concord in Jeopardy* – the deep-seated sense of failure that results from their mothers' disapproval often turns out to be an insurmountable obstacle in the sons' personal development.

While many traditionally-minded mothers in Victorian-centred fiction project their ambitions onto their sons, more progressive women characters are apt to fall into the same error where their daughters are concerned, and are unable to face up to the fact that not every young woman is cut out – intellectually and emotionally – to break out of the conventional mould and embark on a professional career. The topic of 'advanced' mothers struggling to come to terms with their daughters' conventional tastes and predilection for the 'feminine' occupation of wife- and motherhood is a recurring theme in Victorian-centred fiction, particularly during the interwar period, but also in the postwar era. Although the evaluation of this phenomenon varies from author to author, it is observable that these mothers – erring, as they are seen to do, on the side of emancipation rather than repressive Victorianism – never meet with the wholesale condemnation that authors accord characters like Joanna Ruffy, Gwen Armistead or Esther Concord.

In addition, post-war Victorian-centred fiction shows a subtle change in the portrayal and evaluation even of highly conservative mother characters. In novels like Shirley Darbyshire's *Journey to Melbury* (1953), Janet Arbuthnot reflects that "she was not independent enough or yet perhaps sufficiently convinced" (87) to avail herself of the opportunities gradually opening themselves up to women towards the end of the Victorian period; nonetheless, she is adamant that her daughters be given a good education. In F.W. Kenyon's *Without Regret* (1957), Mrs Kershaw, of whom her daughter merely remarks that "[s]he was a dutiful, self-effacing woman; that, perhaps, is why I remember so little about her" (11), likewise lays the foundation for her daughter's career as a teacher through her deathbed wish. Along similar lines, Frances Dormer in R.H. Mottram's *Scenes That Are Brightest* (1956), though less conventional than the women in Kenyon's and Darbyshire's novels, accepts her purely domestic role, but ensures that her stepdaughters are given an education that will enable them to earn their own living when they grow up.

Muriel Kershaw and the Dormer sisters are all, to some extent, examples of young women who successfully outgrow their Victorian homes. Even in Darbyshire's novels, Sylvia's fate is counterbalanced by the happy endings that the books hold in store for several of her sisters and nieces, which, to some extent, are due to her timely intervention and self-sacrificing dedication to her filial duty. It is certainly worth observing that by the 1950s, novels focusing on female protagonists more frequently end on a positive note, presenting empowering fantasies of female success and emancipation which must have appealed to a (female) readership still struggling to free itself of the constraints that these characters had so successfully overcome. At the same time, however, conservative female characters are likewise given a more positive evaluation: in keeping with a new ideology of motherhood,[507] mothers are increasingly presented as nurturing and supportive figures, often contrasting sharply with stereotypically autocratic father figures whose egotism and hypocrisy is criticised in the text.

3.2.3 Success stories, part one – outgrowing the gender divide

The texts discussed in the preceding chapter, with their heavy emphasis on the "infantilising" (Ingman, 2) effects a Victorian upbringing had on its victims, stand in contrast to those comparatively rarer novels which show – most frequently female – characters who successfully outgrow their late-Victorian homes. As outlined in the introduction, it is only during the 1940s and 50s that the adjective 'Victorian' acquires the almost exclusive connotation of sexual repressiveness. While this issue will be given due consideration in the following chapter, the analysis of Phyllis Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* has already shown that there are many facets of Victorianism which it was perceived as desirable, even crucial, for the subsequent generation to cast off. In this chapter, the key themes *Sleep in Peace* presents as relevant to the younger generation's successful emancipation from their parents will be taken up, and Bentley's treatment of them will be compared with two other texts, one published significantly earlier, and one over a decade later. Where applicable, references to other Victorian-centred novels will also be included.

Chronologically speaking, the first – and perhaps because of that the most optimistic – account of a girl who outgrows her stifling Victorian home is Netta Syrett's *The Victorians*

[507] Cf. Humble, 242; Haste, 146f.; Sinfield, *Literature*, 235.

(1915).[508] The novel focuses on a young girl, Rose Cottingham, and "provides an interesting contrast between the proto-modernist heroine and an array of stereotypically Victorian characters" (Glitz, 33), which, Glitz suggests, may to some degree have influenced later accounts of the Victorians in the works of Strachey and Woolf. After the death of her parents, Rose and her sister Lucie are taken in by her grandmother, "a rigid disciplinarian" (Syrett, 26): "She had always ruled the life of her daughter, whom she had loved in a condescending fashion, and now wearily, and from a sense of duty rather than from affection, she took up the task of ruling the lives of her grandchildren" (Syrett, 23). Set at the very end of the Victorian period, the novel describes how Rose, a misfit in every typically 'Victorian' environment she enters, fights against her grandmother's mid-Victorian views. After describing the bleakness of Rose's childhood and youth at home and at a boarding school, her rejection of a 'suitable' match and her struggles to make a career for herself against her grandmother's wishes, the novel ends on a triumphant note with Rose becoming a highly successful novelist.

Violet Dean's *Love's A Man of War* (1956)[509] likewise focuses on a girl at odds with her late-Victorian environment. Unlike the other heroines, Carmen initially escapes her parental home via an unhappy marriage; after her husband's, father's and brother's deaths, however, she returns home to take over the family firm, devoting her life to her work and her daughter, Lesley. Through an Italian business associate, she is commissioned to write an article on the Brontë sisters for an Italian literary encyclopedia; gradually, a love affair between them develops, but ends abruptly when Dario is imprisoned for his resistance to the Fascist regime of *il Duce*. The novel ends on an optimistic note in the 1950s, showing Carmen – happy despite her lover's absence – enjoying a visit to her daughter, now happily married, and reflecting on the amount of progress made since her youth.

Syrett's, Bentley's, and Dean's novels all deal at some length with the question of women's education. In *The Victorians*, Rose repeatedly wishes for the same educational opportunities as her friend Geoffrey, and the novel presents a lengthy and highly satirical account of lessons with her governess, which consist mainly of learning a number of (utterly ridiculous) primers by heart. When Rose, much to her delight, is sent away to school, a further disappointment awaits her: under Miss Quayle, the headmistress of the school, who (significantly) resembles "the postage-stamp likenesses of Queen Victoria" and with whom she soon begins a "war to the knife" (Syrett, 103) destined to last the entire length of her school career, Rose's school life seems to "bristle with rules for her, and to be punctuated by prayers" (Syrett, 115). The headmistress soon recognises Rose's exceptional intelligence and is eager for her to pass the Cambridge Junior examination, mainly, it is suggested, because this would reflect well on the school. The novel presents a disillusioning account of late-Victorian advances in women's education, as Miss Quayle is unable to bend her ideals of new womanhood to the individual needs of her students. That this is a fault which is characteristic of the whole educational system, however, is made evident when Rose, though brilliant in English and History, fails the exam because of her poor score in Arithmetic – her lack of mathematical skills

[508] The novel has been republished several times under the title *Rose Cottingham, or The Victorians* since 1978, most recently by Nabu Press in 2011 and Forgotten Books in 2012. Like *Sleep in Peace*, the novel incorporates a number of autobiographical elements, most notably Syrett's attendance at the North London Collegiate School for Girls (cf. Sheffrin, n.pag.).

[509] The title is an allusion to George Herbert's seventeenth-century poem "Discipline".

thus effectively barring her from pursuing her interest in the Humanities. In the later novels, in contrast, school is presented in a much more positive light, opening up new horizons for the protagonists and liberating them from the narrowness of their home experience. In all three novels, however, the girls' education is abruptly terminated by their elders, regardless of their own opinion and their undeniable academic aptitude.

All three return home to lives of unmitigated boredom, barred from useful occupation both by their sex and their (upper-)middle-class status. From that point onwards, however, the fates of the three girls differ: Laura (in *Sleep in Peace*) finally overcomes her father's opposition and is given permission to study art; Carmen (in *Love's A Man of War*) escapes home through her marriage to Roy, only later embarking on her career; and Rose (in *The Victorians*), having rejected a marriage proposal from her childhood friend Geoffrey and given up her plans to become a teacher for family reasons, is sent to France, where, freed from the interference and constant disapproval of her grandmother, she writes a highly successful novel. In all three texts, however, one of the defining characteristics of the 'Victorian' characters is their inability to conceive of any other career for a woman except wifedom and motherhood, and their lack of understanding for the girls' craving for intellectual stimulation.

In all three novels, the young women come up against a gradually obsolescent ideology of femininity (embodied by Rose's grandmother, Laura's elder sister, and Carmen's mother) which regards marriage as the only suitable career for a woman. The notion of 'duty' – both filial and religious – is frequently invoked to enforce compliance: "What's the good of making such a fuss as you [...] do about going to Church [...], if you've no more sense of what's right than to want to leave home and neglect your family?" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 229), Laura's father fulminates when she wants to study at the Slade School in London. At school, too, religion becomes an instrument of coercion: "Did another [girl] talk in the hours consecrated to work and silence, she was interviewed apart, the name of God was invoked, she was gravely assured that she was displeasing to the Deity, and recommended to seek help in prayer" (Syrett, 121). In *Sleep in Peace* and *The Victorians* especially, as in F.W. Kenyon's *Without Regret* (1957) (another – though less triumphant – account of outgrowing the Victorians), the protagonists' loss of religious belief is celebrated as a crucial step towards freedom from an environment in which gender inequality is also frequently linked to the 'divine order'. (In *Mary Olivier*, for instance, Mrs Olivier likewise invokes religion in order to thwart her daughter's ambitions to transcend the domestic sphere: whenever Mary shows an interest in subjects and activities traditionally gendered masculine, her mother reminds her that this is against 'God's will'.)

However, it is not only at home that women have to combat the Victorian belief in women's intellectual inferiority and the home as their rightful place. In *Sleep in Peace*, women's entry into the 'male' sphere of business and the professions is a key element in the process of 'outgrowing the Victorians'. Grace's and Laura's decision for a career both shows their difference from the Victorian women of the preceding generation, and widens the generation gap as education broadens their mental horizons and radically changes their perception of women's roles and duties. While the novel celebrates the advances that have been made since the nineteenth century, it also shows that women's entry into professional life is still subject to a number of severe limitations and restrictions that the interwar era has inherited from the Victorians. Thwarted in her

ambition to become a lawyer, Grace's teaching career consists of a series of pitched battles between herself and various authorities deeply imbued with Victorianism, misogynistic prejudice, and a deep-seated distrust of new pedagogical developments.

Carmen, in Dean's *Love's a Man of War*, likewise has to overcome Victorian discrimination against professional women, which is shown to continue into the interwar period. However, the novel – like many of the Victorian-centred 'career novels' discussed in chapter 4.1.1 – makes it clear that her career is determined by chance and filial duty rather than the outcome of a conscious choice on her part: after she has returned home from India in the aftermath of World War I, the sudden death of her father forces her to take over the family business, her brother having been killed at the front. In an era in which female 'interference' in the male sphere of business was still regarded with hostility and suspicion, this step is facilitated by the fact that Carmen – now head of a newspaper export firm – conducts most of her business by letter, thus enabling her to hide her sex behind the unrevealing signature "C. Barrington" (Dean, 170). In Syrett's *The Victorians*, in contrast, this is a relatively minor issue, as a writing career is one of the options open to both genders; like the many other Victorian-centred texts, however, the book foregrounds the question of 'femininity' and its compatibility with women's entry into the public sphere.[510]

Both Syrett and Dean go to some lengths to show that intelligent, ambitious women are not necessarily 'unwomanly' according to traditional standards. In *The Victorians*, Rose's best friend Helen comments on the differences between them: "I suppose I have the reasonable, intellectual way of life […] and you have the emotional way. Yours is more attractive, of course – people will always like you – but you will get into lots of trouble" (188). The author is careful to distance Rose from the 'unfeminine' ideal of the new woman favoured by Miss Quayle based exclusively on intellectual achievement and rigorous self-control. Nor is Rose's career as a writer presented as irreconcilable with marriage and domesticity: the novel ends with the triumphant statement that "Jack Colquhoun liked her book!" (Syrett, 384), implying that her literary success will further rather than prevent her engagement to the young man she admires.[511] In *Sleep in Peace*, too, both girls express their desire to advance a step towards women's emancipation by showing that in the twentieth century, marriage and a career can be reconciled; as it turns out, however, World War I intervenes to dash their ambitious plans.

Love's A Man of War adheres to a fairly conservative conception of femininity, frequently emphasising that (heterosexual) love, not her job, is the most important aspect of a woman's life: without a man at her side Carmen feels "like a car limping on three cylinders" (Dean, 172) despite her professional success. Dean's novel differs from earlier texts also in the importance it accords to motherhood as the central experience of a woman's life. Even before she is married, Carmen realises her longing for a child of her own, a longing that makes it easier for her to reconcile herself to her husband's incompetent love-making, but which causes a fatal rift between herself and Roy when the latter reveals that he does not want children. When Carmen, in the absence of reliable contraceptive measures, nonetheless falls pregnant and gives birth to her daughter Lesley, the child soon develops into the centre of her emotional existence, especially after her husband's death.

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[510] For a much more conservative near-contemporary treatment of this theme, cf. e.g. Sheila Kaye-Smith's *A Challenge to Sirius* (1917), discussed in chapter 3.1.4.

[511] As a matter of fact, Rose's story is continued in a sequel entitled *Rose Cottingham Married* (1916).

Portraying Carmen as a model mother and implicitly contrasting her to her own mother's emotional and practical ineptitude, the novel shows its indebtedness to contemporary childcare theories which emphasised the importance of the emotional bond between mothers and children. At the same time, it harks back to the more distanced 'behaviourist' approach of the interwar years, which attempted to forestall Freudian traumas by its emphasis on rational, unsentimental treatment.[512] Bringing up Lesley as a single mother during the nineteen-twenties and thirties, Carmen takes care not to 'spoil' her by excessive displays of affection and to conceal from her daughter the fact that she is the centre of Carmen's world. While the novel stresses the importance of letting children feel that their parents have lives separate from those of their offspring, it undermines this message by revealing that for most of her life, this is a pretence that Carmen deliberately keeps up so as to avoid making excessive emotional demands on Lesley. In the end, the effort is repaid by the close bond that develops between the two women, stressing that Carmen has succeeded in gaining her daughter's confidence and affection because of her ability to keep her distance and let her live her own life. Carmen's approach is presented as the antithesis to that of Roy's mother and Carmen's own parents, whose close supervision and continuous well-intentioned interference into their children's lives have moved her brother Lovell to emigrate to Canada, and have driven Carmen herself into a precipitate marriage with a man she does not love, but who presents her sole chance of escape from the claustrophobic atmosphere of her late-Victorian home.[513]

3.2.4 Success stories, part two – outgrowing Victorian sexuality

In many Victorian-centred novels, a more open-minded attitude towards sexuality is presented as a key element in outgrowing the Victorians. Just as Virginia Woolf in her memoirs of Bloomsbury life (published posthumously in the collection *Moments of Being* in 1976) records Strachey's (in)famous question to her sister as a decisive moment in the process of breaking with the Victorian past,[514] popular Victorian-centred novels likewise emphasise the overcoming of Victorian prudery and repressive sexual standards as one of the most crucial steps towards "[t]he twentieth century [...] casting the shackles of the nineteenth" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 119). In some cases, the inspiration to do so comes from early-twentieth-century literature: having read *Ann Veronica*, Frederick in *Sleep in Peace* insists on the importance of a more open discourse about sexual issues, thus coming into conflict with his Bible-thumping father. The passage serves to contrast the old-fashioned attitudes of the Victorians with the enlightened stance of the next generation:

> "But it's intolerable!" Laura heard Frederick cry passionately as Edward dragged him away upstairs towards the safety of the study. "Is a man to go through life without once mentioning the eternal verities?"
> "They don't regard sex as one of the eternal verities," came in Edward's dry tones.
> "By God," cried Frederick feelingly, "they'd better!" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 148)

[512] For theories about childcare in the interwar years and the post-World War II era, cf. Humble, 224 and 242. For a similar treatment of the theme in Victorian-centred literature, cf. e.g. Shirley Darbyshire's *Journey to Melbury* (1953), discussed briefly in ch. 3.2.2.

[513] The importance of this message is underlined by the narrator's analysis of Roy's character, which directly connects his infidelity, emotional immaturity and egocentrism to the damaging influence of his doting and over-protective mother.

[514] Cf. also Loesberg, 361.

In other instances, the impetus comes either from friends (usually older, from a different social background and/or foreign, such as Killigrew in *Secret Bread*, Esther Richards in *Without Regret* or Rose's lower-class schoolfellows in *The Victorians*), or exposure to a different socio-cultural environment when protagonists are given a chance to leave their Victorian homes (as in *The Victorians, Challenge to Sirius* or *Sleep in Peace*) or, more drastically, even the country of their birth (as in *Love's a Man of War* or *Concord in Jeopardy*). What is important in this regard is the underlying assumption that the repressive effects of a traditional Victorian upbringing cannot be cast off on the protagonists' own initiative, but only with the aid of some outside influence.

The importance of overcoming Victorian attitudes towards sexuality as the most crucial aspect of 'outgrowing the Victorians' can be traced in almost all of the novels discussed in this chapter. Not only in texts focusing on female experience this is often the most prominent feature that marks the difference between one generation and the next. This conviction finds its expression even in otherwise deeply conservative texts, such as Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Challenge to Sirius*.[515] In the novel, John Rainger's belief in the connection between sexual knowledge and sexual depravity marks him as a typical Victorian. When his son Frank at the age of twelve reveals to him that he knows that babies are born in the same way as calves, John Rainger is shocked: "According to his ideas, knowledge of the path of nature meant knowledge of the path of sin, and he could not believe that Frank, while tolerably acquainted with the one, was totally ignorant of the other" (Kaye-Smith, 15). Significantly, this is the only aspect of typically 'Victorian' ideology that is implicitly criticised in Kaye-Smith's novel. Whereas Victorian notions of femininity, patriotism, and martial heroism are endorsed by narrator and characters alike, and affirmed through the events of the plot, Mr Rainger's mistaken belief in the corrupting potential of sexual knowledge is presented as a Victorian misconception happily overcome by the early-twentieth-century audience of the book, and one which Frank comes to outgrow in the course of his experiences.

Comments on this notion recur quite frequently. In *Secret Bread*, too, Ishmael initially regards sexual attraction as a weakness which ought to be overcome by his better nature; in his marriage, he looks for intellectual companionship more than for sexual gratification – a seemingly 'modern' stance that is to some extent due, however, to his conviction that sensuality is inherently sinful and ought to be avoided, and that he has to cast off in the course of the novel. This topic is of even greater relevance to female protagonists, who have to outgrow Victorian discourses on women's 'natural' asexuality. In *The Victorians*, this issue is addressed at some length, as Rose struggles (and ultimately fails) to reconcile her sexual feelings during puberty with her desire to be a 'nice girl'. In a key scene, she admires herself in the mirror:

> For a while she stared at herself irresolutely, then with another breath-taking impulse she unfastened not only her dress, but all her other clothes, throwing these hastily from her on the bed. In a moment she stood, a slim white figure, erect in the midst of the crimson circle made by the dress which had fallen around her feet. Then, indeed, she was beautiful, and she knew it. Her body, at least, was beautiful – even in its immaturity; straight and slender as a lily, and almost as white and fine in texture. She smiled triumphantly. If some one could see her now! Some one who had perhaps thought her plain. Surely then she might be loved. Lovers, she supposed, must see the women they loved – like this? (Syrett, 277–8)

[515] For a detailed analysis of this novel, cf. ch. 2.2.1. and 3.2.4.

Immediately afterwards, however, her desire for sexual love plunges her into a "guilty panic of shame" (Syrett, 278). Unable to come to terms with her own feelings, Rose's largely autobiographical novel is full of "omissions, suppressions; there were reticences which her creator neither dared nor wished to overpass" (Syrett, 379). The incident also serves to highlight the hypocrisy evident in Victorian critics' enthusiastic reaction to her book: "That her psychology was only true up to the approximate age of fifteen, did not matter. Even when they knew better, critics applauded the 'faithful and fearless' delineation of the mind and heart of a young girl,' and Rose winced when she thought of what they might have said if she had been really 'fearless'" (Syrett, 380).

Syrett's description goes some length towards confirming Gardiner's assessment that "[i]n the area of personal relations hypocrisy was soon identified and attacked. Middle-class women were no longer expected to collude in a pretence at sexual innocence. This was not of course the same thing as sexual liberation [...]. But even if men after 1918 were slow to accord women equality of regard, the past could act as a gauge against which to measure progress" (Gardiner, 27). However, it also serves to demonstrate that the treatment of, and attitudes towards, women's sexuality in Victorian-centred fiction is somewhat more complex than Gardiner's summary suggests. Many novels feature female protagonists who, like Rose, have been brought up to believe in the myth of the asexual 'Angel', and genuinely aspire to this ideal. Syrett's novel shows how Rose, in the absence of reliable and unbiased sex education, acquires what little knowledge she has from lower-class schoolmates, whose tales (forbidden by the teachers and told in surreptitious whispers during the night) simultaneously fascinate and disgust her, thus strengthening the association between sex and shame.

Women's self-perception as sexual beings also is an important concern in later novels. In *Sleep in Peace*, Gwen, raised along traditionally Victorian lines, is "grateful to Frederick [...] for admitting her to that experience of sex which she deeply desired – all the more deeply because she never admitted the desire even to herself" (231). Very soon, however, Gwen, unable to accept the sexual side of her nature, subconsciously wants to be forced to have sex by her far too kind and considerate husband, leading to the development of a vicious circle worth quoting at length:

> But Frederick, though an ardent lover, was respectful and unselfish in his passion, qualities which Gwen [...] contemptuously designated as timid and unmanly; when she retreated, in a negative essentially feminine, designed to provoke compulsion, Frederick took her at her word and complied with what he believed to be her wishes. To Gwen this seemed a denial, a rejection, of her own power of attraction as a woman; surely, she argued instinctively, what he truly wanted he would take, and since he did not take he could not want. So on these occasions she positively hated Frederick because he did not enforce submission; and, hating him, repelled his advances all the more stringently. Both therefore returned to Hudley irritable and unsatisfied. (Bentley, *Sleep*, 232)

The unbridgeable gap between Gwen's in-bred frigidity and Frederick's natural tact and consideration for what he believes to be her wishes dooms their ill-considered marriage from the very beginning. It also proves a problematic heritage for the next generation, as Gwen sublimates her sexual feelings into exaggerated maternal tenderness towards her son, thus further alienating her husband and estranging her daughter Madeline – a development that the novel, given its emphasis on 'typicality', evidently intends to depict as characteristic of Victorian family life.

Violet Dean's *Love's A Man Of War* presents an even more unflattering picture of Victorian sexuality, emphasising not only the damaging influence of women's aspirations to sexual 'innocence', but also the Victorians' sexual ignorance and prudery: "It is probable that not many

honeymoons were rapturously happy in the closing decades of Victoria's reign. The contracting parties must too often have approached the perilous adventure from widely different standpoints" (19). The novel repeatedly juxtaposes contemporary knowledge with Victorian "ignorance [...] on certain of the simple facts of life" (Dean, 19), and highlights the drawbacks and dangers inherent in the latter. Brought up, like Rose Cottingham and Gwen Armistead, to consider sexual feelings unnatural and immodest in a woman, Lucy Barrington (the female half of the couple to which the quote applies) appears determined to discourage her husband's sexual attentions: "'[...] I love you too, but I don't believe women have... got those – you know – physical feelings, or if they have, they control them better than men. Of course I want to be a good wife to you, always, but can't we... I mean... sometimes it's quite right of course...'" (Dean, 21). Unlike Syrett and Bentley, Dean does not suggest that Lucy herself suffers from her repressed sexuality; however, she is highly critical of its influence on Lucy's marriage. Deeply frustrated, Charles Barrington concludes that "he had fallen in love with a snowdrop who had turned into an Ice Princess" (Dean, 21). Their lack of sexual rapport leads to a process of mutual estrangement that plunges Charles into alcoholism, and Lucy into a life of emotional stagnation and narrow-minded conventionality.

The novel also criticises the consequences of Lucy's shortsighted attitude towards her daughter's sexual education: not only does Carmen find herself completely unprepared for her first menstruation (before finding comfort from a more 'advanced' friend of Lucy's, who explains that the bleeding that has suddenly set is does not herald her imminent death), but also – more crucially – for the experience of sexuality in marriage. Again, however, the emphasis is not on the psychological consequences this entails – in fact, Carmen appears to have no qualms about experiencing and identifying with sexual desire – but on the effects her own and her husband's ignorance has on their sex life. After her wedding night, she muses: "This breathless scuffle, slight discomfort and nameless disappointment – was it for this that Lancelot had betrayed his king, and Isolde agonised on a Cornish headland?" (Dean, 111). Much more passionate and open-minded than her mother, she is deeply frustrated at her husband's style of love-making, concluding that "[h]e had been content to learn his loving in Tart Town [i.e. Calcutta's red-light district] – ding-dong, ding-dong, ten rupees, please, and the-sooner-it-is-over-the-sooner-to-sleep" (Dean, 134) and is entirely unaware of his wife's feelings. Stressing that sexual fulfilment is an integral feature of married happiness, the novel takes up a topic that must have resonated with many contemporary readers: despite the impact of *Married Love* (1918), letters to Dr Marie Stopes, reports from birth control clinics, the findings of mass observation surveys and a series of interviews conducted by researchers reveal that during the interwar years and even as late as the nineteen fifties, a significant number of middle- and working-class women regarded sex as a mildly unpleasant marital duty rather than a source of enjoyment[516] even as contemporary publications were beginning to stress the importance of a fulfilling sex life in marriage.[517] Moreover, Dean's treatment of the topic also bears evidence to a shift in twentieth-century views of Victorian sexuality that is observable in a large number of Victorian-centred texts, and which will be explored at greater length in chapter 4.2.2.

In *Love's A Man of War*, heterosexual love and sexual fulfilment are interpreted as integral parts of Carmen's "womanhood" (Dean, 134). In earlier novels, too, the importance of sexuality

[516] Cf. Stevenson, 151; Humble, 227; Dyhouse, 183; Fisher, 213ff.
[517] Cf. Haste, 156ff.

as an essential part of human existence is foregrounded. Along somewhat less revolutionary lines, *A Challenge to Sirius* addresses the issue in relation to its male protagonist: as has been pointed out in previous chapters, the novel describes the literary coterie surrounding Rita Simons, a successful writer and self-proclaimed muse to a number of aspiring young authors, to which Frank briefly belongs during his 18 months' stay in London. They freely indulge in relationships that the conventionally-minded Frank regards as immoral and adulterous, but eventually learns to accept as the established way of life among writers. Nonetheless, his disapproval remains tangible. The reader is brought into an ambiguous position: witnessing the entanglements, emotional upheavals and ultimate failure of Rita's way of life, there is every indication that s/he is invited to agree with Frank's typically Victorian disapproval. On the other hand, however, the narrator also highlights the positive side of the ostensibly 'amoral' practices of Rita's set, presenting it as the healthy antonym to Victorian sexual repression. The message that the reader is meant to take away may be briefly summarised along these lines: sex is healthy, and ought to be accepted as a fact of life and frequently indulged in; however, it ought to take place within the context of matrimony (and – preferably – on the initiative of the male).[518]

A similar attitude is discernible in *Sleep in Peace*. Extramarital sexuality – resulting in the birth of Edward's illegitimate son – is depicted as disruptive of social and familial harmony. Bentley's ironic comment that it is "necessary, of course, to experience the supreme adventure of sex" (*Sleep*, 355) in order to break with the heritage of the nineteenth century acknowledges the prevalence of this opinion in 1930s society, while questioning its validity. The ironic tone of the observation echoes that of other contemporary observers who, by the mid-1930s, were beginning to feel that contemporary authors' preoccupation with sexuality was tedious rather than liberating.[519] Bentley's mocking account of Laura's near-seduction by a soldier on leave whom she has encouraged in the hope of finally uncovering the mystery of sexual intercourse (the adventure ends with her jumping out of a moving taxi as her courage to go through with her experiment fails her) makes it clear that sex merely for sex's or mere curiosity's sake, without emotional attachment, is not to be condoned by the reader. The message is reinforced later in the novel when Laura – belatedly realising her love for Edward – muses that "if it had been Edward, that night in the taxi – a strange warm pang went through Laura at the thought" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 386). Female desire within the context of a strong emotional attachment is depicted as acceptable; female promiscuity or sexual adventurousness, however, clearly is not.[520] Female sexual *pleasure* (rather than mere knowledge) – and the obstacles which 'Victorian' sexual ignorance poses to it – gradually comes to be an issue in Victorian-centred fiction, bearing evidence to a corresponding re-evaluation of marital relations in contemporary

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[518] As will be seen in subsequent chapters, this is a message that recurs frequently in interwar Victorian-centred fiction, and had indeed, owing chiefly to the work of sexologists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, and later translations of Sigmund Freud, become a well-established 'fact' in popular discourse, especially in regard to the large number of 'superfluous' women whom emigration and the war had relegated to a life of (supposedly) sex-starved spinsterhood (cf. Beauman, 123).

[519] Cf. Humble, 238ff.

[520] It has to be remembered, in this context, that during the interwar period, promiscuous women were in conservative circles regarded as 'amateur prostitues' (cf. Haste, 134f.; for a reflection of this view in contemporary discourse, cf. G.M. Hall's study on prostitution in Europe, which devotes a separate chapter to 'amateur prostitution').

society.[521] However, Carmen insists that men and women are equal in all intellectual pursuits, but that men ought to take the lead in sexual matters – an attitude which was widely accepted at the time of writing,[522] and which harks back to the 'Victorian' attitude expressed by Gwen in *Sleep in Peace* and implicitly endorsed by Rose's disavowal of sexual agency in *The Victorians*.

In *Love's a Man of War*, the protagonist shows a considerably less conflicted attitude towards her own sexuality. However, the author is careful to ensure that Carmen's sexual longings do not mark her as either 'unfeminine' or immoral. Repeatedly turning down opportunities for casual sex – both before and after her husband's early death in a shipwreck – Carmen makes it clear that for her, as for Laura, love and sex are inextricably connected. Towards the end of the book this view is challenged by her Italian lover, Dario: while he acknowledges that it is most pleasurable to have sex with a beloved partner, he also stresses that sexuality is an integral part of human nature, and that it can – indeed, as he argues, ought to – be indulged in even where there is no emotional attachment. Even though Dario initially condemns her attitude as unduly romantic, Carmen adheres to her opinion, finally winning over her lover and mapping out a similar viewpoint for the reader.

Despite Carmen's own experiences, it is implicitly understood that sexual experience ought to take place preferably within marriage: the discussion between Lesley and her mother progresses seamlessly from gender roles in sexual intercourse to gender roles in marriage, evidently without any need to explain or introduce the transition. Rather than two separate topics, sex and marriage are obviously regarded as different aspects of the same subject. In terms of sexual morality, the novel charts a progression from Victorian prudery to the permissiveness of the interwar period, both of which are, however, to some extent evaluated in negative terms. Whereas Carmen in her youth chafed against the restrictions placed upon her, her daughter, speaking in the 1930s, claims that "[she] could find it in [her] heart to envy your prunes-and-prisms generation" (Dean, 203). Feeling that the sexual entanglements common among her generation distract her from her career, Lesley looks back longingly to a time when young women were 'protected' from male advances and "could get on with it" (Dean, 204) – to which Carmen replies, however, that "[t]here was just one tiny little snag, dear – there was nothing for most of us to get on with" (Dean, 204). While the sexually permissive climate of the thirties involves Lesley in a disastrous affair with an "ambidextrous [i.e. bisexual]" (Dean, 254) young actor which finally culminates in his suicide, the more restrained atmosphere of the post-war era finally brings her peace and happiness in the shape of a respectable husband who, the reader is given to understand, will act as a steadying influence and be able to 'take care of her' in the conventionally accepted manner.

3.3 Conclusion

The texts discussed in this chapter focus on Victorian family life and the domestic sphere, but also chart women's attempts to break out of these typically 'feminine' domains. Written by authors for whom the Victorian age was "not so much distant history as personal memory" (Gardiner, 39), texts from the first half of the twentieth century typically offer "an emotional engagement of with the past rather than a flippant rejection of it" (Gardiner, 38), aiming at historical authenticity and insight into

[521] Cf. Dollimore, 60.
[522] Cf. Fisher, 210.

the Victorian frame of mind even as they critique its effects on the present day. The novels under consideration here explore the way in which patriarchal power structures shape Victorian family life, and curtail the freedom of women in Victorian society. In their treatment of these issues, many of the novels written during the interwar period show a keen awareness of the present generation of readers as, in every sense, the inheritors of the Victorians, mainly focusing on the damaging effects that this legacy has for the present. These texts, while attempting to map out new roles for unmarried women, frankly and often pessimistically acknowledge the restrictions imposed on them by families and society alike, and recognize the compromises that interwar society demanded of those who broke out of the conventional mould. During the postwar era, in contrast, texts which present empowering fantasies of women's success in the professional arena nonetheless tend to focus on their private (love) lives and come to acquire conventional marriage endings, bearing witness to a shift in demographical and, more crucially, ideological trends.[523]

The novels analysed in this chapter fall into two broad categories: those which aim at authentic depictions of 'typical' Victorian family life, and those which foreground the process by which protagonists manage to break free of their Victorian backgrounds. The two types of novel show remarkable parallels regarding their deictic structure. The latter typically choose one or more members of the younger generation as their focalising WHO, usually to the total exclusion of the Victorian characters' viewpoint, thereby emphasising the lack of understanding and common ground that exists between the two generations. In these texts, readers are positioned so as to experience the 'suffocating' atmosphere of Victorian family life through the perceptual deixis of the protagonist, triggering an act of alignment that was facilitated, at the time, by the fact that these protagonists are designed as representatives of the majority of contemporary readers. This establishes the crucial link between the text and the "expectations and dispositions" of its readers, establishing the "good continuation [extending] into the reader's store of experience" (Iser, *Act*, 190) that is vital for text types which want to persuade the reader to concur with the thesis and ideological position mapped out by the text.

Novels of the former type, in contrast, are usually marked by frequent shifts from one focalising WHO to the next, as they attempt a presentation of Victorian patriarchy from a number of different perspectives, exposing both the underlying motivations of the patriarch and the views of his victims. In doing so, these novels at first sight appear to disrupt the structure of the thesis novel as postulated by Iser; on closer inspection, however, they merely present a sophisticated variation of it: while the deictic centre occasionally shifts to the Victorian parental generation, the amount of text governed by their deixis is relatively small in comparison to that which features members of the younger generation as focalising WHOs. In addition, the mind style of the individual focalisers plays an important part in channelling readers' responses to individual characters. 'Period' language – both in the mind style of the focalising WHOs and in passages of direct speech – becomes increasingly important in this respect. As the temporal distance to the Victorian period – and thus the difference between 'Victorian' and 'contemporary' language – grows, unsympathetic characters are usually depicted as speaking extremely stilted 'period'

[523] For this tendency in women's fiction in general, cf. Beauman, 70; for the conservative tendency of historical romance in particular, cf. Hughes, 42. Cf. also the discussion of Victorian-centred 'career novels' in ch. 4.1.1.

language (marked by an absence of contractions, archaic turns of phrase and euphemisms), while the language of those with whom the reader is meant to sympathise shows a far less obvious difference from contemporary usage. A striking instance can be found in *Jealous Goddess*, where Adelaide's speech is markedly 'modern' and that of her conventionally-minded sister is noticeably 'Victorian' – a difference even more conspicuous as the age difference between them is a mere two years. In other novels – such as *Victorian House*, the *Melbury* novels, and *Lilith* – the difference is less obvious, but nonetheless perceptible. Moreover, shifts to the patriarch's (or other markedly 'Victorian' characters') deixis are not infrequently terminated by pops to the deictic level of the narration, forcibly alerting the reader to the distance – both in temporal and in psychological terms – that exists between her/him and the Victorian patriarch. On numerous occasions, these pops are also introduce ironic commentary on the patriarch's actions or attitudes, further discouraging the reader from subscribing to his point of view.

Nevertheless, novels of this type aim both at explanation – in the sense that the reader becomes privy to the Victorian characters' thoughts and feelings – and at interpretation, as twentieth-century narrators or focalisers offer additional insights influenced by twentieth-century psychology. While apparently fairly open-minded and balanced in the way in which these texts allow the Victorians to speak for themselves, the attitude mapped out for the reader is, as outlined above, nonetheless channelled through the deictic structure of the novel, as deictic shifts to the patriarch occur less frequently and preclude identification through overt signalling of ironic distance. Almost inevitably, the reader is positioned so as to share the views of the younger focalisers, whose deixis s/he shares for longer stretches of time and who are far less frequently the subject of the narrators' ironic comments.

Overt narratorial irony is also one of the strategies through which many novels convey a sense of superiority over the Victorians, which plays an important part in shaping readers' attitudes towards the past. The same effect is achieved by more subtle means when Victorian characters refer to themselves or their society as 'advanced' or 'modern' (especially in contexts calculated to convey the opposite impression) or show exaggerated delight in (or fear of) technological advances long surpassed in the reader's own day and age. While direct access to the mind style and viewpoint of the Victorian characters enables readers to arrive at a closer understanding of their thoughts and motivations, many texts use this strategy to present them as inferior to the present generation. Crucial 'proof' of the superiority of the present is furnished also through its awareness of the unconscious: the contemporary reader is not only given access to the Victorians' repressed thoughts and emotions, but is also often explicitly reminded that the Victorians did not even know that there were things they did not know about themselves.

Freudian psychoanalysis, frequently simplified and stripped of its complexities, is most frequently invoked in connection with Victorian attitudes towards sexuality in both types of novel. While many novels bear witness to the fact that they were written at a time when social conditions – especially as regards views on women and the family – still bore the stamp of the Victorian age, attitudes towards sexuality become a key marker of difference between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Even novels which are deeply conservative in other respects, in many instances openly endorsing Victorian views on gender, stress the importance of overcoming Victorian repressiveness and reticence in regard to sex: sexual activity is depicted as

a natural and healthy facet of human life, and open discourses about sexuality are advocated as a crucial means of saving young women from the unpleasant consequences of sexual ignorance prior to marriage. In a smaller number of novels, in contrast, Victorian attitudes towards sexuality are presented as examples of the hypocrisy identified as typical of the age: women's ignorance – as well as Victorian 'respectability' in general – is exposed as a sham, reflecting the Victorians' alleged superficiality and preoccupation with appearances in the name of 'respectability'.

Often denounced as slavish adherence to social norms and lack of intellectual independence, a veritable obsession with 'respectability' is one of the key constituents of the 'Victorian' schema constructed by these novels. Continuously obsessed with 'what the neighbours will say', Victorian women in particular are portrayed as hypocritical, materialistic and superficial – characteristics that they aim to transmit especially to their daughters. Victorian religion, especially Anglicanism, is likewise often depicted as tainted with hypocrisy; a point that is underscored by the close link that is frequently established between Church attendance and 'respectability', implying that for many Victorians it is not religious feeling but its ostentatious display that counts. In addition, it is frequently exposed as a facade erected to mask goals that are both deeply conservative and utterly selfish.

It is worth stressing, however, that attitudes towards religion show much greater variance than other aspects of Victorianism, depending on the writers' personal views. Nonetheless, even in the least critical novels, pious characters are presented as (arguably) admirable, but hardly likeable (as, for instance, Phoebe's sternly religious superior at the ragged school in *Victorian House*). Although the value of religion is not called into question, the reader is given the impression that its practice and expression in a Victorian context often left much to be desired. The majority of texts approach the topic with a blend of tolerant amusement and overt criticism: Macaulay's *Told by an Idiot* gently satirises the late-Victorian quest for spiritual security, and Bentley's *Sleep in Peace* pokes fun at Mrs Hinchcliffe's religious naïveté. However, the novel also draws attention to the more problematic side of Victorian piety: in sternly religious families like the Hinchcliffes, a strict adherence to antiquated Wesleyan beliefs severely curtails the younger generation's freedom. In *Secret Bread*, Mrs Ruan's Wesleyan piety borders on religious mania, from which her youngest son has to be rescued by his guardian. The necessity of freeing oneself of "the old concept of a revengeful God" (D. Hewlett, *Flowing Tide*, 303), due no doubt also to Edmund Gosse's enormously influential autobiographical account of a Victorian childhood marred by his father's religious fanaticism, also features with some prominence in novels as diverse as *Silence for his Worship*, *Sleep in Peace*, *Without Regret*, or *Blossoming Tree*. The crucial importance of 'outgrowing' Victorian belief systems is also connected to Victorian parents' tendency to link class- and gender-based restrictions to the 'divine order' in order to enforce their children's compliance. Mr Cartaret in *Three Sisters* (like John Barnard in *Flint Anchor*) uses religion – in the guise of family prayers – as a form of coercion, enjoying the sadistic satisfaction he derives from bending his daughters' wills to his own. Mr Cartaret's Anglican tyranny, however, is something of an exception in Victorian-centred fiction, which typically establishes a clear-cut distinction between the Church of England, disparaged for its superficiality, and Nonconformism, criticised for its extremist tendencies.

The self-serving hypocrisy of Victorian religion, however, is only one of the aspects which comes in for criticism; another is the Victorians' spiritual certainty and lack of reflexion: "[…]

My worthy parent reminds me of a spiritual engine set on rails which goes puffing contentedly on towards a station labelled Heaven. He accepts everything and calls it faith. I call it mental laziness" (N. Tucker, 31), David reflects in Tucker's *Jealous Goddess*; in *Sleep in Peace*, it is Ludo's inability to do without the deceptive certainties of Victorian religion that prevents him from successfully 'outgrowing' his Victorian home.

Another aspect of Victorianism that has to be outgrown is the Victorians' belief in the God-given nature of the social order (as in, for instance, Amanda's cross-class friendship with Lilith, or Frances' affection for the lower-class boy Frank in *Journey to Melbury*). The implicit class distinction between 'Church' and Chapel is frequently criticised in accounts of Victorian religion, highlighting both the Victorians' lack of true spirituality and their obsession with social status. The latter not infrequently goes hand in hand with an utter disregard for the feelings of those whom they regard as their social inferiors. "These people worshipping so correctly, […] wouldn't they be shocked to hear Christianity doubted? And equally shocked to see it practised – ?" (Woden, *Ruffy*, 98), John Ruffy astutely observes in *Ruffy and Sons*, and examples of this attitude abound in Victorian-centred fiction. In particular, this applies to the Victorians' treatment of their servants: novel after novel depicts Victorian housewives as haughty and exploitative, laying the blame for the servant shortage of the interwar period on the shoulders of the preceding generation. In *Sleep in Peace*, Laura's distance from her Victorian background becomes apparent when she is scandalised by the local housewives's attitudes towards their servants; in other novels, too, a change in attitude towards – or the ability to do without – servants is depicted as a crucial break with middle-class Victorianism, while providing a further link with twentieth-century audiences. In their dealings with the poor, too, typically Victorian characters are frequently shown as either unashamedly heartless or utterly hypocritical; it rests with outsiders – such as Phoebe in *Victorian House* – to evince real sympathy for their plight.

These attributes are very often shown to go hand in hand with a predilection for ostentatious displays of wealth. Frequently, this provides opportunity for highlighting what contemporary critics regarded as the Victorians' lack of taste and artistic feeling, further adding to the sense of superiority that these texts aim to engender in their twentieth-century readers. In a number of novels (*Three Sisters*, *Victorian House*, *Sleep in Peace*, *The Inheritance*, *Trumpeter, Sound!*, *Ruffy and Sons*, *Concord in Jeopardy* and others), characters' attitudes towards Victorian art and architecture are used to channel readerly sympathy and identification: in keeping with interwar views on the subject, disparagement of Victorian taste and a predilection for Georgian artefacts typically indicate that the reader is meant to identify (or at least sympathise) with the character who expresses them.

In addition, the affinity between the Regency and the modern age is also postulated in relation to the Victorians' alleged sexual double morality and hypocrisy,[524] with characters from the Regency – typically eccentric elderly relatives – providing outspoken commentary on the views and actions of the Victorian generation. The Regency was already well-established in the popular

[524] Cf. for example Lady Newstead in *The Rebel*, Mr Fulke in Catherine Gayton's *Poor Papa*, who laments that "we must all watch our step now and be careful in the conduct of our private affairs. The country's getting downright respectable, and good morals are all the fashion. Bah, in my young days… But the people will no longer tolerate those little lapses they used to laugh about" (24–5), or the elderly gentlemen who are contrasted with the "awful solidity" of the Victorians in W.V.Y. Dale's *I Rest My Claims* (115).

imagination as an age of (sexual) excitement and adventure through the best-selling 'regency romances' of Georgette Heyer and her many emulators. In Victorian-centred fiction, regency characters provide opportunities for the expression of 'modern' views on the Victorian period without the disruptive presence of a twentieth-century narrator. In these instances, as in their treatment of Georgian versus Victorian art, the novels construct a direct link between the Regency and the twentieth century, so that the Victorian age stands out as an incongruous interruption of historical progress, especially where the role of women is concerned: "[i]t was Victoria who created a reversion to home-life and subservience after an age of freedom and debauchery" (Leslie, *Concord*, 282), a feminist character points out in *Concord in Jeopardy*.

Given the alleged hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness and emotional coldness of Victorian family life as presented in these novels, it comes as no surprise that many novels highlight younger characters' exhilaration at breaking with the preceding generation: "And Laura felt that she was indeed a free spirit, soaring aloft in a brave new world – a world where it was admitted openly that persons in authority, such as parents and elder sisters, were often horribly hypocritical, that hypocrisy was vulgar, that all that sort of thing would be changed when they themselves grew up and had the upper hand" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 146). All of the texts discussed in this chapter subscribe to a teleological conception of history that charts the progress that has been made since the Victorian era in certain key aspects of life:

> The year was 1900. Elinor, now living in a new century (though Henry stoutly maintained that the twentieth century did not begin until 1901), though at good deal in her solitary hours of the passing of the hours, of so much change about her. The old Queen still sat, although feebly, on her throne, but the world as she knew it had grown beyond her. Men rushed about over her wide dominions in liners, on railroads, on bicycles, and soon they would travel, Elinor supposed, by automobile. Ideas were freer. The old concept of a revengeful God with hell gaping at His pleasure, so familiar in Elinor's own childhood with an old-fashioned father, had almost disappeared. God was kinder, men were kinder. Many might still be without privilege, the underpaid working class, women without a vote who could not enter professions, but at least doors had been opened: women could be educated, could become doctors, and the workman had his Union. (D. Hewlett, *Flowing Tide*, 303)

Simultaneously, however, many texts express a certain nostalgia for what appear to be the lost certainties – intellectual, moral, and religious – of the Victorian era.[525] This becomes increasingly marked in texts from the late 1930s, but also during the post-war period. This paradox links up with the covert conservativism of many of the novels discussed in this chapter, whose overt criticism of the Victorians is frequently undercut by ideological breaks in the text which endorse the very attitudes they apparently set out to critique.

[525] This aspect of Victorian-centred fiction will be addressed in greater detail in ch. 5.2.

4. Rediscovering the Victorians

While the preceding chapters focused on Victorian-centred fiction's attempts to identify the most typical aspects of Victorianism, through which it aims at the construction and affirmation of a distinct 'Victorian' schema, this section focuses on attempts at schema addition and on deliberately schema-disruptive aspects. What unites the disparate texts discussed in this chapter is their avowed aim to bring to light the hitherto unknown and unobserved sides of Victorian life, especially those aspects which the Victorians themselves (supposedly) preferred to keep hidden from view.[526] As so often in Victorian-centred fiction, the texts construct a privileged position for the reader, who is apparently given access to secrets formerly hidden behind the facade of Victorian hypocrisy. Twentieth-century authors, too, are able to present themselves in a favourable light, seemingly exposing and correcting the omissions of their predecessors, and constructing a binary opposition between contemporary openness and Victorian reticence, not only on sexual issues. In accordance with the truth claim typical of historical fiction, the atypical aspects of the Victorians depicted in these novels are presented to the audience as 'factual' information on the nineteenth century that has been 'rediscovered' by twentieth-century writers, who position themselves as having privileged access to the Victorians' thoughts, actions, and emotions (not surprisingly, since they have, in fact, invented the Victorian characters in regard to whom they make this claim). The term 'rediscovering' in the chapter heading, though problematic in regard to texts whose ostensible project of re-discovery often intersects with a re-invention of the Victorians in order to cater to contemporary tastes, or comment on contemporary problems, has thus been chosen to pinpoint this narrative strategy which purports to provide access to previously hidden 'truths'.

In the first section of this chapter, the focus lies on the rediscovery of hidden aspects of the Victorian period: on the one hand, this refers to works which privilege marginalised groups within Victorian society who are absent from canonical works of Victorian literature, be it because of their gender, class, or professional occupation. On the other hand, it also comprises those novels which seek to reintroduce hidden or missing facts into the established narratives of the lives of well-known figures from the period, or to introduce new figures – allegedly historical – into Victorian history. The second section of this chapter focuses on those texts which take up one of the key constituents of the 'Victorian' schema, i.e. the period's hypocrisy, sexual repressiveness and double morality. On the one hand, these works aim to re-inscribe discourses of sexuality into contexts already well-known from Victorian fiction; on the other hand, they attempt to introduce the reader to characters and settings hitherto absent from Victorian(-centred) literature, or to use the Victorian period as a 'distant mirror' for commenting on contemporary problems and debates. No clear-cut distinction between the two, however, is possible: in many cases, novels from the first part of this chapter – most notably those focusing on the private lives of Victorian public

[526] To a certain extent, these novels' intention of uncovering hidden features of the Victorian age links up with a facet of Victorian-centred fiction already mentioned in chapter three, i.e. its predilection for exposing the unconscious thoughts of Victorian characters, placing the reader in the privileged position of knowing more about the Victorians than they themselves could consciously know. The focus of this section, however, lies on those aspects of Victorian society which nineteenth-century observers might well have been aware of, but would (supposedly) never have dared to mention in polite conversation or mainstream literature.

figures – are likewise concerned with uncovering hidden aspects of Victorian sexuality. The division is, accordingly, to a certain degree an arbitrary one, implying a neater thematic division within Victorian-centred fiction than exists in reality; it relies mainly on the varying length and emphasis accorded to the topic in the individual texts, as well as providing the opportunity to comment on the relevant aspects of novels already discussed in previous sections. Given the importance that sexuality (or its absence) assumes in the twentieth-century construction of the Victorian period, it appears expedient to devote a separate chapter to the topic.

4.1 Exceptional Victorians

While the texts discussed in the preceding chapters evince a pronounced interest in Victorian social norms and conventions, gender roles, and expected patterns of behaviour, and their effect on the twentieth century, it has also been shown that a similarly large share of attention falls to those characters who break with Victorian conventions and transgress established boundaries, and thus frequently become objects of identification for the twentieth-century reader. Indeed, it might be argued that it is this feature of Victorian-centred fiction which sets much of it apart from the more strictly defined historical genre: whereas historical fiction is, by definition, concerned with portraying "the historical peculiarity of its age" (Lukács, 15) by choosing protagonists which are typical of the period in which they live, Victorian-centred fiction is in a striking manner concerned with characters who behave in an atypical and uncharacteristic manner. In these novels, the peculiarity of their age is, as it were, presented in negative: it can be inferred from those situations in which the protagonists come into open conflict with Victorian society, or successfully manoeuvre their way around the restrictions it imposes on them.

Once again, it is important to stress that this tendency of Victorian-centred fiction is not an isolated phenomenon: not only is it connected to the rediscovery of 'forgotten voices' in interwar women's historical fiction, which shows a pronounced interest in those marginalised by official historiographic discourses;[527] it also links up with the anti-Victorian tendencies of Victorian-centred fiction outlined in the preceding chapters which invite contemporary readers – many of whom were likely to have regarded themselves as 'victims' of the Victorians either on the personal or on the politico-economic level – to identify with protagonists who successfully sidestep or rebel against Victorianism, regarding them as precursors of the present generation.[528] In addition, it is important to remember that during much of the first half of the century, public and private life in many respects still bore the imprint of Victorianism and Victorian values; successful rebellion within a Victorian context, in this sense, also presented fantasies of empowerment for those disgruntled with their lot in inter- or post-war society. What connects the disparate texts analysed in this chapter is their concern with presenting additions or alternatives to the standard narrative of the Victorians as outlined in chapters two and three. While the fictional biographies presented in the second part of this chapter focus on figures whom the Victorians themselves recognised as set apart from the mainstream by their achievements, the Victorian 'career novels' discussed in chapter 4.1.1 do so by presenting fictitious women who have found

[527] Cf. Wallace, 53.

[528] In addition, the revisionist impulse apparent in these works also provides a link to later neo-Victorian fiction.

workable alternatives to the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House, but whose achievements are presented as recognisable only from the vantage point of the twentieth century.

4.1.1 Victorian career women

As has been shown in the preceding section, the restrictions Victorian society placed upon women constitute an important thematic concern of the Victorian-centred novel – a concern that must be seen in connection with the continuation of Victorian views on femininity and women's sphere well into the interwar period, and their reaffirmation during the 1950s on the one hand, and middle-class feminists' campaigns for women's right to work and access to the professions on the other. While conservative writers resort to depictions of the Victorian period with the aim of endorsing its patriarchal attitudes and practices, and justifying their continuing existence by linking them to historical precedent,[529] others use the Victorian era as a testing ground for more 'advanced' views on women in a setting that is at once 'safe' – because ostensibly removed from the immediate present – and yet perfect for their purposes because of the similarities between Victorianism and twentieth-century conservativism. While the novels discussed in chapter 3.2 focus on early-twentieth-century protagonists who successfully escape their Victorian homes, the novels discussed in this section feature female characters who successfully transcend gender boundaries during the Victorian era. The proliferation of such texts after World War II in particular reflects contemporary tastes for novels about 'career women',[530] while also mirroring contemporary anxieties about women's 'proper' sphere. It is worth noting that women's attempts to break out of their Victorian gender role appear to have fascinated not only female authors like Dorothy Hewlett, Anne Meredith, or Sylvia Townsend Warner, but also male writers such as Frank Swinnerton and Norman Tucker.

Although it is set somewhat earlier than the novels discussed in chapter 3.2, Dorothy Hewlett's *Flowing Tide* (1955) follows a similar pattern, also charting the development of a female protagonist who successfully 'outgrows' her Victorian home. The novel describes Elinor Munro's gradual development from a helpless, unwanted spinster dependent on her male relations for support into a successful businesswoman. Left a near-penniless orphan at the age of twenty-nine when her father dies in a shipwreck, she is deeply resentful of the position of dependency on her elder brother in which she finds herself. As in *The Three Sisters* and *Love's A Man of War*, marriage is presented as the sole means of escape – an escape that is barred for Elinor, however, when her only remaining suitor (all others having long been discouraged by her egotistic father, who preferred to keep his daughters at home as unpaid servants) transfers his affections to her forty-year-old sister, Louisa. Elinor's chance arrives when her old Nurse leaves her a small shop, which Elinor – to the scandalised disgust of her relations – decides to keep, even selling her wares herself on occasion. Her brief period of independence comes to an end, however, when her younger brother Jack, now fabulously rich, returns to England from Australia. Having come to a clear understanding of the precariousness of her position as an unmarried woman without male protection when the father of the little girl she has adopted (after having rescued her during the shipwreck that killed Mr Munro)

[529] Cf. ch. 3.2.4.
[530] Cf. especially Philips and Haywood, 80ff.; also Maslen, *Political*, 167.

suddenly turns up and threatens her, she agrees to leave the shop in the hands of a capable manager and live with Jack. After Jack's elopement with his brother Martin's wife, Violet, Elinor agrees to keep house for Martin until his suicide on Violet's birthday.

Her decision to take over the Munro clothing company after Martin's death is presented as an ideal merger of duty and inclination. Her femininity stands her in good stead; perceived as a drawback by her contemporaries, it works to her advantage because it gives her a much better understanding of her female customers' tastes and requirements. Part of her success, however, also rests on her feeling of solidarity for the seamstresses in her employ, whom she treats on much fairer terms than her male competitors (thereby ensuring greater loyalty and better service) and for whom she even provides revolutionary comforts, such as a canteen. Whereas Elinor initially finds fulfilment in her new role as businesswoman, her life undergoes an abrupt change for the worse when she marries Adam Vereker, a potter from the works of her brother-in-law, Mr Beale. Elinor's shrewd business sense stands in stark contrast to her emotional naïveté. Having let herself be blinded by Adam's virility and rugged charm, she quickly realises their mutual incompatibility, but is – like Adelaide in *Victorian House* – unable to obtain a divorce because she is only able to prove adultery, but not cruelty or desertion on her husband's part. The problem is solved by a somewhat unrealistic *deus-ex-machina* strategy, when Adam is discovered to be a bigamist and is dragged off by his first wife. Having learned the hard way that physical attraction does not provide a stable matrimonial basis, Elinor is now ready for an entirely different, emotionally fulfilling relationship based on mature affection and mutual respect: after Louise's death, she agrees to marry her sister's widower, and act as step-mother to her two nieces. The marriage turns out to be a great success, even though the couple have to live abroad until the abolition of another remnant of the Victorian age (the interdiction on marriages between widowers and their former sisters-in-law) by the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act of 1907.

Focusing almost exclusively on Elinor's experience, the book charts her personal growth as she leaves behind the confines of her Victorian home and unfolds her full potential in professional as well as emotional terms. As in Violet Dean's novel, it is the personal aspect of her development that is shown to be the most crucial and the most fraught with difficulties. Like Carmen in *Love's a Man of War*, Elinor stumbles into marriage with an attractive, but utterly unsuitable man because she has grown up without the experience of a functional married relationship, and has to learn through painful personal experience how to achieve a degree of married happiness based on equality and respect. The novel encourages the reader to enthusiastically endorse Elinor's initial decision to reject marriage in favour of a career – an encouragement that is underlined through the consistent use of Elinor as a focaliser, and the almost total exclusion of Louisa from the narrative after her marriage. *Flowing Tide* thus resorts to the narrative strategy that Hewlett had employed almost two decades earlier in *Victorian House*, which re-enacts the 'silencing' of married women through their exclusion from the deictic centre. The paradoxical way in which the novel thus colludes in the very practice which it appears to condemn – taking away women's voices within the text rather than righting the perceived injustice by giving them a voice – has already been discussed in connection with *Victorian House*. In *Flowing Tide*, however, the issue is given a further twist: whereas *Victorian House* saw the re-appearance of Adelaide after the failure of her marriage to Carlo (and once, memorably, even that

of her mother when she dares to defy Mr Pratt), Louisa, happily married to Mr Beale, is only mentioned again after her death of influenza towards the end of the book. While the reader learns that she has led a happy and useful life and is sorely missed by her family, there is also the hidden implication that her life has been much too uninteresting to bear inclusion in the novel.

Overtly, however, marriage is presented as a crucial element in women's lives: Louisa, we infer, has been happy even though she had no other interest in life than her husband and (step)children; Elinor, on the other hand, is truly happy (despite her business success) only when she finally finds a suitable husband. Below the pro-marriage ideology – which chimes in with the conservative message of *Love's a Man of War*, published at almost the same time, and reflects the ideological climate of its day and age – there lies a subversive sub-current which suggests that marriage is not only lacking in interest, but also a highly effective means of silencing women. This applies even to the central protagonist: once happily married to Mr Beale, Elinor virtually disappears, and the rest of her life is summed up in a few paragraphs.

Mary Howard's 1954 novel *Sew a Fine Seam* shows a number of parallels with *Flowing Tide.* Set in a small village in Yorkshire, the novel follows its protagonist Hannah Howards as she slowly rises from the position of a lowly sewing maid in the household of Lady Burkenshaw, to the proprietor of a prosperous dressmaking establishment with several employees. Left crippled after a childhood accident, Hannah as a young girl discovers her passion for sewing. After she is forced to quit Lady Burkenshaw's employment because the butler saw her being kissed by her employer's son Gavin, she finds work at a local dressmaker's. Despite the fact that she turns out to be an invaluable asset to her employer, she is dismissed after his death by his son, whose offer of marriage she has rejected. Hannah, however, refuses to be daunted: she sets up her own establishment and soon gains the favour of several influential customers, among them Lady Burkenshaw and her future daughter-in-law, Hannah's former school fellow Fanny, whose parents have in the meantime 'gone up in the world' and who is about to marry Hannah's former admirer Gavin. Hannah accepts a proposal from William Howards, a childhood friend, who for her represents security and a chance to relax, and becomes the mother of two children: beautiful but difficult Martha and David, whose exceptional intelligence soon kindles in her the wish to earn enough money to send him to Cambridge when he is old enough.

Hannah becomes increasingly successful and independent, even going to London on her own to buy fabrics, despite her husband's disapproval. When she receives a highly lucrative offer from Fleury's, a flourishing London dressmaker, to become master dressmaker in their London establishment, Hannah is tempted, but finally turns down the offer because of her husband's objections and continues as a provincial dressmaker. As in *Flowing Tide*, Hannah's professional interests are gradually eclipsed by descriptions of her private life: in London, she encounters Gerald Marchmont, the good-looking brother of Lady Burkenshaw's daughter-in-law, who pleads with her to leave her family and elope with him. Despite her love for Gerald, however, Hannah refuses: her sense of self-respect and duty forbid her to leave either her family or her business. After witnessing Gerald's death in a shipping accident, Hannah is devastated and seeks comfort by drawing closer to her estranged husband. At age forty, she gives birth to a third child, Jenny, who later becomes her favourite. Both of her older children, in contrast, grow up to disappoint her: as the Victorian era draws to a close, Martha elopes with an actor (only to discover that he is

already married), returns home pregnant, and finally marries the son of Hannah's rival, Ernie Davis. David, on the other hand, foils his mother's ambitious plans for his future career by marrying Petula, whose father owns a plant nursery, and decides to become a gardener.

After World War I, Martha's daughter Gwyneth returns to Yorkshire from London to nurse Ernie Davies (from whom Martha has separated long since). Hannah discovers her talent as a fashion designer and counsels her to seek a career in London or Paris, foretelling the death of provincial dressmaking establishments and the rise of ready-made clothing. She tells Gwyneth that she knows that her business will die with her; she does not want her granddaughter to take over after her, but would rather see her "picking up where I leave off" (Howard, 206) by grasping opportunities not open to women in the Victorian period. After their conversation, Gwyneth experiences "a feeling of awe, almost exaltation, as though Hannah had bequeathed something to her, a baton or a pennant to carry through life, and the memory of her young lover, and the aching, empty brittleness of modern life seemed not to matter any more. To create – that was Hannah's creed. To do the best that was in you" (Howard, 206–7).

Howard presents Hannah as a paradoxical figure: on the one hand, she represents the mid-Victorian era, symbolised by her rigid adherence to mid-Victorian fashions for herself, if not for her customers, believing that it is a woman's duty to subordinate her own needs and desires to those of her husband and family, and to sacrifice her career in order to save her marriage. On the other hand, however, she triumphs because of her determination to overcome the restrictions placed upon her by Victorian conventions and gender norms in the public sphere. Ultimately, however, she has to sacrifice her ambitions to the needs of her family.

The frequency with which this pattern is repeated emphasises its topicality in postwar Britain, reflecting the problematic position of women in late 1940s and 1950s society. The close connection that exists between the ambiguous evaluation of working women in Victorian-centred fiction, in which overtly expressed admiration for these characters' achievements is frequently undercut by conservative plot lines, and social changes in post-war Britain, becomes most clearly apparent in Frank Swinnerton's *English Maiden* (1946). Subtitled "Parable of a Happy Life", the novel presents the history of Sarah Whelpdale, a kitchen maid who falls in love with and marries her employer's son Victor. Scandalised at first, his family is persuaded to accept Sarah when she dissuades her sister-in-law from an elopement with a married man. Soon afterwards, Victor loses a sizeable amount of money, having let himself be cajoled into backing a play against his better judgement. When he returns home, he overhears Sarah affectionately saying goodbye to Tom, a childhood friend who is about to leave to fight in the Boer War. Victor misinterprets the situation, and suffers a nervous breakdown. While her husband is hospitalised, Sarah takes over his failing publishing house, and reveals herself a much shrewder business manager than her husband. She clears Victor's debts, but is afraid that Victor might resent her success, carrying on only as long as he is unable to reassume his position. When he finally recovers from his illness, having overcome his traumatic experiences and accepted Sarah's assurances that her feelings for Tom are entirely innocent, they settle down to enjoy their retirement. By the end of the novel, events appear to have come full circle: Sarah is back in the village of her childhood, and reunited with her three most intimate friends from school. The closing scene presents an idyllic account of a village cricket match, at which Victor congratulates Tom's son on his performance, just as he had

congratulated Tom himself several decades earlier. Like *Challenge to Sirius*, also written in the aftermath of a world war, the book presents the soldier's fantasy of returning home to find that nothing has changed during his absence, thinly disguised as a tale of female empowerment.

While overtly celebrating women's success in the 'masculine' business world, all of these novels are markedly conservative as regards the underlying assumptions regarding women's priorities which reveal themselves in their plots, and which are in keeping with the conservative outlook of the decade during which they were published. The message that unlike men, women are forced to choose between professional success and fulfilling personal relationships is reiterated in numerous Victorian-centred novels.[531] Women who opt for marriage are expected to give up their vocations: Rita Simons in *A Challenge to Sirius* argues that it would be unfair on her husband to continue writing after marriage; the eponymous protagonist of *Fanny by Gaslight* gives up her position as personal assistant to Kitty Cairns, just as Beth in *Darkness I Leave You* quits the employment of Madame de Marchant, despite the fact that both women enjoy their work, and Elinor in *Flowing Tide* finally gives up the family business to devote herself to her stepdaughters. In those rare instances where women continue working after marriage, they frequently find that their personal obligations interfere with their career: in *Sew a Fine Seam*, for instance, the extremely successful dressmaker Hannah Howard has to turn down an advantageous business offer and reconcile herself to an existence as a small provincial dressmaker because of her husband's objections. *Sew a Fine Seam* presents a simple solution to the perplexing issue of career women's divided loyalties debated by contemporary feminists such as Myrdal and Klein: while "a man's career must come first" (N. Tucker, 57), a woman's is clearly expected to come second after her role as a wife.

A job (however rewarding), on the other hand, is frequently presented as a second-best option for women who fail to find suitable husbands: Elinor in *Flowing Tide* initially chooses her career because her suitor has transferred his affections to her sister; Millie, the highly successful shopkeeper-turned-bestseller-author of *Impetuous Heart*, remains unmarried from lack of opportunity more than from choice. Moreover, even in fiction women are restricted to a limited range of 'feminine' occupations and in their work cater for a largely female clientele, usually either in the clothing or publishing industry. Once again, this is a representation of Victorian reality as much as of the contemporary situation in postwar Britain, where "a revised version of the traditional division of labour between the sexes still exist[ed]" (Myrdal and Klein, 76; qtd. in Philips and Haywood, 7).[532] By transposing the contemporary situation of women in postwar Britain into the Victorian era, these novels ostensibly celebrate the amount of progress that has been made during the intervening decades. This teleological conception of women's history is emphasised in Hewlett's and Howards' novels, in which the protagonists help younger women to fulfil the ambitious plans that the end of the Victorian period has finally put into women's reach – Hannah by financing her granddaughter's art education, Elinor by providing her maid Lucy with money to study French literature at Cambridge, which seems to imply that the present generation

[531] One of the very few examples of a Victorian 'career woman' who deliberately rejects love in favour of a career is the Cornish actress Avice in J.H.B. Peel's *The Gallant Story* (1955).

[532] For the preponderance of 'feminine' occupations for women in romance novels, cf. also Philips and Haywood, 80.

of readers occupies the position of inheritors to the hard-won freedoms these women have gained during the Victorian era, symbolised in *Sew a Fine Seam* through Hannah's bequest of her thimble and scissors to her grand-daughter Gwyneth.

In their innovative study on 1950s women's popular fiction, however, Philips and Haywood (2) emphasise that the myth of the 'domestic fifties' has to be counterbalanced by statistical evidence which shows that the number of working women was rising significantly, including not only most single women but also a large number of married ones. As Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein pointed out in their 1956 study *Women's Two Roles*, "though the fact has impressed itself surprisingly little on the consciousness of the public, every fourth married woman in Britain has a job outside the home" (54; qtd. in Philips and Haywood, 7). The official line taken by the government, however, still considered work an interim solution for women waiting to get married, even while women were being actively recruited into the job market[533] – a stance that is reflected in the Victorian-centred novels discussed. In comparison to earlier times, however, even this development was heralded as an advance by contemporary feminists: "Now it is the accepted thing that when a girl leaves school she will take up some form of gainful occupation at least until she marries. The last remaining barriers of Victorian prejudice against working women outside the home vanished with the war-time mobilization of women" (Haslett, 82; qtd. in Philips and Haywood, 5). There is no indication, however, that "Victorian prejudice" against married women working had disappeared – in fact, criticism of working mothers especially was rife during the fifties.[534]

Norman Tucker takes up this debate in *Jealous Goddess* (1954). In the novel, it is initially George Bellingham's mistress, Harriet Hillier, who represents the 'unconventional' side of womanhood. The discontent she voices with women's role in Victorian society must have resonated strongly with female readers who, during World War II, had experienced the freedom Harriet longs for:

> "There are tremendous issues being fought out in Europe today and I want to participate. The morning paper stirs one's imagination. What does a woman do? Enter the arena? A man may, but not a woman. One preens oneself before one's mirror, and endeavours to acquire a correct deportment. One's brain may atrophy, but the waistline remains elegant. George, I despise this life. I want to break away from society and convention and civilisation." (N. Tucker, 41)

Harriet's complaint echoes that of Rita Simons in *A Challenge to Sirius*: "as long as [a woman] has sense, she's better without brains" (Kaye-Smith, 93). Unlike Rita, however, who finds conventional happiness with a suitable husband, Harriet finally succeeds in finding a niche in which a woman with brains may exist, becoming the editor of a woman's newspaper.

However, Harriet's main role – apart from acting as a spokesperson for the discontents of Victorian women – is that of a mentor to Adelaide Bellingham, the protagonist David's fiancée. Having followed David, who has embarked on a journalistic career in London, to the capital, Adelaide finds herself without useful occupation and consequently jealous of David's work, as it occupies most of his time and mental energy. As their relationship threatens to dissolve under the pressure of David's neglect and Adelaide's unreasonable demands on him, Harriet takes Adelaide under her wing and tries to impress upon her the importance of David's career:

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[533] Cf. Philips and Haywood, 4.

[534] Cf. Haste, 153f.; Dollimore, 60.

> "[…] Laidie, promise me something. If you marry David, promise you will not interfere with his career. You must not be a stumbling block."
> "Of course not. I want him to succeed."
> "He won't succeed with two arms about his neck. You can shackle a man as effectively with silk as with iron." (N. Tucker, 64)

In order to safeguard David's career, Harriet first takes Adelaide on a prolonged tour through Europe, and finally gives her a job on the staff of her newspaper. Victorian convention, which relegated women to the home, is reinterpreted in terms of a threat to, rather than a guarantor of, domestic happiness: it is only when Adelaide has found a job writing for Harriet's newspaper that she can finally understand David's absorption in his career. Equality of opportunity is presented as the basis for their marital happiness.

Like Sylvia Townsend Warner,[535] albeit with none of Warner's stylistic brilliance, Norman Tucker re-invents the Victorian era to comment on mid-twentieth-century reality, transposing the contemporary discussion about women's role in the world of work into the nineteenth century. The novel ends, however, on a self-contradictory note, as Tucker's version of Victorian female empowerment is subsumed into the existing patriarchal order: Adelaide's decision to take on journalistic work for Harriet's newspaper has to be sanctioned by her husband, and is presented as a means of keeping her in happy submission in her marital role, preventing her from distracting her husband from his own career. *Jealous Goddess* implicitly contradicts Rita's assertion that "it wouldn't be fair on the man" (Kaye-Smith, 93) to go on working after her marriage, emphasising that, to the contrary, it would be even more unfair to expose the man to the unreasonable emotional demands of a bored and neglected wife. David's chances of professional success and marital happiness increase when his wife likewise has a job; Adelaide's decision to work is rationalised and evaluated in terms of its impact on her marriage and her husband. Moreover, the job which she finally takes on is decidedly 'feminine': implicitly compared to David's career as a war journalist, her writing for a women's newspaper at once allows her to enter the public sphere and at the same time keeps her safely within that area of public life tentatively ceded to the female half of the sex, but firmly cordoned off from the masculine domain of war, politics and the economy. What appears like a pragmatic recognition of the restrictions Victorian society imposed even on the most enterprising and emancipated of women becomes highly problematic when the text is read as a commentary on contemporary debates, endorsing a carefully regulated amount of freedom for women in order to ensure their continuing acceptance of patriarchal power structures.

Tucker's novel is highly unusual in its depiction of the Victorian period as a time of female emancipation sanctioned by a rising generation of liberal-minded young men. In contrast, most other novels – while 'rediscovering' Victorian women who manage to subvert the established order and carve out niches for themselves in the 'masculine' domain of commerce – implicitly affirm conservative ideologies by ostensibly 're-inscribing' these accounts into a framework of Victorian gender roles which regulates their careers. The overtly emancipatory agenda of these texts entails a celebration of women's work and the freedoms it places within their reach; their covert conservativism is reflected in the protagonists' readiness to subordinate the demands of their careers to those of their husbands and families in accordance with Victorian ideology. In

[535] Cf. ch. 2.1.2 and 4.2.4.

addition, women's choice to continue working after marriage is frequently linked to the unimpeachably 'feminine' aspiration of securing a better future for their children (as in *Sew a Fine Seam*), or has the function of stabilising their marriage (as in *Jealous Goddess*). Significantly, the Victorian-centred novels discussed here display little of the "marked continuity with women's aspirations [i.e. towards emancipation] during the war years" that Philips and Haywood (3) discern in women's popular fiction from the first postwar decade; as a teleological narrative of women's emancipation merges with increasing nostalgia for Victorian domesticity, the Victorians paradoxically become both a benchmark against which to measure contemporary progress, and a role model for postwar women. The ideological importance of the Victorian setting becomes apparent especially in view of the fact that there are hardly any examples of Victorian-centred novels which feature positive evaluations of Victorian 'career women' prior to the mid-1940s: while interwar fiction tends to establish a binary opposition between Victorian domesticity and the new opportunities opening up for women, it is only after World War II that texts transpose the issue into the Victorian era, aiming to reconcile emancipatory accounts of successful working women with the prevailing ideology of domesticity.[536]

Due to these novels' position on the intersection between women's emancipation and conservative reaffirmation of the status quo in terms of gender roles, it is perhaps not surprising that few Victorian-centred novels feature depictions of Victorian feminists.[537] In those rare instances where they do occur, they are almost invariably negative. In *Flowing Tide*, for instance, the episode of Elinor's shop-keeping serves as an opportunity for veiled criticism of the Victorian Women's Rights movement: even Elinor's 'advanced' cousin Ettie distances herself from Elinor, revealing the lack of cross-class solidarity of the emergent feminist movement, which focused almost exclusively on the concerns of middle-class women. In her negative depiction of Ettie's snobbism, Hewlett touches upon an issue that was still topical at the time of the novel's publication: not only had the interwar years seen the emergence of disparate strands of feminism, the 'old' campaigning for equal opportunities with men, the 'new' focusing on gender difference and insisting on measures which would acknowledge women's different needs (such as legalised abortion, birth control, child-care facilities etc.), and gradually gaining in influence until the late 1960s. In addition, there was also a clear division along class lines, with middle-class women campaigning for the right to work, while working-class women were fighting for a lightening of their workload[538] – a division that continued well into the second half of the twentieth century.[539] In addition to her lack of understanding for Elinor's need for autonomy, Ettie is presented as the negative stereotype of the 'advanced' woman: utterly unfeminine in her lack of regard for dress and appearance, her inability to control her children or keep her household in any semblance of order, and her disdain for any kind of useful employment serve to discredit her 'feminist' aspirations. Her theories about Women's Rights stand in starkly negative contrast to Elinor's

[536] For the ideology of domesticity, cf. Sinfield, *Literature*, 232ff.

[537] This also ties in with Sinfield's observation that by the 1950s, feminism had achieved several of its main goals (such as women's education and entry into the professions) and was coming to be perceived as obsolete (*Literature*, 235).

[538] On the distinction between 'old' and 'new' feminism, cf. e.g. Beddoe, 6, 136, and 139ff.; Maslen, *Political*, 149; Joannou, 5; M. Shaw, 176.

[539] This applies especially to Liberal vs. Marxist feminism; cf. Tong, esp. 22ff. and 53ff.

practical, hands-on approach to female emancipation, and the competence with which she manages both her firm and her brother's household.[540]

In *Concord in Jeopardy*, Dr Elizabeth Enderby is likewise portrayed in starkly negative terms: she is characterised as unappealingly mannish, "a plain, determined woman with large, unlovely teeth" (285). To the reader, she appears ridiculous because of a speech impediment that in lengthy passages of direct speech effectively distracts the reader's attention from the content. Repeatedly, her conversation is described as a boringly long-winded rehearsal for her public speeches, as she airs her pet grievances with patriarchal society with little or no regard for the social proprieties or the feelings of her listeners. Like Concord, the narrator evidently sees her as subject for caricature, and presents her as such to the reader. Both *Concord* and *Flowing Tide*, however, avoid direct commentary on feminist arguments, although they incorporate them into passages of direct speech ascribed to their feminist characters, occasionally even allowing them to gain the upper hand in discussions with other characters. The reader, however, is given little incentive to subscribe to the arguments presented due to the sense of antipathy or amusement engendered by the descriptions of the feminist characters; their 'unfeminine' rejection of the patriarchal status quo contrasts unfavourably with the 'feminine' compromises enacted by the main characters. It is only in Shirley Darbyshire's *A Journey to Melbury* (1953) – a novel which features numerous arguments unequivocally in favour of female emancipation, but whose plot line makes it one of the most determinedly 'non-career' novels in my corpus – that Nancy Parker, the feminist character of the novel, is described in glowingly positive terms. Her main attraction, however, lies not in her professional achievements, but in her more traditionally 'feminine' warm-heartedness and her outstanding cooking skills.[541]

4.1.2 Fictional biographies and fictional biographees

Like the works discussed in the previous section, the novels featuring in this chapter focus on individuals – either historic or fictional – whose lives are unconventional by Victorian standards. From Lytton Strachey onwards, the act of 'writing back' to the Victorians has inevitably been connected not only with fiction, but also with biographical writing. The genre enjoyed a renaissance during the interwar era, with a large number of authors experimenting in new modes and departures from the Victorian precedent, which was typically characterised by heavy reliance on archival material and primary sources for documentation.[542] At the same time, fictional biography began to establish itself as a distinct genre, with Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1928) and *Orlando* (1934), and Robert Graves's Claudius novels (1934), *Count Belisarius* (1938) and *Wife to Mr Milton* (1943) as

[540] As Philips and Haywood (80) note, this correlation between women's household skills and their competence in the workplace is a feature frequently found in 1950s romances, in which women's work is thus cast as an 'extension' of, rather than a contradiction to, their domestic role. A particularly good example of this can be found in Francesca Marton's *Mrs Betsey* (1954), in part also a 'career novel' about a young widow who makes a tremendous success of her post as housekeeper.

[541] Even Darbyshire, however, cannot fully resist the trend outlined above, as becomes apparent from her description of the self-centred, long-winded conversation of the semi-deaf Harriet Martineau.

[542] Cf. Bloom, 93; Hoberman, 5. For a detailed discussion of the development of biographical writing in the twentieth century, cf. Ruth Hoberman's excellent study *Modernizing Lives.*

its first and most prominent examples.[543] Victorian-centred fiction was influenced by and responded to this trend in two different ways: firstly, there appeared a host of fictional biographies of 'eminent Victorians', most notably authors, painters and actresses, cashing in on the (comparative) novelty value of offering glimpses of a Bohemian lifestyle at odds with most readers' schematic expectations of the Victorian period. From the late 1920s onwards, and especially in the post-war years, a number of fictional biographies of Victorian literary figures – such as Charles Dickens in C.E. Bechhofer Roberts's *This Side Idolatry* (1928), W.V.Y. Dale's *I Rest My Claims* (1948) and Hebe Elsna's *Consider These Women* (1952),[544] Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 'Carola Oman's' (C. Lenanton's) *Miss Barrett's Elopement* (1930), William Makepeace Thackeray in C.E. Bechhofer Roberts's *Bread and Butter* (1936), Caroline Norton in David Emerson's *Dark Bright Rose* (1951), Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his circle in Nerina Shute's *Victorian Love Story* (1954), or Oscar Wilde in Sewell Stokes's *Beyond His Means* (1955)[545] and John Furnell's *The Stringed Lute* (1955) – as well as actresses, most notably Ellen Terry in Hebe Elsna's *The Sweet Lost Years* (1955). In a similar vein, a spate of novels aim to 'rediscover' the private life of the late Queen Victoria, most notably 'Lozania Prole's' (Ursula Bloom's) *A Queen for England* (1957), *The Little Queen* (1957), and *Consort to the Queen* (1959), in the first of which she explicitly states her intention of providing a corrective and complement to Lytton Strachey's 1921 biography of the monarch.

Like the historical novel, fictional biography as a genre is notoriously difficult to define,[546] even more so in view of metahistorical discourses which acknowledge the essential narrativity of all historiographic – and hence also biographic – writing. "Both fictional and factual biographies are based on the facts of history and of an individual's life, and both, in the sense that they are constructs made up from the facts, are fictions" (Schabert, 13). The difference, according to Schabert, lies in fictional biographies' attempt to offer "not factual but imaginative truth" (2). However, they are not purely imaginary accounts: Dorrit Cohn observes that "the historical and novelistic genres that centre on a life plot [represent] the generic region where factual and fictional narratives come into closest proximity, the territory that presents the greatest potential for overlap" (3). Like factual biography and historical fiction, these texts are usually based on extensive and painstaking research. In their presentation of these facts, they typically aim to capture "what its author feels to be the characteristic, essential qualities of a particular individual in a particular historical situation" (Schabert, 6), so that real-life events are given metonymic or even symbolic status – becoming, in the case of the Victorian biographees discussed in this section, symbolic not only, as Schabert maintains, of the individuals' characters, but also – especially in the case of Dickens – symbolic of the historical peculiarities of their age. Moreover, Victorian-centred novels of this type display a further characteristic: like the other texts discussed in this section, they are

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[543] Cf. Schabert, 2; on *Orlando*, cf. also Artemis, 152ff.; for the distinction between fictional ("novel*ized*", italics in original) and "novelistic" biography, cf. Hoberman, 58ff.

[544] In addition, two plays about Charles Dickens, *The Dickens of Gray's Inn* and *On the Portsmouth road* by H.F. Rubinstein were published in 1931.

[545] Sewell Stokes had already collaborated with his brother Leslie on a play about Oscar Wilde in 1937. For a chronological overview of fictional biographies of Oscar Wilde, especially of his trial for homosexuality, cf. Krämer, "Of Doormats and Iced Champagne".

[546] As Schabert (1) points out, the definitions of biographical writing offered by its most prominent theorists, James Clifford (85–7) and Murray Kendall (15 and 126), allow for various gradations on the scale of subjectivity between the factual biography and the biographical novel.

fascinated with uncovering hidden aspects of the Victorians. True to Lytton Strachey's motto "Je n'impose rien; je ne propose rien; j'expose", they proceed on the premise that 'official' accounts of Victorian celebrities' lives are by necessity incomplete, falsified by Victorians' biographers' limited focus on biographees' public lives and works, and their notorious reticence on certain subjects.[547]

In some cases, authors draw on contemporary psychoanalytical approaches to arrive at 'insights' purportedly 'hidden' from the Victorians: in *This Side Idolatry*, for instance, Roberts resorts to Freudian psychoanalysis to 'explain' what he regards as the "effeminate streak in Charles's character" which is "clearly shown in his fascination by abnormality and suffering, his visits to asylums, prisons, morgues and executions, his vanity, his foppery, his spiteful caricarturing of relations and friends in his books, his facile tears and of course his obsession with the word 'manly'" and which he connects to Dickens's "'mother-fixation'" (author's note) – a statement arguably more revelatory of Roberts' misogyny than Dickens' neuroses. Frequently, this attitude goes hand in hand with a penchant for debunking the Victorians in the heavily ironic vein of Lytton Strachey. Roberts, for instance, deliberately positions himself in opposition to Dickens's first – Victorian – biographer:

> Forster, with the aid of Georgina, fulfilled his promise to write Charles's biography. Therein he established the tradition that Charles, the Inimitable Boz, had ever shown himself in his life as in his work the uncompromising foe of Cant, Hypocrisy, and Humbug.
> Kate still kept her silence. (*This Side*, 319)

In his novel, Roberts – like Hebe Elsna – sets out to break the silence and expose the injustice and hypocrisy with which Dickens treated his wife, thus deliberately disrupting the reader's 'Dickens' schema, while also adding to it through his detailed descriptions of the author's childhood and youth.

While not all fictional biographies are as openly critical of their Victorian subjects, they for the most part nonetheless follow the same trend, focusing on the private lives rather than the public careers of their protagonists and aiming to uncover hidden (and possibly scandalous) titbits of information behind and beyond the facts the public is already assumed to possess. Several of these fictional biographies rely on the strategy of presenting their subject through the eyes of family members or other trusted intimates, either in the form of first-person narratives or through focalisation: in *Bread and Butter*, for instance, the reader is afforded glimpses of Thackeray's childhood and school life through the eyes of his oldest friend; in *Consider These Women*, Dickens is shown from the point of view of the three most important women in his life, Catherine Dickens (née Hogarth), her sister Georgina, and the young actress Nellie (Ellen) Ternan; and in *The Stringed Lute*, the reader – like the biographer – watches the scenes of Oscar Wilde's life flash by in the company of the great man's ghost. Inevitably, relational deixis – expressions that encode the social viewpoint and relative situations of authors, narrators, characters, and readers;

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[547] The latter attitude is best expressed in Lady Eleanor Furneaux Smith's *Caravan* (1943), which will be discussed at greater length below. Having interviewed a famous Victorian novelist, his late Victorian biographer reflects that "there was no doubt that he'd [i.e. the novelist] missed a lot of fun, despite all that wandering about! Probably never been in love!" The novelist, on the other hand, "wondered what sort of rubbish that young man would print about him. Nothing, in any case, that would have the power to trouble him, for he had kept his secrets – those secrets that had been so rigorously suppressed from all the books. No one knew" (12). The rest of the novel consists of precisely those secrets, which are revealed to the twentieth-century reader while Victorian audiences had to make do with the "rubbish" contained in the authorised biographical sketch and the deliberate falsifications in the great man's fiction.

evaluative word-choices, and stylistic tones of voice or mind style[548] – play a prominent role in these texts, as the reader is positioned so as to concur with the narrator's or focalising character's evaluation of the main character. It is an interesting and perhaps unintentional side effect of this technique that it is the focalising WHOs rather than the main characters who thus 'come to life' for the reader, who maps her/his deixis onto theirs, while the ostensible subject of the biography remains the object of observation – the focalised but not the focalising WHO, seen from the outside, but denied the right to speak for her/himself. By this strategy, however, the reader – as so often in Victorian-centred fiction – is placed in what appears to be a privileged position, being given access to inside information that the Victorian celebrities themselves might, it is implied, not have wished to divulge.

In other novels, the action is presented by a twentieth-century narrator who, with the benefit of hindsight, likewise appears to reveal 'facts' hitherto shrouded in secrecy. By linking these 'revelations' to established historical facts about the celebrities in question, these novels ensure what Iser terms "a good continuation that will extend into the reader's store of experience" (Act, 190): by anchoring her version of events to key dates and events in Dickens's career, for instance, Hebe Elsna forges a link to her readers' schematic knowledge about the Victorian writer, making them more ready – in the absence of antecedent knowledge – to accord other pieces of information which are 'factual' only within the context of the story world as 'real'.[549] In addition, the novel – like C.E. Bechhofer Roberts's and W.V.Y. Dale's fictional biographies of the same author – frequently establishes connections between fictional events and the plots of Dickens's novels, so that the existence of these scenes in Dickens's works (which form part of the reader's real-world experience) is presented as constituting 'proof' of the events in the fictional Dickens's biography from which they are said to result.[550] Through this strategy, these authors give readers the impression that their fictional accounts present authoritative, 'authentic' recreations of Dickens's private life: by an intertextual sleight of hand, fictional events in Dickens's works are used to authenticate fictional events in that of Roberts, Dale or Elsna; as the boundaries between fact and fiction become increasingly blurred, the contents of the 'real' (in the sense of existing in the real world of the reader) nineteenth-century work – albeit no less fictional than the twentieth-century novel – are used to establish the 'reality' of the fictional biographies' story worlds and their ability to add to the readers' real-world schema of Dickens.

A similar strategy – that of ostensibly 'authenticating' fictional biographies through the inclusion of information which extends into the readers' store of schematic knowledge about the Victorian celebrity in question – is used in novels which dispense with narrators, 'by fiat', as it were, creating characters and story worlds which the reader perceives as recreations of Victorian reality.[551] Nerina

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[548] Cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 40; also ch. 1.4.1.

[549] This interpretation is in line with Rapaport and Shapiro's (108ff.) cognitive framework for historical fiction; Schabert (5), in contrast, claims that fictional biographies discourage readers from establishing links between their world knowledge and the text, as their main interest lies in the interrelation of these 'facts' within the structural design of the work.

[550] In a similar vein, *This Side Idolatry* is peopled with characters who appear to have come straight out of Dickens's works, postulating them as 'models' for Dickens's crations and hence apparently 'proving' their reality independent of Robert's story world.

[551] Cf. ch. 1.4.1.

Shute's *Victorian Love Story* (which focuses exclusively on Rossetti's and his friends' marriages and love affairs), for instance, includes not only quotations from the works of Rossetti and several of his contemporaries, but also provides a note on its sources and a bibliography. The thematic focus of Shute's novel is typical of the sub-genre; especially in the case of women, their love lives provide the main centre of attention. As already indicated in the title of, for instance, *Miss Barrett's Elopement*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's professional life as a poet receives scant attention in the novel; in *Sweet Lost Years*, Ellen Terry's acting career takes off only at the end of the book. In contrast to the texts discussed in chapter 4.2, however, there are few revelations designed to disrupt the established schema of Victorian sexual repressiveness and prudery: somewhat paradoxically these novels' claim to 'exclusive' information leads not to the uncovering of sex scandals, but to the revelation that – contrary to period gossip and readers' expectations – there is nothing to uncover. In *Dark Bright Rose*, for instance, the reader learns that rumours concerning Caroline Norton's relationship with Lord Melbourne were entirely unfounded, as were similar rumours about him and Queen Victoria, at least according to *The Little Victoria*. Along similar lines, Sewell Stokes' fictional account of Oscar Wilde's last years purports to reveal that the relationship between the great man and Lord Alfred Douglas ('Bosie') at the time of the trial was entirely platonic:

> It was not even, he [i.e. Wilde] thought, as if Bosie any longer held a physical attraction for him. In the presence of his extraordinary beauty he felt as asexual as any normal man would have done in the presence of the Venus of Milo. It had struck him before that could Queensberry have known the truth of his association with his son, how far removed it was in fact from what he imagined it to be, he might well have found some other cause to engage his venomous attention. (30)

In many of these texts, two conflicting schemata are juxtaposed: that of the 'typical' Victorians (among whose key constituents are prudery and sexual repressiveness) and that of the Bohème, with its associations of sexual licentiousness and transgressions against moral norms – a schema that recurs throughout Victorian-centred fiction as the antithesis of Victorian 'respectability'.[552] Disruptions of the latter – i.e. scenes showing Victorian artists behaving 'respectably' and thus contrary to rumours and readerly expectations – serve to reinforce the former, showing the all-pervasiveness of Victorianism during the nineteenth century.

This becomes apparent especially in descriptions such as Ellen Terry's marriage to the Victorian painter George Watts in *Sweet Lost Years*, which is never consummated because he cannot bring himself to sully her virginal purity, and the account the novel gives of Ellen's lack of sexual knowledge: despite the fact that she grows up in a family closely connected to the allegedly 'immoral' world of the theatre, she is so ignorant that she is unable even to imagine what it might be that she should "know more about" (Elsna, *Sweet Lost Years*, 53) when her older sister Kate attempts to persuade her mother to give Ellen some essential information prior to her wedding night. (Like many Victorian-centred novels, *Sweet Lost Years* is intensely critical of the restrictions Victorian society placed upon women, condemning especially nineteenth-century women's fashions and, as mentioned above, the 'unfairness' of leaving girls in ignorance about sex.) The novel also reinforces the reader's schematic knowledge concerning the frigidity of Victorian women due to their social conditioning: Ellen's mother opines that "marriage in its true sense, was a distasteful

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[552] Cf. for instance descriptions of the theatre scene in D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!*, or of the dissolute lifestyle of the (fictitious) Victorian poet Matthew Templeton in Arthur Nash's *Dangerous Haven* (1953).

affair for any woman" (Elsna, *Sweet Lost Years*, 102), and Ellen is presented as loving and warm-hearted, but barely interested in sex – much to the displeasure of her second husband, the architect Edward Godwin, from whom she separates when he has an affair with one of his students. (The novel's evaluation of Ellen's conflicted attitude towards sex due to her Victorian upbringing is somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand, her frigidity destroys her marriage; on the other hand, the separation from Godwin opens up the way for her acting career.)

Along similar lines, *Victorian Love Story* not only reveals that Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddell hardly ever had sex after their wedding, but also features a prolonged and rather ridiculous scene of Ruskin explaining to his confused parents why he never consummated his marriage to Effie Grey (having been rendered impotent by the shock of seeing a naked woman 'in the flesh' for the first time). Like *Sweet Lost Years*, the novel juxtaposes schematic knowledge about 'Bohemian' lifestyles and 'Victorianism', represented by Elizabeth Siddell and Jane Morris on the one hand, and Rossetti and William Morris on the other. Deliberately exaggerating the incompatibility of these two for comic effect, the novel ridicules both the Victorians' prudery and obsession with gentility and respectability (when in doubt about anything, Jane and Elizabeth resort to books on etiquette and self-help manuals) and the artists' self-conscious and ultimately futile revolt. The novel's ironic tone leaves it open with whom – if anyone – the reader is meant to sympathise; while all of the characters are, to some extent to be pitied for their inability to escape determination by Victorian notions of 'respectability', either because of their slavish adherence to them, or because of their continuous, self-conscious revolt against their constraints, none of them are presented as particularly likeable.

The second way in which Victorian-centred fiction responds to contemporary tastes for biography, especially in the interwar period and during World War II, is through the creation of fictional 'eminent Victorians' who are more or less convincingly presented as historical figures. In chronological terms, the first example of this type of novel is Maurice Hewlett's *Mainwaring* (1920), discussed at some length in the following chapter; other noteworthy examples are Doris Leslie's *Concord in Jeopardy* (1938), Eleanor Furneaux Smith's *Caravan* (1943) and J.H.B. Peel's *The Gallant Story* (1955). Like the fictional biographies discussed above, these novels are for the most part schema confirming in relation to the tastes, mores, and preoccupations of mainstream society during the Victorian period. Unlike the above-mentioned texts, however, which aim at schema addition by shedding new light on well-known historical figures, novels belonging to this second category are potentially schema adding because they inscribe new figures – presented as 'historical' in the context of the novel – into well-known contexts. The former texts often present that which is known to the reader through the eyes of someone who does not share the twentieth-century reader's knowledge, so that it becomes linguistically marked as new. The latter frequently reverse this strategy, presenting that which is new – because fictional and thus outside the scope of the reader's real-world knowledge about the Victorian era – in linguistic terms that mark it as already known.

In *Concord in Jeopardy*, for instance, the narrator incessantly refers to the reader's supposed background knowledge about the fictional painter Alexander Concord. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, we are told that "[i]t is not necessary to be more explicit. We all know that the origin of Concord is obscure, but those who tell you that he originated in a slum are quite mistaken"

(Leslie, *Concord*, 11). The statement implies not only that Concord is a well-known historical figure about whom the audience can be expected to possess a certain amount of antecedent knowledge, but also that he is frequently talked about and that there are conflicting accounts of his life in circulation. (In fact, the narrator repeatedly mentions the necessity of discrediting these erroneous statements about the painter, and reveals that his biography is based on privileged information obtained from Concord himself.) Along similar lines, the reader is told that

> [s]ome of his critics say that his amazing versatility was not to his advantage. He, we know, acknowledged that his earlier pen-work was far too glib, and that glaring faults of technique and composition were disguised by a too agile facility. [...] Fundamentally, as has since been noted, Concord was a painter – in the sense, perhaps, that Daumier is a painter – although what of Daumier or anything but Concord can be seen in his 'Orange Girl', or in his 'River in the Street'? Or in any of that startling work done in those few eventful months of his respite [...] We who know and can trace when evolved that joyous litany which symbolized the short-lived idyll of his later life, may regret the circumstances of his youth [...] (Leslie, *Concord*, 164)

The use of the deictic term "that" in the passage, coupled with the repeated assertion that "we know", serves to anchor it to the real-world context in which the text is read, rather than referring to anything within the story world, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction in a way that is unusual in historical novels: rather than including real art works into the story world, the reader is given the impression that art works from the story world have entered into her/his everyday life. The illusion of shared background knowledge between the narrator and the audience is strengthened through the inclusion of numerous instances of what at first sight appear to be ekphrastic references, but which refer in fact to the non-existent works of a fictional painter: "still we have it, here for our keeping" (Leslie, *Concord*, 48), the narrator remarks of Concord's first sketch for his celebrated painting 'The River in the Street'; "[w]e see the effect of [the inspiration provided by his first seaside holiday] in many of his early sketches" (54), of which "we have his early records" (54); "we have seen [Sidey Sid, Concord's most celebrated cartoon character], swanking through the pages of *Punch* and *Life* and *Humour*" (108); "that drawing of the veteran G.M. Renshaw" can still be seen "in a certain Press lord's sanctum" (163); "we see how in common with Renoir he insists on using the full range of expression in his oil paint"; and "[w]e all know [his 'Contadini'], that group of peasants toiling in the sun [...] as we know his 'Orange Girl'" (308), just as we all remember, the narrator insists, "that series of war posters which stirred the nation's pulse" (321). Again and again, the deictic term "that" points back not to prior passages of text, as in anaphoric references, but to the reader's background knowledge, creating the impression that objects from the story world – in fact merely created through the language of the text – have an independent existence in the real world, until the reader becomes convinced that s/he knows – or at least ought to know – Alexander Concord's oeuvre.

By deliberately blurring the boundaries between that which is – and can be – known and that which is unknowable, but is presented in the same terms, the novel inevitably turns into an interrogation of the nature of biographical or historical 'knowledge', leaving the audience to wonder how much of that which is commonly presented and accepted as historical 'fact' may have no connection to historical 'reality'. Several decades before Hayden White, the novel thus takes up the theme of history/biography as narrative, revealing the extent to which historical 'facts' – like those within the story world – can be created 'by fiat'. Eleanor Furneaux Smith's *Caravan* (1943), though operating with different strategies, shares the same preoccupation with

the narratival shaping of the past, and the (im)possibility of knowing or representing the 'truth' about historical figures and events. The novel, already briefly touched upon in the introduction to this chapter, may have been inspired by W. Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* (1930), with which it shows a number of (superficial) parallels.

The frame narrative of the novel is set in the 1890s, when the young journalist Edward Scales is at long last granted an interview with James Darrell, a famous and extremely reclusive Victorian novelist. After the event, Scales returns to London to write his article, pitying the old man who, he has become convinced, has led a life of hard work and dreary respectability, living out his fantasies of love and adventure in his novels, racy tales set in exotic locations. Darrell, in the meantime, goes to sleep, congratulating himself on keeping his secrets, which, however, now resurface in his dreams. After a shift to the deixis of the old man, the main part of the novel consists of an account of Darrell's childhood and youth: the reader becomes privy to his dream, during which he tours the country in the company of gipsies, embarks on a perilious secret mission to Spain involving a fabulously expensive diamond necklace; is attacked by brigands, suffers partial amnesia, becomes secretary to a famous bullfighter, has a stormy love affair with a nude flamenco dancer, and finally returns to England (after she has been killed by a jealous lover), where he encounters his childhood sweetheart Oriana Camperdene, now married to an opium addict slowly dying of tuberculosis. After a brief love affair, however, they are again separated, because Oriana feels duty bound to accompany her husband when his doctors order him abroad for his health. When Darrell hears that she has been killed in an accident, he finally settles down to record his adventures in the series of novels upon which his fame rests. Once again, fact and fiction become blurred and exchange places: Darrell's novels are revealed as 'truer to life' than Scales' biographic article, yet also full of deliberate falsifications. In the end, it is Smith's own novel which is presented as 'truest' to life: the twentieth-century reader is placed in a privileged position, being given access to Darrell's dreams, and thus to the wealth of information that has been withheld from the young journalist and the readers of Darrell's novels.[553] At the same time, however, the reader is reminded that all biographical writing – even (or especially) that based on first-hand information – is potentially unreliable, because subject to processes of selection and narratival shaping.

What the texts discussed in this chapter have in common, however, despite the epistemological differences between fictional biographies of famous Victorians and novels purporting to be biographies of fictitious Victorian celebrities, is the fact that they tend to be schema-confirming in their portrayal of Victorian England as a place of sexual repression, moral (and religious) hypocrisy, and gross materialism. In most cases, the exceptional characters portrayed in the novels inhabit subcultures which are contrasted to, and sometimes get into conflict with, mainstream Victorian society, deliberately flaunting its norms and transgressing established boundaries. A notable exception, however, is Charles Dickens: presented as the unofficial 'voice' of the Victorian era – "its prophet and its conscience" (Dale, 106) – he is epitomic of everything later generations either admired or deplored about Victorian England, such as its predilection for "Cant, Humbug, and Hypocrisy" (Roberts, *This Side*, 319). In *Consider These Women*, this applies especially to his inability to see beyond the Victorian ideal of the 'Angel in the House': reading one of her brother-in-law's works, Georgina

[553] The novel discourages speculations that Darrell might merely have imagined the events about which he dreams; his death at Oriana's grave at the end of the novel is presented as proof of the 'authenticity' of the dream narrative.

"puzzled, as she had puzzled before this, over the enigma of Charles; over his monstrous power of self-deception, and his colossal ignorance of women. There was scarcely a real woman in any of his books. Such angels as Agnes Copperfield, Rose Maylie and Florence Dombey had never existed except in Charles' imagination" (Elsna, *Consider*, 89). A similar (albeit slightly less critical) image is presented in W.V.Y. Dale's fictional biography, which mainly sets out to confirm readers' schematic expectations about the Victorians' commercialism and views on women.[554]

In the case of most other Victorian celebrities, however, the reader remains aware that these are exceptional figures who are not intended as representatives of the period. The schema-disrupting potential of their non-normative behaviour is therefore negated; for the most part, it merely serves to affirm the existence of what Foucauld in regard to Victorian sexuality would later call "places of tolerance" (4) within Victorian society. In addition, however, it reinforces the reader's antecedent knowledge about the more 'typical' Victorians, by juxtaposing mainstream Victorian society and its opposite, the Bohemian world inhabited by artists and actresses. While the novels discussed in this chapter thus tend to confirm the readers' world schemata, they are potentially text schema disrupting for an audience accustomed to more traditional biographic writing (though perhaps not for those who followed contemporary trends in biography) because of their focus and subject matter. In addition, their schema-disrupting potential is due to stylistic features: the language of these novels is often deliberately colloquial, reflecting the voice and/or mind style of the focalising characters; moreover, the narrators of a number of works draw attention to the incompleteness of their information, and their potential unreliability: the narrator of *Concord in Jeopardy* frequently presents information in terms of conjecture rather than fact; the women through whose deixis Dickens is presented in Elsna's text freely confess that Dickens is an "enigma" to them; and the narrator of *Bread and Butter* explicitly emphasises his inadequacy as a biographer of his famous friend Thackeray:

> I must guess at it too, though my guesses are not worth setting on paper, since I cannot be expected to remember every detail of that far-off occasion.
> It is remarkable perhaps that I recall so much of it: sometimes I wonder if my mind is not playing me a trick and if I am not involuntarily inventing the scene that seems so clear in my memory. …so, very likely, I think I remember more than I do. (Roberts, *Bread*, 14–5)

In Maurice Hewlett's *Mainwaring*, all these aspects are brought together in an account of an imaginary Victorian politician which starts out as a fictional biography, but ends by subverting even this already subversive text schema. The novel is remarkable not only for the way in which it uses its Victorian setting in order to propagate traditional gender roles and family values, but also for the way in which takes up and playfully deconstructs prevailing preoccupations, such as contemporary novelists' obsession with Freudian psychoanalysis. *Mainwaring*'s blend of radical social criticism and reactionary attitude towards femininity deserves in-depth analysis in this

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[554] Late for dinner at his fiancée's parents, Dickens knows that he will easily be forgiven: "He apologised for being late. But he had excellent reasons. Business. They must feel it was good that a young man should be delayed owing to business engagements. It was entirely meritorious to be busy" (Dale, 20). The novel's account of Victorian attitudes towards women is likewise schema-confirming: "The ladies were present and in deference to them it was not possible to talk sensibly" (Dale, 19), the male characters reflect after dinner.

chapter not only because of its unusual portrayal of Victorian society, but also because of its experimental narrative technique.

4.1.3 Maurice Hewlett: *Mainwaring* (1920)

4.1.3.1 Summary

Maurice Hewlett's novel purports to be the biography of the (fictitious) Victorian Labour politician Richard Denzil Blaise Mainwaring, allegedly written by his oldest (and perhaps only) friend, Whitworth. The events of the novel are set in Marseille, Venice, Madrid and London during the 1870s, but narrated with considerable hindsight. In the course of the rambling narrative, the reader gathers that Mainwaring is the son of a French mother and an Irish father. The narrator meets him in Marseille, and describes him as a poor English teacher filled with overweening ambition and strong political opinions, and with an outstanding gift as an orator. He also reveals himself as entirely ruthless. After his arrival in England, Mainwaring gets involved with the Trade Unionist movement, and soon becomes a hugely successful political agitator and organiser of strikes. During this period, he falls in love with and marries Lizzy Matthews, who comes from a working-class family and at first believes that he really cares about working-class people. For this reason, she consents to marry him at her mother's insistence, although she does not love him, only to find that he only instrumentalises the workers' concerns to further his own career. His political success and the concomitant social advancement leave her completely out of her sphere. Knowing that she cannot meet his expectations and live up to the role of society hostess, she finally takes on the role of parlour maid in her own house, while Mainwaring becomes increasingly infatuated with Lady Whitehaven (who, in turn, is in love with Lord Gerald Gorges). Whitworth, who is hopelessly in love with Lizzy, is scandalised by this development and disgusted with his former friend, but tries to understand and accept Lizzy's decision. Despite the fact that Lizzy reciprocates the narrator's love, she has internalised contemporary ideology regarding marriage, and refuses to contemplate leaving her husband. At her insistence, the narrator agrees to break off all intimate contact, only choosing books (first Dickens, then all of Sir Walter Scott) for her to further her education.

Meanwhile, Mainwaring's political career advances rapidly: he becomes a Member of Parliament and wins an important libel case against the *London Messenger*, which threatened to ruin his reputation. However, tuberculosis finally puts an abrupt end to his meteoritic rise: just as he is about to be offered the post of Secretary of the Board of Trade, which presents a crucial step towards his declared ambition of eventually becoming Prime Minister, he suffers a near-fatal haemorrhage. During his prolonged convalescence, he is to some degree reconciled with Lizzy, who accompanies him on a journey to Marseilles (recommended to him for his health). Lizzy is reluctant to go, and does so only after having secured the narrator's promise that he will come to her immediately should she need him. Soon afterwards, he indeed receives a telegram asking him to come to Madrid, where he finds that Mainwaring has suffered another haemorrhage as he was preparing to fight a duel against Lord Gerald Gorges. He dies soon afterwards without regaining consciousness. Whitworth, the executor of Mainwaring's will, sacrifices most of his fortune in paying off his deceased friend's debts, and eventually marries Lizzy, having become her social equal as he, too, is now obliged to work for his living.

4.1.3.2 World and text schemata

In terms of world schemata, *Mainwaring* is essentially schema confirming, as the novel draws on the reader's knowledge of Victorian life without offering any explicit additions or contradictions. Because of its strategy of presenting the story as if it were already known to the reader, and keeping up the pretence of shared background knowledge, it provides a wealth of information about the Victorian world schemata that the reader of the book is expected to possess. In regard to the spatial setting of the events described, the narrator rarely troubles himself with detailed descriptions; of Lady Whitehaven's "huge drawing-room", we are merely told that it contains "an Aubusson carpet, silk hangings, gold chairs and all the rest of it" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 131) – "all the rest of it" having to be supplied from the reader's schematic knowledge of Victorian interiors. Likewise, descriptions of dinner-parties and other formal events are sketchy at best, and the reader's knowledge of the correct scripts for these occasions is assumed. Divergences from established scripts and socially acceptable patterns of behaviour are recounted without explanatory comment, but clearly signalled to the reader by the narrator's and other characters' reactions. While the mere occurrence of such incidents may, to some extent, challenge the reader's schema of the 'Victorian', it is made obvious that they are not intended as schema disruptions or additions.

Lady Whitehaven's relations with her male admirers may strike the contemporary reader as somewhat 'un-Victorian', as the description deconstructs the myth of an era of sexually passive women and predatory men: "It was plain that her ladyship had her work cut out for her to keep Gerald Gorges up to the mark and at the same time hold Mainwaring at a distance from it" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 31). It is made obvious that it is Lady Whitehaven who selects and controls her lovers and would-be lovers, even if Mainwaring does not realise it: "Lady Whitehaven, you will say, had picked him up. Mainwaring did not think so. He considered her advance as a tribute to worth, and might perhaps have gone so far as to say (if pressed) that really he had picked *her* up. I never saw in any man so cool an assumption of *droit de seigneur*" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 32); that Mainwaring is in error, however, is indicated by the reference to "her advance" in the quote, and by the unfolding plot of the novel. It must be remembered, however, that the schema of the asexual Victorian Angel in the House applies mainly in a middle-class context; 'immoral' behaviour on the part of aristocrats (as on the part of artists), on the other hand, would probably have conformed with most readers' expectations. In contrast to Lady Whitehaven, the narrator confirms the reader's schema of Victorian social conventions by his reluctance to mention 'indelicate' subjects. Once this schema has been instantiated as one of the sub-schemata of the 'Victorian' schema triggered by the explicit and implicit headers in the text, it is easy for the reader to understand what the narrator hints at when he, for instance, describes how Lizzy, then newly married, "sat quietly down to her needlework. I saw what she was making, and indeed there were other signs" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 52). The same applies to the narrator's views on women. As outlined in chapter 3.2.4, the novel draws on rather than engages in a dialogue with the reader's beliefs about the Victorian era, invoking stereotypical notions of female chastity and the dignity of manual labour as important elements of Victorian culture, and as possible role models for the modern reader.

While the novel tends to offer little in terms of world-schema disruption, it appears calculated to disrupt the reader's expectations in regard to generic conventions. From the beginning, the reader is presented with headers calculated to instantiate different text schemata: described and marketed as a historical novel by its publishers, the novel starts with its narrator's stated intention of writing a biography, before setting out to deconstruct its own avowed project. As outlined above, the very sketchy and incomplete scene descriptions, which only barely provide the headers necessary to instantiate the corresponding 'Victorian' schemata in the reader's imagination, draw attention to the amount of background information that the reader is expected to bring to the text. It is worth noting this lack of descriptive 'period' detail constitutes a violation of the established text schema for the historical novel, as does the substitution of coded allusions for overt references to its temporal setting, and the inclusion of historical individuals under fictional names.

However, the novel's most obviously schema-disrupting qualities apply to its ostensible status as a biography. The beginning of the novel at once signals the highly unusual quality of the text, and at the same time appears to show a desire to reassure the readers that their genre-based expectations are to be fulfilled, at least in terms of the novel's chronology:

> There's nothing for it but to begin at the beginning. I don't mean of Mainwaring himself, for nobody knows his beginning now that he himself can't tell it – I mean rather the beginning of myself and himself – which was at Marseilles in the 'seventies. (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 1)

The narrator's intention of beginning at the beginning is, arguably, the only thing that conforms to the reader's text schema of a biography; however, the fact that this is explicitly stated is the first disruptive element, as most biographers *do* rather than *say* so. The next sentence further subverts the reader's expectations concerning biographical writing, as the narrator immediately qualifies his intention of beginning "at the beginning" by adding that, contrary to the reader's expectations, this does not refer to the birth of his subject, but merely to the time when he made the acquaintance of Mainwaring, then already aged between twenty-five and thirty. It is only two pages later, after a rambling disquisition on predetermination and chance, and a concise account of the narrator's own affairs at the time of his first meeting with Mainwaring, that the narration finally moves on to the eponymous protagonist. Moreover, the rambling narrative offers not information about but merely a commentary on Mainwaring's life, the facts of which – as in *Concord in Jeopardy* – are assumed to be known to the reader. At an early point in the text, the reader is prepared for this departure from the conventional 'biography' schema, as the narrator remarks on the impossibility of reducing a man's life to a well-ordered literary narrative:

> The history of a man – I know that very well – can't be rounded up into a tale in the artist's sense. Nature won't have anything to say to your antithetical light and shade, your balance and chiaroscuro and climax. Form, which all the poets talk of and none of them understand, is no concern of Nature's, occupied with her enormous affair of production, absorption and reproduction. (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 1)

Schema disruption on the level of content and organisation of the biography are, as can be seen from this passage, accompanied by deviations on a linguistic level, as contractions such as "there's", "can't" and "don't", colloquialisms, interjections and elliptical sentences do not usually form part of the reader's schema of a serious 'literary' biography, or of a fictional account

purporting to be a biography. Moreover, Mainwaring himself seems to defy the narrator's attempt to make him the subject of a biography:

> I noted then as a characteristic of him [i.e. Mainwaring], which has been more than confirmed since, that all his zest was for the future; that the past indeed did not really exist for him. I was told nothing – I never learned anything but the bare bones – of his birth and upbringing. […] He had been educated – that was obvious: he had classics, languages, history, literature. He knew the byways too: he knew eighteenth-century poetry extremely well – much better than I, who professed poetry. But he cared nothing for his scholarship. He had got it – and the sources were therefore dried up. Facts then were entirely to seek in Mainwaring's conversation, though I am quite sure that his prospective actions were facts to himself. I never met a man so sure of himself as he was. (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 12–3)

Moreover, the text also undermines the reader's schematic expectation of the biographer as an expert on his subject, as the narrator emphasises his own lack of information and expertise: "I am not a politician myself, and have never been a member of parliament, so that I feel quite incompetent to say how Mainwaring gradually edged himself into the position he occupied" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 91). In the course of the narrative, the 'biography' schema increasingly has to be abandoned, despite the fact that the narrator repeatedly declares his intention of giving a "history" of Mainwaring's life. The illusion of authenticity is undermined and the fictionality of the main character is hinted at: at the beginning of their acquaintance, the narrator notes somewhat ambiguously "how literary" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 8) Mainwaring is; later, he is described as "the perfect bomb-thrower of fiction" (26); towards the end of the book, the narrator finally appears to contradict his initial assertion about the impossibility of a man's life being "rounded up into a tale" when he explicitly comments on the structure of his narrative and announces its "climax" (245). The reader is, of course, fully aware of the fact that Mainwaring's life is merely a fictional construct; however, the narrator's hints to this effect go some way towards text schema disruption, as well as presenting metatextual comments on the act of biographic writing.

Mainwaring continues to feature prominently in the novel; however, the main focus shifts to the relationship that develops between the narrator and Lizzy, and to Mainwaring's impact on the life of Lady Whitehaven. The reader's schematic expectations of a biography are finally overthrown when the text does not end with Mainwaring's death of tuberculosis shortly afterwards and gives no detailed account of his political achievements, but rather moves on to the narrator's and Lizzy's future together; the ending reveals that the text is both a love story and a study of Victorian morality, similar to the one that young Whitworth wanted to write before embarking on an account of Mainwaring's life. The former is indicated by the narrator himself when he describes Mainwaring's death – rather than his achievement of the post of Secretary of the Board of Trade, which was the apex of his political career – as the "climax of [his] record" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 245), as this leaves the narrator free to marry Lizzy Mainwaring.

4.1.3.3 Deixis

As stated above, the focalising consciousness of most of the novel is that of the first-person narrator Whitworth, who tells the story with the benefit of considerable hindsight. The reader gains very little information about the narrator's present circumstances; as a consequence, the spatial component of the deictic centre at the beginning of the novel cannot be precisely determined. The temporal aspect can only be assessed in relation to the fictional NOW-point of

the story that Whitworth narrates, i.e. at least twenty years after the events of the novel, which is set in the 1870s and 80s. After the rambling introductory passage, in which the WHEN and WHERE are temporarily voided while the narrator muses on causality, predetermination and chance, a push into the narrator's reminiscences takes place. The deictic centre shifts between two versions of Whitworth, the younger one who made Mainwaring's acquaintance and witnessed his career, and the older one who offers explanatory and evaluative comments. In keeping with the conventions of first-person narrative as a 'feigned reality statement' (of crucial importance in this text because of its purported aim of presenting a biography of a 'real' historical figure), which has to justify the narrator's knowledge of events within the framework of the story world epistemology,[555] other voices are brought into the narrative to fill in the gaps in the narrator's own knowledge of Mainwaring. There are several pushes onto the deictic plane of other embedded narrators, such as a letter from Whitworth's friend Allenby and lengthy monologues by Bill Birks, M.P., Lady Whitehaven, and Lizzy, and corresponding pops back onto that of the narration.

As already indicated, the focalised WHO to some extent violates the reader's expectations, as the narrator's focus shifts increasingly from Mainwaring towards Lizzy and Lady Whitehaven. It is also important to note that because of the nature of first-person narrative outlined above, the narrator's younger self is usually also within the older narrator's focus, as he primarily dwells on his meetings with Mainwaring and the other characters. The narrator's voice is that of an educated man of his time, with occasional archaic colloquialisms, quotations from Shakespeare and the Bible, and allusions to Greek mythology. In some areas, however, he shows himself aware and open to contemporary influences, especially contemporary politics and Freudian psychology. This picture of an educated man of leisure is borne out by the information the reader is given in the course of the narrative, with allusions to his private fortune, his disinclination for work and amateur interest in poetry, his travels, and his wide circle of titled acquaintances. Because of its casual quality, however, the narrator's voice diverges from that of Victorian fiction. This strategy sets up an illusion of a communicative situation; on the deictic plane of the narrative, the reader's deictic centre is thus not mapped onto that of the narrator, but on that of the fictional listener implied by the text. This illusion is strengthened by Whitworth's adherence to the conventions of the communicative model through his direct address of his 'listener' and allusions to shared background knowledge.

It has to be pointed out, however, that this illusion of shared knowledge exists only on the deictic level of the narration, and refers to the fictional listener's knowledge of story-world events. Unlike in other historical novels – even *Concord in Jeopardy*, which experiments with a similar technique –, references to real-world historical personages are carefully avoided; where real-world characters are introduced, they are fictionalised and given different names, even where the historical facts are otherwise correct (for example, Sir Isaac Bentivoglio, the "exotic leader of the Tory party" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 8) to whom Britain "owed the Empire of India [and] Peace with Honour" (167) is clearly Sir Benjamin Disraeli, while Hardman is a fictional version of Gladstone). Likewise, it is possible to establish the exact dates for Mainwaring's first and second election to Parliament (1880 and 1885 respectively), but these are not given in the text, which in the second instance only refers to "the General Election of 18-" at which "the Liberals came back triumphant" (M. Hewlett,

[555] Cf. ch. 1.4.2.

Mainwaring, 91). (This implicit invitation to draw parallels between the story world and the real world tends to strengthen the reader's suspicions that Mainwaring must have been a real-world historical figure, albeit presented under a different name.)

As argued in the preceding chapter, Whitworth's ideological point of view is essentially that of a man of his age and class, especially where women and the lower classes are concerned. His mind style is highly individual: for two thirds of the novel, the narrator's voice is rich in metaphors, most of them drawn from the source domain of nature (especially flowers) and birds. Whereas his comparisons of Lizzy and Lady Whitehaven to flowers are in keeping with conventional clichés, his 'bird' metaphors are much more diversified and idiosyncratic, and are sometimes superimposed on his more conventional 'flower' metaphors: "The Duchess was a peony to an iris in [Lady Whitehaven's] regard, a peacock to a silver pheasant" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 27). At other times, Lady Whitehaven reminds him of "a woodpigeon before a large and very lean tom-cat" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 41); Lizzy is "a thrush in winter, frozen tame" (59) and "a home-keeping bird" that is contrasted with the "peacocks and popinjays" (76) Mainwaring associates with. Hardman, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, is "like a wicked old stone eagle", "with the angry eyes of some accipitrine fowl, sitting couched in his place" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 81), while the British Prime Minister Bentivoglio is compared to yet another bird of prey, "with velvet gloves over his claws" (81).

The abundance of bird metaphors is explained when the narrator mentions that he is not only interested in birds, but had been working on a study of comparative ethics entitled *The Morality of Birds*, which he has abandoned in favour of following Mainwaring's career.[556] After this has been stated, no further 'bird' metaphors occur in the text. However, the book gradually develops into the book Whitworth has abandoned: no longer a biography of Mainwaring, but a study of the ethics and morals of the metaphorical 'birds' of Mainwaring's circle. The striking prevalence and sudden disappearance of the narrator's 'bird' metaphors can be analysed along Freudian lines, suggesting an attempt on the author's part to hint at the change in text schema that the reader is about to experience: once the 'repressed' fact of the book on bird morality has been expressed in the text, it ceases to break through in the shape of bird imagery, instead overtly supplanting the biographical text schema. This 'psychoanalytical' approach to the narrator is to some extent suggested by the fact that the narrator himself shows his awareness of Freud, describing Mainwaring as a man without a super-ego and thus a thoroughly amoral being.[557]

Throughout the text, Mainwaring is constructed as the metaphorical opposite of the people he comes into contact with. When the narrator first describes his conversation, he recounts how Mainwaring "would raise his finger higher and higher towards heaven, his whole person straining up after it, as if the scarecrow he was were on the point of flight upon the wings of his words" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 6). Highlighting the incongruity of Mainwaring's appearance and career, the bird metaphor implied by "on the point of flight" breaks down when Mainwaring is compared to "a scarecrow" – not a type of bird, but the farmer's means of scaring away birds. That he represents a danger to the "birds" he comes into contact with is implied in the quote above, which likens him to "a large and very lean tom-cat" threatening Lady Whitehaven, "a woodpigeon"; later, he is transformed into an even larger type of predator. When he is speaking in public, his voice "raises [sic] to a wail, to

[556] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 191.
[557] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 3f.

a long howling like the wolves at sundown" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 19); on another occasion, the narrator refers to Mainwaring's "leonine head" and "jet-black mane" (94), and his "head of a black panther" (95). Even more consistently, Mainwaring is associated with destructive forces of nature, especially fire: at the beginning of the book, we are told that Mainwaring "burned his way through the England and London of the last generation" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 2). His eyes have the "quality of fire" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 5), and his words come in a "firy flow" which "poured forth like a lava-stream and was punctuated, as that is, by the frequent fling-up of some great rock of oratory, some bursting proof, some pounding, shattering conclusion" (6–7); at times, his conversation is characterised by a "red-hot, biting gaiety" (14). Mainwaring himself is "fond of saying he had a fire in his belly"; according to the narrator, he "could have ignited the Thames" (94). The "smoulder of fire in his eyes" (26) is not even extinguished as Mainwaring lies dying: "Not that the fire had gone out. It was there. But it had gone cold" (263).

4.1.3.3 Intertextuality

The novel is rich in intertextual allusions to nineteenth-century literature and poetry, with a large number of titles mentioned explicitly: Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1860/61), Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), and *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828), as well as a number of poems from Francis Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (1875), among them "Lucy Gray", "Poor Susan", "The Daffodils", "The Cuckoo", "Helen of Kirkonnell, "Willie Drowned in Yarrow", "Jack and Joan they think no ill", Byron's "Elegy", "Auld Robin Gray", "The Scholar Gypsy" and "The Forsaken Merman". On the textual level, these titles serve the not unimportant function of creating a bond between Lizzy and Whitworth in showing that they have similar (and similarly conservative) tastes in literature. In this regard, Lizzy's fondness for writers with very traditional views on gender – Dickens, in particular, being renowned for his presentation of angelic women truer to the Victorian ideal than to real life – becomes an important comment on the novel's endorsement of Victorian views on gender, outlined already at some length in chapter 3.2.4.

In its repeated references to the workers as a different "nation", the novel also evokes another classic of Victorian literature, Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845). Unlike Disraeli, however, the narrator of *Mainwaring* shows a romanticising attitude that constructs the "nation" of the workers (epitomised by Lizzy) as a race of noble savages possessing an innate sense of morality. As already discussed in chapter 2.1.2, this links up with the novel's ideal of social justice through universal poverty and hard work. Somewhat problematically, the novel's ideology of two distinct "races", that of the workers and that of the upper classes, prevents upward mobility. In *Mainwaring*, however, this is presented in positive terms: Lizzy's 'racial' difference from Mainwaring and the other upper-class characters is stronger than Victorian convention; although her status is, in theory, determined by that of her husband, she cannot 'rise' with him because to do so would violate the "laws of her being", forcing her to deny the demands of her innate morality. Lizzy's behaviour also highlights a facet of Victorian society which frequently comes in for criticism in other works, emphasising the importance of keeping up appearances: with her, "conduct must be as scrupulous as the thought which moved it. She would neither do wrong, nor seem to do it" (M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 129).

Obsessed with respectability, Lizzy Mainwaring is the most conventionally 'Victorian' character in the novel; as outlined in chapter 3.2.4, however, *Mainwaring* deviates from the overall tone of Victorian-centred fiction because of its positive evaluation of this preoccupation. Lizzy's 'innate' adherence to the socially constructed rules of Victorian morality is contrasted to the upper-class characters' thoroughly 'immoral' behaviour, that is to some extent presented as the result of nature as much as nurture.[558] For Lizzy, they symbolise immorality to such a degree that Lady Whitehaven's assurance that there is nothing morally wrong in Lizzy's innocently platonic relationship with the narrator at once convinces her that they should never meet again. The novel's allusions to Freudian psychoanalysis serve to underline this message: just as Mainwaring is, in Freudian terms, presented as a man without super-ego, Lizzy and her "nation" appear to consist entirely of super-ego, being by nature unable to have any desires that contradict the established moral code. What to Lizzy comes naturally, however, can be achieved by others through an effort of will: at the end of the novel, the narrator relinquishes his social status in order to become one of her "nation", resolving to live according to the same high ideals.

4.1.3.4 Conclusion

While essentially world-schema confirming in its presentation of the Victorian period, Maurice Hewlett's novel possesses high potential for text-schema disruption. Ostensibly aiming to present a biography of a historical character, it goes a step beyond the novels discussed in the preceding chapter because of its extensive re-writing of Victorian history. Unlike most historical fiction, which incorporates 'factual' history in order to authenticate its setting and plot, Mainwaring deliberately obscures and fictionalises its 'factual' content: while a number of real-life historical individuals play important roles in the novel, these are fictionalised and given different – though easily recognisable – names, inviting readers to draw on their historical knowledge in order to find their real-world equivalents. On this basis, it becomes even more tempting to speculate as to the real-world equivalent of the novel's eponymous protagonist – who, however, does not exist.

As outlined above, Hewlett's novel can be regarded as playful metatextual commentary on the act of biographical writing, and on its status as a fictional narrative: as Mainwaring's life unfolds, the narrator with increasing frequency stresses the fictionality of his account, highlighting the extent to which the protagonist resembles a character in a novel, and deploying an intricate web of metaphorical expressions which deliberately draws attention to Mainwaring's status as a fictional construct. In addition, it draws attention to the fact that biographical writing may turn out to present a clearer picture of the biographer than of his subject, as all events in the politician's life are presented in relation to their effect on that of the narrator. As the subject of a written biography, Mainwaring is shown to have no existence independent from his biographer: his story begins with their first meeting rather than his birth, and does not end at his death, but only after its effects on Whitworth's life have been recorded. As Mainwaring's political career leads him from one success to the next, his biographer gradually shifts his focus away from Mainwaring onto Mainwaring's wife, Lizzy, and his own love for her; the death of his ostensible subject becomes, from Whitworth's point of view, the 'climax' of the love story he has now shifted to writing. The novel thus highlights the extent to which all biographic writing,

[558] Cf. M. Hewlett, *Mainwaring*, 231, where the narrator proposes that a sense of morality is acquired "at one's mother's breast".

albeit supposedly based on historical fact, is subject to processes of narratival shaping and selection which reveal more about the concerns of its writer than those of its subject. The Victorian setting of the novel, in contrast, emerges not so much as a construct of the writer's as of the reader's imagination, as the numerous gaps in the novel's descriptions have to be filled from antecedent schematic knowledge; at the same time, however, the ideological stance of the period – especially where its views on women are concerned – is held up as a model to the twentieth-century audience.

4.2 "Crossing the great divide": Victorian lowlife

As has been outlined in the preceding sections, Victorianism is frequently identified as a middle-class phenomenon, in keeping with the popular conception of the period as the age in which the middle class rose to prominence.[559] This is reflected in the choice of protagonists of a vast majority of the novels discussed in this thesis. Nonetheless, many of these works also feature lower-class characters or vignettes of lower-class life. In addition, a number of novels – such as D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!* (1933) or Bernard Ash's *Silence for his Worship* (1953), as well as parts of *Lilith* (1954) and *Victorian House* (1939) – focus on lower-class protagonists or attempt to give the reader a deeper insight into the lives of the Victorian poor. The enormous gap between the affluent classes of Victorian society, and those below the poverty line, has already been thematised in the preceding chapters, as has the interest that contemporary historiographers evinced in the subject. During the interwar period in particular, researchers became increasingly concerned with investigating the plight of the urban poor, both in the Victorian era and in contemporary Britain.

Victorian-centred novelists not infrequently drew on this material for information and inspiration, seeking to bring to life the information compiled by social historians. In *Silence for His Worship*, the narrator acknowledges that "[l]ibraries of literature, good and bad, have been written about the two worlds which existed on each other's doorsteps amid the power and light of the 1870's [sic]. Tomes of research both slipshod and scholarly exist for those who wish to study at length the customs, contrasts, and contradictions of the one with the other" (68). Simultaneously, however, he also emphasises the difference between these "scholarly tomes" and the Victorian-centred novel, which – unlike 'factual' histories of the period – allows the reader a first-hand view without having to wade through "libraries of literature". As the protagonist "cross[es] an immeasurable gulf" between his middle-class home and the London slums, readers are told that "[a]ll you and I are concerned with here is to follow Arthur over the great divide into the scene that was to be the backcloth of his life for many a year and acquaint ourselves with what he found there, how he lived, and what it did to him" (Ash, 68)

At the beginning of the novel, its middle-class protagonist Arthur loses his loving parents in a theatre fire, and is taken in by his elderly great-aunt and uncle. Unable to comprehend the emotional needs of a little boy, the couple – though acting on the best intentions – makes Arthur's life miserable to the point that he decides to run away and try his luck on the streets. As he strikes up friendships with a succession of street urchins and petty thieves who facilitate his slow initiation into the life of the London poor, the novel – despite its avowed intention of showing rather than telling – develops into a "sociological survey" (Ash, 117) crammed with a wealth of

[559] Cf. Cannadine, 118f.

information about the lives of the lower classes. In doing so, Ash's novel – and the many other texts constructed along the same lines – aims at schema addition rather than schema disruption: readers are expected to be aware of the existence of the 'two worlds' of Victorian London, and to possess a certain amount of background information on the subject. The aim of these texts, however, is to flesh out this information, to add salient or surprising details, and to allow readers to gain 'first-hand' experience of the underbelly of Victorian society by immersing themselves into the experience of the protagonists.

4.2.1 Beyond Dickens

In a significant number of Victorian-centred novels, the work of Charles Dickens features – either implicitly or explicitly – as a source of information on the Victorian lower classes, both for readers (assumed to possess a certain degree of familiarity with his novels) and for authors, for whom he either acts as a source and role model, or as a point of reference against which to measure the greater realism, honesty or explicitness of their own descriptions.[560] Assessments of Dickens's literary qualities vary considerably: in *Love's a Man of War*, the narrator remarks without irony that only Dickens could truly have done justice to a description of the Beldons' family life.[561] In *Our Mr Dormer*, R.H. Mottram has the narrator remark à propos a pauper: "Nearly a generation was to pass before Dickens should breathe into all that half-bestial world of want and helplessness, such breath of life that they have become of necessity a landmark, a memorial, one of the few things likely to be remembered of the century Dickens adorns" (7). In *This Side Idolatry*, the Dickensian characters which people the novel are an implicit acknowledgement of Dickens's ability to present an 'authentic' account of Victorian London. In *Victorian House*, Phoebe admires Dickens's works because they parallel her genuine concern and compassion for the poor, and in *Mainwaring*, the narrator recommends Dickens's novels to his lower-class beloved, rightly assuming, as it turns out, that she will be able to relate to the experiences they describe.

In *A Challenge to Sirius*, in contrast, Frank's mental maturation process is depicted as complete when he disparages the "slipshod heartiness" of the Victorian authors – Dickens among them – whom he had previously admired; and Georgina in *Consider These Women* disapproves of her brother-in-law's work because of his unrealistic portrayal of women. In Angela Thirkell's *Coronation Summer* (1937),[562] "our dear Boz" is the favourite author of the ridiculously featherbrained Victorian narrator – hardly an endorsement from a twentieth-century perspective. In addition, a number of authors are somewhat doubtful concerning the efficacy of Dickens's descriptions in raising awareness of the London poor: in *Poor Papa* (1953), Catherine Gayton pokes fun at Dickens's zeal for social reform through his writings by describing their effect on the typical middle-class housewife of the era:

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[560] As Louis James and 'ASW' note in the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, adaptations, parodies and plagiarisations of Dickens were by no means uncommon during the nineteenth century, as were sexually more explicit re-writings. Michael Sadleir in *Forlorn Sunset* (1947), for instance, makes the connection to these earlier works explicit by prefacing his novel by an extract from Renton Nicholson's *Dombey and Daughter* (c. 1850), a contemporary attempt to 'go beyond' Dickens.

[561] Cf. Dean, 17.

[562] For detailed discussion of Thirkell's parody of the Victorians, cf. ch. 5.2.4.

> She was, in fact, unaware of the poor themselves, unless she met with them in the slim green numbers of Mr. Dickens's works, and then she wept big tears on her husband's shoulder and begged to be assured that it was only a story.
> Her husband, resenting it that his wife, who should be guarded from the world, should be made to weep by it, bore away the green numbers of *Nicholas Nickelby* and *Oliver Twist* to his own study, where he read them himself with dry eyes; yet he shook his head frowning and, the following Sunday, dropped a heavier coin in the velvet bag. (39–40)

As Dickens's reformist zeal collides with Victorian hypocrisy and the urge to protect women from the realities of life, his novels are soon forgotten; a single donation serves to assuage the pangs of the Victorian middle-class conscience.

Nonetheless, many novels implicitly draw on Dickens's novels (popular during the interwar period as well as during World War II in print form and film adaptations[563]), featuring characters, descriptions or plot lines which are markedly 'Dickensian'. Mr Torch, the Cockney showman in Eleanor Smith's *Caravan*, is a case in point, as are the above-mentioned Beldons in *Love's a Man of War*, the street urchins and slum dwellers in *Silence for his Worship*, the inhabitants of Mimosa Street in *Concord in Jeopardy*, Dickens's friends and family in *This Side Idolatry*, or Dr Blimber's school and the lower-class characters in *Victorian House*. In *Trumpeter, Sound!*, not only the setting, the recreation of nineteenth-century cockney slang, and the novel's critical commentary on Victorian hypocrisy, but also several characters appear to be based on Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. This applies most obviously to the ballet-dancer Fancy, whose name and position as Mark's protector hint at the parallel between her and Dickens's Nancy, as does the implied immorality of her occupation; this is reinforced when she becomes also the protector of her father, Fawkes, whose first name turns out to be Oliver. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Dickens's text is briefly invoked, when the reader is exhorted to "look after [his] silk handkerchief", recalling the thievery of Fagin's gang. The description of the 'baby farm' where Fancy has to leave her child is also reminiscent of *Oliver Twist*, recalling the establishment of Mrs Mann (where Oliver grows up), as are the descriptions of the London slums. Moreover, there is a parallel in the plot of the novels, as in both cases the central character (an illegitimate child unaware of his true parentage) runs away from his place of employment after a fight with another boy, and later finds himself pursued by his ill-meaning and darkly mysterious half-brother.[564]

Nonetheless, the stylistic features and narrative modes of *Trumpeter, Sound!* and other Victorian-centred novels are frequently very different from Dickens's novels, as contemporary authors introduce twentieth-century narrators who highlight the temporal distance from the Victorian setting through the introduction of conscious anachronisms: in *Silence for his Worship*, for instance, Arthur's parents' kitchen is described as "non-labour-saving", and the noise of the slums is compared to the "heterodyne noise on an inefficient radio set" (70). In addition, it is frequently

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[563] Cf. Gardiner, 164.

[564] It is worth noting, however, that these parallels are merely superficial. Mark is no Oliver Twist: although he exhibits some of the latter's naïveté and innate goodness, he is also headstrong, impetuous and fond of fighting. Fancy again may share some of Nancy's characteristics: her energetic determination to help her young protégé, her courage in the face of adversity and, not least, her relationship with one of the adversaries of the protagonist. However, in the end she escapes Nancy's fate and finds happiness with Mark. Moreover, she is an actress and a ballet dancer, but not a prostitute. Most significantly, Murray rejects the rags-to-riches ending envisaged by Dickens, although this is initially presented as a distinct possibility in his novel.

stressed that the locales in which the action is set have disappeared or altered beyond recognition, and are accessible to the reader only in the company of the narrators. In many novels, the function of these narrators comes to resemble that of tourist guides, displaying the Victorian period for the readers' edification and/or amusement, offering explanatory or disparaging comments, tracing connections to the twentieth-century present, and drawing attention to the dangers of Victorian London. They address themselves to those interested in discovering the secrets of the metropolis, and who are "susceptible to the lure of the back streets, to the thrill of turning out of a busy main road in a great city and turning again and finding yourself in quite a different world not twenty yards from the traffic and bustle you have just left" (Sadleir, *Forlorn Sunset*, 21):

> If you sought it [i.e. Greensleeves Row] from the north, the usual course was to go down Rosamund Street and then lose your way; if from the south, it was wisest to turn up where Old Street ended, and catch a boy – that is, if you could, for boys were too spry to be easily caught in those days. If, however, you did succeed in laying hold of one from out the whirl of tip-cat or "trip the baker" – and you had best look sharply after your silk handkerchief in the act – he could take you in a moment to the premises of O. Fawkes, late Bluemantle, the toy-maker. (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 22)

> London in the early 'sixties was still three parts jungle. Except for the residential and shopping areas […], hardly a district was really 'public' in the sense that ordinary folk went to and fro, heedless of the route they took so that it led them where they wished to go. There was no knowing what kind of a queer patch you might strike, in what blind alley you might find yourself, to what embarrassment, insult or even molestation you might be exposed. […] Behind the house-fronts… that very phrase has the romance of menace! (Sadleir, *Forlorn Sunset*, 21)

While extremely knowledgeable about Victorian London, however, the narrators of these novels are rarely omniscient; in many cases, they present the unspoken thoughts and motivations of the characters in terms of conjecture, or freely admit their ignorance. The main part of the narratives is typically focalised through the protagonists – many of them, like the reader, outsiders to lower-class London, so that their sense of confusion and estrangement becomes a point of identification while the reader occupies their deictic position on a voyage of discovery through the Victorian underworld: to name just a few examples, Phoebe and William in *Victorian House*, Arthur in *Silence for his Worship*, and Amanda in *Lilith* are from a middle-class background, while Mark in *Trumpeter, Sound!* and the eponymous protagonist in *Lilith* – though of lower-class origin – are from the countryside.

Through their eyes, the reader experiences a side of the metropolis which is already vaguely familiar from the works of Dickens, but which is often presented with an even greater wealth of detail and a degree of insight into the psychologically damaging consequences of this kind of life, especially for young and impressionable characters. Though faithful to their model in the reproduction of period Cockney slang and the depiction of the dirt, drunkenness and poverty of the slum dwellers, several authors go beyond Dickens by introducing hitherto unknown locations (ranging from the 'pegs' or mission-houses where the poorest of the poor get free breakfasts, over the more disreputable music halls, to establishments like Kate Hamilton's Academy of Life – where young female painters copy from the nudes of old masters –, the intriguingly named Reception House for the Copulative Conjunctive, or Mother Stewart's School of Flagellation), or highlighting instances of social injustice not explicitly mentioned in Dickens's novels, such as society's hypocritical attitude towards prostitutes. In many cases, attempts to flesh out Dickens's descriptions involve the inclusion of details which the Victorian writer for reasons of propriety

decided to omit or making their characters more outspoken (often on sexual issues) than Victorian notions of decorum would have allowed.[565]

By engaging in an intertextual dialogue with the works of Dickens, twentieth-century authors are also confronted with what was then regarded as one of the most obvious gaps in Dickens's particular brand of realism. As Edmund Gosse observed, in Dickens "the clamorous passions of mankind, the coarser accidents of life, were absolutely ignored, and the whole question of population seemed reduced to the theory of the gooseberry bush" (qtd in Lerner and Holmstrom, 120, 135).[566] Within the framework provided by twentieth-century literary censorship, Victorian-centred fiction aims to remedy Dickens's omissions, by reinscribing sexuality into the context of the Victorian period.

4.2.2 Exposing the Victorians

Most late twentieth and early twenty-first century commentators tend to connect the trend towards uncovering the Victorians' hidden (sex) lives to "the libertarian impulses of the 1960s, so invested on the one hand in driving a final stake through the heart of Victorian values, [which] reanimated them on the other through its prurient curiosity about the period" (Kaplan, 86).[567] According to these critics, it was mainly Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1964)[568] and Foucauld's *History of Sexuality* (1976) which "sought to interrogate myths of Victorianism and to reclaim the Victorians from the charges of prudery and hypocrisy laid against them in the early twentieth century", leading to a "much more nuanced and multifarious" (Moore, "Neo-Victorian", 628) understanding of the period. It is only rarely – as, for instance, in Jonathan Loesberg's discussion of the subject – that references to earlier novels, such as Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940),[569] can be found. It is worth noting, however, that Victorian-centred fiction from the first half of the twentieth century is rich in scenes and episodes which strike a similar note to that of later texts, aiming at introducing the reader to aspects of the Victorian period at odds with its established reputation as uniformly undersexed, boring and prudish– an feature that, as shall be seen, becomes more pronounced as temporal distance from the Victorians increases. The appearance of these works may well be explained to a large extent by the novelty value they possessed on a literary market already well stocked with explorations of the 'typically' Victorian. It is also worth noting, however, that the trend towards rediscovering the Victorians harks back to a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon, when the Victorians themselves where interested in rediscovering the Regency, usually with a view towards exposing its sexual misdemeanours.[570]

In this context, it must be remembered that the revisionist impulse of early- and mid-twentieth-century writers was subject to similar restrictions as those imposed on their Victorian predecessors. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 remained in place largely unchanged until 1959, when a

[565] The bawdy songs and comments of the seamstresses in *Concord in Jeopardy*, Phoebe's vocal refusal to sleep with her admirers or the theatre manager in *Trumpeter, Sound!*, or Mr Torch's outspoken interpretation of the Punch and Judy show in *Caravan* are cases in point.

[566] Cf. also Mason, 15.

[567] Cf. also Kirchknopf, 56; Moore, "Neo-Victorian", 628; Joyce, 148ff.

[568] It is perhaps worth noting that Marcus himself conceived of his work as filling the gaps in Dickens' novels (cf. Joyce, 150).

[569] For an in-depth discussion of the novel, cf. ch. 4.2.3.

[570] Cf. Mason, 16.

clause was introduced to allow for exceptions on the basis of literary merit.[571] Its interpretation, however, varied considerably over time. While literary censorship intensified in the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century,[572] the end of the nineteenth century saw a gradual loosening of moral standards, and during World War I, censorship was primarily concerned with the potential danger of sapping public morale or conveying sensitive information to the enemy.[573] When Sir William Joynson-Hicks became Home Secretary in 1924, however, the situation changed drastically: "During the late 1920s and early 1930s the moral censorship of literature was, if not stricter, at least more obtrusive than it had been for some considerable time" (Thomas, 304). Books were now banned because of their alleged ability to deprave the public, irrespective of their literary value or the explicitness of their sexual content. While Naomi Mitchison asserted that historical fiction was granted greater liberties than most other genres in this respect – "apparently it's alright when people wear wolfskins and togas" (Mitchison, 179)[574] –, it is nonetheless important to stress that there existed certain subjects which either could not be mentioned, or only with the utmost circumspection. However, by the mid-twentieth century, restrictions had lessened considerably, even though graphic descriptions of sexual encounters – as in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's* lover, whose obscenity trial in 1960 went some way towards abolishing literary censorship – were still taboo.

Few authors, however, found this an obstacle to their attempts at de-Bowdlerising Dickens. In regard to lower-class sexuality, in particular, many Victorian-centred authors remain true to their commitment to filling the gaps in his descriptions: in *Victorian House*, Phoebe's first glance of the street urchins lodging in the house where she is kept captive reveals a naked couple of eleven-year-olds enacting a repulsive pantomimic parody of copulation, while older children in the same room are openly engaged in sexual intercourse.[575] *Forlorn Sunset* introduces the reader to a neighbourhood where "[o]ut in the open boys and girls from six to sixteen fought and gambled and pelted one another and passers-by with stone and mud and rotting cats. In the wrecked houses of Field Lane they clustered in corners, relieving nature, drinking gin, fumbling themselves and one another, sometimes launching yet another unwanted baby into savagery and destitution" (9), and where "soldiers and roughs and tipsy sailors and bullies and half-naked screaming harlots danced round hurdy-gurdies in the streets, while other women and their clients pelted them from upstairs rooms, shouted obscenities and copulated on the very window-sills" (29).

Bernard Ash, *In Silence For His Worship*, goes a step beyond mere description when he sets out to expose the damaging effects the lack of privacy in lower-class houses had on the sexual development of Victorian children. Ash points out that while middle-class girls, in particular,

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[571] As Donald Thomas (262) points out, however, this had also been implicit in Lord Campbell's original 1857 act, which was aimed at pornography, but did not initially interfere with literary publication.

[572] In 1857, Campbell had stressed that it rested with the conscience of the individual whether s/he chose to read Restoration drama, Zola, or Hardy, and had explicitly named Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848) as one of the works which he personally disapproved of, but which the act was *not* intended to suppress. By the 1870s, however, translations of French authors, most notably Zola and Maupassant, were being seized and their publishers prosecuted (cf. Thomas, 262f.; 269).

[573] Cf. Thomas, 296ff.

[574] Qtd. in e.g. Joannou, "Naomi Mitchison", 296 and "Historical Fictions", 127; Waters, 188; Beauman, 141; Wallace, 51.

[575] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 183f.

were kept in ignorance of the 'facts of life' as long as possible, children of the lower classes, from an early age onwards, witnessed sexual intercourse between their parents and other adults sharing the same room. For Arthur, the sensitive protagonist of Ash's novel, this has lasting effects on his relations with women, as his revulsion for the physical side of love forces him into loneliness and isolation.[576] In the end, however, Ash ironically undermines his project of verbalising that which his Victorian predecessors left unsaid:

> There are certain things over which the novelists of an age gone by used to draw a veil, and I am not quite sure but what they were right. Arthur had led a peculiar life – a solitary life and a one-track life, in which many of the things we count in our wisdom as the strongest springs of human behaviour and conduct had been supressed and sublimated. There had been certain sexual revulsions in his adolescent experience. For that reason I suppose his wedding night might provide a magnificent opportunity for some fine, witty, salacious or deeply psychological writing. […] You, if you like, may debate it with yourself in the knowledge of the circumstances and in the knowledge of how human beings work; but I propose to pass it over simply by saying that Arthur's case, though bad, was far from pathological, and that two people who really love each other can put most things right. (219–20)

However, such an admission is rare in Victorian-centred fiction, which frequently posits the superiority of the twentieth century on the basis of its more open-minded attitude towards sexuality. In addition, Victorian-centred fiction frequently constructs a binary opposition between the sexually ignorant middle classes, and sexually knowledgeable (and frequently promiscuous) lower-class characters.[577] In view of these novels' positive evaluation of twentieth-century sexual knowledge it is remarkable, however, that the relative sexual freedom of the lower classes is rarely depicted in positive terms, perhaps revealing the hidden class anxieties of these novels' middle-class readership.[578]

In contrast to the examples cited above, descriptions of middle-class sexuality bear witness to the gradually shifting connotations of the term 'Victorian' towards its virtual synonymy with 'prudish' and 'sexually repressive'[579] and the increasing currency of what Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality*, would several decades later come to define (and deconstruct) as the 'repression hypothesis':

> Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as a model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parent's bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanour avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behaviour carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted in making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.
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> Nothing that was not ordered by generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation – whether in acts or in

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[576] Interestingly, a similar concern in regard to "young denizens of overcrowded bedrooms" is expressed by G.M. Hall (28) in her 1931 study on prostitution.

[577] In *Lilith*, for instance, the eponymous protagonist – unlike her middle-class friend Amanda – knows about "birth and life and death"; in *Challenge to Sirius*, Frank learns about them from his lower-class playfellows.

[578] For the perceived threat to middle-class identity during the interwar period, cf. Cannadine, 118f.; for the situation in postwar Britain; cf. ibid., 152.

[579] Cf. Glitz, 7ff; for detailed discussion of this topic, cf. Introduction.

> words. […] These are the characteristic features attributed to repression, which serve to distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law: repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know. (3–4)

There are hardly any passages which attempt to disrupt the schema outlined by Foucault within a middle-class context; indeed, most comments and descriptions tend to be schema-reinforcing. While during the first post-Victorian decades, authors evinced little interest in the sex lives of Victorian couples, later novels show considerable delight in discussing its virtual non-existence. Mid-twentieth-century authors frequently portray Victorian middle-class women as prudish and sexually frigid, and barely resigned to their marital duty towards their husbands. Examples of this attitude are legion, and have already been discussed in the context of 'outgrowing' Victorian sexuality in chapter 3.2.4, so that a few samples will suffice here: in *Lilith*, for instance, both Mr and Mrs Leigh appear to regard sex as a somewhat distasteful task whose primary object is the production of an heir to Amber House: "Laura cast down her eyes. […] Two miscarriages and then Amanda. Two more and still no son. She was terrified of pregnancy. Nor did she welcome the ritual which must precede those weary months. Every night when they sat together in the drawing-room, she dreaded to hear those words: 'I will come to your room tonight, Mrs. Leigh'" (29). In *Love's A Man of War*, too, Lucy Beldon shows an aversion to sex (much to her husband's dismay), as does Mrs Terry in *Sweet Lost Years*. In *Victorian House*, Adelaide is warned by her mother that marriage is, above all, a duty for the woman, but is unable to comprehend the full significance of her remarks: the Victorian injunction to silence reduces Mrs Pratt's well-meant advice to terms too vague to be comprehensible to a girl utterly devoid of sexual experience.[580] Victorian husbands, however, are hardly portrayed in more attractive terms, being either sexually promiscuous, brutal, and unaware of their wives' needs (such as Carlo in *Victorian House* or Roy in *Love's A Man of War*), as frigid as their wives (Jonathan in *Mine Is the Power*, George Walsh in *Sweet Lost Years*, or Ruskin in *Victorian Love Story*), or helpless and frustrated in the face of their wives' passivity (Frederick in *Sleep in Peace* or Harry Beldon in *Love's a Man of War*).[581]

Sexually active middle-class women, on the other hand, are typically 'explained' – and thus deprived of their schema-disruptive potential – by linking them to experiences outside Victorian middle-class society: in Eleanor Dunbar Hall's *Mine is the Power* (1954), Jonathan's wife Emma is dissatisfied in her marriage because her French upbringing has given her expectations which her English husband fails to live up to. In Eleanor Smith's *Caravan* (1943), Oriana has been 'corrupted' by her aristocratic husband. In both novels, the evaluation of these women is decidedly negative. The novel shows that Victorian men were assumed to perceive sexually active and confident women as threatening to their masculinity. After spending a night with his childhood sweetheart Oriana, now grown up and married to another man, the protagonist "felt ashamed of himself, and of his manhood, for he knew, then, that he had never possessed her – she had possessed him all through the night. He knew, too, that he had failed, loving her, despite the

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[580] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 359. The theme of Victorian girls' sexual ignorance occurs frequently, and is given two different interpretations: while some works insist on the unfairness of leaving girls in ignorance about sex, others insist on the hypocrisy of forcing them to keep up a pretence of ignorance.

[581] To some extent, the Victorian-centred novel's preoccupation with marital sexuality must also be seen in connection with changes in sexual attitudes during the 1950s (cf. ch. 3.2.4).

pleasure she had had from him. Her masterful mind had controlled their bodies, and she had taken from him to please herself, as though she had been the male" (E. Smith, *Caravan*, 95). The protagonist's shame arises not from the adulterous nature of their brief affair, but from his realisation that he failed to fulfil the dominant sexual role conventionally ascribed to the male.[582] While the passage conforms to readers' expectations concerning Victorian gender roles in regard to sex, it provides a more telling picture of twentieth-century concerns about masculinity than it does of Victorian men's views on the subject: as discussed in chapter 3.2.4, the belief that men were 'by nature' destined to take the active and women the passive role in any sexual encounter was widespread even during the 1950s.[583] Moreover, it has frequently been argued that British society inherited from the Victorians a fear of sexually independent women, who as late as the 1950s were perceived as a threat to the social order.[584] At the time of the publication of Smith's novel during World War II, this fear was intensified by government propaganda aimed at reducing the incidence of venereal disease among the armed forces, which depicted sexually active women as a danger to male health and to the national war effort.[585]

Secure in their 'knowledge' about the "monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie" (Foucault, 3), a number of authors turn away from the boring sex lives of the middle classes and the squalid couplings of the lower to investigate the "places of tolerance" which, according to the repression hypothesis, existed in Victorian society:

> If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. […] the prostitute, the client, and the pimp […] seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted. Words and gestures, quietly authorized, could be exchanged there at the going rate. Only in those places would untrammelled sex have a right to (safely insularized) forms of reality, and only to clandestine, circumscribed, and coded types of discourse. Everywhere else, modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence. (Foucault, 4–5)

Victorian-centred fiction frequently displays a marked interest in these "clandestine, circumscribed, and coded forms of discourse", aiming to re-inscribe them into the 'respectable' narratives of Victorian fiction. In keeping with a certain predilection for debunking the Victorians and exposing their moral hypocrisy, these texts also delight in uncovering the ways in which crafty Victorians managed to circumvent social prohibitions.[586]

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[582] Later on in the novel, Oriana is confronted by the protagonist, who accuses her of sexually exploiting him, implying that sexual desire is 'unfeminine' and reprehensible in a woman. She concedes his point, but explains that her behaviour is due to the fact that she has been corrupted by her depraved and sexually promiscuous husband, who has taught her something that no women should know, i.e. to experience and demand sexual gratification for herself (cf. E. Smith, *Caravan*, 189–90).

[583] Cf. Haste, 156f.

[584] Cf. e.g. Dollimore, 51ff.

[585] Cf. Haste, 112ff.

[586] One of the areas which thus become a focus of interest for Victorian-centred fiction is gambling; the second, inevitably, is sex. Both of these items feature prominently on the list of Victorian men-about-town's requirements for a fashionable evening out, and, as descriptions of Mrs Ramage's in *Trumpeter, Sound!* and The Aviary in *Fanny by Gaslight* make clear, establishments which cater for the first are careful to provide a choice selection of personable young ladies, which, it is implied, can not only be engaged as dancing partners, but also taken away for consumption off the premises.

A prime example of this is Aubrey Menen's *The Abode of Love* (1957). The novel is a fictionalised account of the religious sect of the Agapemonites, founded by Henry James Prince, a clergyman who during the 1850s broke away from the Church of England. They believed in the imminent return of Christ and lived together in a community financed by sizeable donations from its wealthy members, who had sold their assets and placed the proceeds at Prince's disposal.[587] In the novel, they also practise free love, euphemistically referred to as 'Buntism', and depicted as a revolutionary departure from Victorian sexual mores: "for his time, Prince's idea was new. The recognition of Buntism has had a long history since then, and some voluble prophets" (Menen, 109).[588] Menen presents Prince's decision to found a religion of his own as an ingenious solution to the predicament in which he finds himself when – on the look-out for a wealthy wife – he makes the acquaintance of the Nottidge family. Mr Nottidge tells him that he has settled his sizeable fortune entirely on one of his five daughters, but refuses to tell his prospective son-in-law which one. Prince solves the problem by founding a sect which allows, even encourages, polygamy, and marries all five of the Nottidge sisters, thus – according to the blurb – laying the foundation of "a large harem that was open to visitors", which is described in some detail in the text. The novel attempts a tightrope walk between schema disruption through its presentation of a community which practised free love in the mid-Victorian era, and its insistence on the materialistic considerations which underlie Prince's decision and which were fully in keeping with contemporary views on the Victorians. This becomes apparent especially when Menen chronicles the reactions of nineteenth-century visitors to the 'abode of love', who tend to view it favourably because their sense of moral outrage is dulled by the air of wealth and prosperity that the community exudes.

Most other Victorian-centred novels, however, are concerned with the more 'typical' "places of tolerance" in Victorian society. Moreover, they appear to be governed by the assumption that Victorian society – allegedly far surpassing the present in terms of its regulation of 'respectable' sexuality – must also have exceeded present standards as regards its opposite. As a rule of thumb, it may be stated that the sensationalist element of these descriptions increases with the temporal distance from the Victorian era.[589] In most earlier novels, there is little of the self-consciously revelatory in accounts of Victorian nightlife. In Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Challenge to Sirius*, for instance, the existence of pornography and Mr Bellack's nephew's interest in (and authorship of) such works – "full of red lips and white bosoms and kisses that scorched and limbs that clung" (21) – are mentioned merely in passing, serving mainly to highlight Frank's naïveté. While the narrator clearly does not approve of the genre, there is no suggestion that the reader ought to feel

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[587] Cf. Stunt, n. pag.

[588] The term derives from the name of Sergeant Bunt, a fictional character in Menen's novel. Finding himself – Robinson Crusoe-like – stranded on a deserted island, Bunt proceeds to furnish a brothel for himself, staffed by rag dolls.

[589] As already stated, the cause for this development must be sought in a combination of factors: the relaxation of censorship; the growing prevalence of the 'repression hypothesis' and its corollary, a sense that the present was superior to the Victorians because of the greater freedom with which it allegedly approached sexual matters, and the necessity of avoiding repetition on a literary market which placed a high value on novelty, apparently provided by descriptions of the teeming world of illicit sexuality which in the mid-1940s, few readers would have suspected behind the respectable façade of the Victorian period.

surprise at seeing the subject mentioned in a Victorian context, nor is the subject treated at any length.

Visits to night clubs and bawdy music hall performances are also not infrequent, and are presented as typical features of Victorian life. In H.C. Bailey's *The Rebel* (1923), Arthur Beauforest accompanies his friend to a Victorian brothel, described in a passage worth quoting at length:

> They went out to dine in the grim respectability of a city tavern, Colonel Justin arguing that since there was no good dinner to be found in London a wise man would choose the grossness of honest English cooking rather than a horrid travesty of better things. Thereafter Mr. Beauforest was taken to a house in a dirty street behind the Haymarket which seemed to him an exhibition of the nastiness of men. The big room reeked of tobacco and liquors and the smell of humanity. A collection of men, young and old, flashy and bourgeois, were struggling hard to be merry with the aid of drink and women whom they incited and who incited them, women garishly dressed and undressed. From a little platform came songs of an imbecile clumsiness in music and words, some seeking fun by dull nonsense, some by obscenity, some, more nauseous, attempting horror or the pathetic. And the audience would howl a chorus of catchwords back at the singer or repartee or insult.
>
> The Colonel was engaged in a battle of wits by a fat fellow dressed like an undertaker (so Arthur's loathing described him), each plying the other with abuse composed of slang and catch words and queer inventions. It seemed to Arthur idiocity, but they were very jolly over it. A painted woman in a hat like a pork pie, and little else above her skirt, swooped down upon the Colonel and called him Uncle Sam and kissed him and demanded shrub.
>
> "Grandpa stands a treat, Kate." Colonel Justin fondled her carelessly. "He sneaked the plate at chapel yesterday."
>
> They went on some while in that strain with the woman shrieking laughter, till the fat man offered a bottle of port if Kate would dance on the table. "Port hell," said Colonel Justin. "All the wine in this house is ink and sugar. You sell it, don't you granpa? And make it too down in your coal hole." So Kate had her shrub and they hobnobbed over it while a gaunt creature on the platform howled out a song about the last popular murder, acting the crime, the villain and the dismembered corpse. And Mr. Beauforest felt qualms urge him.
>
> A square bull-necked man picked his way neatly through the room, nodded to Kate, and was hailed by her with a screech of laughter, and came to their table. He was neat in his clothes as in his movements, but he wore diamond rings on hands none too clean. She had him drinking with them in a moment and coming into the talk eagerly.
>
> Mr. Beauforest drew his chair away. Their talk was worse than ever. The square man, a creature who exuded gross vigour, was boasting, and in careful English, which made the talk sound worse, of his prowess with women, and Colonel Justin egged him on. He expanded his vaunts to a Rabelaisian scale and the Colonel mocking him made him more preposterous. Now they were arguing about the numbers of women a man could want, doing absurd sums against each other. Mr. Beauforest seemed to be listening to a nightmare of stupid filth. He plucked the Colonel's sleeve and made for the door. (74–5)

The scene, presented through Arthur's perceptual deixis, makes it clear that the prim and high-minded protagonist does not approve of the entertainment on offer; however, the narrator's ironic attitude towards Arthur tends to discourage the reader from identifying with the protagonist, and from adopting his very conventional views. If the reader is left in little doubt that Arthur is disgusted, however, it is also apparent that he is not surprised; nor is the scene accompanied by narratorial comments which suggest that the reader ought to be. If there is an element of schema disruption in the description, it occurs shortly after Arthur has left the brothel, when the conversation between Colonel Justin and the stranger is revealed to have been a negotiation for a cargo of firearms for the Irish revolutionaries, carefully coded to avoid being overheard. In an era otherwise renowned for its reticence about sexual matters, an outspoken conversation about sexual adventures thus serves to disguise that which truly cannot be said (i.e. the need for arms for a revolution in Ireland); the sexual boasts of the two men are presented as an established component of Victorian men's 'brothel script', and as such do not attract attention.

Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The True Heart* (1929) – a socially critical rewriting of the Cupid and Psyche myth set in Victorian England[590] – includes an interview with the madam of a brothel; in several later novels, among them D.L. Murray's *Trumpeter, Sound!* (1933) and Lady Eleanor Smith's *Caravan* (1943), visits to night clubs are likewise presented as typical features of a Victorian night out. However, there is little indication that such episodes are intended to disrupt the reader's schematic knowledge about the Victorian era; they merely add descriptive detail to features of the Victorian age of which the reader is expected to be already aware. However, an element of mildly sensationalist schema addition begins to emerge in descriptions of the "thickly rouged prostitutes in feathers and silks who slowly patrolled the pavements" around the Haymarket, and the "hoarsely whispered invitations to sports and pleasures that dared not flaunt their claims upon the facade of the main thoroughfare" (Murray, *Trumpeter*, 227–8). Even before George Marcus's ground-breaking 1966 study of Victorian sexuality introduced readers to 'the Other Victorians', it is made clear that there lurked a world of untold sexual promiscuity beneath the 'respectable' facade of Victorian society; the readers, however, remain outside observers, largely excluded from events: in all pertinent passages, their deixis is mapped onto that of characters who do not participate in the entertainment on offer.

In contrast, *Fanny by Gaslight* goes a step further in admitting the reader into the secrets of the Victorian demi-monde, not only through the length and explicitness of its descriptions, but also through its narrative strategy: the passage detailing the attractions of Hopwood's Hades maps the readers' deixis onto that of a Victorian man-about-town, not only in spatio-temporal, but also in relational terms, inviting them to align themselves with his positive evaluation:

> There are now signs that something is to happen on the small stage at the far end. The curtains have parted; the orchestra strikes up, the footlights go on and the lighting in the hall is lowered. Two smartly dressed comedians do a cross-chat act, full of topical references and scandalous allusions to Royalty, to prominent members of Society, to reformist clergymen and politicians. One of them then sings a popular song, while the other arranges a few pieces of furniture to suggest a lady's dressing-room. Very soon a beautiful girl steps on to the stage, muffled in a smart evening cloak. She and the comedians carry on a conversation as elegant as it is suggestive, until she bids them goodnight as she is going to bed. One after the other the men go out. The violinist begins a soft sensuous tune, and the girl starts – unconcernedly but with the skill of an artist – to undress.
> Hades made a speciality of this disrobing act, which ended, not with a last-minute disappearance behind the scenes, but with an unselfconscious descent from stage to auditorium. […] Hopwood's girls could not only strip without a qualm, but let themselves be seen stripped under a top light and at a distance of a few feet. They were also pleasant, well-spoken girls who, although they lived by their bodies and made no bones about it, could behave decorously and, in public, were always so treated. (69–70)

Descriptions such as this must be seen as part and parcel of a tendency towards what Marie-Luise Kohlke has, in the context of later neo-Victorian fiction, described as 'orientalising' the Victorians, in the sense of projecting our sexual fantasies onto the past and affording the reader a privileged position as voyeur.[591] In the socio-historical context of the novel's publication, in particular, the Victorian age presents an ideal setting for male fantasies, evoking a past world of sexual pleasure inaccessible to the average twentieth-century reader: after the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had clamped down on prostitution, brothels – in the guise of the

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[590] Cf. Harman, 85f.; Mulford, 108; Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 45ff.

[591] Cf. Kohlke, Marie-Luise. "Sexsation and the Neo-Victorian Novel: Orientalising the Nineteenth Century in Contemporary Fiction."

luxurious (or even run-down) establishments described in Victorian-centred fiction – had virtually disappeared from the London scene. As late as 1955, an official report on prostitution in the metropolis could confidently state that if by a brothel one "means a house where a man may go to choose one, or two, of a number of prostitutes who are lined up for his attentions", one will discover that "[r]esorts with such characteristics are not to be found in London" (Rolph, 61).

Stressing that Hopwood's female employees are always "decorously treated", the novel gives the reader little reason for moral outrage on their behalf, and, indeed, opens up the possibility of identification for female readers, so that the novel offers the possibility for "sexual touristry" (Loesberg, 364) and voyeuristic enjoyment to both genders, particularly since the glimpses of Victorian nightlife offered in the novel are mediated through a female eye-witness inviting the narrator to assume the voyeuristic gaze of a Victorian man-about-town.[592] It is an interesting paradox that none of the novels featuring descriptions of night clubs or brothels show the slightest degree of moral condemnation for the practice of prostitution; perhaps as a concession to contemporary readers' (and censors'[593]) views, however, their heroines, while occasionally coming into close contact with such establishments, never actually become sex workers: both Beth in *Darkness I Leave You* (1953) and Fanny in *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) enter into the employ of brothel keepers as their secretaries, and every care is taken to assure the reader that they are not involved in prostitution as such. This is hardly remarkable as prostitution, especially during the interwar period, was still a delicate subject and excited a high degree of moral condemnation from conservative observers, such as Gladys Mary Hall.[594] The anonymous writer of a 1955 study on the same subject employs a completely different tone, but notes the prevalence of discrimination and prejudice against prostitutes in mainstream society.[595]

Despite the fact that Victorian-centred novels from the mid-twentieth century are for the most part still a far cry from what John Sutherland was later to describe as the "neo-Victorian low-life,

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[592] The positive tone characteristic of Sadleir's descriptions is observable in many texts dealing with the subject. The sinister brothel keeper of *Victorian House*, who abducts and imprisons Phoebe in an attempt to force her into prostitution, is a notable exception in Victorian-centred fiction: figures like Madame de Marchant, Mrs Ramages or Kitty Cairns blend motherliness with a shrewd eye for business, and are at pains to ensure the wellbeing of their employees. Even though their motives may not be altruistic in this regard, it is also made clear that in terms of physical wellbeing and economic success, prostitution is certainly not the worst fate that might befall a Victorian woman. The 'girls', in turn, are likewise described in glowing terms – beautiful, cultured, and apparently fairly contented in their position.

[593] It is probably worth noting, in this connection, that novels dealing with prostitution in the twentieth century almost invariably came into conflict with the censor: in 1929, Sheila Cousins's *To Beg I Am Ashamed* (purporting to be the autobiography of a London prostitute) was withdrawn after the publishers were visited by police; in 1934, Wallace Smith's *Bessie Cotter* was tried for obscenity (cf. Haste, 75 and Thomas, 305).

[594] In her 1931 monograph on *Prostitution in the Modern World* (based on her dissertation at the University of Liverpool), Gladys Mary Hall consistently refers to the phenomenon as a 'problem' and an 'evil', and notes that the "'typical prostitute'" is frequently characterised by "vanity, greediness, [and] indolence". Some prostitutes' "excessive readiness to be sexually stimulated", Hall maintains, sets them apart from 'normal' women and ought to make them "subjects for medical supervision" (94). In addition, she goes so far as to suggest that prostitutes may have an inherited criminal streak passed on from generation to generation "in certain degenerate families" (Hall, 46). Hall's work provides fascinating insights into the attitudes and assumptions triggered by the subject, and on conservative attitudes towards promiscuous sexuality in general. This becomes especially apparent when one contrasts Hall's monograph with the 1955 survey edited by C.H. Rolph; unfortunately, detailed discussion of the topic exceeds the scope of this thesis.

[595] Cf. Rolph, *Women of the Streets*.

high-filth novel" ("Hoist", 28),[596] it has been shown that they nevertheless evince a marked interest in the less respectable side of Victorian life. Nonetheless, *Fanny by Gaslight*[597] deserves a special place within this group of novels because of its sustained treatment of the theme and its metatextual dimension. Providing a detailed description of the London red light milieu of the 1860s and 70s, and including "what was for the time a daring amount of eroticism" (Sutherland, "Sadleir", 151), it has frequently been regarded as the prototype and originator of all subsequent neo-Victorian "explorations of the seedier side of Victorian Britain" (Moore, "Neo-Victorian", 634).[598]

4.2.3 Michael Sadleir: *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940)

4.2.3.1 Summary

Set in London during the second half of the nineteenth century, *Fanny by Gaslight* presents the life story of Fanny Hooper (née Hopwood), illegitimate daughter of (Sir) Clive Andrew Seymore and the daughter of one of his tenant farmers. Before Fanny's birth, her mother has married William Hopwood (whom Fanny initially believes to be her father), a former servant of Seymore's and now the proprietor of a flourishing and eminently respectable public house, The Warrior, and a subterranean high-class brothel known as Hopwood's Hades: "The place – to put it brutally – was a gambling-hell, a drinking-den, a house of assignation, a theatre of obscene burlesque, even – within the limits of its accommodation – a knocking-shop. Practically nothing was too scandalous to be tolerated; virtually no taste was too wanton to be catered for. But Hopwood's idea of service to his clients was based on a fundamental honesty between himself and them" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 63). Despite the fact that Hopwood is involved in petty crime and not averse to turning police informer when an opportunity presents itself, he insists that all such operations must take place off his own premises; his insistence on the 'respectability' of both his establishments and on strict fair play towards his customers constitutes the key to his success during the 1860s.

After Hopwood is ruined by Lord Gerry Manderstoke, whom he has offended by throwing him out of Hopwood's Hades for bringing there and molesting a child prostitute in defiance of Hopwood's regulations, Fanny's mother returns to her Yorkshire home, Aughton Seymore, while Fanny goes into service in Clive Seymore's household, graduating to the post of auxiliary lady's maid when his wife, Lady Alicia, takes a fancy to her. Mrs Heaviside, Clive's former nanny and now his housekeeper, knows the secret of Fanny's birth and arranges meetings with Clive, and a close and loving relationship begins to develop between father and daughter. From her childhood friend Lucy Beckett, now gone to work as a model-cum-call-girl at Neldé's, a high-class dressmaking establishment which also offers rooms for private meetings to its customers, Fanny finds out that Lady Alicia is conducting a love affair with a Captain Tennant. Unable either to tell her father about his wife's infidelity for fear of hurting him, or to silently continue her work as Lady Alicia's maid because of the personal animosity she has now begun to feel against her, she

[596] Also qtd. in Moore, "Neo-Victorian", 634.

[597] Sadleir's novel was very popular during the 1940s, selling 150,000 copies in its hardback version and going through four reprints during its first year. The 1944 film adaptation was similarly successful (cf. Sutherland, "Sadleir", 151).

[598] Cf. also Loesberg, 363 and Sutherland, "Sadleir", 153. This is despite the fact that Sadleir had already taken up the topic in his 1923 novel *Desolate Splendour*, and was to return to it in *Forlorn Sunset* (1947).

decides to run away. For some weeks, she lodges with Hopwood's former bouncer Chunks (Joe Box), now landlord of the Jolly Bargee in Islington, before Lucy finds her a job as secretary and personal assistant to Kitty Cairns, matron of a very discreet and well-kept brothel, Florizel Thirteen. There she meets Harry Somerford, whom she loves (and who loves her), but refuses to marry because of the damage such a marriage would cause to his social position and career; instead she agrees to become his mistress, living in lodgings with him for two blissful years (1876–8). From his friend Julian Carteret, a lawyer, they hear about Seymore's divorce, the loss of his post in the foreign office (where Harry worked under him for some time and came to admire him), and his financial ruin and subsequent withdrawal to Aughton Seymore, where Fanny goes to console him, and to introduce Harry to her parents. While Mary jealously resents Harry's influence over her daughter, Clive welcomes him and even endorses the unconventional nature of their relationship, his own unfortunate matrimonial experience making him sympathetic to Fanny's reluctance to marry her lover.[599]

In the meantime, Lucy has left Neldé's and is kept by Mr Barclay Pippin, who has connections in the theatrical world and has found her a job as a chorus-girl. On Harry and Fanny's advice, he contrives to send her off on a tour to Canada when Gerry Manderstoke becomes interested in her after seeing her on-stage at the Gaiety. Harry and Fanny spend a holiday in France, returning after three blissfully happy weeks at Les Ivelynes-la-Carrière via Paris. Fanny is pregnant and finally ready to accept Harry's offer of marriage, but decides to postpone telling him until after their return to London. They coincidentally see Lucy (who has decided to cut off both her Canadian engagement and her relationship with Pippin, and to return to Europe) on stage in Paris and afterwards invite her out to dinner, where they are joined by Manderstoke, now Lucy's lover. In the course of the evening, Manderstoke deliberately insults Harry (who has knocked him out on a previous occasion when he attempted to molest Lucy), who is left with no option but to challenge him to a duel. Warned by Lucy about Manderstoke's reputation for expert marksmanship, Fanny begs Harry to leave Paris immediately, which, however, he refuses to do, even though she finally reveals to him that she is expecting his child.

As Fanny had feared, Harry is severely wounded, and initially receives insufficient medical attention. In despair, Fanny sends telegrams to Harry's family and his best friend Sir Julian Carteret; the latter secures the help of the experienced physician Dr Loewenthal, who agrees to do his best to save Harry. However, his efforts are foiled by the arrival of Harry's sister, Kate, who refuses to let Harry see Fanny and thus takes away his will to live. His daughter, Evelyn, is born five months later at Aughton Seymore, where Fanny has gone to live with her mother. When Evelyn is grown up, she succeeds in winning Harry's mother's affection, agrees to take the name Somerford, and thus ensures her share of her grandfather's inheritance. She spends the money on going out with the Friends' Ambulance Unit to Serbia during the war, where she is killed. Fanny retires to Les Ivelynes, where she meets the publisher and writer Gerald Warbeck, to whom she tells her story, and who records it, along with his thoughts and comments on the problems of writing historical fiction. Fanny dies before the book is finished; Warbeck arranges for her to be buried in the garden of the hotel in St Yvelines in which she spent her happiest weeks with Harry.

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[599] Cf. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 282.

4.2.3.2 Scripts and Schemata

Because of its unusual subject matter, it is difficult to assess whether the book sets out to be schema-adding or schema-disrupting. On the one hand, it upholds readers' expectations about most middle-class Victorians' sexual prudery and obsession with respectability. Emphasising that this is only one track through the 'Victorian' schema, however, it adds to the readers' knowledge about the Victorians by introducing them to the demi-monde of Hopwood's Hades, Neldé's and Florizel Thirteen. On the other hand, however, the narrator also acknowledges the potentially schema-disrupting tendencies of the book: in some passages, it is implied that the 'Victorian' schema of contemporary readers might well be so fundamentally determined by notions about Victorian repression that the very existence of a second track might be perceived as schema disruption, particularly when the novel describes venues where even 'respectable' lovers could indulge their feelings in public: "Nowadays, when the despised Victorians are labelled as tyrannical and prudish, the freedom of Rosherville would simply be disbelieved" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 137).

Other schema-disrupting elements are probably the prevalence of child prostitution in Victorian times,[600] or the way in which semi-nude prostitutes are described as openly offering themselves to their clients in broad daylight in some London streets during the 1860s.[601] Despite the disclaimer implied in the term "labelled", however, there are several descriptions, characters and episodes which reinforce the "prudish" and 'repressed' track through the reader's 'Victorian' schema. For instance, the existence of Neldé's (conceived and owned, significantly, by a foreigner, the Viennese Jew Kramer) is explained as follows:

> The surface-puritanism of the English had created a state of affairs in which would-be lovers had nowhere to go – nowhere, that is to say, either civilized or discreet. At the same time, English wealth and English snobbery could be trusted to follow a continental chic. It should not, therefore, be difficult to collect a rich clientele willing to pay high prices for smart gowns, or luxurious privacy, or both. (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 196)

The passage at once invokes and confirms the reader's impression of Victorian moral hypocrisy, and adds a concrete example of the way in which this could be exploited by enterprising foreigners, almost implying that the Victorians themselves lacked the audacity, inventiveness and shrewd business sense necessary to supply the demand for a private venue for extramarital sex which the moral climate of the era had created.[602] In this sense, Harry's sister, Kate, who is characterised by the "granite inflexibility" with which she disapproves of Harry and Fanny's relationship and who finally "in the name of righteousness [kills] her brother" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 362) by separating him from Fanny, represents the typical Victorian, as do several of Harry's former acquaintances who decide to 'cut' him after learning details of his private life with her.

In addition, the novel confirms the reader's 'Victorian' schema in that it emphasises the existence of a different code of sexual morality for women and men. While Harry's mother is anxious for him to find a 'suitable' girl and settle down, she also accepts that he has had pre-marital sexual encounters with prostitutes: it is "part of the creed of a respectable matron that

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[600] Cf. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 72.

[601] Cf. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 74.

[602] Incidentally, a "cheerful lack of imagination" is described as "typical of Britons in every class" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 106; cf. ch. 2.2.4), and there are several instances where this stereotype is reiterated.

'gentlemen are different'" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 250). This alleged difference lies in the 'fact' that men – unlike women – are perceived as being subject to sexual needs and desires, a 'failing' which experienced women have learned to overlook. While a "respectable matron" like Mrs Somerford can afford to be indulgent towards the failings of the male sex (especially as represented by her own son), men are regarded as predatory and potentially dangerous by many Victorian women, especially those lacking sexual experience. The twentieth-century reader may well have felt tempted to agree with Lady Alicia, who analyses this popular misconception in terms of sexual jealousy: "Carver [Lady Alicia's maid] goes through life hoping to be molested – and because she isn't, complaining that other women are. There are lots like her" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 150).

In point of fact, much of Sadleir's criticism – though ostensibly aimed at the Victorians – was still highly topical at the time of the book's publication: although extramarital relationships and even 'trial marriages' were being advocated by Bertrand Russell and other supporters of the 'new morality' during the interwar years, acceptance of such unconventional relationship patterns was confined to an avant-garde minority; in most circles, Harry's and Fanny's relationship would scarcely have been regarded as less scandalous than during the Victorian age. The belief that men are subject to stronger sexual urges than women was likewise still widespread, and endured – although increasingly challenged by popular as well as scientific discourses – into the post-war period.[603] Lady Alicia's comment, in contrast, provides a pithy paraphrase of Bertrand Russell's remarks on the subject in his revolutionary *Marriage and Morals* (1929):

> For the large class of women who, as things are, must remain permanently unmarried, conventional morality is painful and in most cases harmful [...] A woman who has no experience of sex and has considered it important to preserve her virtue has been engaged in a negative reaction tinged with fear, and has therefore as a rule become timid, while at the same time instinctive unconscious jealousy has filled her with disapproval of normal people and with a desire to punish those who have enjoyed what she has forgone. (Russell, 221)[604]

The novel is schema-confirming also in its depiction of the confines of the traditional Victorian woman's sphere, not only in regard to sexuality. Not only Fanny's own experiences after her flight from the Seymores' house, but also the stories of Polly the barmaid and Kitty Cairns emphasise the difficulties women experience when they have to find ways of earning their own living;[605] of the three, only Fanny – due to the help of her friends Chunks and Lucy – escapes prostitution, but even so can only find a job connected with the demi-monde. Harry, otherwise one of the most likeable characters in the book, in this respect embodies Victorian hypocrisy: although he freely owns that he has been an occasional client of Kitty Cairns', he persuades Fanny to give up her job at Florizel Thirteen after they have become lovers, not wanting her to be associated with the class of women who work there. When Fanny, against her own convictions, plays devil's advocate and argues that women have a right to sell their bodies without incurring

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[603] Writing in 1931, Gladys Mary Hall (96) for instance noted that "[t]he cause [for prostitution] generally believed in and accepted by the public is the overwhelming male need to exercise, for his health's sake, the sex function, unbalanced by any similar need on the part of women." Haste cites a mid-1940s survey which "revealed [the widespread belief] that sex was something in which men indulged but women tolerated" (Haste, 109).

[604] Cf. also Hall, 174f.

[605] Cf. ch. 3.1.2.

social ostracism if society leaves them no other means of earning a living, Harry merely laughs at her.[606] The passage reveals the problematic aspects of holding up the Victorian period as a 'distant mirror' to the present: on the one hand, Sadleir makes it clear that Fanny's suggestion that prostitution might be a valid choice of occupation for a woman unable to find other work is spoken tongue-in-cheek – as a serious proposition, the remark would hardly have gone down well with contemporary audiences. At the same time, however, it draws attention to a very real problem, and shows that mainstream society (especially its male representatives) is unable to offer a viable solution – instead of suggesting an alternative way of earning a living, Harry attempts to pass the matter over with a laugh.

While the repression hypothesis according to Foucault's analysis acknowledges that Victorian society provided "safely insularized" venues for the open expression of sexuality, the narrator's attitude – as exemplified by the quote about Rosherville above – seems to imply that these did not necessarily form part of the reader's 'Victorian' schema. While the novel is schema-confirming in its presentation of the 'respectable' side of Victorian life, it embarks on a course of schema addition in respect to the less reputable side of Victorian society, whose existence the reader might have inferred, but about which s/he was unlikely to have any detailed antecedent information. Through her presentation of Hopwood's Hades, described as an unusual (and thus schema-disrupting) example of a Victorian night club, the narrator manages to convey an impression of the usual features of these establishments, thus avoiding unwieldy passages of historical background information, yet constructing a 'Victorian nightclub' schema while at the same time maintaining the flattering illusion that the reader already possesses the relevant knowledge. On a more specific level, the narrator is also at some pains to describe the scripts associated with these establishments, especially when she invites the reader to imagine her/himself as a Victorian man-about-town, or when she details the more individual routines of treating the proprietor of The Warrior, or picking up a female companion for dinner at Evans's. Incidentally, the former passage, beginning with Fanny's exhortation "You must please imagine yourself a man about town, with money in his pocket and a fancy for a night of pleasure. It is early in the year 1870" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 65), also enacts the above-mentioned pretence concerning the reader's antecedent knowledge of the relevant aspects of Victorian life, while in fact the information about Victorian "night[s] of pleasure" will be supplied by Fanny on the following pages. As in other historical novels, the strategy serves as a means of storyworld building while observing the principle of textual economy; in addition, however, it also emphasises Fanny's 'modernity' by strengthening her bond with the twentieth-century reader through the implication of shared background knowledge as well as a shared value system.

The ending of the novel serves to confirm the reader's schema of the Victorian era as a time of sexual prudery and moral hypocrisy, during which transgressions of the accepted social code were doomed to failure. Fanny's unconventional approach to her relationship with Harry not only loses her the man she loves, but also the chance to save his life; moreover, it also overshadows the future of her daughter, who is illegitimate and has to negotiate with her grandmother for the inheritance which would otherwise have been rightfully hers. Convention, in the shape of the

[606] Cf. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 329.

"granite inflexibility" exhibited by Kate when she refuses to let Fanny see her lover, and thus takes away her brother's will to live, triumphs: although she has lost her brother, Kate is too staunch a believer in the moral rectitude of her decision to realise that she is to blame for her brother's death. Unlike her mother, whose treasured recollections of her love for Clive fascinated Fanny during her childhood, the protagonist is left even without the consolation of her memories of Harry, as the past – even in its most happy aspects – becomes too painful for her to remember.

The text displays the same schema-adding potential on the level of text schemata: having established Victorian fiction as the point of reference – in other words, instantiated the reader's 'Victorian literature' schema –, Sadleir sets out to expand and disrupt this schema, both on the level of context (as outlined above), and on that of narrative strategies. While changes of narrator and point of view, and the presence of a frame narrative set at some temporal distance from the events of the main story line are indeed common features of nineteenth-century fiction, the presence of the strong metatextual element that Warbeck's musings bring to the story is a twentieth-century addition to the schema.[607] The same applies to the juxtaposition of the hopeful note on which Warbeck ends Fanny's story, and the disillusionment brought on by the frame narrative. On the level of textual strategies, the book must be regarded as a conscious experiment in schema transformation, as Sadleir adopts Victorian narrative strategies in order to present subject matter which had no place in canonical Victorian literature and finally subverts them by contrasting the conventional happy ending of Warbeck's book with the pessimistic realism of his own. Revealing that the ostensibly 'realist' Victorian text schema is merely a sentimental façade that obscures the bleak reality of Fanny's later life, the book not only reiterates its criticism of the Victorians, but, by extension, all attempts at fictionalising history, implying that the genre conventions of realist literature distort the reality they purport to depict. As will be outlined in the next section, the deictic element in the text serves to strengthen this impression.

4.2.3.3 Deixis

Fanny by Gaslight presents the most complex arrangement of deictic planes of all the novels treated in this study. As part of the edgework, but still belonging to the real-world reality of the reader, it features an author's note which explains the arrangement, and also the different styles and tones of voice used in the individual sections:

> Differences in style between the various sections are deliberate. The first section and the last, which tell a tale of our own days, are written as the author wished to write them. Parts One and Three of Fanny's story are told by her in the first person *but written by Warbeck in the nineteen-thirties*; they are therefore modern as to narrative but 'period' as to conversation. Part Two of Fanny's story, told in the first person by Harry Somerford, is more nearly period throughout, because it purports to read as a contemporary account of events which took place during the eighteen-seventies. (italics in original)

Opening in the thirties of the twentieth century, the novel by stages eases the reader back into the Victorian age: in the first section, the deictic centre, initially featuring Fanny as the focalising WHO,

[607] Cf. Loesberg, 365: "Historical novels in the nineteenth century were, with some exceptions, always more or less noticeably narrated by a contemporaneous narrative voice that addressed its audience in terms of the historical difference between the age depicted and the one the narrator and the audience shared. But that narrative stance in the nineteenth century was always more the unassumed norm than a situation that needed attention called to it."

shifts to Warbeck as it describes the progress of his acquaintance with the old woman from his point of view. The next part, focusing on Fanny's early life up to her time as Harry's mistress are purportedly told by Fanny herself; as indicated above, however, in the reality of the story world created by the initial section, this part is written by Warbeck, who edits and arranges the story Fanny has told him. Using a fictional version of the older Fanny as the focalising WHO, the deictic centre almost exclusively follows on the younger version of the narrator, explicitly avoiding the inclusion of overmuch detail about the histories of the other characters. In an instance of textual deixis, the narrator not only draws attention to the act of storytelling, but also emphasises this constraint: "This is *my* story, and I am bound so far as possible to keep it to its subject" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 82).

After this section, the origo (but not the focalised WHO, as the narrative remains focused on Fanny) of the deictic centre shifts to Harry Somerford, whom Warbeck uses as the narrator for the period covering their relationship, in order to present the reader with an account of those aspects of Fanny's personality of which she herself is not aware, but which have struck Warbeck during their brief acquaintance. In his final reflections on the process of writing Fanny's story, he justifies this technique to himself and the reader, arguing that a change of narrator and point of view "was a favourite with certain famous novelists of the Victorian period, and could therefore suitably be revived for a book with a Victorian setting" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 378). Incidentally, this remark combines textual and compositional deixis, as it not only foregrounds the text *qua* text and the process of its production, but also locates it within literary tradition in relation to other texts, highlighting its shared generic features with Victorian literature.

The third part of Warbeck's book (corresponding to the fourth part of Sadleir's novel) shifts the deictic centre back to Fanny for the last part of the story. Warbeck's novel ends on an optimistic note, as Fanny holds her new-born daughter Evelyn in her arms and for the first time after Harry's death feels her interest in the future reawaken. However, this apparently happy ending is contradicted by the final section of the book, which reveals that at the time of Warbeck's meeting with Fanny, she has lost her daughter and has now little left for which to live.

After the end of the book within the book, a shift back onto the original level of the nineteen-thirties story world takes place, the deictic centre shifting onto Warbeck, who has just finished writing the book which the reader has just finished reading. This sudden pop back to the level of the frame narration destroys the illusion that the reader may have had – although already undermined by the author's note which precedes the text, and of which more will be said below – of eavesdropping on the story that Fanny tells to Warbeck, and reminds her/him that they have been reading what is essentially a second book embedded within the first, whose narrator is doubly fictional in the sense that she is Warbeck's fictional recreation of a character that is 'real' only on the no less fictional level of Warbeck's storyworld 'reality'. For a brief moment, the reader gets the disconcerting impression that s/he has been reading along over Warbeck's shoulder, and that the creation of the fictional book-within-the-book covered the same period as the experience of reading it, before a flashback reveals that a time interval of roughly one year has elapsed since his first meeting with Fanny. As Warbeck muses about the genesis of his novel, the reader is able to appreciate some of the problems attendant on the writing of historical fiction:

> Finally he had to steer a way between pedantic observance of period detail and reckless commission of anachronisms. He decided that when he was not writing conversations, not, that is to say, purporting to

> record words actually spoken sixty years earlier, he would write freely and in his own manner; but that when characters were speaking, they must so far as possible speak as they would have spoken. It went without saying that details of life and environment must be strictly period. He realised, when he had written these desiderata on a piece of paper, that he had taken on a real job […] (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 378)

Not only is the reader made aware of the fact that the story s/he has been reading is by no means identical with the one Fanny has told to Warbeck, as Warbeck emphasises the effort he has had to put into sorting through and rearranging Fanny's occasionally confused and disjointed recollections; instances of textual deixis which Warbeck has attributed to his narrator must retrospectively be re-attributed to Warbeck, the 'author' of Fanny's story on this level of fictional 'reality'. Sadleir thus finally destroys the reader's illusion of 'listening to Fanny', which Warbeck – as the writer who invents her as the fictional narrator of his book – appears determined to uphold. Although some features of textual deixis – i.e. the insertion of paragraph breaks, chapter headings etc. must obviously be attributed to Warbeck (since Fanny's story is an oral account), there are numerous instances where textual deixis reinforces his attempt to create a fictional narrator whose situation parallels that of the 'real' Fanny (i.e. on Warbeck's level of storyworld 'reality'). Several times, his narrator uses textual deixis not only to refer to the act of telling her story, but also to signal her awareness that she is telling a story to a man who means to turn it into a book: "I realize, however, that a protracted story of even three weeks of unalloyed contentment makes monotonous reading for those who have not shared it; and I shall therefore condense their happenings to within likely limits of a stranger's patience" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 154).[608]

The insertion of what may be termed a 'dummy' deictic layer – that of Warbeck as the author, but not the narrator, of the book within Sadleir's book – also affects the question of voice, as Sadleir points out in the author's note quoted above: the first and third parts of Fanny's story purport to reflect Fanny's voice and mind-style; however, as he reminds the reader, they were written by Warbeck in the nineteen-thirties, and thus reflect Warbeck's voice – or Warbeck's rendition of Fanny's voice – rather than Fanny's own. The same applies to the notion of mind-style: again, the reader has to remember that the story comes down to her/him not directly from Fanny, but is mediated through Warbeck: views and attitudes about the Victorians – especially the narrator's implicit and explicit condemnation of the 'respectable' side of Victorian life – are therefore attributable to Warbeck as much as to Fanny. It is implied, however, that this consideration is of less significance than might have been suspected, as there appears to be significant overlap between the attitudes of these two characters: on the deictic level of the frame narration, their mutual sympathy and disregard for convention is repeatedly brought to the reader's attention. In particular, their open-minded and appreciative attitude towards sexuality is emphasised, as Warbeck is delighted with a surprisingly pornographic depiction of Adam and Eve in one of the glass windows of the local church. It is this similarity in their tastes and attitudes towards the open expression of sexuality that moves Fanny to tell him her story: "'[…] Let me ask you this – what in a year's time will you remember most clearly of that church there?' 'The

[608] For similar instances, cf. e.g. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 49; 56; 64; 82. No such illusion is attempted in the case of Harry Somerford, the narrator of the second part of Warbeck's book, who has no 'real-world' equivalent on Warbeck's deictic level.

Adam and Eve window' he replied. […] 'I will tell you my story – or as much of it as you care to hear. […]'" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 25).[609]

On a more general level, this section of Sadleir's novel – like many other works discussed in this thesis – highlights the fact that the writing of history (or, in this case, a novel based on the life history of one individual) by necessity involves processes of selection, omission and distortion, and is inevitably shaped by the subjectivity of the writer, deconstructing the illusion of authenticity by revealing Fanny's first-person narrative (ostensibly an 'authentic', eye-witness account of events) to be Warbeck's creation. Whereas John Sutherland ("Hoist", 29) "sees [*Fanny by Gaslight*] as offering a direct line back to the nineteenth century", alleging that "Sadleir, who was born in 1888, was writing about a world he knew, and is able to convey the sights and sounds so much more vividly than contemporary writers who can only know the Victorians through the archives" (Moore, "Neo-Victorian", 634), the novel in fact draws attention to the impossibility of 'knowing' the Victorian world from first-hand experience at the historical moment of *Fanny*'s publication, as the last generation of eye-witnesses to the mid-Victorian era is rapidly dying out. In his analysis, Sutherland falls into what in chapter 1.1 I have termed the 'Victorian fallacy', i.e. the assumption that a writer who was born before 1901 automatically has first-hand experience of the Victorian period as a whole: in point of fact, Sadleir was born a full 28 years after the setting of his novel – to gain first-hand experience of Fanny's world, he would have to have been born during the 1840s at the latest. By exposing the impression of first-hand knowledge as an illusion, and the impression of "vividness" and 'authenticity' as a narratorial sleight of hand, Sadleir invites readers to question the possibility of reliable recreation of the past and highlights the extent to which it is constructed through contemporary discourses.

4.2.3.4 Inter- and Metatextuality

The only overt intertextual reference in the text occurs fairly late in the novel, when the narrator muses on the similarity between Mrs Potts, one of the minor characters with whom Fanny comes into contact, and Mrs Brown, a figure well-known from magazine articles in the Victorian era, and the stereotypical emblem of the lower-middle and working class attitudes. In a sense, the comparison serves as a justification for using Victorian literature as a source for historical information about the period, highlighting the verisimilitude of literary descriptions of the era. This also points towards the wider-reaching intertextual dimension of the work: if, as Macherey (79f.) postulates, each book must be read against the background of the other books against which it is elaborated, this background in the case of *Fanny by Gaslight* is clearly provided not only by other contemporary works about the Victorian era, but more significantly by Victorian literature. As a literary scholar and bibliographer of Trollope,[610] Sadleir was able to draw on his extensive knowledge of the Victorian period, and of its literature, and – as has already been outlined above – consciously sets out to fill in the blanks and silences in the works of his predecessors, offering

[609] Cf. Loesberg, 366.
[610] Cf. Loesberg, 363; Hudson, n. pag.

the opportunity for "a sexual touristry of a part of Victorian England we did not usually see in its own novels" (Loesberg, 364).[611]

On the other hand, Victorian literature is also presented as a model, as he establishes a connection between the narrative strategies employed by himself and his fictional author, Warbeck, in terms of their adherence to Victorian models: changes of narrator and point of view were "a favourite with certain famous novelists of the Victorian period, and could therefore suitably be revived for a book with a Victorian setting" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 378). As contemporary critics have pointed out, the melodramatic ending (which met with a certain amount of disapproval at the time of the book's publication) can also be regarded as partaking of Victorian literary tastes and conventions.

In addition to the consciously post-Victorian element, by which Sadleir establishes his book both as a successor and as a complement to Victorian literature, he also shows his awareness of the novel's position as a work of historical fiction. The extensive metatextual comments which characterise the frame narrative allude not only, as already outlined above, to the important influence of Victorian literature, but also to the difficulties of writing historical fiction: "he had taken on a real job" (Sadleir, *Fanny*, 378), Warbeck realises after sketching out his desiderata for recreating the Victorian period. In addition, it also draws the reader's attention to the fact that the written representation of historical events inevitably undergoes a process of narrativisation and selection, shaping it in accordance with the tastes, views and preoccupations of the writer.

At the same time, however, the link with contemporary (i.e. nineteen-thirties) historical or Victorian-centred fiction is implicitly disavowed, as we learn that Warbeck's tastes in literature differ markedly from those of the general reading public (hence his lack of success as a publisher).[612] While he draws on his knowledge of Victorian literature, moreover, there are no overt references to more recent (Victorian-centred) novels, and no explicit acknowledgement that *Fanny by Gaslight* may also be located within a wider contemporary tradition of 'writing back' to the Victorians. Implicitly, however, Sadleir's justification of the book's structure and narrative technique show that he anticipated that readers would perceive it as an unusual novel. His evocation of Victorian narrative modes on the one hand points towards the well-established trope of 'legitimising' contemporary phenomena by linking them to historical precedents; on the other hand, it also implies that he felt readers might be not be consciously aware of the narrative strategies of Victorian literature and might thus perceive his work as more text-schema-disrupting than he intended it to be. While *Fanny by Gaslight* shows itself intensely critical of twentieth-century tastes and attitudes, however, the novel also offers implicit criticism of Victorian literature: by contrasting the sentimental happy ending of Warbeck's book, with its clichéd depiction of new motherhood, with the reality of Fanny's life that is revealed to the reader in the last section of the book, it shows up the hypocrisy inherent in conventional happy endings. In a wider sense, it can also be regarded as implicit criticism of literary realism, biography and

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[611] There exist, of course, a number of non-canonical works of Victorian literature featuring accounts of prostitutes and prostitution, such as Thomas Miller's *Godfrey Malvern*, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Alice*, George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Wilkie Collins's *The New Magdalen*, or Edmund Yates's *Land at Last* (Gutleben, 44); however, none of these were particularly well-known, and unlikely to shape twentieth-century readers' schematic expectations concerning the usual subject matter of Victorian literature.

[612] Cf. Sadleir, *Fanny*, 15.

historiography, highlighting the extent to which accounts of past lives are shaped by processes of selection and strategic exclusion. Through the frame narrative, we come to realise that Warbeck has deliberately left out a significant amount of information and arbitrarily cut Fanny's story short in order to allow him to end his novel on a hopeful note.

4.2.3.5 Conclusion

As has been outlined above, Sadleir embarks on a tour de force of what at first sight appears to be critical commentary on Victorian England. Highlighting the hypocrisy which forced women into the demi-monde by barring their access to more 'respectable' careers, and at the same time disparaging them for their choice of earning a livelihood, he sets out to provide a counter-image to the Victorian conception of prostitutes as vicious and morally depraved. Fanny's choice to step outside the bounds of convention and become Harry's 'love-girl' rather than his wife serves as a further example of Victorian hypocrisy: having realised that marriage is nothing so much as a business transaction, Fanny refuses to marry her lover because she knows she cannot fulfil her part of the bargain, in the sense of being a social asset to Harry and furthering his career by bringing him a dowry of money and social connections. Her honest acknowledgement of her shortcomings, however, forces her outside the pale of Victorian society: her adherence to one set of social rules forces her to break others and thus effectively makes her an outcast, finally preventing her from saving the life of the man she loves.

Jonathan Loesberg notes that "the novel's concern with illicit affairs and the sexual demi-monde has at least the justification of giving the banal theme of resistance to hypocritical respectability a new twist on a traditional Victorian scene" (365). While it is certainly true that criticism of Victorian hypocrisy is one of the standard themes of Victorian-centred fiction, it has to be remembered that most of the points made by Fanny were highly salient also to twentieth-century discussions on sexual morality and the changing status of women in society. By setting his tale of an 'immoral' relationship and its consequences in the Victorian period, Sadleir achieves the twin goal of holding up a thinly veiled 'distant mirror' to the present, and of disparaging present-day conservativism in these domains as repressively 'Victorian'. The close link between past and present is underlined by the novel's insistence on the similarities between the two narrators Fanny and Warbeck: both are, to a certain extent, out of step with the social norms and values of their day, and both are deeply hostile to what they perceive as hypocrisy. Loesberg comments that "*Fanny by Gaslight* sets out clearly the way in which a post-Victorian fiction […] lays out its theme of what we should be that Victorians are not" (367); far from being one of "the novels [...] offering us a supportive myth rather than a history" (362) of twentieth-century sexual openness in contrast to Victorian sexual repression, however, it also very clearly holds up for criticism those features of contemporary society which were still noticeably 'Victorian'.

Despite the book's unmistakable social criticism, however, it also presents a strong argument for remaining within the established social boundaries. As in many other examples of Victorian-centred fiction, the ideological message remains deeply ambiguous: on the one hand, society is blamed for placing Fanny in a position where her commendable choice for honesty and personal integrity rather than hypocritical Victorian morality ruins her life and kills her lover; on the other hand, the ending implicitly allocates the blame for Harry's death to Fanny, showing that a choice

which might be commendable in the abstract may have disastrous personal consequences when it is at odds with established social practice. It might be argued that Fanny, by bowing to convention and suppressing her scruples, could have prevented the final tragedy. In this sense, the text exemplifies how the different positions identified by Iser – that of the plot, the characters, the narrator, and that mapped out for the reader – converge or contradict one another. In this context, it is worth noting that the narrator Warbeck and the two main focalisers, Fanny and Harry, concur in their assessment of Victorian morality and their positive evaluation of the protagonist; on the other hand, the reader has no access to the point of view of the more conservative – and thus more critical – characters.

Moreover, the frame narrator's presentation of Warbeck, and later Warbeck's presentation of Fanny and Harry aims at facilitating the reader's identification with those figures. Warbeck and Fanny in particular share many of the features that make them appear attractive for the reader to identify with: while both of them are to some extent outsiders, their difference from mainstream society is presented in positive terms: both of them are more tolerant, more open-minded and less hypocritical than the mass of their contemporaries (as becomes apparent from their views about the unusual glass window in the parish church of Les Yvelines); by adopting their position, the reader can flatter her/himself that s/he possesses the same qualities. Moreover, the smooth transition from one focaliser to the next is guaranteed not only by the similarity of their opinions, but also by a subtle strategy that establishes each successive focaliser as an object of respect and affection for the preceding one. Having come to regard Warbeck as trustworthy, the reader readily accepts his admiration for Fanny as well-founded; in turn, Fanny's love for Harry predisposes the reader to view him favourably. However, the positive evaluation of Warbeck and Fanny by the different narrators obscures one of the breaks – in Macherey's sense – that characterise the text, as their outstanding character traits effectively prevent them from leading happy and successful lives (Warbeck is a failure as a publisher, because he refuses to cater for the taste of the contemporary public; Fanny loses everyone she loves and cannot even turn to her memories for consolation).

While the positions occupied by the narrator, the main characters and the reader coincide, that of the plot (as outlined above) undermines the overt ideological message.[613] However, the reader is subtly positioned so as to miss the contradiction, as the deictic centre shifts from one unconventional focaliser to the next. Opposing, more conservative viewpoints are ascribed only to the most unsympathetic (minor) characters; the reader is discouraged from reflecting that Fanny might have done well to follow their example. In a sense, the emotionally charged atmosphere that prevails towards the end of the book further serves to distract the reader from rational analysis: confronted with Fanny's and Warbeck's condemnation of Harry's sister, whose rigid adherence to conventional morality causes her brother's death, the reader is not encouraged to speculate that by adhering to the same conventions that motivate Miss Somerford's actions, Fanny could have prevented her interference. The melodramatic ending of Warbeck's book-within-the-book thus invites the reader to pity Fanny, not to pass judgement on her. The same applies to the frame narrative, as Fanny is mourned by Warbeck, who in a touching gesture decides to erect a gravestone for her in the garden of the Boule d'or at Les Yvelines, the scene of her happiest memories.

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[613] This reading implicitly contradicts Loesberg's assertion that "Sadleir's novel justifies its sexual touristry with a critique of Victorian hypocritical respectability that, while it does not really comprehend the narrative, at least does not collide with it" (364).

4.2.4 Homosexuality

A number of historical fiction writers of the interwar years show some awareness of issues connected with gender and sexuality, especially those types of sexuality that deviate from what was then perceived as the heterosexual norm. However, in an age where censorship still prevailed, references to homosexual preferences and practices could only be expressed in coded terms; it is only in the post-war era that homosexual relationships come to be portrayed more openly.[614] Wallace (33f.) argues that this leads to the prevalence of depictions of male homosexuality, as these could be encoded in terms of 'wartime friendships'. In addition, Gay Wachman in *Lesbian Empire* draws attention to the prevalent practice of "Lesbian crosswriting that most often transposes the otherwise unrepresentable lives of invisible, silenced, or simply closeted lesbians into narratives of gay men" (37), typically in the context of historical novels set in sexually more tolerant societies, such as ancient Greece. While historical fiction allowed its writers greater latitude in the depiction of sexuality and even non-normative sexual behaviour, examples of homosexuality, either male or female, in Victorian-centred fiction (despite its predilection for 'exposing' the Victorians) are relatively rare, for reasons which will be briefly outlined below. A notable exception, however, is the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner, particularly *Summer Will Show* (1936) and *The Flint Anchor* (1954). Despite the amount of critical attention her oeuvre has attracted in recent decades, the importance of its Victorian setting and its contribution to contemporary discourses on the Victorians has received only very limited attention, and deserves closer scrutiny.

The relative scarcity with which homosexuality features in Victorian-centred fiction is due to a number of interconnected factors: firstly, the relative temporal nearness of the Victorian age may well have acted against the liberties otherwise afforded to the historical genre – things which are, as Naomi Mitchison said in 1934, "all right when people wear wolfskins and togas" may have struck censors, publishers and audiences as decidedly less acceptable in characters wearing top-hats or crinolines. In addition, it is also conceivable that the Victorian era – both because of its temporal and emotional proximity and its well-known attitudes towards homosexuality – may have proved particularly resistant against attempts to re-inscribe an alternative history of homosexual empowerment in comparison to earlier ages, whose views on the topic where either less well-known, or known to be less restrictive than those of the notoriously prudish nineteenth century: an Amazon queen, as in Maude Meagher's *The Green Scamander*, is arguably a much more attractive figure for identification than the tightly corseted and genteelly asexual ladies of the Victorian age.

The main problem, in this regard, lies in the fact that the term 'homosexual' as a marker of a distinct (sexual) identity only emerged towards the very end of the century, under the twin influence of the French decadence and German sexology, most notable the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and his followers.[615] It is frequently argued that prior to these developments, it is relatively unlikely that individuals would have regarded their identity as primarily constituted by their sexual orientation. For men, the legal situation coupled with the social stigmata attached to the term would have made such an identification highly undesirable during the Victorian era. In the case of women, the option of identifying oneself as 'lesbian' was arguably not available, as will be outlined at

[614] Cf. Maslen, *Poltical*, 157; 147.
[615] Cf. Faderman, 185f.; also Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 12ff.

greater length below. Even in the early twentieth century, as a number of prominent homosexuals where publicly declaring their sexual orientation and fighting for its recognition, "[b]eaucoup d'homosexuel(le)s ne [...] reconnaissent pas leur sexualité comme l'élément déterminant de leur rapport a la societé" (Tamagne, 46).[616] Novelists who did, on the other hand, were frequently more interested in presenting (semi-autobiographical) accounts of homosexuals' experiences in the here and now as a more obvious means of making a socio-political statement.

The emergence of the term 'homosexual' as a marker of sexual identity initially went hand in hand with an increase in the public visibility of homosexuals. In addition, the "libéralisation des moeurs dans les années 1920 [...] va de pair avec une tolérance accrue", making the decade the "age d'or homosexuel" (Tamagne, 45).[617] At the same time, however, it is also important to stress that tolerance towards public displays of homosexuality remained "essentiellement superficielle" and was confined to certain milieus, most notably the public schools, universities, the Bohème and the upper classes. In most walks of life, however, "[ê]tre homosexuel, meme dans les années 1920, peut vous attire des tracas familiaux, professionels et juridiques" (Tamagne, 45). After the relatively open-minded climate of the 1920s, the 1930s saw a decline in demands for sexual reform when more pressing political and economic concerns came to the forefront,[618] and a conservative backlash which continued and even intensified well into the post-war era.[619] In view of Tamagne's claim that the relative sexual permissiveness of the twenties led to the "multiplication des écrits sur ce theme [i.e. homosexualité], notamment dans le domaine litteraire" (44), it is important to stress that a more open-minded attitude towards homosexuals of both genders within certain privileged sections of society did not go hand-in-hand with a more tolerant approach to censorship. Homosexual relationships could, at best, be cautiously expressed in coded terms; open discussions of the topic – as in Radclyffe Hall's famous lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) or James Hanley's *Boy* (1931), which features scenes of homosexuality between sailors – inevitably brought authors and publishers into conflict with the censor. (Both novels were banned following prosecutions for obscenity and had to be published abroad.)[620] In this regard, the twentieth century – especially during the era Joynson-Hicks – was showing itself less tolerant than the nineteenth: "As long as the tree of Freudian knowledge remained untouched" (Thomas, 272), homoerotic scenes which would shock twentieth-century sensibilities could still be written and published with relative impunity.[621] In early twentieth-century texts, in contrast, such descriptions are notably absent: in *Summer Will Show* – as in *The Well of*

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[616] Cf. also Weeks, *Coming Out*, 33f.

[617] Cf. also Humble, 236ff.

[618] Cf. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 199f.

[619] On 1930s attitudes towards homosexuals, cf. Tamagne, 46; Beddoe, 28; on the post-World-War-II period, cf. Haste, 168ff. and Humble, 243.

[620] Cf. Haste, 75. As late as 1954, Chatto & Windus feared that *The Flint Anchor* might prove "too controversial" (Harman, 257; Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 181) and requested the author to rewrite the passage in which Crusoe declares his love for Thomas.

[621] Thomas names as an example the poetry collection *Ionica* (1854), which Eton master William Johnson (alias William Cory) addressed to his young 'playmates'. In a similar vein, Lillian Faderman (184f.) cites passages from Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1860) and Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871) which strike the modern reader as clearly homoerotic. For further examples and a sustained discussion of the theme in nineteenth-century literature, cf. Foster, 91ff.

Loneliness – the consummation of the lesbian relationship disappears into a gap in the text,[622] and the theme continued to be treated with extreme reticence throughout the 1940s and (early) 50s.[623]

Despite the relative similarity of treatment accorded to lesbianism and male homosexuality in the domain of literary censorship, social attitudes and developments from the Victorian period onwards varied considerably in regard to male and female homosexuality. As already briefly mentioned, 'lesbianism' was not perceived as a distinct sexual identity prior to the twentieth century.[624] While there exists a persistent myth that female homosexuality was not expressly prohibited by law because Queen Victoria did not believe in its existence (and/or because none of her ministers had the courage to broach the subject to her), this is, in fact, an apocryphal story dating back to the 1970s. It does, however, provide a fairly accurate account of social attitudes towards lesbian love during the period, characterised mainly by a firm belief in its physical impossibility and hence non-existence.[625] Throughout the Victorian age, 'romantic friendships' among women, not infrequently involving physical displays of affection such as kissing, holding hands or sharing the same bed, were considered socially acceptable and unremarkable.[626] In her survey of love between women from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, Lillian Faderman (172ff.) stresses that same-sex relationships between women, while characterised by a high degree of emotional intensity, may in many cases have been utterly devoid of sexual aspects: socially conditioned to regard sexuality as sinful and unnatural in females, many women would have aimed at keeping their love for other women 'pure' and free of the perceived 'taint' of sexuality.[627]

Lesbianism first impinged upon the public consciousness during the infamous Pemberton-Billing trial of 1918;[628] however, a 1921 attempt to criminalize lesbianism along similar lines as male homosexuality failed "after Parliament was persuaded it was in the public interest to draw a veil over the subject [...] Lesbians escaped criminal punishment because it was thought better that the female population should remain in ignorance of lesbian sexuality" (Haste, 85).[629] By the late 1920s, however, lesbianism had gained significantly in public visibility, both because of the relative conspicuousness of contemporary lesbian fashions (often consisting of male clothing, monocles, and Eton crops) and the notorious obscenity trial against the publishers of *Well of*

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[622] Cf. Castle, 222; on *The Well of Loneliness*, also Beddoe, 30.

[623] Cf. Dollimore, 74.

[624] Cf. Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 12; Jeffreys, 22ff; Faderman, 15ff.; Sh. Marcus, 6; Weeks, *Coming Out*, 34. This does not mean, however, that same-sex relationships between women did not exist in Victorian England. For a sustained discussion of the subject, cf. Sh. Marcus, *Between Women*.

[625] Cf. Faderman, 157ff.

[626] Cf. Faderman, 157ff., especially 169ff.; also Haste, 85 and Jeffreys, 19ff.

[627] Cf. also Jeffreys, 20f.; However, Jeffreys (27) also suggests that these women might have had more obviously sexual relationships. For a detailed discussion of same-sex relationships between Victorian women, cf. Sh. Marcus, *Between Women*.

[628] Noel Pemberton-Billing had been sued for libel by the actress Maud Allen, whom he had implicitly described as a lesbian in his right-wing journal *Vigilante*. During the trial, he asserted that the German government had compiled a 'black book' of the names of 47,000 British 'perverts' (among them Herbert Asquith and his wife), whom it was now blackmailing for information on the British war effort and strategy (cf. Searle, n. pag.; Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 13ff.; Weeks, *Coming Out*, 105f.).

[629] For more detailed discussion of the subject, cf. Hyde, 202ff.; also Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 17 and Weeks, *Coming Out*, 106f.

Loneliness in 1928.[630] Sylvia Townsend Warner's depiction of love between women, *Summer Will Show* (1936), was written during a time which had already experienced an increase in homophobic sentiment, forcing homosexuals to hide their sexual orientation as far as possible from the public gaze. In this atmosphere, Victorian-centred fiction lends itself peculiarly well to explorations of the topic: the inevitable ambiguity of female-female relationships in a Victorian context (coupled with a conspicuous lack of descriptive passages) made it possible to evade censorship under the pretence of authentically recreating a historical era that was for once less restrictive than the present. Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of Warner's novel, however, it is necessary to consider some of the implications of the term 'lesbian fiction' and to establish the theoretical framework relevant to the discussion to female-female love in the context of the Victorian-centred novel.

In an attempt to define 'lesbian fiction' as a distinct sub-genre, Terry Castle in her groundbreaking essay "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the counterplot of lesbian fiction" draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretisation of male homosociality as the structuring element of canonical fiction. Since Castle's and Sedgwick's arguments are of relevance to the depiction of homosexuality in Victorian-centred fiction, they deserve to be briefly outlined here. Sedgwick postulates that English literature has, since the late seventeenth century, been shaped by what she terms the 'erotic triangle' of male homosocial desire. She argues that "patriarchal culture has traditionally been organized around a ritualised 'traffic' in women – the legal, economic, religious, and sexual exchange of women between men (as in the cherished institutions of heterosexual love and marriage)" (Castle, 214), and that this is replicated in canonical English literature. As a consequence, the "hidden subject" (Castle, 214) of canonical literature has always been male bonding, "mediated 'between' two men through, around, or over, the body and soul of a woman" (214). Woman is thus reduced to a mere "'conduit of a relationship' in which the real *partner* is a man" (Sedgwick, 26; italics in original).[631] In this context, the distinction between homosociality and homosexuality acquires crucial importance. For Sedgwick, the continuation of the existing social order, the "social form or forms" (86), is guaranteed by male homosociality. Male homosexuality, on the other hand, is perceived as threatening to the social order, since it obscures the distinction between traditionally established gender boundaries: "By doing away with the 'female middle term' and blurring the putative difference between 'male' and 'female', the overt eroticization of male bonds undermines the very conceptual distinction on which modern patriarchy is founded" (Castle, 215). As Sedgwick argues, not only does canonical English (and American) literature show a deep-seated investment in the vindication of male homosociality, and the condemnation of homosexuality; she argues that it is precisely the degree to which a given text invests in the concept of male homosociality that determines its inclusion in the literary canon.[632]

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[630] For a detailed account of the trial, cf. e.g. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 107ff. and Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 161ff.; for the impact of the trial on Lesbian identity formation, cf. e.g. Ingman, 11; Beddoe, 29f. and Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 165; for lesbian fashions, cf. Tamagne, 45; also Wachman, "Lady", 106, following Castle, *Noel Coward*, 29ff. and Doan, "Passing Fashions"; Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 19ff. and 42.

[631] Cf. Castle, 214.

[632] Cf. Sedgwick, 17; Castle, 215f.

While Sedgwick constructs a binary opposition between male homosociality and homosexuality, she refrains from establishing the same distinction in the case of women: "The adjective 'homosocial' as applied to women's bond need not be pointedly dichotomized as against 'homosexual'; it can intelligibly denominate the entire continuum" (3). In her theoretisation of lesbian writing, Castle takes issue with this perceived 'blind spot' in Sedgwick's theory, constructing a female counterpart to Sedgwick's male-female-male triangle through female homosociality:

> Female bonding, at least hypothetically, destabilizes the 'canonical' triangular arrangement of male desire, is an affront to it, and ultimately – in the radical form of lesbian bonding – displaces it entirely. Even Sedgwick's own geometrical model intimates as much. [...] the male-female-male erotic triangle remains stable only as long as its single female term is unrelated to any other female term. Once the two female terms are conjoined in space, however, an alternative structure comes into being, a female-male-female triangle, in which one of the male terms from the original triangle now occupies the 'in between' or subjugated position of the mediator [...]. (Castle, 217)

The female homosocial structure effectively precludes male bonding by isolating the male term; taken to its extreme, that of female homosexuality, it even dismisses it altogether.[633] The alternative plot structure outlined above, which "undo[es] the seemingly compulsory plot of male homosocial desire" (Castle, 218), for Castle becomes the prototypical structure of lesbian fiction. This becomes of particular importance in the context of Victorian-centred fiction, working as it does simultaneously against Victorian patriarchy, patriarchal structures within the Victorian canon, and the sub-current of patriarchal ideology that has been identified as typical of much Victorian-centred fiction.[634]

In her essay, Castle identifies Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* as a paradigmatic example of lesbian fiction. The novel has in recent years (following its republication by Virago in the late 1980s) received a fair amount of critical attention, and has already been touched upon briefly in the context of 'political' Victorian-centred fiction; nonetheless, an outline of its lesbian plot, and its construction of a counter-plot in opposition to the text schema of canonical Victorian fiction, cannot be omitted from this chapter. In *Summer Will Show*, lesbian fiction's reversal of the male homosocial structure is exemplified through the love triangle between Sophia, her husband Frederick, and Frederick's mistress Minna, from which Frederick is finally excluded as the two women discover their love for each other. Castle's insightful analysis focuses on the construction of the female-(male-) female love triangle within the text, highlighting the extent to which Frederick at first occupies the traditionally 'female' role of mediator: it is through him that Sophia first begins to catch glimpses of Minna's personality, as she observes the alterations in Frederick's speech and behaviour after his return to England. Even after Frederick goes back to Paris after the death of their children from smallpox, Sophia finds that he continues to act as a conduit for thoughts of his mistress: "If she remembered [the children], she must rememeber Frederick; and how remember Frederick without snuffing Minna? The children, Frederick, Minna. Through this order her thoughts ran, and at Minna stayed, ignobly fascinated, ignobly curious" (Warner, *Summer*, 74).

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[633] Cf. Castle, 218.

[634] Cf. especially ch. 3.1.

When Sophia arrives in Paris on her quest to seek out her errant husband and force him to give her more children, this again leads her directly to Minna's apartment, where she listens spell-bound to Minna's recitation of her childhood experiences in Lithuania. Having served the function of bringing the two women into contact, Frederick is speedily excluded from their relationship: declining his offer to fetch her a cab, Sophia ends up spending the night with Minna after he has left. When Frederick pays a visit on the day after, he finds them deep in conversation and is "instantly felled into taking it for granted that his wife and his mistress should be seated together on the pink sofa, knit into this fathomless intimacy, and turning from it to entertain him with an identical patient politeness" (Warner, *Summer*, 129).[635] Frederick's inability to grasp the situation is entirely in keeping with the Victorian setting of the novel. He is fully able to accept a close relationship between women as 'normal' according to the standards of his time. He even advises Sophia to stay with Minna for another night in order to avoid the dangers of the 1848 Revolution, which has broken out in the interim. It is only when Sophia refuses to return to Frederick despite the intercession of her beloved great-aunt Léocardie that Frederick, furious at his wife's and mistress's desertion, decides to cast off both of them, and to deny Sophia access to her fortune – his outrage, however, is ostensibly directed at Sophia's revolt against patriarchy; there is no indication that he perceives anything intrinsically immoral in her relationship to Minna.

As Castle points out, the "narrative impulse" of *Summer Will Show*, "the desire to plot *against* the seemingly indestructible heterosexual narrative of classic European fiction" (224; italics in original), shows itself in the novel's parodistic relationship to Flaubert's *Education sentimentale* as well as to a range of canonical Victorian novels.[636] Fully realised in the love relationship between Sophia and Minna, the novel's rewriting of the male homosocial plot structure is foreshadowed already at the beginning of the book, which shows Victorian patriarchy in action, but also points towards possibilities of its subversion through female bonding. After their children have fallen ill, Sophia is reluctant to write to her husband, then staying in Paris with Minna. Knowing this, Doctor Hervey, the children's physician, takes it upon himself to inform Frederick without Sophia's knowledge; however, the doctor's wife intercepts the letter and takes it to Sophia in a gesture of female solidarity: "'For why should all this be done behind your back? [...] What right have they to interfere, to discuss and plot, and settle what they think best be done? As if, whatever happened, you could not stand alone, and judge for yourself! As if you needed a man!'" (Warner, *Summer*, 62). The novel repeatedly hints at the existence of some stronger emotional bond between the two women: "The letter [...] seemed to have no real part in this to-do. Some other motive, violent and unexperienced as the emotions of youth, trembled undeclared between them" (Warner, *Summer*, 62). "She might be in love with me" (Warner, *Summer*, 51), Sophia later realizes. Although Sophia rejects Mrs Hervey's unspoken advances, the scene already hints at the possibility of the subversive restructuring of the male homosocial plot.[637] While the scene is schema-confirming in its depiction of Victorian patriarchy, it also draws the

[635] For a different interpretation of this passage, cf. Castle, 221.
[636] Cf. ch. 2.1.2.
[637] Cf. Castle, 225.

reader's attention to possibilities of successful female resistance which are absent from the depictions of patriarchal power structures typically found in Victorian-centred fiction.[638]

It is worth noting, in this context, that Warner underlines the reversal of gender roles implicit in the transformation of the canonical triangle through her description of the main characters, disrupting readers' schematic expectations of binary gender oppositions in Victorian and Victorian-centred fiction.[639] Frederick, "the husband of Mrs. Willoughby" (Warner, *Summer*, 29) is described in terms conventionally gendered feminine: upon their marriage, he brings with him "a dowry of debts"; afterwards, Sophia takes him home to live at her parents' house. While she is busy on the estate, he leads an idle, aimless life whose boredom is alleviated only occasionally when Sophia takes pity on him and joins him for a game of billiards (at which she, however, is far better than he). "In the evening, […] the four would play whist together, and Sophia and her father would beat Frederick and Mamma," highlighting the binary opposition between 'feminine' and 'masculine' (as opposed to 'male' and 'female') characters. Unable to put up with the monotony of his life, he later becomes "a companion" (Warner, *Summer*, 27) to an old uncle, and plunges into a life of fashionable amusements in London.

Sophia, in her turn, is consistently described in terms which highlight her 'masculinity': in contrast to her emotional husband, she is depicted as rational, controlled, and ambitious; she is able to view her uncle's sexual misdemeanours with "masculine tolerance" (Warner, *Summer*, 32), and "deplore[s] her mother's feminine intuition" with "the rather pompous disapproval of a strong character" (Warner, *Summer*, 30). Throughout the first part of the novel, she chafes at the restrictions imposed upon her by society. In her daydreams, she finds "herself betrayed by fancy into Cornwall, and leading there a wild romantic life in which, unsexed and unpersoned, she rode, sat in inns, slept in a bracken bed among the rocks, bathed naked in swift-running brooks, knocked people down, outwitted shadowy enemies, poached one night with gypsies, in another went a keeper's round with a gun under her arm" (Warner, *Summer*, 33–4) – an essentially masculine existence, but also, crucially, one that transcends class barriers.[640] Her physical appearance – tall, strong, and long-legged – is in keeping with her 'masculine' image. Minna, too, is described in terms which are at variance with the conventional model of femininity, regarding both her physical appearance and her refusal to be bound by established norms of behaviour: throughout the novel, she seamlessly crosses from the private into the public sphere, provides arms and money for the revolutionaries, and fights on the barricades. While the novel reverses the Sedgwickian triangle of male-female-male, it leaves unchallenged – indeed re-inscribes – its traditional corollary, that of masculine-feminine-masculine. Sophia's depiction in terms traditionally gendered 'masculine' also draws on the popular concept – following the Austrian sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing – of homosexuality as 'inversion', i.e. the consequence of a person being trapped in a body of the opposite gender.[641]

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[638] Cf. ch. 3.1.

[639] Cf. Brothers, 266ff.

[640] Cf. Hackett, 97.

[641] Cf. e.g. Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 11. As Warner's letters to her lover Valentine Ayckland show, she was familiar with and admired Krafft-Ebing's work. Wachman ("Lady", 112), however, also points out that the novel, through its intertextual engagement with Hall, Lawrence, and Diderot, deconstructs

The ending of the novel enables Castle to identify further characteristics of lesbian fiction. Having lost sight of Minna after she has been attacked and possibly been killed by Sophia's nephew Caspar, Sophia sits in Minna's apartment reading the Communist Manifesto. The text breaks off abruptly, and the reader is left in uncertainty whether Minna has died or will eventually return. As Castle argues, the open ending signals Warner's "apparent inability to let go of the possibility of euphoric resolution however improbably such a resolution must seem" (229) is typical of the "profoundly attenuated relationship" that lesbian fiction has "with what we think of, stereotypically, as narrative verisimilitude, plausibility, or 'truth to life'":

> Precisely because it is motivated by a yearning for that which is, in a cultural sense, implausible – the subversion of male homosocial desire – lesbian fiction characteristically exhibits, even as it masquerades as 'realistic' in surface detail, a strongly fantastical, allegorical or utopian tendency. (229)

In keeping with her argument, Castle (230) notes that its presentation of the Paris revolution is somewhat sparse and superficial. While it is undeniable that Warner does not provide a detailed account of the historical moment of the novel's setting, its relation to the Paris revolution of 1848 is nonetheless significant in terms of its Marxist political message.[642] More importantly, however, Castle fails to mention the strong connection between the triangular plot structure identified by Sedgwick and the novel's Victorian setting: as outlined above, the Sedgwickian triangle depicts, and depends for its existence on, a strictly patriarchal social order. Warner's deconstruction of the male homosocial triangle seems therefore possible only because the action is set within the context of Victorian patriarchy.

Moreover, the temporal setting is also of crucial importance for the novel's depiction of a love relationship between women. Sophia's Victorian background provides not only the backdrop for her gradual sexual awakening, but also an explanation for her initial inability to recognise her feelings for other women; in addition, as outlined above, it also offers a context in which lesbianism can be presented with sufficient ambiguity to escape censorship.[643] Despite her dissatisfaction with her traditional gender role, Sophia in many other respects adheres to patterns of thought which readers would perceive as distinctly 'Victorian', confirming the established schema. In particular, this applies to the high value she places on respectability, her class consciousness, and her keen sense of social taboos. When Mrs Hervey openly declares that Sophia does not need a man, she is outraged at this breach of decorum:[644]

> Down there, in that lowest class, sexual decorum could be kilted out of the way like an impending petticoat; and Mary Bugler, whose husband was in jail, and Carry Westmacott, whose husband should be, might declare without offence that a woman was as good as a man, and better. In her own heart, too, unreproved, could lodge the conviction that a Sophia might well discard a Frederick, and in her life she had been ready, calmly enough, to put this into effect. But into words, never! Such things could be done, but not said. (Warner, *Summer*, 65)

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existing misogynist stereotypes of the lesbian as the "doomed invert, the ineffectually mannish woman in need of a strong man's love, and the voracious corrupter of youth crazed by perverse desires."

642 Cf. Montefiore, *Men*, 177. For detailed discussion of this point, cf. ch. 2.1.2.

643 As Mulford (111) notes, the precise nature of Minna and Sophia's relationship is never named in the novel, and many reviewers ignored the lesbian nature of their close friendship.

644 Cf. Brothers, 268; also Hackett, 96 and 99.

As Castle notes, *Summer Will Show* is a "novel of liberation" (227).[645] Lesbian love provides an escape from constraints of class and gender, from "sitting bored among the tyrants. From Sunday Schools, and cold-hearted respectability, and hypocrisy, and prison. And domesticity" (Warner, *Summer*, 179). It is important to note that these constraints are historically specific, conforming exactly to the constituent features of the established 'Victorian' schema, which is construed as the antithesis to same-sex desire. The extent to which Victorianism precludes lesbian sexuality becomes evident also through Sophia's reactions to, Mrs Hervey and Minna respectively. Within the confines of her English home, a homosexual relationship strikes her as "intolerable" (Warner, *Summer*, 64), effectively precluded by her adherence to heteronormative values which lead her to reject Mrs Hervey's advances, arguing that "'[…] Mine is a spoilt marriage. Yours is not, and I cannot let you endanger it'" (Warner, *Summer*, 63). Even though she feels "her flesh hanging cold and forlorn, as though in this conflict she had forever abandoned it" (Warner, *Summer*, 63) as she tells Mrs Hervey to leave, she is unable to confront the homosexual desires that her Victorian upbringing has taught her to repress. It is only when she is freed from her Victorian background, and ousted from her class position – after her first night with Minna (which she spends fast asleep on her sofa) she perceives herself as a "fallen woman" and delightedly embraces the sense of liberation from constraints of domesticity and decorum that this entails – that she is able to acknowledge her attraction to the other woman.[646]

As Terry Castle (229f.) notes, the novel is remarkable for the implausibility of many of its plot elements.[647] Warner's deliberate disruption of readers' expectations – realism being one of the most prominent elements of the text schema typically associated with the historical novel – are the more striking because none of the unusual events in the novel appear to be regarded as unusual by the characters concerned. This strategy is typical of novels which aim to construct story worlds which exist as alternatives to the real world of the reader; within this context, schema-disrupting objects and events usually possess second-order informativity, as the reader is led to accept them within the fictional setting, but discouraged from linking them to real-world experience.[648] Warner's choice of a specific historical setting, however, serves paradoxically both to authenticate the implausible private events she describes, and to enhance their schema-disrupting potential by establishing their link to the real world of her audience, inscribing a (pre-) history of lesbianism into the Victorian period but simultaneously profiting from the Victorians' ignorance for narrative effect. In this regard, the novel adheres to the text schema of the

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[645] Cf. also Hackett, 102.

[646] On Sophia's hypocritical adherence to Victorian norms, cf. Brothers, 268; on her sexual liberation through her status as a "fallen woman", cf. Wachman, "Lady", 111; on her social and personal liberation through her journey to France, cf. Lecercle, 298; on the connection between lower-class characters and lesbianism and on Sophia's rejection of Mrs. Hervey's advances, cf. Hackett, 96ff.

[647] Cf. also Mulford, 118. As a caveat, however, it is also worth noting that at least one of those apparently implausible developments – that of an upper-class woman becoming a Communist – was modelled on Sylvia Townsend Warner's own experience (cf. Harman, 141 and 149).

[648] Science fiction is frequently cited as a prime example of second-order informativity, in which schema-disrupting elements are presented as 'unremarkable' and 'given' within the story world, while there is no encouragement for the reader to connect them to established real-world schemata: a science fiction novel might, for instance, introduce flying saucers as an 'unremarkable', indeed well-known element of its story world, without encouraging its readers to believe in their existence in the real world (cf. Stockwell, *Cognitive*, 80f.).

Victorian-centred novel, mapping out a position of superiority for the reader vis à vis the nineteenth-century characters.[649]

Castle's analysis of lesbian fiction in terms of its disruption of the canonical homosocial text schema can also profitably be applied to another Victorian-centred text, Faith Compton Mackenzie's *Crooked Wall* (1954) in which female homoerotic desire plays an important, though ambiguous, role. The novel charts the lives of two friends, the beautiful heiress Judith Jasmin and her plain, moneyless friend Bertha Pringle, from the age of seventeen to adulthood. Like *Summer Will Show*, the novel was not regarded as a lesbian text by contemporary reviewers, who related its subtitle, *A Victorian Story of Love*, exclusively to Judith's two marriages and her drawn-out love affair with an older man, Mr Ivery.[650] However, it is female homosociality and female homosexual desire – though never explicitly stated – which accounts for most of the narrative suspense and the development of the plot.

As becomes apparent from a brief summary, the novel is remarkable for the way in which it subverts the canonical structure of male homosciality, repeatedly constructing and deconstructing female homosocial triangles, or focusing on female same-sex relationships which prove immune to male interference. At the same time, however, the novel is strongly homophobic. The setting of the novel is carefully chosen to imply the possibility of homosexual desire in an ambiguous but socially unimpeachable context, that of a boarding house for schoolgirls. The establishment is run by two friends, Miss Pomona Sabine ("Pom") and Miss Dora Leech ("Pussy"). Cast as, respectively, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' halves of an elderly couple, the two women are shown to be on very intimate terms. The precise nature of their relationship, however, remains undefined: within the Victorian context of the story, the mere fact that they share a bed is significant, but inconclusive (especially as 'bed scenes' usually feature quarrels rather than caresses between the two women). They are assisted by Miss Coppin, a timid, retiring spinster who lives at home with her aged mother, and is devoted to the young girls in her charge, especially Bertha. The boarding house thus presents, significantly, an all-female environment, precluding the formation of male homosocial triangles, and facilitating female bonding.

In the beginning of the novel, Bertha and Judith, hitherto roommates, are punished for staying up too late by having a third girl, the obnoxious Beatrice, quartered upon them; however, the irksome arrangement ends abruptly when Beatrice falls to her death on the stairs of the lodging house. When the establishment is forced to close after the tragedy, Judith is taken to Italy by her father, where she meets and falls in love with Robert Ivery. After her return to England, however, she agrees to marry a young neighbour, John Oliver, because she senses that her father, a widower passionately in love with his housekeeper, wants her out of his house. Together, Judith and Oliver move to Penfurlong, Judith's inheritance from her grandfather. However, the marriage is far from happy and comes to a sudden end when John dies in a riding accident. Bertha and Judith are

[649] It is important to note, in this context, that Warner ("Historical Novel", 52) herself "warns against the practice of understanding the past through contemporary understandings" (Hopkins, "Sylvia Townsend Warner", 123), thus challenging the definition of Sophia as 'lesbian' before its establishment as a distinct sexual identity.

[650] Cf. Baber, n. pag.

reunited, and Judith offers Bertha the nominal post as her 'secretary' (and a substantial salary) as an encouragement to take up permanent residence at Penfurlong.

Mr Ivery's brief visit to England does nothing to disrupt the harmonious relationship between the two women, even though Judith's and his mutual love is reaffirmed. When he has to go back to Italy in order to do research for a book he is writing, Judith loses faith in his love for her. As his return to England is inexplicably delayed, she accepts a marriage proposal from the good-looking but money-loving Herbert Marinden, who is attracted by her sizeable fortune. Once again, the marriage is unhappy and short-lived, as Herbert dies of antimony poisoning during a visit from Miss Coppin. Although she is never officially accused of murdering her husband, suspicion immediately falls on Judith. As poison-pen letters start to arrive and the village gossip becomes unbearable, Judith together with Bertha moves to the Italian resort of Bagni Caldi, where she owns a house. Mr Ivery is informed of their stay there by Judith, who urges him to join them, but his arrival is delayed once again. As the strain of waiting for Mr Ivery begins to tell on the two women, a letter from Miss Coppin's solicitors arrives, informing them of her death and enclosing a written confession in which she admits to killing Beatrice and Herbert. In both instances, her motive is based on her love for Bertha, and her desire to save her from unpleasantness: in the first case, by ridding her of an undesirable roommate, and in the second by forestalling Judith's husband's attempts to have her removed from her post in order to economise on her salary. As the two women ponder the correct course of action, Mr Ivery suddenly arrives, and the novel ends abruptly.

The novel is remarkable for its avoidance of the canonical male homosocial triangle: not even Judith's first marriage can properly be described in these terms, as it does not facilitate male bonding between her father and her husband, but leads to a severance of all contact between Mr Jasmin and the young couple. Within the context of female bonding, however, it is also worth noting that the novel establishes the same dichotomy between homosociality and homosexuality that is characteristic of canonical fiction in regard to men. The author is careful to avoid all indication that the relationship between Judith and Bertha is anything but platonic; it is also remarkable that it is repeatedly cast in terms of a triangular structure, in which a middle term – initially Beatrice (significantly described in markedly 'unfeminine' terms), later Judith's two husbands, and finally Mr Ivery – prevents the conflation of the two female terms of the triangle. Whenever fate or Miss Coppin intervenes to remove the 'male' middle term, the plot takes a further turn that ensures that it is re-instated. In the course of the novel, this structural arrangement, accidental at first, develops into a fully-fledged Sedgwickian triangle, albeit in inverted form: as Mr Ivery finally returns to Judith, he becomes the mediating middle term of a female-male-female triangle, while his and Judith's mutual love preclude the possibility of the homosocial triangle's collapse into homosexuality. Whereas female homosociality is evaluated positively, female homosexuality – in the guise of Miss Coppin's love for Bertha – is presented as threatening and destructive, causing the death of two people. When Mr Ivery fails to return, both women start to feel the strain: "'I know what is the matter with both of us. What has happened to him? It is too long to wait'" (Mackenzie, 247). Mr Ivery's arrival at the precise moment when the two friends deliberate on the consequences of Miss Coppin's posthumous revelations is a symbolic reaffirmation of the novel's homophobic tendencies: in the simplest of terms, a heterosexual relationship presents itself as the solution to the perplexing 'problem' of female homosexuality.

While the novel's negative depiction of 'Pom's' and 'Pussy's' relationship – continually quarrelling during their joint ownership of the boarding house, both of them are described as being much happier when they separate after Beatrice's death – is in keeping with its homophobic stance, it is also worth noting that the book's presentation of heterosexual relationships implicitly deconstructs its heteronormative point of view. The novel opens upon a description of the school girls listening to the sound of working-class men beating their wives which is clearly audible in the boarding house, and which is described as a weekly ritual following upon the distribution of wages (and hence a visit to the pub) every Friday. While Judith's own husbands stop short of physical violence, neither of her marriages turns out well, and she deeply resents the curtailing of her freedom which they entail. The happy ending implied in Mr Ivery's return follows literary convention; however, it remains open to conjecture whether the promise of happiness it holds out for Judith lies in her marriage to Robert Ivery, or in the re-establishment of the female homosocial triangle in which her husband serves both as a link between herself and Bertha, and as the necessary preventive from its conflation into a lesbian relationship.[651]

Like *Summer Will Show*, *The Crooked Wall* is firmly anchored in the historical moment of its setting: however implausible and, apparently far removed from realist conventions, the plots of both novels depend on their location within a strictly patriarchal framework characterised by sexual repression, hypocrisy, and a rigid separation of spheres according to gender – attributes typically connected with Victorianism. However, that setting is also shaped and influenced by the moment of the books' publication, determining which aspects of the Victorian era are foregrounded: by contrasting close relationships between women with the heterosexual institution of marriage, both authors are able to comment on lesbian love and its evaluation in the twentieth century. The different assessment of love between women in the two novels coincides with wider social trends at their moment of publication: whereas lesbians were still campaigning for tolerance towards their sexual orientation during the thirties, the 1950s saw a reaffirmation of the cult of heteronormative domesticity which left little room for lesbian emancipation: "[b]oth living and writing openly as a lesbian required exceptional courage right through the 1950s" (Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 40).

In many respects the issue of male homosexuality – in fiction as much as in the real world – was fraught with greater difficulties than its female counterpart. The 1861 Offences Against the Person Act had confirmed the status of 'buggery' – considered a legal offence since 1553 – as a crime, and further legislation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly the Labouchère Amendment of 1885, had further circumscribed the sexual freedom of male homosexuals. In 1895, the notorious Oscar Wilde trial had additionally sparked off a wave of homophobia.[652] At the same time, however, it had also contributed significantly to the formulation of a distinct homosexual identity.[653] In contrast to these earlier developments, the interwar years were relatively permissive in regard to male homosexuality. Not only did homosexuals profit from the overall relaxation of sexual

[651] It is also worth noting that the ending of the novel in a sense parallels Mr Ivery and Judith's first meeting: just as his reappearance at Bagni Caldi puts an end to the intimacy between Bertha and Judith, Judith's acquaintance had put an end to his intimacy – presented in vaguely homoerotic terms in his diary – with a young man.

[652] Cf. Haste, 29; Weeks, *Coming Out*, 11ff.; http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/gay-lesbian.htm (accessed 21 July 2012).

[653] Cf. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 21; Pykett, 17.

mores during the period; as Florence Tamagne (46) points out, the relatively high percentage of homosexuals among writers and in high-ranking positions in the newspaper and publishing industry also ensured a fairly tolerant attitude in intellectual circles. During the 1930s, homosexuality experienced a brief heyday as a fashionable way of life among the 'Bright Young Things' in Oxford.[654] While it would be an exaggeration to argue on the strength of these observations that society as a whole was becoming more liberal, it is true that "[m]ale homosexuality avoided becoming an issue of major public concern in the period between the wars" (Haste, 87), although convictions for homosexual offences increased slightly towards the end of the thirties. During World War II, too, homosexuals – though officially subject to court martial upon discovery – were frequently treated with a degree of tolerance: the preservation of manpower in the armed forces being a priority, only the most blatant transgressions were punished.[655]

Evidence of this fairly permissive attitude can be found in Doris Leslie's treatment of the theme in *Concord in Jeopardy*, in which the protagonist during his teens falls in love with his beautiful and highly intelligent schoolfellow Huckaby. Described in terms which highlight the effeminate characteristics typically associated with male homosexuals at the time, Huckaby – nicknamed 'Adonais' by Concord's fatherly friend and mentor Barford – becomes Concord's closest friend. In fairly unambiguous terms, the narrator describes their relationship as "the first romance in Concord's life" (Leslie, *Concord*, 46), and mentions that "since the advent of Huckaby in his life [he had not] shown the slightest interest in girls" (67). After Huckaby's death, Concord is devastated, tormented by guilt because he feels he has "failed" (Leslie, *Concord*, 76) Huckaby by briefly flirting with a girl, and convinced that he cannot live without him. The relationship is portrayed in terms which are never openly sexual, but nonetheless frequently highlight the 'tenderness' Concord feels towards his delicate friend, and is given a very positive evaluation both by the narrator and Concord himself. The novel establishes an implicit contrast between homoerotic desire and Victorianism, as Huckaby becomes the driving force behind Concord's revolt against the narrow-mindedness and conventionality of his Victorian home.

In contrast to the relatively open-minded attitude of prior decades, the early 1950s saw a change in the Home Office's law enforcement policy in regard to homosexuals, especially after the homosexual 'Cambridge spies' Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean had defected to Russia in 1951. The scandal once again established the connection – latent in the popular imagination since the Pemberton-Billing trial – between homosexuality and espionage, and turned homosexuals into scapegoats in a climate characterised by "Cold War paranoia" (Haste, 169).[656] At the same time, however, medical experts, psychologists and a Committee set up by the Church of England were increasingly calling into question the appropriateness of criminal sanctions on homosexuality, especially in the aftermath of the Kinsey report.[657] At the same time, police activity and homophobic propaganda in some sections of the British press increased, culminating finally in a

[654] Cf. Haste, 87f.

[655] Cf. Haste, 117ff.

[656] Cf. also Wallace, 105.

[657] Cf. Haste, 168; Dollimore, 62ff. The Kinsey report had revealed that 37% of American adult males had had homosexual encounters at some point during their lives, even though only 4% were exclusively homosexual.

sensational trial against Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, Peter Wildeblood, and Michael Pitt-Rivers.[658] As Haste observes, "[t]he trial triggered profound concern about the homosexuality laws" (170) and led to the establishment of the Wolfenden Committee, which in 1957 presented its unanimous endorsement of decriminalizing homosexuality between consenting adults, sparking off an energetic and high-profile debate between supporters of legal reform, and those who maintained that homosexuality was a social evil which the state had a duty to suppress.[659] It is in the context of this highly controversial discussion that Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor* has to be read. The novel, which charts the consequences of John Barnard's repressed homosexuality has on himself and his family, represents the most outspoken example of male homosexual fiction within the Victorian-centred genre. It has, like Warner's other works, attracted the notice of a number of literary scholars in recent decades, but has to date received considerably less attention than her earlier novels, particularly *Summer Will Show*.

Set in the first half of the nineteenth century, the novel chronicles the life history of John Barnard throughout the late Georgian and early to mid-Victorian eras. Described as "a man's young man" in the novel, Barnard represses his attraction to other men in conformity to social expectations. In doing so, he is contrasted with his son-in-law Thomas, who turns away from his wife in order to find emotional fulfilment in the company of the fishermen of the village, who openly engage in homosexual practices. The difference between the two men's attitude towards their sexuality is represented in symbolic terms by water: towards the end of the novel, we see John Barnard skating alone on a frozen pool of water, while Thomas leaves Loseby on the freely-moving waters of the sea. The novel thus implicitly contrasts the frigidity and emotional stagnation of the one with the freedom of the other.[660] This motif occurs again and again throughout the text, beginning with Thomas's first meeting with the young fisherman Crusoe when he goes out on John Barnard's boat *Mary Lucinda*, which, as he reflects later, was worth even marriage to John Barnard's daughter Mary afterwards. When Crusoe later in the novel declares his love for him, Thomas muses that "Crusoe's declaration sounded neither classical nor reprehensible. So rang the long harsh sighs of the waves embracing the shore, an elemental voice, alien and indisputable" (Warner, *Flint Anchor*, 189). Homosexuality is neither 'unnatural' – a favourite epithet applied to it in Victorian times – nor morally wrong; it is a fact of nature. That Thomas perceives it as 'alien' is due to the lifestyle and the prejudices of his class, of which he has to free himself in order to find personal liberty. As Robin Hackett (92f.) points out, the novel – like *Summer Will Show*, in which Sophia's acceptance of her homosexual nature depends on her coming into contact with the lower-class character Minna – is to some extent primitivising in its association of homosexuality with the lower classes.[661] However, it also draws attention to the

[658] Cf. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 161ff.; Haste, 170f.

[659] Cf. also Dollimore, 61.

[660] Cf. Wallace, 106.

[661] Cf. also Wachman, *Lesbian Empire*, 75. As Weeks (*Coming Out*, 40f.) points out, however, this was to some extent a social reality among early twentieth-century homosexuals, who frequently placed a high value on cross-class relationships (also as a means of escaping the confines of middle-class culture).

narrow bounds of convention and decorum which governed Victorian (upper-)middle-class life, and the damaging consequences of enforced social conformity on the individual.[662]

The impossibility of combining sexual freedom with a middle-class identity is made explicit when Crusoe tells Thomas that he loves him after having enraged Thomas and scandalised his in-laws at Anchor House by publicly accusing Thomas of an affair with another fisherman. As Crusoe explains to Thomas, the declaration of his love only becomes possible once Thomas "leave[s] off feeling as a gentleman" (Warner, *Flint Anchor*, 189). When Thomas chooses not to deny the allegation of having a homosexual relationship, he deliberately opts for the status of social outcast that this implies:

> Come what might, he was tired of defending his innocence. He saw a future of surveillance, imputations, interrogations, and an ignominy of always happening to be innocent – by misfortune, by inadvertence, by the consistent malice of circumstances. If he did not frustrate it now, it would endure till his life's end.
> "You wish me to conclude the worst? You do not deny it?"
> "I do not deny it." (Warner, *Flint Anchor*, 185–6)

The scene (arguably inadvertedly) echoes Peter Wildeblood's statement after pleading guilty at his trial, in which he emphasises the sense of freedom he experienced after his conviction,[663] and probably reflects the feelings of many contemporary homosexuals after their 'coming out'. Thomas, who is able to overcome class prejudices and to meet the fishermen on equal terms, is liberated by this transcending of class boundaries, and finally by his rejection of his social status.[664] Like Sophia in *Summer Will Show*, who likewise embraces her status as a 'fallen woman' as a means of escaping the confines of Victorian society, Thomas experiences homosexuality as empowering.[665] It is important to note, however, that Warner remains carefully guarded about Thomas' real sexual orientation: he embraces the allegation as a means of escape from the narrow-minded respectability of Anchor House; at the same time, however, the reader is told that he is "innocent" of Barnard's accusations, and not in love with any of the other men, although he values their friendship. He thus provides a contrast to John Barnard, whose class consciousness prevents him from intimate (in every sense of the word) contact with the fishermen who feel attracted to him at the beginning of the novel, with dramatic consequences for himself and his family.[666] Finding himself unable to love his wife Julia,[667] he finally finds a 'safe' outlet for his repressed feelings in his exaggerated love for his daughter Mary; a relationship that is at

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[662] The motif of men broken by attempting to live up to social expectations recurs frequently in Victorian-centred fiction, e.g. in *Victorian House*, *Sleep in Peace*, and, as Brothers (272) points out, also in *Summer Will Show*.

[663] Cf. Wildeblood, 188; qtd. in Haste, 170.

[664] Cf. Hackett, 92f.

[665] This motif resurfaces in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), in which Sarah Woodruff likewise accepts her undeserved stigmatisation as 'the French Lieutenant's whore' as liberating. This reinforces the parallel, noted by Wallace (105), between homosexual men and women in historical fiction. Wallace argues that women readers were likely to identify with homosexual male characters because of the restrictions imposed on both groups by a patriarchal society.

[666] Cf. Hackett, 93.

[667] As Hackett (91) points out, he regards Julia merely as protection against the Loseby mothers who regard him as a potential husband to their marriageable daughters, and feels no desire for her.

once sanctioned by society and innocent of all sexual connotations, but crippling to his own and the child's emotional development and fatal for the Barnard family.

The novel offers an insightful critique of the inhibiting and potentially damaging effects the strict moral code of middle-class society could have on individuals who did not conform to the sexual mores of the day. While schema-confirming in its portrayal of these restrictions, it is to some degree schema-disrupting in its depiction of a Victorian subculture in which homosexuality is an accepted way of life. After Crusoe has declared his love for Thomas, Thomas reminds him that "for a man to love a man is a crime in this country" (Warner, *Flint Anchor,* 189). Crusoe's reply overturns both Thomas' and the reader's schematic expectations:

> "Not in Loseby, Mr Thomas, not in Loseby. Nor in any other sea-going place, that I've heard of. It's the way we live, and always have been, whatever it may be inland. I can't say for inland. I never went there, and wouldn't want to, particular. But in Loseby we go man with man and man with woman, and nobody think the worse. Why, they darstn't even preach against it. […] They hunt out a queer old lot of sins to preach at, but not this one. They darsn't." (Warner, *Flint Anchor,* 190)

Homosexuality is not only portrayed as a matter-of-course aspect of the fishermen's lives, it is also legitimised by Crusoe's assertion that this is the way they "always have been".[668] The past fulfils a double function: within the story world of the novel, it serves to justify the existence of homosexual practices in Victorian England. As the present of the novel becomes the past from the point of view of the twentieth-century reader, it in turn serves to legitimise homosexuality in contemporary twentieth-century society by linking it not only to Victorian, but, crucially, to pre-Victorian precedents, once again constructing the Victorian period as an age of exaggerated sexual repressiveness which sought to interfere with 'natural', long-established practices.

Just as the novel in its evocation of Victorian village life resists totalizing narratives of Victorian homophobia, it also resists the tendency of Victorian-centred fiction to construct a binary opposition between Victorian sexual ignorance and contemporary knowledge. Warner deliberately thematises and to some extent deconstructs the two most prominent beliefs about Victorian women's sexual ignorance, both of which show the Victorians in a negative light: on the one hand, she establishes a hierarchy between Victorian women and their more advanced modern counterparts; on the other hand, she suggests that Victorian women's ignorance was feigned, thus again deconstructing that hierarchy of sexual knowledge. By doing so, however, she to some extent exposes Victorian women as hypocritical: a conversation between three women, Mary, Euphemia, and Ellen, reveals that the Victorians – just as their contemporary readers – possess varying degrees of knowledge depending on their age, background, and interest in the subject. While these descriptions go some way towards disrupting the established schema with regard to Victorian women's reluctance to take an interest in sexual matters, it is nonetheless schema-confirming in its portrayal of the taboo Victorian middle-class society placed on the unequivocal verbalisation of this knowledge. After Mary has been told about Thomas's alleged love affair, the vocabulary at her disposal turns out to be almost childishly inadequate as she describes her husband as "one of those things in the Bible" (Warner, *Flint Anchor*, 184).

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[668] Crusoe thus follows the strategy that Lowenthal (41) describes as characteristic of all illiterate societies, which tend to legitimise the present status quo by asserting that this is the way things have always been; cf. ch. 1.1.

David Malcolm's analysis shows that *The Flint Anchor* also possesses the potential for text schema disruption in regard to the historical novel.[669] Warner's text abounds in markers which signal the temporal deixis of the novel, including clear references to the period in which her novel is set, such as the inclusion of nineteenth-century dates, references to historical persons and events, and "allusions to idiosyncratic circumstances of nineteenth-century life" (Malcolm, 149). Even more significantly, the prejudices, preferences and opinions expressed by the characters are in accordance with those of the mid-nineteenth century.[670] Nonetheless, Malcolm argues that the novel deviates from the conventions of the historical novel in its emphasis on "virtually a-historical psychological states, and on very general existential states and experiences" (150), rather than laying its emphasis on historical specificity. Malcolm's criticism is to some extent answered by Warner's own definition of historical fiction, in which she comments on her interest in the complex interaction between psychological and existential states and experiences and the historical peculiarities of an age:

> The historical novelist cannot dodge the obligation, so it seems to me, of knowing pretty accurately how people clothed their minds. Human nature does not change etc., but human thinking alters a great deal, it is conditioned by what it has been taught, what it believes or disbelieves; what it admires in art or nature; at what age it marries, to what extent it has outwitted the weather […] what careers are open to it. (Warner, "Historical Novel"; qtd. in Sykes, 105)

Malcolm (145ff.) criticises that the characters in *The Flint Anchor* do not consistently use 'period' language,[671] and that their fears and anxieties – most notably of death – are not specific to the nineteenth century.[672] It is worth noting, however, that Malcolm's analysis contains few references to the central position that the issue of (repressed) homosexuality has to the plot of the novel, and fails to mention that the novel presents an exploration of this topic which is intensely 'historical' and specific to the era that it portrays. Malcolm (150) is thus certainly correct in his assessment that *The Flint Anchor*, like many other historical novels written and published at the same period, disrupt the text schema established by the nineteenth-century historical novel. It could also be argued, however, that in regard to twentieth-century historical fiction, many readers' text schema might already have changed to encompass novels such as those of Sylvia Townsend Warner, both as regards her interest in psychological characterisation and in her use of non-period language.[673] That is not to say that *The Flint Anchor* and, as has been shown above, *Summer Will Show*, are not highly unconventional – and, in cognitive terms, schema-disrupting – texts; however, I would argue that in *The Flint Anchor*, this unconventional element lies in the open discussion of homosexuality in a Victorian context rather than in Warner's interest in human psychology.

The rapid shifts between the basic deictic level of the story world and those of the various characters' thoughts which characterise Warner's style both in *The Flint Anchor* and *Summer Will*

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[669] As Cook points out, variation on the level of text schemata between individuals with a similar cultural background is greater than on the level of language or world schemata, as they depend largely on the reading preferences and experience of the individual reader (cf. Cook, 222; also ch. 1.4.1).

[670] Cf. Malcolm, 149f.

[671] An assessment that is, however, open to debate, and is, indeed, contradicted by some of Malcolm's own examples of the dialogue (consistently noted and downplayed by him), as well as the "things from the Bible" example cited above.

[672] For the latter point, cf. Malcolm, 151f.

[673] Warner herself points out that this is an emerging trend in contemporary historical fiction in "The Historical Novel".

Show, however, are evidence not only of her interest in the psychological motivations underlying her characters' actions, to which the reader is given access in long passages of represented thought. They are also a deliberate attempt to recreate the myriad different and often contradictory voices that make up the raw material of both historiography and historical fiction.[674] Warner's fiction is a deliberate attempt to distance herself from the myth of unified history often espoused in the historiography of her day, and even more so by Victorian historiographers. In contrast, her fiction forces the reader to view the events of the novels from the points of view of several of the characters, some of which may appear more sympathetic than others, but none of which are privileged on structural grounds. Just as there is no unifying focalising consciousness which solicits the reader's identification, there is no unifying historical narrative that is able to encompass all possible views and accounts of a historical era or event.[675]

4.3 Conclusion

What unites the diverse array of texts presented in this chapter is their commitment to the aim of adding to – and occasionally disrupting – their readers' 'Victorian' schema by uncovering forgotten, atypical and unexpected aspects of the period. Unlike the novels discussed in the preceding chapters, which were primarily concerned with the ways in which the Victorian past shaped twentieth-century society, and which therefore almost inescapably carried a socio-political message, the texts discussed in this section appear for the most part mainly intended for escapist entertainment. This applies particularly to the fictional biographies discussed in chapters 4.1.2 and 4.1.3, whose main aim is to present well-known historical figures in a new and unexpected light, to add to readers' antecedent knowledge about them, or to disrupt existing schemata by offering radical re-interpretations of established 'facts' and assumptions (as becomes apparent, for instance, in Elsna's, Dale's and Roberts's debunking rewriting of the Dickens myth). In many of these novels, the Victorian period exists mainly as a backdrop against which the stories of these characters' lives are played out; nonetheless, these texts also contribute to the on-going engagement between readers' schemata of the Victorian period, and the Victorian-centred novel's recreations of that period within a fictional context. In most cases, however, the relation that exists is predominantly one of schema reinforcement, as authors set out to create Victorian story worlds which are as close as possible to their audience's schematic expectations, and against which the lives of their protagonists stand out as different, unusual, and strikingly 'un-Victorian'.

The novels discussed in chapters, 4.2.1 to 4.2.3, in contrast, aim at schema addition not in relation to individual characters, but in regard to the Victorian period in general; as a consequence, it is the construction of the Victorian story world as such which includes aspects which are either schema-adding or schema-disrupting, introducing readers to locations and situations with which they could not be expected to be familiar either from Victorian fiction or other Victorian-centred novels. Both groups of texts – those which aim at filling the gaps in well-known Victorians' lives, and those which aim at rediscovering the hidden settings of Victorian life – present the Victorian past as clearly distinct, and cleanly severed, from the present.

[674] For Warner's fascination with the myriad and often contradictory sources of history, cf. Sykes 104ff.
[675] Cf. Hopkins, "Sylvia Townsend Warner", 125; Hackett, 86; Foster, 533ff.

Victorian-centred biofictions position the reader as spectator, looking on (and occasionally peeping through the keyhole) while the drama of the Victorian protagonists is played out against its 'period' background (a technique that becomes most clearly apparent in *The Stringed Lute*, in which the reader literally watches the scenes which flash by the dying Oscar Wilde's inner eye while sitting on his living room sofa in the company of the book's author and the Victorian writer's ghost). In the second group of texts, those seeking to rediscover the Victorian underworld and demi-monde, the reader is given a similar role: typically, the Victorian past depicted in these novels becomes, to borrow Lowenthal's famous phrase, a 'different country', through which the reader journeys in the company of the knowledgeable narrator who acts as his guide and protector. Many of these texts deliberately draw the reader's attention to the fact that this is a purely imaginary journey, possible only through immersion in Victorian-centred fiction, as the real-world settings of these novels have long since disappeared ("you will please imagine yourself", Fanny repeatedly exhorts the reader). Thus severing the link between the past and the present that is so strongly emphasised in the Victorian-centred novels discussed in chapters two and three, these works also symbolically absolve the reader of responsibility for the social ills that they point out in relation to the Victorians: as Lowenthal points out, one of the main attraction of the past lies in the fact that it is unalterable, and therefore makes no demand on the present to change it or right past wrongs.[676]

The Victorian past depicted in these novels is thus not the "prehistory of the present" (Lukács, 61), but deliberately constructed as an alternative to the conflicted legacy of middle-class Victorianism. Nonetheless, it is also a version of the past that is shaped and determined by the present of these novels' publication, designed to allow reader's unrestricted access into the story world by ensuring what Iser calls "good continuation" (*Act*, 190) into their existing store of knowledge, while also foregrounding those aspects which authors thought might interest, amuse, or surprise twentieth-century readers. With the passage of time, these aspects come more and more from that domain about which the Victorians kept most resolutely silent in their own fictional accounts, namely that of sexuality – the one area of life in which the Victorians were increasingly coming to be regarded as the exotic 'Other' of the sexually advanced twentieth century. Somewhat paradoxically, these works exist at the intersection of dominant discourses which insist on the sexual frigidity of the Victorians – on which they depend for the surprise effect of their descriptions – and a delight in disrupting the dominant schema through their revelations.

While also partaking of the project of rediscovering the Victorians, the novels discussed in the sub-chapters framing this section, 4.1.1 and 4.2.4, are markedly different in their approach to the period, the position which they map out for the reader, and the use they make of the Victorian past. By ostensibly 'rediscovering' two social groups which the reader would have been highly unlikely to identify with the Victorian period – successful business women and homosexuals of both genders – these novels do not only offer fresh perspectives on the past, but also use it to comment on contemporary issues. (Re-)inscribing an empowering history both of homosexuality and of working women into the Victorian era, these works fashion a prehistory of these phenomena which serves to legitimise their presence in the present. In many cases, however, what

[676] Cf. Lowenthal, 49; also ch. 1.2.

initially appears to be a celebration of difference is finally subsumed into the conservative value scale of the Victorian period. The Victorian 'career novels' discussed in chapter 4.1.1, in particular, are remarkable for the way in which a teleological conception of history – from the restrictions imposed on women in the past to the (relative) freedom of the present – absolves the reader from responsibility for further action. At the same time, however, these novels subscribe to a 'Victorian' ideal of femininity that counteracts the overtly emancipatory discourse of these texts. It is in the texts dealing with homosexuality, however, that the ideological impact of the Victorian period becomes clearest: especially in the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner, the impulse to 'legitimise' homosexuality by linking it to historical precedent is linked to an overwhelmingly negative construction of the Victorian period, whose insistence on social conformity is shown to be psychologically damaging to the individual: by labelling heteronormativity, traditional gender constructions, and sexual repression 'Victorian', Warner implicitly makes a case for their abolition in twentieth-century society.

Despite the widely differing uses these texts make of the Victorian past, however, they share a common commitment to challenging unifying discourses about the period, insisting on the existence of alternative histories and giving a voice to those marginalised by more traditional historiographic and biographic discourses. By emphasising the fragmented nature of historical reality and the coexistence of different, even contrasting, versions of the past, they also draw attention to the processes of selection and narratival shaping which lie behind the construction of 'the Victorians', drawing readers' attention to the fictionality of the past they present and blurring the boundaries between 'fiction' and 'reality'.

5. Re-inventing the Victorians

The final chapter of this survey focuses on those texts which are the farthest removed from the Victorian period, both in terms of their publication date – with very few exceptions, the novels discussed in this section are products of the post-war era – and in terms of the attitude towards the Victorians that they reveal. Unlike many earlier novels, which focus on the consequences of Victorianism on the present, the Victorian period in the texts under consideration here emerges not merely as history, but as a historical curiosity to be either disparaged or admired from the 'safe' vantage point of the mid-twentieth century, or as a 'different country' (to once again borrow Lowenthal's famous phrase) offering readers a period of respite from present-day cares. As will be seen from the analyses presented in this section, this is reflected in the position – both spatio-temporal and ideological – mapped out for the reader. Moreover, it also finds its expression in the way in which these texts set out to interact with the audience's antecedent world schemata: by adhering to established stereotypes about the Victorians, the texts create an impression of historical authenticity due to their conformity to the audience's expectations. In all of these novels, the emphasis is thus on schema confirmation – a strategy which facilitates immersion by offering the least possible resistance to the gap-filling process that, according to Wolfgang Iser, underlies the act of reading. Whether the Victorian period is thus presented as a period of gloom and horror – as in the 'Gothic' novels discussed in part one of this chapter – or as a source of amusement and consolation for the apparently greater complexity of twentieth-century life, it is always a picture that simplifies and smoothes over the inhomogeneity and complexity of historical reality: what is presented in these novels is thus not a historically accurate impression of the Victorians, but a fictional re-invention that nonetheless lays claim to historical 'authenticity'.

5.1 Reading the Victorian nightmare

5.1.1 Defining the 'Victorian-centred Gothic'

From the mid-1940s onwards and increasingly in the 1950s, there appears a spate of popular novels set in the Victorian age belonging to the genres of horror, Gothic and crime fiction (with occasional nods towards romance, as for instance in Margaret Archer's *Gull Yard* or Janet Whitney's *Quaker Bride*). As will be outlined below, nearly all of these texts are highly formulaic and adhere to stereotypical character drawing and genre conventions; more significantly, however, they are also remarkably similar in the image of the Victorian age that they present, and to which I shall refer by the shorthand version of the 'Victorian-centred Gothic'.

The most salient characteristic of the genre is the strong emphasis on the visual impression of Victorian interiors, invariably described as dark, overcrowded and over-decorated, crammed with heavy wooden furniture, cluttered with tasteless bric-à-brac and shrouded in semi-darkness by heavy curtains. In many cases, a sense of decay and neglect adds to the depressing effect, implying an age that has long passed its heyday but continues to drag on, and somewhat incongruously evoking the way these same rooms might look to the contemporary observer, if one assumed that they had been allowed to remain untouched (and undusted) for some decades. Not

infrequently, this pervasive sense of gloom, darkness and dust is carried over into the outdoor scenes as well, with many incidents taking place at night or in the London fog, in ill-lit alleys and narrow side-streets in disreputable parts of London, or, in the case of *Margot Leck*, in the early dusk of winter evenings or during a snow storm. In their choice of setting, these novels subscribe to the same aesthetic as David Lean's influential Dickens adaptations, which, Raphael Samuel contends, were instrumental in "fixing a notion of the Victorian as a time of oppression and fear", a vision representing "the summit of some three decades of modernist revolt" (402).[677] While Samuel's assessment is, to some extent, an over-generalisation about popular views of the Victorians during the late 1940s and 50s, his remarks are nonetheless useful in assessing the influence of contemporary cinema on this particular Victorian-centred subgenre.

The symbolic dimension of these descriptions, which implicitly find their parallel in the restrictive social conventions and oppressive moral climate of the era, need hardly be commented upon. In many cases, the perspective taken at the beginning of the book (before a temporal shift into the Victorian story world occurs) is that of a twentieth-century observer, highlighting the fact that the spatial setting of the novel has disappeared or changed beyond all recognition and is thus not accessible to the real-world reader. The 'Victorian' age as portrayed in these novels is "a different country",[678] existing merely as a text world to which the reader has access through the words on the page. Moreover, the 'Victorian-centred Gothic' is not primarily concerned with real-life persons or events; in the rare cases where they do appear, they only play very minor roles and do not significantly influence the course of the action,[679] but merely serve to authenticate the 'Victorian' setting, and, by implication, to accord a modicum of credibility to otherwise wildly fantastic plots.[680] The implication is that these are not accounts of a real past which has irrevocably and mercifully been superseded by a brighter and happier present, but a fictional construct which parallels some elements of the real past – as a consequence, these settings must be regarded less as realistic recreations of a real-world historical era than as the creation of a fictional world that to some extent draws on readers' real-world schemata without overtly seeking to modify them.

In their emphasis on the inaccessibility of the Victorian epoch as it is constructed in these texts, representatives of the 'Victorian-centred Gothic' follow a consistent strategy of 'othering' the Victorians (a term I have borrowed from Grace Moore ["Reworkings, 140], but adapted to my own needs in this chapter). Unlike the texts discussed by Moore, and their predecessors during the 1920s and 30s,[681] the novels analysed here are not primarily (if at all) concerned with a critique of social structures or conventions or prevalent discourses on race, gender or sexuality, either present or past. In order to satisfy the readers' sense of justice, injustices are frequently righted on the

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[677] Cf. also Joyce, 141.

[678] Cf. Lowenthal, xvi-xvii.

[679] Marghanita Laski highlights this facet of the 'Victorian-centred Gothic' when she has her protagonist realise the futility of mentioning the names of real-world Victorian personages in order to establish her credentials as a time-traveller (*Victorian*, 95).

[680] Helen Hughes comments on this strategy of using history as a means of authenticating otherwise unlikely and fantastic narratives (cf. Hughes, 18); a prime example of this strategy can be found in *Quaker Bride*, whose protagonist is not only presented to Queen Victoria, but also briefly meets Caroline Norton (67).

[681] Cf. e.g. novels by Dorothy Hewlett, May Sinclair, Catherine Carswell, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Phyllis Bentley or Rose Macaulay.

level of individual characters, but the social norm is upheld. In this sense, these novels follow the same pattern as discussed in the chapter on Victorian-centred romances, and which Helen Hughes (42) shows to be characteristic of historical romance fiction in general.[682] Since the 'Victorian' settings of these novels are constructed as an escapist fantasy world which has no connection with and thus no bearing on the real world of the contemporary reader, no evaluation of Victorian mores and social conventions in terms of their consequences on the present is offered. By and large, they are presented as the underlying logic of the 'Victorian' story world evoked in the novels, whose rigid social hierarchy and strict division of gender roles, along with well-defined social conventions and notions of propriety, provide the (only) framework in which the sometimes implausible plots are able to function.[683] As will be outlined below, however, the reader is aligned with characters who are to some extent victimised by this framework, and is thus implicitly positioned to perceive the Victorian period as threatening and oppressive.

In order to achieve the aim of 'othering' the 'Victorian' setting, most texts rely on what is essentially the same strategy by plunging the reader in medias res at the beginning of the text;[684] this either parallels the arrival of the focalising character at an unknown location (which in many cases is to be (one of) the setting(s) of the narrative) later in the text, or coincides with it. In most cases, the focaliser's arrival is charged with a sense of foreboding, and usually takes place under the gloomiest and most inauspicious conditions. Very often, it is implied that the arrival marks a turning point in the character's life. Significantly, the Victorian-centred Gothic eschews the 'objective' perspective provided by omniscient third-person narration in favour of limited first- or third-person narration, thus channelling the readers' identification with the focalising character. Readers thus find themselves in the same position as the focaliser (or rather, the focaliser in the same position in which they are themselves) in that they are suddenly confronted with strange surroundings and experiences (i.e. the 'Victorian' story world); in most cases, they will perceive that these are even more 'alien' to them than to the focalising characters, as they have the added disadvantage of finding themselves in a strange time and age as well as a strange place. To some extent, however, this is balanced by the fact that the focalising characters turn out to be either fairly naïve and inexperienced (e.g. Rose Cartwright in *Quaker Bride* or Nellie Greene in *Gull Yard*), or unable to grasp the implications of their discoveries (e.g. William Montrose in *Margot Leck*, who fails to make sense of the story even as he narrates it and exasperates the other characters by his stupidity – "'Don't, please, say <I can't understand> again'" [164–5], his policeman friend begs him at the end of the novel).

An exception to this pattern is provided by Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953), arguably the most disturbing version of the Victorian-centred Gothic and one which will be discussed at greater length below, where the effect of 'othering' the Victorian is achieved by the

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[682] Cf. also ch. 5.2.1.

[683] In addition, the absence of modern technology is a decided advantage to authors of crime fiction: the plots of both crime novels discussed in this chapter are sustainable only in an age when there is no telephone, no means of transport faster than a train or a horse-drawn carriage, and where the police are not in a position to take fingerprints.

[684] For "textual economy" in science fiction and other non-realistic genres, cf. Zubin and Hewitt, 142; for similar textual strategies in historical romance fiction, cf. Hughes, 19; for a discussion of these arguments in relation to historical fiction, cf. ch. 1.4.2.

unusual expedient of transferring a twentieth-century character to the Victorian age and establishing her as the focalising consciousness of the text. As a consequence, the reader's first impression of the 'Victorian' age is coloured by Melanie's horror at awaking in unfamiliar surroundings:

> Shrunk with fear, she saw the room she was in.
> She had turned over in her sleep, and knowing the lace-hung plush-draped window to be away to her right, she saw beyond her couch's foot a round black iron fireplace, and in its empty hearth a pink paper fan. Over it was a brown wooden mantel, built up with little pillars, little mirrors, till it rose almost to the ceiling. Melanie's gaze passed beyond it, up to the ceiling papered with huge white formalised flowers patterned in smooth and shiny paper; […] Melanie looked down again to the overmantel, which carried so many small objects that she had only a confused impression of worthless trash, […] She looked at the heavy red wallpaper, patterned like the ceiling in textures that formed shapes and then shifted as she looked, at the clumsy black chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, its arms and back and seat padded in embossed green velvet that was studded with dull brass nails. One by one she saw the objects in the room, the black squat fire-scuttle with its shovel in a slot behind, the round table in the window-bay covered with a bobble-fringed green plush cloth, the text in the rustic frame on the wall by the overmantel, reading, in hand-drawn Gothic letters […] 'GOD BLESS OUR HOME'? [sic] From the text she looked down to the carpet, dirty scarlet background and heavy ugly pattern in black and green and a vivid electric blue; then up again to the known round table covered with tatting, the coarse tumbler filled with barley-water […] (Laski, *Victorian*, 52–3)

Rather than relying on Eco's "technique of the aimless glance",[685] the texts discussed in this chapter rely on what I would tentatively label the 'technique of the apprehensive glance' exemplified by the extract above. Melanie's uncertainty about her surroundings finds its parallel in the constantly shifting patterns of the wallpaper, and the bobbed, fringed and tasselled covers and heavy curtains hint at a mystery to be unveiled. The violent colour scheme is indicative not merely of the lack of taste of which later generations were wont to accuse the Victorians,[686] but also serves to create a sense of menace. In this context, the framed text reads like a cruel joke, reminding Melanie that she is anything but at home in her new environment. As the focalisers' eyes roam over everyday objects to which the beholders in their fearful and apprehensive state accord heightened significance, readers are given an emotionally charged, highly subjective impression of the situation and are led to identify with the focalisers' negative emotions towards the 'Victorian' setting.

Two other texts which exploit the same strategy are Margaret Archer's *Gull Yard* and Peter Piper's *Margot Leck*, two crime novels published in 1947. *Gull Yard* is a third-person account of the murder of Reverend Cagg, with his daughter's governess, Nellie Greene, acting as the focaliser for most of the text. Typically, the focalising character is an outsider, who – like the reader – arrives in an unknown and potentially threatening world. In this case, the 'nightmare' setting is the vicarage of St. Crispin's, situated close to a particularly disreputable part of London, where Nellie, who has recently lost her mother and has for the first time left the country village of her birth to earn her living in the capital, feels thoroughly out of her depth. The novel begins with Nellie's arrival:

> At the corner of Mulberry Street, leading to the Embankment, a narrow lane, scarcely noticed by the passer-by, cuts sharply to the left, and running thinly between a tumbledown row of houses comes abruptly to a small square. This lane is identified by a grimy plate as 'Gull Yard', so called perhaps because of its proximity to the river, above which the gulls whirl and scream in all weathers. […] The

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[685] Cf. ch. 1.1; also Hughes, 19.

[686] Cf. Conekin, 143f.; Gardiner, 28-30. The Victorians' lack of artistic taste is a recurrent theme in Victorian-centred fiction (cf. also ch. 3.3 and 5.2.3).

> houses are dingy and ill-cared for, and shadows lurk in their doorways. It is no fit place for a man to walk unattended after dark, unless he risks the loss of his wallet or carries a stout stick as protector. […] On a bleak February evening in 1840, a hackney-coach came rattling and jingling along the Embankment. […] Nellie Greene peered through the misted windows into the fading light. […] Nellie […] turned her eyes to the opposite window where the houses loomed strange and unfriendly in the twilight. (Archer, 5–6)

Nellie feels so discouraged at her unappealing surroundings and her inability to prevent a stranger (who later turns out to be her employer) from striking one of the ragged boys in the street that she is tempted to tell the coachman to take her somewhere else, but is forced to realise that she has no choice but to go on: "But where would he take her? There was nowhere, indeed no one to welcome Nellie Greene now. She was homeless and friendless with no means save the two gold sovereigns in the purse at her waist. Accustomed to country ways and country people, what chance would she have of finding a different situation in London?" (Archer, 6). As it turns out, the inside of the vicarage is hardly more welcoming than the neighbourhood in which it is located:

> Nellie sat down in a worn armchair by the schoolroom fire, and loosing her cloak, began to warm her hands at the feeble frame in the grate. The room was shabby and ill-furnished, with few pretensions to comfort save an ancient horse-hair sofa, the stuffing of which protruded in an ugly gash at one side. An old trunk half hidden beneath a faded Paisley shawl stood in the window, and there was a square table in the middle of the room covered with a green, ink-stained cloth, an inkwell and a couple of pens. There were shabby, green curtains at the windows and a number of lithographs on the walls. An amateurish water-colour of a country scene hung over a mantelpiece cluttered with some wool-embroidered pansies framed in shells, a loving-cup depicting a buxom nymph encircled in a blue and gold heart and a miscellany of china ornaments. The mantelpiece had a red overlay, beaded and tasselled and in shabby repair. There were two straight-backed chairs beside the armchair where Nellie was sitting, and a quantity of dog-eared schoolbooks on a bookshelf by the fire. (Archer, 7–8)

The shabbiness of Nellie's sphere is contrasted with her employers' drawing room, "a brightly-lit room, patterned with a flowery wallpaper and heavy fringed curtains" (Archer, 10). The positive connotations of "brightly-lit" are immediately contradicted as the oppressive, cluttered atmosphere establishes it as a gilded cage for Mrs Cagg, a semi-invalid who lives in terror of her despotic husband and her unruly daughter Hilda:

> A vast chandelier hung from the ceiling, and there was scarcely an inch of wall left uncovered by heavy framed portraits of middle-aged gentlemen and perpetually smiling ladies, hung cheek by jowl with delicate samplers, or crowded against an ornament bracket or china cabinet. The furniture was cumbersome, upholstered in plush, a little faded in places but nevertheless expensive. An ormolu clock stood in the centre of the mantelpiece beneath a glass dome flanked on either side by a china shepherd and shepherdess, a glass snowball, four candlesticks and an innumerable collection of smaller oddments. The room was crowded with chairs and occasional tables of all sizes, and a large chintz sofa had been drawn up before the fire. (Archer, 10–11)

Margot Leck, on the other hand, features a limited first-person narrator. The story is set in 1888 and is told with hindsight by William Montrose, journalist and would-be biographer of the German banker Hermann Brandenfeldt, whose mysterious disappearance he reluctantly and somewhat incompetently undertakes to investigate on behalf of Hermann's step-mother Christina. In Montrose's case, the first 'Gothic' setting is the luxurious mansion of the Brandenfeldt family – alien to him both because of the wide difference in social standing, and because of the foreign elements introduced by the German banking family; what is unusual, however, is the fact that the

arrival scene is re-enacted several times throughout the text, as Montrose travels to and fro between the sinister Lowminnock Hotel and the mansion of the Brandenfeldts.

5.1.2 Playing with the Victorian-centred Gothic

By the early nineteen fifties, the Victorian-centred Gothic genre was obviously sufficiently well-established for authors to draw upon their readers' text schemata as a means of establishing a narrator's credentials: in Janet Whitney's *Quaker Bride* (1954), we once again find the by now familiar pattern of a narrator newly arriving in the alien 'Victorian' setting of the story. Rose Cartwright, the eponymous Quaker Bride, is taken from her American home to 1850s England by her husband, Luke Ashton. Rose's first-person narrative is unusual in that it establishes very little temporal distance between events and their narration; occasionally, the narrative even shifts to the present tense as Rose actually tells things as they happen, thus heightening the readers' sense of immediacy and personal involvement, and forcing them to share her confusion as mysterious and apparently inexplicable developments destroy her hopes of a happy marriage to Luke. Eventually, it turns out that Luke has married her with the double purpose of securing her not inconsiderable fortune, and of using the reputation of moral uprightness and religiosity that adheres to her as a Quaker as a decoy for the illegal gambling den he has established at his ancestral home, Friar's Court. Rose's arrival at Friar's Court is full of the sense of foreboding typical of the Victorian-centred Gothic:

> The house was invisible behind brick walls and a row of poplars planted thick together, so that a second fence of dense greenery showed above the fence of brick as we approached down Chelsea Street. Wrought-iron gates were opened for us by some servant stationed there for the purpose – our coming was expected. The screech of the opening hinges and the clang as the gates closed to behind us was not a very cheerful sound. There was something final about that clang. (Whitney, 30)

Inside, the house turns out to be an unorthodox mixture of Gothic architecture and heavy Victorian furniture, while the room inhabited by Mrs Tabitha, Luke's ancient housekeeper and Rose's declared enemy, is hot and stuffy, and resembles nothing so much as the Victorian version of hell: "At the end of the light corridor we went down two little dark steps and through a dusky, windowless vestibule into another wing. […] The room we entered was bright and hot and smelled of spice. A blazing fire flickered on the walls, candles were lighted, and the curtains drawn, although I knew the sun was shining outside." (Whitney, 31–2). Rose's determined efforts to find her new surroundings attractive at once signal to the reader the extent of her infatuation with Luke and her essential naïveté and sometimes unfounded optimism, and mark her as a particularly limited and not quite reliable narrator. In this sense, Rose is an inverted version of Catherine Morland: while the pre-Victorian heroine of Austen's *Northanger Abbey* needs only be reminded of "the country and the age in which we live" (902) in order to realise the absurdity of her Gothic fancies, it is implied that the same reminder ought to have alerted Rose to the fact that her new home is indeed the place of Gothic horrors that it appears to be. Readers' schematic knowledge of the 'Victorian' age as dark, oppressive and threatening is drawn on to discredit the narrator; as Rose's optimism turns out to be unfounded and the reader correct in mistrusting her instincts, this schema is not only preserved, but reinforced.

Despite the elements of textual deixis which emphasise the fictionality of these descriptions, it must, however, be borne in mind that they were informed by and in their turn contributed to the

popular image of the Victorian era current at the time; in terms of schema theory, there are considerable overlaps between the readers' 'literary' Victorian and real-world Victorian schemata. This idea is taken up and ridiculed in Shelley Smith's *An Afternoon to Kill* (1953), a crime novel which to some extent plays with the schematic expectations raised by the Victorian-centred Gothic genre as well as the Victorian schemata which contemporary readers brought to such texts. The novel is unusual in that it features a contemporary (i.e. mid-twentieth-century) frame narrative, in which a young man named Lancelot Jones unexpectedly arrives at the home of the aged Englishwoman Alva Hines after his plane is forced to land in the desert on the way to Bandrapore, where he is to take up the post as tutor to Mahmut Khan's son. Alva offers him hospitality while her driver and the pilot attempt to repair the plane, and proceeds to tell him why she has elected to live alone in the desert. Lancelot at once pounces upon what he perceives to be the parallel between her present home and that of her Victorian youth:

> "You come to a country where the thought is predominantly Mahommedan and the women are kept in submission, just as you must have been when you were young in Victorian England; you choose a place where the empty stretch of tawdry earth and the enormous unobstructed sky is in some odd way not unlike the Essex coast; you create about you the atmosphere of your 'dark home' (where the trees grew too near the house with its gloomy Victorian draperies) even here, where the sun is so strong that it has to be filtered through pierced gratings; you have even set yourself a little away from the village so that you can live in studied isolation, 'visiting no one, and with no one coming to see you'." […] "But why is that 'disastrous', if I am happy here, after all?" (S. Smith, 22–3)

Incidentally, this reveals more about Lancelot's schema of the Victorian age, which clearly has many of the slots of the Victorian-centred Gothic as outlined above: without being told, he automatically assumes that Alva's home must have been dark and gloomy, and hung with draperies, and that she must have been kept in "submission" and "isolation". More significantly, Lancelot's attitude also parallels the contemporary reader's sense of superiority over Victorian narrators or focalisers in the text. Viewing Alva's narrative from a 'modern' perspective, he automatically assumes that he has deeper insight into the psychological background of her actions:

> "[…] I wanted Papa to remain for ever with me in this dark unreal world of the past. I wanted to take Mama's place with Papa."
> Lancelot Jones sat up more alertly, and behind his glasses he raised his eyebrows.
> "That shocks you," said the old woman, smiling faintly.
> "Oh, not at all," Lancelot hastened to assure her. "I'm not shocked. We all know about the Oedipus complex now. The only thing about it that is horrifying to our twentieth-century minds is that the Victorians in their innocence found the perverse sexual relationship between parent and child 'pretty', something to be encouraged and fostered. I confess that does make me feel rather ill. It apparently never occurred to them that it was not only dangerous but often disastrous for the child."
> "Not for Miss Mitford, not for Elizabeth Barrett Browning, not – if I dare put myself among such august company – for me," said the sturdy old woman equably.
> "I don't think you quite understand," said Lancelot Jones kindly.
> "But I do," she said cheerfully. "You think I do not realise that I was in love with my own father; yet that is exactly what I have been at some pains to describe to you, my dear young man, in the simplest language possible, so that you could not fail to understand. It was a tragedy, and from it came tragedy. There is no need to veil one's meaning behind the timeless antics of Greek mythology."
> He arched his brows politely.
> "Yet you say it was not disastrous for you."
> "Look at me!" she said, sitting there with her hands on her knees like a fat brown goddess, placid and ironical. "Am I not what they call 'an integrated personality'?" (S. Smith, 20–21)

Alva's response reveals that the Victorians were by no means as naïve as her guest believes, and appears to neatly deconstruct his argument; like Ash in *Silence for his Worship*, Smith implicitly ridicules contemporary novelists' (and readers') propensity for psychoanalysing the Victorians.[687]

After this introductory conversation, the deictic centre shifts to Alva, who proceeds to narrate the reasons for her voluntary exile from England. With a number of interruptions from her guest, she outlines her personal history, dwelling particularly on the murder of her hated stepmother, suspicion of which falls on all members of her family in succession and of which Oliver Bridgewater, Alva's husband and her young stepmother's lover, is finally found guilty. The repeated pushes and pops from the twentieth-century frame narrative into Alva's reminiscences serve a double function: on the one hand, they provide an opportunity for revealing Lancelot's arrogant and unwarranted belief in his own superiority; on the other, they constantly remind the reader that the 'Victorian' aspect of the text is a fictional construct narrated by Alva and thus accessible to the reader only as mediated by her. At the end of Alva's story, the frame narrative is taken up again. Lancelot, who in the course of the story has become convinced that Alva is her stepmother's murderess and a homicidal maniac who allowed her husband to be hung for her own crime, begins to suspect that she has also put poison into the food she served him. The house which he himself has established as the mirror image of the 'Gothic' setting of Alva's story thus becomes the setting for his own 'Gothic' fantasies.

As it turns out, however, his suspicions are entirely groundless; after his return to England, he receives a parcel containing Alva Hines' 100th crime novel, "dedicated without his permission to the Patient Listener who had An Afternoon to Kill." Once again, the gloomy 'Victorian' setting is revealed as a fictional construct, and the contemporary listener is ridiculed for believing it to be a statement of fact. Interestingly, the structure of the novel allows the author both to challenge and to reaffirm the expectations based on the reader's textual schema of the Victorian-centred Gothic. The structure of the novel resembles that of *Fanny by Gaslight*:[688] again, there is a hierarchy of deictic planes, and the reader is eased gradually into the Victorian age by pushing first into a contemporary frame narrative, and only later in the text onto a lower-level 'Victorian' plane mediated by a character who has outlived the Victorian age and thus bridges the gap between then and now by offering explanatory comments. The novel differs from the other Victorian-centred Gothic texts in that it has two focalising characters: Lancelot for the contemporary frame narrative, and Alva for the 'Victorian' part of the story; by this strategy, Lancelot is set up in the same position as readers of the more traditional Victorian-centred Gothic novels described above, and he automatically makes the same assumptions about the narrator's naïveté that readers of the genre are invited to make. Unlike his real-world counterparts, however, he finds that his superior and patronising attitude is unjustified.

On the second level, however, the genre convention of the readers' superiority over the focalising consciousness is upheld. Readers might initially have been tempted to identify with Lancelot as the most 'modern' character in the novel; however, his patronising attitude and unfounded belief in his superiority (which is deconstructed through his unintelligent and unsympathetic interruptions of Alva's story), and not least his hysterical and entirely groundless

[687] Cf. ch. 4.2.2.
[688] Cf. ch. 4.2.3.

fear that Alva might have poisoned him soon confirm readers in their sense of superiority over him. This act of schema confirmation on the level of textual schemata, however, forces the reader to readjust her/his world schema of the Victorians: once Lancelot's sense of superiority has been revealed as unwarranted, the reader, whose opinions about the Victorians may have been in line with those of the twentieth-century focaliser, has to question her/his own assumptions about the Victorians, and adjust his 'Victorian' schema accordingly. In a sense, the text schema confirmation through the use of a naive focaliser compensates for the act of world schema disruption and refreshment occasioned by Alva's story, and by the surprise ending of the novel. This relies on the assumption that readers' schematic knowledge of the career options open to Victorian women does not extend to the fact that they might become writers –the majority of readers was evidently expected to miss the clue contained in the quote above when Alva compares explicitly herself to Miss Mitford and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

As has been shown, *Quaker Bride* and *Afternoon to Kill* self-consciously highlight and, to a certain extent, ridicule, some features of the Victorian-centred Gothic; ultimately, however, these novels reinforce the existing text schema. In striking contrast to other novels discussed in this chapter, Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953) presents a much more disturbing version of the Victorian-centred Gothic as the author both draws on and disrupts her readers' schematic expectations of the genre. In view of its postmodern metafictional dimension (which has prompted Robin Gilmour to include it in his list of neo-Victorian novels),[689] and its striking anticipation of cognitive approaches to literature, Laski's novel merits a more detailed analysis than the texts previously discussed in this chapter. In her introduction to the 1999 edition, P.D. James asserts that *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* is a novel about "that most atavistic of human horror [sic], confusion of identity and the realisation that one is inexorably trapped by circumstances which one can neither influence nor understand" (v). My analysis, drawing on cognitive poetics, analyses of its intertextual dimension, and psychoanalytical approaches, is an attempt to show how Laski achieves the nightmarish quality of her text.

5.1.3 Marghanita Laski: *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953)

5.1.3.1 Summary

The opening of the novel is set in London in the 1950s, after which the protagonist is transported to the year 1864. The actual events of the story cover only a few hours (part of the afternoon and evening of April 22, 1953/1864). The novel focuses on Melanie Langdon, a young suburban housewife and mother who has just learnt from her GP, Dr Gregory, that she is finally on the road to recovery from tuberculosis. The book begins with an expository section which introduces Melanie to the reader from the doctor's point of view. Dr Gregory, whose feelings for Melanie are an uneasy mixture of paternal tenderness and sexual attraction, describes her as an unconsciously seductive child-woman with a smile that seems to promise "things he was sure she had never known" (Laski,

[689] Cf. Gilmour, 189. It must be noted, however, that self-referentiality and metafictional elements are not only characteristic of historiographic metafiction (to use Linda Hutcheon's term), but are apparent in early historical novels from the Victorian age onwards. As Mariadele Boccardi observes, "[a] degree of metafictionality is inherent in the historical novel *qua* historical novel" (9).

Victorian, 10). According to his assessment, she is not clever, but could be cunning, if ever she had need to be – however, her sheltered existence renders this unnecessary. She is "utterly feminine" (Laski, *Victorian*, 15) in her relish for her traditional wifely duties and her readiness to mould herself to her husband's wishes, for whom she enacts the role of a sweet, rather stupid little girl evidently in need of male supervision and protection. Other childlike traits are her impetuosity, her boundless vitality despite her illness, which makes it virtually impossible for her to sit still or take matters calmly, and her impatient resentment of her enforced rest. Dr Gregory's attitude is expressed in his comparison of Melanie to a piece of Dresden china – fragile, essentially useless but eminently decorative –, his patronizing tone and his irritated wonderings why her husband never told her that "gentlemen visitors wanted something a bit more substantial to sit on" (Laski, *Victorian*, 10–11) than the flimsy papier-mâché chairs with which she has furnished her pale pink bedroom. Clearly, such practical considerations must be assumed to lie outside Melanie's mental scope.

After this introduction, the point of view shifts to Melanie, who acts as the focalizing character for the rest of the narration. There is very little action; however, the reader is allowed free access to Melanie's thoughts and emotions; she is thus firmly established as the focalising consciousness at the deictic centre. In the first scene, a dialogue between Melanie, her husband, Guy, and the doctor gives the reader the most salient details about her situation and case history. Melanie was diagnosed with TB during the first stages of her pregnancy with baby Richard, now eight months old. Despite her GP's objections, her determination to go through with the pregnancy has given her a healthy child, but also significantly exacerbated her condition. As a result, she has had to spend the time since her baby's birth in bed, isolated from Richard, who is cared for by a nurse and whom she is only allowed to see occasionally from a distance. The doctor's promise that she will be allowed to have Richard on her bed if the next two tests also provide negative results throws her into a fit of impatient excitement detrimental to her health. He tries to calm her down by promising her "a little treat to be going on with" (Laski, *Victorian*, 20): for the first time in eight months, she will be able to leave her bedroom to spend the afternoon lying on the living-room sofa – the Victorian chaise-longue of the title. In a flashback, the reader learns that this piece of furniture is the last one that she has been able to choose for herself. She remembers seeing it in an antiques shop on her way to the doctor's appointment which revealed her condition. Clumsy and ugly by modern standards, the attraction of the chaise-longue for Melanie lies in the spectacular embroidery that covers it, and which shows few signs of wear and tear; its only blemish is a brownish stain on the seat. In addition, she experiences a strange sense of déjà-vu, and an inexplicable, fleeting memory of a male body on hers on the chaise longue. Lovingly installed there by her adored and adoring husband, she falls asleep in a state of ecstatic happiness brought on by her delight in her surroundings, her love for her young family, and her hopes of finally recovering her health.

She awakes after a short nap to find herself in a room that she does not recognize: dark, cluttered with ugly, old-fashioned furniture and tasteless bric-à-brac, and pervaded by an unpleasant, musty smell of decay. Only the chaise-longue on which she is lying is familiar. Her confusion heightens when she is suddenly confronted with a dour, coldly antagonistic woman in Victorian dress who claims to be her sister. Shortly afterwards, the slovenly servant Lizzie and Mr

Endworthy, the vicar, enter upon the scene. Finally convinced that she is no longer asleep and hence not dreaming, she briefly toys with the idea that Adelaide is a madwoman who has abducted her, and from whom she will eventually be rescued by her husband. However, she is eventually forced to realize that she has indeed been transported to the year 1864. Gradually, she learns more about her Victorian alter ego, Milly Baines: like Melanie, Milly is suffering from TB – 'consumption' –, but unlike Melanie, she has no hope of recovering from her illness. She is cared for by her sister Adelaide, a prematurely aged spinster. Adelaide's unsympathetic attitude becomes understandable when it emerges that Milly has committed a 'sin' that has brought shame on the family (and has, it may be surmised, destroyed Adelaide's slim chances of ever finding a husband). The precise nature of Milly's sin has been covered up by Adelaide and is unknown to Melanie and the other Victorian characters. During a private meeting Melanie has requested, Mr Endworthy urges her to confess. Melanie in turn tries to convince him that she is, in fact, a visitor from another century, to which she wants to return. The conversation ends on a note of mutual confusion and misunderstanding, and Mr Endworthy's prayers, which Melanie had hoped would have the power of returning her to her old life, turn out to be ineffectual.

When Melanie remembers a passage from a story in which a monk returns to his monastery to find that a hundred years have passed while he listened to the song of a lark, she becomes convinced that this is the key to her situation: ecstasy is timeless, and after experiencing it, the soul returns to time at a random moment; her goal now becomes to recapture the ecstatic feeling she experienced upon falling asleep. Shortly afterwards, Mr Endworthy's curate Gilbert Charters joins them. To her surprise, Melanie finds that she feels a strong sexual attraction to him, which leads her to speculate inconclusively whether he is an earlier incarnation of her husband. It becomes clear that Mr Charters returns her feelings, but is unable to spend more than a few seconds alone with her. Her sexual attraction to Gilbert Charters and her memory of a male body crushing hers into the embroidered fabric of the chaise-longue show Melanie a way of achieving the feeling of ecstasy that might allow her to return to her former life; however, Milly's medical condition and Victorian conventions combine to bar this way of escape, as does her disgust at the idea of sleeping with a man who –from the point of view of her nineteen-fifties reality – is already dead.

After tea, Adelaide, Mr Endworthy, and Mr Charters leave to attend some charitable function. During their absence, Milly receives a visit from Dr Blundell. To her surprise and contrary to readers' expectations of Victorian conventions, she finds that Milly is on very familiar terms with her GP. Gradually, we gain some information about Milly's misdemeanours: after flirting heavily with the doctor, who still loves her, she has evidently jilted him for Gilbert Charters. Melanie, who has now convinced herself that the whole episode is a test of her courage and that she has been sent to the Victorian age in order to save Milly's life, insists that his treatment will only exacerbate her condition and that she knows from her 1950s experience what should be done. However, she is unable to overcome the doctor's stubborn (and from his point of view understandable) conviction in his own superior medical knowledge and his firm belief that Milly's case is hopeless anyway. Moreover, the scene also serves as a reminder of Melanie's naïveté, as her childish impetuosity and departure from Milly's script spoil her chances of convincing Dr Blundell. Readers may also be inclined to share the doctor's doubts about the

efficacy of her proposed treatment: “fresh air and sunshine” (Laski, *Victorian*, 143) and plenty of milk to drink do seem a somewhat inadequate remedy for a patient on the brink of death.

After he has left, she tries to cajole Lizzie into giving her a drink, but fails because Lizzie is afraid Adelaide might notice the smell on her return. In a key passage in the novel, Melanie reflects on the situation in what might be termed an ‘interior dialogue’ with Milly:

> We seem to be together now, she [i.e. Melanie] explained, you and I both hopeless. I think we did the same things, she told her, we loved a man and we flirted and we took little drinks, but when I did those things there was nothing wrong, and for you it was terrible punishable sin. It was no sin for Melanie, she explained, because the customs were different; sin changes, you know, like fashion. There can be no punishment for Melanie, only for you, and now the other side of the conversation awoke, the answer came, saying, But how do I know this is punishment, I was ill before it happened, would I be well if I were sinless? (Laski, *Victorian*, 147–8)

Once again, the reader is tempted to share Melanie’s facile assumption of superiority over the ‘Victorians’, only to find this deconstructed by Milly’s unanswerable question.

In a fit of despair, Melanie tries to determine whether the body in which she finds herself is her own or Milly’s. Under several layers of obstructive Victorian clothing, she is shocked to find an emaciated body which shows unmistakable signs of having borne a child, thus revealing the precise nature of Milly’s ‘sin’. In a final merger of Melanie and Milly, she screams for her baby, which brings Adelaide running to her bedside. Adelaide promises her that she will be allowed to see her son if she tells her whose child it is; this, however, Melanie cannot do because she only partially shares Milly’s memory. Adelaide misinterprets her admission that she “do[es] not know” (Laski, *Victorian*, 157): beside herself with rage at the idea that her sister has had more than one lover and is thus unable to name the father of her child, she attacks her physically. Her blows bring on a severe fit of coughing which results in a fatal haemorrhage (the bloodstain on the sofa). At the end of the novel, Melanie sees Milly on her deathbed, surrounded by Adelaide, Mr Endworthy, and the doctor, while Gilbert Charters prays for her soul. Then the focus shifts to a similar scene in the 1950s: Melanie sees her husband, the doctor, and Sister Smith bending over her body on the Victorian chaise-longue; however, she is too far away to see the expressions on their faces. The ending is open:

> Who is dying? cried the fainting voice [in Melanie’s brain], only Milly, it can only be Milly. I am not in that body, sinking and unconscious, we are only waiting for release, Milly to death and I to life […] and at last there was nothing but darkness, and after the darkness ecstasy, and after the ecstasy, death and life. (Laski, *Victorian*, 158–9)

5.1.3.2 Scripts, plans, and schemata

In the analyses presented in preceding chapters, the focus has mainly lain on the interaction between readers’ schemata of the Victorian age, and the ways in these are instantiated, confirmed or disrupted by fictional texts. In the case of Laski’s novel, however, schema theory applies on a number of levels, both within the story world, and on that of the reader’s real-world experience of reading and interpreting the text. Regarding the first, the reader becomes privy to Melanie’s confusion as she tries – and repeatedly fails – to find a schema which would enable her to understand and negotiate her situation. This confusion concerns two different aspects of her

experience: firstly, her interactions with other characters, and secondly, her own thoughts about her plight when she is alone.

Concerning the first issue, it is perhaps worth noting that from the very beginning, the Victorian chaise-longue is associated with the disruption and reversal of Melanie's and the salesman's 'buying' scripts:

> "It's this one that's taken my fancy," said Melanie, suddenly forgetting the need for feigned disinterest, and speaking from a profound want of this Victorian sofa. […]
> "It seems to have got a bit stained," said the young man, as they stood side by side, looking down on it. […]
> "It hardly shows," said Melanie, as if she were the salesman now. "Have you got room for it?" he asked, he too accepting this reversal of the roles, and discarding his proper duty of titillating and praising for the customer's part of hesitant withdrawal. (Laski, *Victorian*, 36)

After Melanie has been transported to the Victorian age, her situation involves a constant struggle to find the correct schemata: "If only I knew what it was all about, I could make party conversation, thought Melanie, but it's hard to know what would be safe, what I can ask and what I'm supposed to know. I made a bad bloomer calling her *Miss* Adelaide; fancy being sister to a creature like that" (Laski, *Victorian*, 61). Clearly, Melanie lacks both the personal scripts which would allow her to understand and fulfil the other characters' expectations of her, and the situational scripts needed for life in 1860s London. As far as the latter are concerned, however, readers may imagine themselves in a privileged position: in all likelihood, textual and paratextual cues (most notably of course the title) have already instantiated a schema most readers are familiar with from their reading, if not from personal experience. Consequently, the reader is less at a loss to discover "what it [is] all about" and thus able to smile at the incongruity of transferring Melanie's 1950s "party conversation" script to a Victorian sickroom. Likewise, readers are able to recognize stereotyped 'Victorian' episodes such as Adelaide's embarrassment when her account of the history of the chaise-longue forces her to mention the word "*legs*" (Laski, *Victorian*, 82). The same applies to stock scenes such as, for example, the vicar coming to tea. On the other hand, however, the fact that the reader shares Melanie's real-world schemata also contributes to our partial identification with Melanie.[690] It should be noted, however, that the text to some extent precludes complete empathy or even identification with the focalising character, as readers resist aligning themselves with the negative attributes (naïveté, passivity, self-centredness) mapped onto the focaliser in the first part of the narrative.[691] This contributes to the position of apparent superiority that the text initially constructs for the reader. As will be outlined below, the repeated deconstruction of this position significantly contributes to the unsettling effect of Laski's novel.

Melanie's behaviour conforms to the pattern outlined by Cook (83ff.), who, following Schank and Abelson, proposes that experiences which are too unpredictable or novel to be negotiated by scripts are dealt with on the basis of plans, which in turn aim at the realization of certain goals. In the absence of an applicable script, Melanie single-mindedly tries to discover a plan that will enable her to fulfil her goal of returning to the twentieth century. As Cook (83) points out, knowledge of a character's

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[690] For this aspect of readerly empathy or identification, cf. Bray, 66; also ch. 1.4.2.

[691] For a similar argument concerning readerly identification, cf. Stockwell, "Texture", 150f.; also ch. 1.4.2.

plans enables readers to understand this character's actions even if they do not share the character's scripts. In this particular case, however, it also allows readers to evaluate Melanie's actions by measuring her behaviour against the 'proper' Victorian scripts, and thus to predict the possible outcome of her endeavours. Unlike Melanie, the reader is quick to realize the incongruity of Melanie's attempt to force her own plan onto Mr Endworthy without making allowances for the vicar's own schema-based expectations of a sick-room visit. Not surprisingly, the resultant conversation is reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd, as Melanie tries to convince the vicar that she comes from the future, but is unable to frame her thoughts into the appropriate words, since she only has access to Milly Baines' vocabulary. Mr Endworthy in turn is unable to understand Melanie's references to a brighter, happier future; for him, they instantiate a theological schema associated with death and resurrection, and accordingly he follows his script for consoling the terminally ill and dying.

For most of the book, the events around Milly are fairly stereotypical and serve to re-inforce the reader's schema of Victorian conventions and conversational rules, and there is nothing to suggest that this schema is likely to be disrupted. As a consequence, we are forced to radically alter our schema of the Victorian era in order to accommodate the fact that Milly's doctor turns out to have been her former lover, and that Melanie, who is unconsciously able to access some of Milly's memories and experience, is able to draw on Milly's highly unconventional personal script for his visit. Our feeling of superiority over Melanie vanishes when we discover that we have let ourselves be misled into believing that we "know what this is about", only to find that a radical act of schema refreshment is called for. It also highlights the fact that scripts are essentially personal schemata that vary between individuals.[692] Thus, the reader's preconceived idea of a stereotypical, uniform essence of 'Victorianism' has to be discarded in favour of a recognition of the individuality of the Victorians, but also re-inforces the similarity between Melanie and Milly as the least 'Victorian' characters.

Another schema that is radically disrupted is that of 'time' as constructed from the readers' everyday experience. Once readers have come to accept Melanie's explanation for her strange predicament (an explanation which, as I shall argue below, it is virtually impossible to reject), they have to discard the notion of linear time in favour of the equation of time with space. This is re-inforced by Melanie's use of the spatial adverbs *here/there* rather than the expected temporal adverbs *now/then* to distinguish between her situation in the 1950s and in the Victorian age, which will be discussed in the section on deixis below.[693]

Scripts and schemata are not only applicable to the conversations and interpersonal encounters within the text; rather, the search for a schema that explains her plight is the essential theme of the novel. In this sense, the novel becomes a story about reading and interpreting Melanie's story, and the reader's identification with Melanie finds a parallel in Melanie's identification of herself as the reader of Milly's (and her own) story. The reader and the focalising character not only share the same schemata, they also share the common goal of finding those that they need in order to understand the text. Melanie herself formulates this thought when she tries

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[692] Cf. Cook, 84; 150; also ch. 1.4.1.

[693] In this context, it must be stressed that the equation of time with space in Laski's novel is not merely a conceptual metaphor, but must be taken literally as a feature of the story world which clearly distinguishes it from reality.

to convince herself that "what [the doctor] thought didn't matter, Milly's living or dying being unreal, a *story*" (Laski, *Victorian*, 141; italics in original). In order to understand the story in which she is caught, however, Melanie first has to decide which genre her story belongs to; once she has discovered the underlying text schema, this will allow her to know which course events are expected to take, and thus influence them in a way that leads to a happy ending: "I must find the pattern, a new pattern, the right pattern" (Laski, *Victorian*, 125). After quickly discarding her first attempts at an explanation – that she is dreaming, and that she has fallen into the hands of a madwoman who has kidnapped her – Melanie relies increasingly on literary schemata to make sense of what is happening to her. Her naïve conviction that the vicar's prayers will have the power of returning her to her former life is born from the fact that "in the stories, ghosts always go when you pray" (Laski, *Victorian* , 88); conversely, the vicar tries to make sense of Melanie's behaviour by surmising that she has been "reading Old Mother Shipton" (Laski, *Victorian*, 115). Despite the fact that the ghost story schema is quickly revealed as inappropriate, Melanie is evidently right in supposing that her knowledge of literature rather than her everyday experience has to be drawn on in order to find "the pattern".

In the end, it is a literary schema which allows her to 'read' her situation, which she interprets in terms of a quest, or, as she says, a 'challenge'. "That is a pattern, she decided excitedly, now I have only to settle what is right – and this was not difficult, for the phrases forged by many, many generations needing courage were waiting in the storehouse of her mind. To master my fate, to smile in the face of danger, to keep my head, grasp the nettle, put a bold face on it, go out to meet it, struggle and strive and do the best one can" (Laski, *Victorian*, 126–7). Interestingly, this realization goes hand in hand with an idea that emphasizes Melanie's existence as a fictional character: in order to fulfil the expectations of the pattern, there has to be an outside authority to assess her behaviour: "Did someone – Fate, Providence, God? – place me here to see how I did, and if I do right, then I shall be free? […] and *someone*, watching, will assess and judge, award the marks, decide if I pass and fail." (Laski, *Victorian*, 126–7; italics in original). Once again, the fictionality of Melanie's existence is foregrounded as the text reminds readers of their position as outside observers. Once again, the reader is set up in a position of superiority, only to find that this is deconstructed as the quote simultaneously hints at and denies the possibility of finding the key to Melanie's situation: the reader may be in a position to judge, but, like Melanie, she/he does not know the underlying "pattern" against which to assess her actions.

Melanie is soon forced to realize, moreover, that showing courage is only a means to an end but not an end in itself. Since a quest needs an object, she convinces herself that this object is to save Milly's life.[694] However, Dr Blundell's stubborn insistence on his own superior medical knowledge (which, after all, does not seem entirely unreasonable from his point of view) prevents her from doing so. By now Melanie is sure that "Milly's living and dying [are] unreal, a *story*, and the need to save her nothing but the instrument of release for Melanie, nothing in terms of real living and dying" (Laski, *Victorian*, 141). In the end, however, Melanie has to discard even this schema and awakes to the full horror of her situation when she realizes that "there is no shape or

[694] Melanie's thoughts thus follow a pattern Lowenthal (26f.) identifies as characteristic of time-travel fiction, i.e. an urge to improve the past by 'bringing it up to date' in order to improve the time-traveller's own conditions in her/his new surroundings.

pattern and nothing I can do" (Laski, *Victorian*, 150); there is no schema which is applicable to the story world in which she finds herself, and thus no way of escape for her, and no definitive means for the reader to resolve the open ending.

The final passage of the novel appears to contain headers which instantiate conflicting schemata: on the one hand, out-of-body experiences often feature in the reports of people who have returned from the brink of death. On this basis, the reader might conceivably draw on a real-world schema of death which includes such an experience, and might therefore conclude that both Melanie and Millie are dying. However, this explanation is contradicted by the first part of the story, since it is emphasised that the assertion that Melanie is getting better rests not on her subjective impressions, but on the scientific 'facts' provided by the laboratory results. On the other hand, it must be remembered that time, in the story world, does not proceed chronologically, but rather exhibits the same characteristics as space, in the sense that all moments in time exist simultaneously, and that (random) movement between them is possible. On this basis, it is equally likely that the applicable schema is much less dramatic: Melanie, finally set free by the 'ecstasy' of Millie's death, has once again stepped out of time and is thus able to see both moments, that of Millie's death in the Victorian era and her own waking-up in the 1950s, from a distance. In the first schema, the "darkness" mentioned in the passage equals death; in the second, '(time) travel' schema, it might be construed as the effect of Melanie's re-entry into time (as through a tunnel).

It is interesting to note that throughout the novel, Melanie's departures from established scripts foil her plans or presage disaster: her departure from Mr Endworthy's religious script spoils her chances of enlisting the vicar's help; her disruption of Milly's interpersonal script prevents her from convincing Dr Blundell of the efficacity of her proposed treatment; and, perhaps most importantly, the very act of buying the fatal chaise-longue is associated with the radical disruption of a situational script. In terms of schema theory, Laski's text therefore embodies an intriguing paradox: on the one hand, I have shown that the text repeatedly disrupts and refreshes the schemata readers bring to bear on its interpretation; on the other hand, however, it also appears to question the desirability of schema disruption and change.

As I have argued above, the description of Melanie's surroundings contains all the typical headers which usually instantiate the text schema of the Victorian-centred Gothic subgenre, one of whose components are naïve and potentially unreliable narrators. As has been shown, however, Laski's text repeatedly instantiates this schema only to disrupt it and overthrow the readers' schema-based expectations. This feature of the text, which continually invites readers to draw on their world and text schemata, but finally rejects their conclusions, will also be explored in the following section.

5.1.3.3 Deixis

The nightmare quality of the novel hinges not only on this repeated failure of apparently applicable scripts and schemata and the uncanny parallel of a character within the book trying to make sense of the story along the same lines as the readers themselves. What is even more unsettling to the reader is the consequence which this double identification of the reader with Melanie and Melanie with both the reader and Milly has on the deictic centre of the narrative.

Melanie, the focalizing character, is the focalising WHO of the second part of the text, beginning with the point at which Melanie falls asleep on the chaise-longue and awakes to find herself in the Victorian era. It is this shift to Melanie's perceptual deixis which reinforces the reader's sense of identification with Melanie as the reader's deictic centre is mapped onto hers. In terms of compositional deixis, the temporal and spatial shift to an unknown location in the Victorian age, which coincides with the push into Melanie's perceptual deixis, is marked by a break in the text, which begins on a new page after the shift. Linguistically, this section is characterised by variation between first and third-person pronouns, often within the same sentence, as the reader pushes into and pops out of Melanie's thoughts. While this does little to alter the deictic centre of the narrative, it nonetheless serves to foreground the fictionality of the story world, as the existence of two separate but complementary deictic planes is contrary to our real-world experience of deixis. To some extent, the rapid shifts between these two deictic planes also undermine the reader's identification with Melanie by setting up the illusion of a more 'objective' outside perspective that complements Melanie's thoughts. This strategy adds to the impression of superior knowledge which Laski consciously builds up and deconstructs in the course of the narrative. It must be stressed, however, that this is an illusion, as both planes – that of textual 'reality' and the lower-level plane of Melanie's thoughts – are accessible to the reader only as mediated through Melanie's perceptual deixis.

It is precisely this shift to Melanie as the deictic centre which initiates the gradual disintegration of deictic patterns – especially the WHO, WHERE and WHEN components of the deictic centre – within the text. This becomes evident first on the level of temporal and spatial deixis: "I know what the Victorian age was like, of course I do, except that being here, it isn't like that at all. It's just like now […]" (Laski, *Victorian*, 95). The use of the past tense of the beginning of the sentence indicates a deictic centre located in the 1950s present; in the second part of the sentence, however, this changes to "isn't", thus locating the centre in the Victorian age. The same applies to the term "here", which might be taken to point towards Melanie's present location in a Victorian drawing room, or, as I argue above, more generally as meaning "in the Victorian age". The meaning of "now", however, remains ambiguous: if – in accordance with readers' everyday experience, which demands a correlation between "here" and "now" – it is taken to refer to the Victorian present, the sentence is obvious to a degree that renders it virtually meaningless; if it refers to the 1950s present, it presupposes a shift away from the Victorian deictic centre indicated by the use of the present tense at the beginning of the sentence and hence the dissolution of the expected correlation between "here" and "now". Incidentally, the use of "here" to refer to Melanie's temporal position in the Victorian age rather than her spatial location in the sisters' drawing room prepares the ground for the radical refreshment of the readers' 'time' schema that (as I have already mentioned) will be called for later in the text.

Melanie's confusion about WHERE and WHEN mirrors her initial determination not to accept the reality of her experience in the Victorian age. As this irregularity only occurs in conjunction with passages of free indirect thought, readers will initially accept it as a reflection of Melanie's confusion; an irregularity that can be resolved by resorting to the higher-level deictic plane of 'textual reality' expressed through those sentences featuring the third-person pronoun

(which reflect Melanie's perceptions concerning her immediate surroundings).[695] This is complemented by the reader's everyday experience that what can be seen and felt must *now* be *here*, and that in common usage, "here" and "now" refer to these immediate surroundings and the present moment rather than another place in the far-distant future. In contrast to Melanie, moreover, readers are from the outset aware of the fact that Melanie is a fictional character who inhabits a story world; they are thus more ready than Melanie to willingly suspend disbelief and accept that the setting has changed to Adelaide's and Milly's drawing room, 1864 – easily recognizable from the 'Victorian' clues scattered across the text –, probably in the assumption that the explanation for this sudden change will presently be revealed.[696] There is, of course, nothing particularly unusual about this awareness. What is perhaps unusual, however, is that this awareness heightens the sense of superiority already engendered by Dr Gregory's description of Melanie. Once again, this sense of superiority is deconstructed as Melanie herself realizes that Milly's life is "a *story*" (Laski, *Victorian*, 141; italics in original).

In conformity to the reader's expectations, the deictic confusion evidenced by Melanie's thoughts eventually disappears once she has come to accept her altered spatial and temporal position.[697] However, it becomes increasingly apparent that Melanie's sense of selfhood is inextricably linked to her existence in the 1950s; as she comes to accept the new meaning of "here" and "now", the term "I" starts to disintegrate. It is this strategy of dissociating the terms *here*, *now* and *I*, so alien to readers' real-world experience, that partly accounts for the unsettling, nightmarish quality of the text. As Zubin and Hewitt (152ff.) point out,[698] it is not uncommon for authors to unsettle the reader briefly by creating a sense of insecurity concerning one of the aspects (i.e. WHO, WHEN, WHERE, WHAT) of the deictic centre; however, in the instances cited in their analysis, the fleeting insecurity that the reader experiences is usually cleared up as the narrative progresses, or can be resolved on the basis of the reader's world knowledge. Moreover, it must be stressed that these instances refer to the location of the deictic centre as a whole, but not to the correlation between individual deictic markers.

What is so unusual about Laski's text is that the feeling of uncertainty about the meaning of "I" and "she", the markers that ought to point towards the focalising WHO component of the deictic centre, can neither be resolved with the aid of textual clues nor on the basis of schematic knowledge that readers bring to the text from their real-world experience. As outlined above, Melanie's initial confusion about "here" and "now" presents no grave problem to the reader's understanding of the novel. It has been argued above that this feature initially establishes the reader in a position of superiority over the focalizing character; a feeling engendered by the existence of a perceived 'outside perspective' (provided by those sentences featuring the third-

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[695] As outlined above, subjective sentences can be questioned (unlike objective ones, which must be accepted as 'true' within the fictional framework of the story world) and are open to 'correction' by the reader by contrasting the character's mental model of the story world with the reader's own (cf. Wiebe, 269; also ch. 1.4.2).

[696] Guy Cook emphasises the "overriding belief human readers have, often exploited in literature, that the texts they read are coherent if only they can find the key" (84).

[697] Cf. for example *Laski, Victorian*, 152, where "here" means the Victorian age, and "there" refers to the 1950s.

[698] Cf. also Segal, "Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory", 77.

person pronoun, which, though not 'objective' in the true sense of the word, nonetheless reflect a higher-level deictic plane than Melanie's thoughts, i.e. that of the 'reality' of the story world) that sets up the illusion that readers know more about Melanie's position that she does herself. In the second instance of deictic instability discussed here, however, this illusion of 'objectivity' is finally destroyed, and the reader is reminded that the 'reality' of the story world is a subjective account mediated through Melanie's perceptual deixis. This heightens the reader's insecurity as s/he is made aware of the fact that there is no objective reality against which to assess the validity of Melanie's subjective point of view. The reader is privy to the focalizing character's thoughts and thus witness to Melanie's growing sense of panic and confusion as she herself starts to question her identity.

Initially, it appears that Melanie has inexplicably exchanged her body and position in spacetime for that of another woman, Milly Baines. Increasingly, however, she becomes convinced that this is not an accurate description of her situation, and that Milly and Melanie in fact share the same body. "Milly" is thus not merely the name by which the Victorian characters address Melanie, but in fact denotes a separate individual whom the focalizing character refers to as "she" in those moments when she is clearly Melanie, whom she addresses as "you" in a mental conversation, and whom she includes in "we" when she stresses the similarities of their position. Laski uses the notion of the 'embodied' nature of human consciousness (which also lies at the heart of deixis) to disconcerting effect: as the two women share one brain and thus one consciousness, the reader has access to the thoughts of both, without being able to clearly distinguish between the two. Milly thus can be seen to vie with Melanie for the position in the deictic centre – uniquely, a shift from one focalizing character to another, and hence the substitution of one referent of "I" for another, does not bring about a corresponding shift in the meaning of "here" and "now" as both focalising WHOs occupy the same spatial and temporal position, i.e. are located within the same body.

This is re-inforced by the higher-level deictic plane characterised by the use of the third-person pronoun as the name "Milly" begins to appear alongside "Melanie" to refer to the focalizing character. The text thus gradually deconstructs what Zubin and Hewitt term the "folk belief in the unitary nature of experience" (Zubin and Hewitt, 131) which is essential for the construction of a deictic centre. Essentially, readers are left with two possible options, neither of which resolves this deictic dilemma: since there is no objective perspective on events, readers are either forced to conclude that Melanie is gradually becoming insane, or to accept that the story world created by Laski is governed by rules which are so far removed from those of the real world that they cannot be understood on the basis of readers' experience of deixis and real-world schemata.

In both cases, the reader is forced to reject all attempts at interpretation as futile: in the first instance, readers are left without any reliable foundation upon which to base their assumptions because the world which the reader experiences through Melanie's eyes exists only in her imagination; in the second instance, readers are barred from drawing any conclusions whatsoever. In both cases, the focalizing character has to be accepted as the only authority, because there are no real-world schemata which can be used as a yardstick against which to measure her assumptions, and real-world logic is not applicable to the story world. This is a focalizing character, however, who may be unreliable or even mad and who is at the very least naïve, and

who insists on the fictionality of her own experience, but fails to discover the text schema that would lend coherence to the narrative and reveal the underlying storyworld logic. Deixis, like schema theory, thus serves to foreground the metatextual dimension of Laski's text, but also fails to explain the open ending. Indeed, the final passage appears deliberately constructed to confuse the reader, as both the WHERE and the WHEN components of the deictic centre are shifted to an unknown location, while Melanie is retained as the focalising WHO. This not only violates the WHO-WHERE-WHEN-continuum postulated by Zubin and Hewitt (143)[699] but also leaves the reader uncertain as to whether a push to a lower-level (i.e. the perceptions of a dying woman) or a pop to a higher-level deictic plane that exists 'above' the basic level of storyworld reality has taken place. In fact, the shift appears to overthrow the entire concept of deixis based on embodied perception. By suggesting that the focalising WHO has become, as it were, disembodied and exists independently of time and space, the text leaves it open whether this voiding of WHEN and WHERE prepares the reader for a shift to another location within spacetime, or whether they presage a final voiding of the focalising WHO.

5.1.3.4 Intertextuality

Laski's use of intertextual allusions re-inforces the theme of 'fictionality' and adds another layer of meaning to the text, while also suggesting possible answers to some of the more pressing questions engendered by Melanie's unusual experience. As I have argued above, the most obvious facet of the intertextual dimension of Laski's text is the parallel with other novels belonging to the Victorian-centred Gothic genre, as Laski both draws on and rejects the reader's expectations based on the established text schema. However, this schema fails to account for Melanie's unexpected journey back to the Victorian age. It also leaves the reader with two irreconcilable interpretations of the final passage: the text schema demands the happy ending characteristic of the Victorian-centred Gothic genre, but there is nothing in the text to indicate whether this demand will be met, or whether the ending represents yet another act of schema disruption. As it is, the ending of the novel appears modelled on the real-world experience of waking from a dream or nightmare rather than on the text schema of the Victorian-centred Gothic, as the reader is jolted back onto the deictic level of the real world at the very moment when the 'truth' about Melanie's "death and life" appears about to be revealed.

However, the text contains a number of further intertextual allusions which throw additional light on the issue and open up further avenues of enquiry. Shortly after Melanie's awakening in the Victorian age, a quotation from a story she has read which suddenly comes to her mind provides her with a possible solution to the problem of how she came to be transported to another moment in time: drawing on her memory of the legend of a monk who returns to his monastery to find that a hundred years have passed while he stood entranced in the song of a lark, she becomes convinced that her feeling of ecstatic happiness lies at the root of her journey to the Victorian age.[700] According to the legend, ecstasy equates timelessness; on this basis, Melanie surmises that

[699] Cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[700] As Marghanita Laski (*Ecstasy* 111) herself notes, it was this legend, which the author herself read in Arthur Mee's *A Thousand Beautiful Things* during her childhood, which gave her the idea for the novel.

the soul's return into time is merely a random event.[701] (Whether Milly is, in fact, an earlier reincarnation of Melanie is left open; however, there is some evidence – such as Melanie's memories and recognition of certain people and events in Milly's life. Her feelings on first seeing the Victorian chaise-longue in the 1950s are a case in point: "[…] there was only her body's need to lie on the chaise-longue, and an overwhelming assurance, or was it a memory, of another body that painfully crushed hers into the berlin-wool" (Laski, *Victorian*, 37). Another explanation put forward by Melanie is a form of telepathy, which allows her to partially share the thoughts of the people surrounding her, and thus gives her access to their knowledge about Milly.) There are several versions of this legend, and several sources where Melanie could possibly have read it; however, the wording of the quote she remembers is exactly the one used by J.M. Barrie in *Courage* (10): "*Time had been blotted out while he listened to the lark*" (Laski, *Victorian*, 112; italics in original). Despite the fact that this is nowhere explicitly acknowledged in the text, it ties in with the fact that "courage" suddenly becomes a key term when Melanie formulates her idea of being on a quest, and when she initially hopes that by showing courage, she will be transported back to the twentieth century. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that there appears to be no version of this legend in which the monk does, in fact, return to his former life, which may throw some doubt onto the validity of Melanie's interpretation. Moreover, it is perhaps also significant that Barrie's version of the story occurs at a juncture in his text which deals with accounts of famous explorers (most notably Scott) who are renowned both for their courage in the face of adversity and for the fact that they lost their lives on their expeditions.

In addition, Laski's concept of ecstasy shows some parallels to Burke's notion of the sublime in the sense that it represents "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (36).[702] In contrast to earlier notions of the sublime, Burke distinguished between sublimity and beauty, maintaining that the former was essentially connected to states of terror and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of an omnipotent deity, most notably the experience of imminent (violent) death.[703] It is this link to the Gothic novel which accounts for the most obvious and also the richest facet of the intertextual dimension of Laski's work. This is highlighted when Melanie draws a parallel between her own experience and the ghost stories she has read. Similar to Victorian writers of Gothic fiction, Laski eschews the medieval settings and supernatural monsters of earlier Gothic texts in favour of a more subtly psychologized version of the uncanny.[704] As in these Victorian texts, the uncanny in *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* is situated close to home – is, in fact, inextricably bound up with the place that Melanie is forced to consider her new home, as the framed motto ironically attests. Laski thus draws on Freud's notion of the uncanny as outlined in his essay on the topic.[705] Freud argues that the binary opposition between the uncanny (*unheimlich*) and that which we regard as familiar and 'homely' (*heimlich*) is undermined by the existence of the Oedipus complex and its close connection to the home and family life. The *unheimlich* for Freud ("Uncanny", 347) thus develops into a sub-category of the

[701] Cf. Laski, *Victorian*, 141.
[702] Qtd. in A. Smith, 11.
[703] Cf. A. Smith, 10f.
[704] Cf. A. Smith, 87.
[705] Cf. Freud, "Uncanny", 339–76.

heimlich as the home (as the site where the Oedipus complex is enacted) becomes associated with sexual repression and feelings of dread, horror and anxiety.[706]

Moreover, Freud's concept of the uncanny is closely connected to the idea of the double as a central feature of Gothic literature. According to Freud, children go through a stage of primary narcissism, during which they experience their double as "a preservation against extinction" ("Uncanny", 357).[707] This stage ends when the subject develops a moral conscience, which allows it to regulate its actions in a social context, but which draws on the subject's capacity for self-regarding (and, hence, self-criticism) implicit in the earlier stage. In adult experience, the image of the double thus becomes linked to moral censorship and thus to the limited and finite nature of our existence – "From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud, "Uncanny", 357).[708] This explains why the uncanny is so closely connected to images of death and dead bodies, and most specifically to the return of the dead. In Freud's interpretation, this "image of repetition" (A. Smith, 14) is symbolic of an urge to relive (and thus possibly resolve) repressed Oedipal traumata.[709] To some extent, Melanie's morbid imaginings echo Freud's analysis:

> […] Milly and Adelaide and Lizzie, all dead and rotten long ago. This body I am in, it must have rotted filthily […] It's all dead and rotten, […] these hands, all this body stinking, rotten, dead. She shuddered, and knew she was shuddering in a body long ago dead. Her flesh crawled away, and it was flesh that had turned green and liquescent and at last become damp dust with the damp crumbling coffin-wood. (Laski, *Victorian*, 70–1)

> For an instant she felt his [i.e. Gilbert's] body on hers, […] and then enormous disgust blotted the picture out. He is dead, thought Melanie, to link love and death is horrible, to think of being touched by the dead. (Laski, *Victorian*, 126)

Typically, however, Laski both draws on and plays with Freud's interpretation, as the trauma that Melanie is forced to confront is not her own but that of her Victorian 'double', Milly: it is her realization that Milly has been separated from her child that brings on the final crisis, and which may be the means of setting her free. On the one hand, this interpretation appears to derive added validity from the parallel between Burke's idea of the sublime and Laski's concept of ecstasy; on the other hand, however, it appears to be implicitly contradicted by the book's motto, a quotation from T.S. Eliot's *Song For Simeon*, which, immediately preceding the quotation chosen by Laski, also contains the lines "Not for me the martyrdom, the *ecstasy* of thought and prayer, / Not for me the ultimate vision" (my italics), thus apparently denying the possibility of this way of escape for Melanie.

Taken in conjunction with Freudian ideas, however, the motto opens up another possible reading of Laski's text in which the roles of Melanie and her double are reversed and Milly, rather than Melanie, becomes the central figure. In fact, Eliot's line "I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me", whose significance is somewhat puzzling when applied to Melanie, is more readily adaptable to Milly's situation; it is she who is clearly "dying in her own death", and, if we hypothesise that she has later been re-born as Melanie, will also die in "the deaths of those after [her]". On the basis of the assumption that it is Milly who has by some means been temporarily

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[706] Cf. A. Smith, 13.
[707] Cf. also A. Smith, 14.
[708] Cf. also A. Smith, 14.
[709] Cf. Freud, "Uncanny", 364; A. Smith, 14.

transported to the 1950s, only to be taken back to her native Victorian age,[710] her horror of death and morbid fantasies of dead bodies returning to life bear out Freud's assumption of a repressed trauma (albeit not of an Oedipal nature) that needs to be confronted: the text appears to suggest that she has repressed the traumatic experiences of illegitimate motherhood and separation from her new-born child and only recalls them when she sees the swollen breasts on her naked body.

This role reversal would imply that it is Milly who must be regarded as 'real' (in contrast to her 'fictional' double, Melanie), and that the reader has been tricked into accepting Melanie's version of events as the most reliable account of 'reality' on the level of Laski's story world. To some extent, this is borne out by evidence in the text: from the beginning of the 'Victorian' episode onwards, Melanie repeatedly stresses the fact that it is Milly's body in which she now finds herself, thus marking herself as the intruder who has usurped Milly's role and temporarily silenced Milly's own voice. Towards the end of the novel, as Milly increasingly reasserts her presence, Melanie herself confirms the close connection between identity/reality and the body, arguing that she can only hope to retain her identity as Melanie and to return to the 1950s if the body which she now lives in turns out to be her own rather than Milly's. It is this hope that urges her to disprove her initial assumption that the body is indeed that of Milly, and which, as she undresses in order to get a better view of the body, leads to the realization that Milly has borne a child and thus to the confrontation of her traumata.

It is important to note, however, that Laski's novel is not merely a horror story incidentally set in the Victorian age; it also makes use of twentieth-century schemata of the 'Victorian' to comment on contemporary reality. As such, it belongs to the category of historical novels that David Cowart labels the "distant mirror" (9), i.e. which project their own age into the past and use the past to comment on the contemporary world, and which appear to suggest that "historical change might be largely illusion" (11).[711] On the surface, Laski's text conforms to the conventions of the Victorian-centred Gothic subgenre, both in its presentation of Victorian interiors and its emphasis on the restrictive moral code and social conventions that governed women's lives at the time, metaphorically reflected in Melanie's inability to speak her thoughts because Milly's restricted vocabulary condemns her to silence. As has been shown above, Melanie herself points out the obvious parallels between herself and Milly, and the enormous advantage her life in the mid-twentieth century gives her over the latter.

However, readers are not invited to endorse Melanie's analysis of her situation unreservedly: Milly's rejection of Melanie's facile identification of her illness as punishment for her "sin" remains unanswered (and unanswerable), and highlights the fact that Melanie's point of view is always open to question. Moreover, there are further parallels between the two women which Melanie fails to notice, in that they are both unable to act on their own behalf, as illness and social conventions combine to curtail their freedom. This is emphasised in the final passage, where both women are shown as equally trapped and powerless, and surrounded by their carers/keepers. It must be stressed, however, that Melanie does not long for freedom, but merely for an abdication

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[710] This interpretation obviously runs counter to our everyday concept of linear time, according to which the idea of re-living past experiences appears vastly more probable than that of pre-living, as it were, future ones; however, it has to be borne in mind that Laski's text is informed by a different 'time' schema, i.e. that of time as a fourth spatial dimension, all of which exists simultaneously and which can be accessed at different points.

[711] Cf. ch. 1.2.

of responsibility (throughout the book, she longs for her husband to rescue her, or looks to other men – Mr Endworthy, Dr Blundell, Gilbert Charters – to help her) and a return to her gilded cage, where she is kept in dependence on her nurse and doctor, and in willing submission to her husband. As Melanie herself asserts, the Victorian era is indeed "just like now". The text is thus open to a subversive reading as a feminist critique of mid-twentieth-century middle-class society; it can also be read as a bleak commentary on the futility of human existence in general, as the contemporary world of the reader is compared to a story world that has no underlying logic, and thus leaves no room for meaningful and goal-oriented action.

5.1.3.4 Conclusion

As I have attempted to show in my analysis, *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* both belongs to and transcends the genre of the Victorian-centred Gothic. Like other exponents of this particular subgenre, Laski's novel highlights the fact that history is itself a narrative,[712] and the past as recreated in contemporary discourse is "largely an artefact of the present" (Lowenthal, xvi). The 'Victorian' world of these novels is clearly, in Melanie's words, "nothing but a *story*", with little or no pretensions to verisimilitude or authenticity.

In a sense, the Victorian-centred Gothic can be regarded as a de-politicised version of the anti-Victorian attitude characteristic of the interwar period.[713] In addition, it may also mark a reaction against nostalgic recreations of the Victorian era in the Victorian-centred romances and reminiscences discussed in the following chapters, and the nascent nostalgia for 'quaint' Victoriana that characterised the period;[714] one case in point is of course Laski's *Victorian Chaise-Longue*, where Melanie's hankering for the eponymous piece of furniture lies at the root of her horrifying experience. Paradoxically, however, the typical texts of the 'Gothic' category (with the notable exception of *The Victorian Chaise-Longue*) also show marked parallels with the Victorian-centred romances discussed in the following chapter in that they are determinedly escapist, constructing a version of the 'Victorian' entirely divorced from present-day reality. In this respect, they fulfil the same 'consolatory' function that critics of the neo-Victorian novel of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries have noted regarding the treatment of Victorian sexuality in contemporary texts, which allows us to construct a narrative of sexual progress.[715] In contrast to more recent novels, however, the Victorian-centred Gothic of the first half of the twentieth century is not primarily concerned with Victorian sexuality and gender roles; nonetheless, the argument holds good at a more general level: by presenting the Victorian era as dark, gloomy, and repressive, these texts imply that, although in some respects still far from ideal, our present condition is vastly improved in comparison with that of the Victorians. As I have attempted to show, this impression is further strengthened by the use of naïve and unintelligent narrators, which further enhance the reader's sense of superiority. Moreover, the

[712] Cf. Cowart, 14ff.

[713] Cf. Gardiner, 19–36.

[714] Cf. Conekin, 139f.

[715] Cf. Loesberg, 363; also Brosh, 138ff., who analyses this topic in conjunction with contemporary film versions of Victorian novels; Cora Kaplan (85ff.) likewise explores this topic in chapter three of *Victoriana*. For the 'consolatory' function of neo-Victorian fiction, cf. Kaplan, 95.

'Victorian' past – ugly, dusty and dingy as it may seem in these novels – can nonetheless be read as a safe haven from the problems and anxieties of the present.

In this respect, the perceived rigidity and conventionality of the Victorian era becomes an asset rather than a drawback, implying that, once a given set of rules had been learnt, life was simple and straightforward, and in most cases led to a happy ending. As Lowenthal suggests, the attraction of the past often lies in the fact that it can be "ordered and domesticated" (69), and, with the benefit of hindsight, appears more readily understandable than the fragmented and confusing present.[716] In this respect, "termination" (Lowenthal, 69) is one of the key assets of the past; even its drawbacks can be enjoyed because of their difference from present-day concerns, and because, as Lowenthal (49) notes, readers are not called upon to take action or feel responsible. In addition, it is worth noting that, as I have shown above, the Victorian-centred Gothic subgenre not only upholds but thrives on these rigid structures. It is only when this illusion of a more well-ordered and thus more comprehensible way of life breaks down, as it does in Laski's *Victorian Chaise-Longue*, that the Victorian nightmare becomes truly horrifying – the horror lies not in the return to the Victorian age as such, but in the utter incomprehensibility of a fictional world whose underlying logic is never revealed.

5.2 Victorian Afterglow

Unlike the texts discussed in the first part of this chapter, which depict the Victorian age as a period of dread and darkness, characterised by repression, hypocrisy, and a rigid framework of social taboos calculated to shroud sinister secrets, the works discussed here present a lighter and more positive image of the era, albeit one that is not devoid of criticism of the Victorians. Many of these texts, however, reveal an attitude towards the past that is similar to the one identified in connection to the Victorian-centred Gothic genre: like the texts analysed in the preceding chapter, they depict the Victorian period as governed by an inflexible set of rules, which, once learnt, make life seem simpler than it appears in the twentieth-century present, and which also provides the frame to which the sometimes wildly implausible plots of these novels are anchored. As in the Victorian-centred Gothic and in the texts discussed in chapters two and three, the emphasis of these novels is on typicality and schema construction, confirmation and re-inforcement. In Victorian-centred romances, this serves a dual aim: on the one hand, the Victorian period is conceived mainly as a 'period' background to the love story; the addition of schema-disruptive elements to the former would distract the reader's attention from the latter, and hence provide an obstacle to the experience of immersion into the story world that is crucial to the enjoyment of 'escapist' fiction. In addition, many readers value historical romance fiction precisely because of the perceived authenticity of its setting (which justifies the 'indulgence' of reading romantic fiction by postulating its quasi-educational function).[717] In order to achieve this, however, authors somewhat paradoxically have to avoid giving readers new or different information about the Victorians, since the impression of authenticity rests on confirmation – rather than disruption – of the audience's antecedent schemata: the reader 'knows' that an account is 'authentic' when it is

[716] Lowenthal (69) notes that a less advanced stage of technology also contributes to this illusion of comprehensibility and simplicity; cf. ch. 1.2.

[717] Cf. Radway, 109ff.

similar to what s/he has been told about the Victorians in other books. (This probably also accounts for the homogeneity of the depiction of the period in Victorian-centred romance fiction.)

A similar tendency towards schema re-inforcement is apparent in the Victorian memoirs discussed in part two of this chapter, which aim to present individual experiences which are nonetheless to some degree representative of women's lives during the nineteenth century. While showing the Victorian period in a more positive light than most other examples of Victorian-centred fiction, these reminiscences deviate from the image they construct not so much in its constituent features, as in their evaluation of them. In the third section, in contrast, the Victorian period is held up not as a role model, but as a source of amusement. Nonetheless, the emphasis of these texts is similar in that they – perhaps even more markedly than the other text types – aim to select the most typical features of the Victorian period in order to ridicule them: as will be shown, Angela Thirkell's parody, in particular, relies on the exaggeration of features which the reader has come to recognise as 'typically Victorian'.

The view of the Victorian past in these texts is somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand, it offers a safe haven from many of the complexities and specific anxieties of life in twentieth-century Britain; simultaneously, however, these works also adhere to a teleological conception of history, emphasising the amount of progress that has been made since the Victorian period, particularly in regard to women's position in society. As a consequence, the Victorian age is shown to be simultaneously more attractive than the present, and less so. In this sense, the texts under consideration fulfil a dual consolatory function: the reader gains both a respite from present-day problems by escaping to a less difficult past, and the impression that, to borrow Harold Macmillan's famous phrase, women, at least, "have never had it so good". Although the emphasis varies, both elements are present in all the different text types discussed in this chapter.

5.2.1 Love in the Age of Crinolines: Victorian-centred romances

As so often when dealing with historical fiction, the notorious difficulties inherent in its definition extend to its sub-genres, in this case that of the historical romance. As Helen Hughes notes in her introduction to her monograph on the genre, "the term [...] is sometimes used indiscriminately by publishers and booksellers for historical novels of all descriptions" (2); as in Hughes' study, however, it is here taken to refer to works which are distinguished from other types of historical fiction by their "formulaic and fantastic character" and their focus on "a romantic story" (Hughes, 2). The former characteristic, in particular, also provides a link to the 'Gothic' novels discussed in the previous section, particularly *Quaker Bride* and *Darkness I Leave You* (which, in turn, also feature a love interest). On the surface level, the formulaic character of these texts may leave very little room for active engagement with the socio-political situation of their production; as Frederick Jameson points out, however, "generic affiliations, and the systematic deviation from them, provide clues which lead us back to the concrete historical situation of the individual text itself, and allows us to read its structure as ideology, as a socially symbolic act, as a prototypical response to a historical dilemma" (157).

Historical romance fiction has – with the exception of Helen Hughes' groundbreaking study and Lisa Fletcher's investigations into the speech act "I love you"[718] – received relatively little critical attention, but enjoyed considerable popularity during the interwar period. For Wallace, "[t]he impossibility of romance in an age of sex manuals and a man shortage explains the attraction and, indeed, the perceived necessity of a retreat into the past for women during these years" (32). The attraction of historical romance fiction – generally considered the most 'escapist' form of historical writing – continued during World War II, when it offered readers the possibility of respite from the grim realities of wartime Britain,[719] and well into the 1950s. For most of this period, the temporal setting most attractive to writers and readers of historical romances appears to have been the Regency and the Georgian period, popularised by the immensely successful works of Georgette Heyer, who from the mid-1920s significantly contributed to the shaping of the genre and its re-orientation towards a predominantly female audience.[720] In contrast to the Regency, perceived as an age of lost elegance and graciousness, as well as a period of comparative sexual freedom which provided the ideal backdrop for tales of mildly erotic adventure, the Victorian period at first appears to have had little appeal to readers and writers of popular romances. To a certain extent, this becomes understandable in the light of a remark by a contemporary observer. Referring to the revolutionary changes in the status of women brought about by the transition from the Victorian era to the 1930s, he points out:

> Compared with the more spectacular developments of our time its progress has been largely ignored; and its results lie still in the future. We are becoming conscious that it has profoundly affected the most intimate and long-established of our conventions, and necessitates a new relationship between men and women. Some of us are shocked into reactionary denunciations; some excited into extravagant demands; the majority muddle along in bewilderment. Between the old bogies of Victorian prudery and the new bogies of sexual promiscuity it is not easy to see and think clearly. (Raven, 9)

As the previous chapters have shown, recreations of the Victorians, intimately connected as they still were to many present-day issues and concerns, tended to foreground the more controversial and less attractive aspects of the past as well as the present. In light of this fact, it is hardly surprising that it was the Regency, "an era more safely in the past than the Victorian years" (Wallace, 82), rather than the nineteenth century, which would have appealed to readers in search of escapist entertainment.

Moreover, the Victorian period, due to its temporal nearness and its omnipresence in popular discourse as a 'problematic' era where personal relationships where concerned – a period haunted by the "bogies of sexual repression" – presents little scope for the romancer's imagination at a time when the audience's schematic knowledge about the Victorians was too firmly established, and in many cases too distinctly coloured by personal memory, to be easily disrupted by romantic re-invention. By the 1950s, however, the Victorian period was beginning to gain in popularity as a setting for historical romances, as attested by the proliferation of Victorian-centred titles. There is some evidence that the 'asexual' image of the Victorian period – which appears to have acted as a

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[718] Cf. Hughes, *The Historical Romance*; Fletcher, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*; also Introduction.

[719] Cf. K. Bell, 152.

[720] Cf. Hughes, 39.

deterrent during the interwar years – was coming to be perceived as an asset: at a time when sexual fulfilment as a central element of successful married life was very much at the focus of sex manuals and women's magazines' advice columns, most of which tended to lay the responsibility for sexual success squarely on the shoulders of the female partner,[721] the Victorian period appears to have gained attraction because it offered female readers respite from these anxieties. This is borne out by the fact that unlike earlier romances (especially those by Michael Sadleir, which are of the type later to become known as 'bodice rippers'), few 1950s texts feature obviously suggestive or overtly sexual scenes.

As indicated above, there are few examples of Victorian-centred romances from the interwar period, among them Michael Sadleir's *The Noblest Frailty* (1925) and *Desolate Splendour* (1926), both melodramatic and wildly implausible tales set among the Victorian aristocracy, John St. Loe Strachey's *Madonna of the Barricades* (1926), and Stanley John Weyman's[722] *The Great House*. Published in 1919, this work significantly predates popular women's costume fiction as written by Georgette Heyer, and stems from an era when romance fiction – often linked to the adventure novel – was still targeted at a mixed audience of male and female readers.[723] As Helen Hughes (16ff.) points out in her survey, these early texts tend to combine a central love interest with an adventure plot, in which the 'manly' hero succeeds in a mission of national importance, before settling down to domestic happiness with the heroine. Hughes argues that texts of this type are characteristic of the period up to the 1920s, but were later superseded by the model popularised by Heyer and her numerous imitators, in which the adventure element is replaced by social comedy. To a certain extent, this shift in emphasis and target audience is observable also in the romances under consideration in this chapter, with texts from the 1950s in particular foregrounding concerns typically gendered feminine and evidently judged to be of interest to a predominantly female audience. These range from women's position in society, over childbirth and childrearing methods, to relatively 'mundane' topics such as fashion, food, and Victorian housekeeping, which are frequently explored in some detail. As will be shown, however, it is impossible to establish a clear temporal division between the two models in relation to the Victorian-centred romance: Weyman's early work provides a twist on the typical text schema of the 'manly' hero 'domesticated' by the attractive heroine, while later examples – such as Alan Kennington's *The Dark Hour* (1953) – adhere more strictly to the earlier pattern, as the hero's successful attempt to prevent Britain's involvement in the American Civil War is accorded equal importance as his pursuit of the attractive American heroine.

Weyman's novel provides a fascinating interweaving of two disparate plot strands, so that it can either be read as a love story with political interruptions, or a political story with love interruptions. Set during the 1840s, it provides a detailed account of the political debate surrounding the Corn Laws, of the fierce rivalry between Whigs and Tories, and of the intricacies

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[721] Cf. Haste, 156ff.

[722] Stanley John Weyman (1855–1928) was the author of a large number of hugely successful historical novels from the 1890s to the 1920s. He achieved the greatest renown for his historical romances set in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, his best-known work being *A Gentleman of France* (1893). His English novels, among them *Chippinge*, *Ovington's Bank*, and *The Great House*, have received less attention, both now and at the time of their publication (cf. J. Williams, n.pag.).

[723] Cf. Hughes, 38.

of the election process (and the machinations going on behind the scenes); on the other hand, it traces two love stories, that between the maid Etruria and the local curate, Mr Colet, and that of the heroine, Mary Audley, who is wooed by her two cousins, Lord Audley and Peter Basset. In the background, there is a highly complicated inheritance plot, as Mary gets caught up in her grandfather's prolonged struggle to prove his right to Lord Audley's title and estate. (In the end, it turns out that old Mr Audley is right: Etruria's father produces a piece of evidence according to which Lord Audley comes from an illegitimate branch of the family, making old Mr Audley – and Mary as his next of kin – the rightful inheritors to the 'great house' of the book's title.)

In keeping with romance traditions, Mr Colet's and Peter's love is presented as noble and unselfish: Mr Colet wants to marry Etruria despite her lower-class origins and lack of money; Peter even goes so far as to furnish Lord Audley with proof of his right to the title (thus losing his own claim to the inheritance through his grandfather), believing that he is acting in Mary's interests by doing so. Lord Audley, on the other hand, is anything but disinterested: though attracted to Mary because of her beauty, his main interest in her lies in the fact that the marriage would reunite the two branches of the Audley family and thus legitimise his claim to the estate, either through his own line or through marriage to the rival claimant's heiress. In addition, however, the women's views of their lovers (and the reader's reactions) are shaped by the men's involvement in politics and their opinions on the Corn Laws: Etruria's suitor is presented as admirable because of his impassioned sermons against the new laws; Lord Audley becomes increasingly unsympathetic because he supports them. Initially, however, Mary nonetheless favours him over Peter, believing that she will be able to change his political views after marriage. When Mary rejects Peter because of his withdrawn lifestyle and absorption in his hobby of heraldry, telling him that he is wasting his life, he decides to stand for election as a rival candidate to the one chosen by Lord Audley. Although he narrowly loses the election, his decision has significantly altered Mary's opinion of him; disillusioned with her aristocratic cousin, she decides to marry Peter after all.

The book ends happily for all concerned: Peter and Mary (as well as Etruria and Mr Colet) marry, the Corn Laws are repealed, and Lord Audley is allowed to keep the great house (Mary having burned the evidence of his illegitimacy) and marries a rich heiress. The ending provides an element of text schema disruption: rather than aiming to 'domesticate' her lover, the heroine accepts him only after she has persuaded him to undertake a public 'mission'. Through the 'Corn Laws' plot, the novel is firmly anchored to its historical setting, which also provides the framework for the love story between Etruria and Mr Colet by providing what appears to be an insurmountable obstacle to their marriage: "The days had been, as Mary knew, when the chaplain had married the lady's maid. But those days were gone" (Weyman, *Great House*, 85). The novel endorses rather than criticises the rigidity of the Victorian class system: Etruria's marriage is finally sanctioned because her father (by selling evidence to both contestants for the Audley inheritance) has finally acquired enough money for a sizeable dowry, which will secure Mr Colet's social advancement by enabling him to buy a living. In addition, Etruria has consistently been portrayed as superior to other village girls because of her beauty, natural refinement and her determined efforts at self-education through extensive reading. Mary, on the other hand, by accepting Peter and destroying the evidence that would have made her Lady Audley, like Fancy in

Trumpeter, Sound!, decides against social advancement. The novel ends on a note that celebrates the middle-class way of life as the most conducive to happiness, one of its heroines having married 'up', and the other 'down'.

The apparently 'democratic' stance of this and a large number of similar romances' depiction of cross-class marriages is consistently deconstructed by the description of the lower-class heroines: they are either of good family and have 'come down in the world', such as Isabella in *Caroline Terrace*, are the offspring of 'misalliances' between middle-class women and lower-class men (and thus have some claim to 'gentility' at least through one parent), such as the eponymous heroine in *Mary and the Lion*, or they are at least distinguished from the other characters of their class by their superior beauty, character, and intelligence. While the romances imply a re-evaluation of the Victorian class system along meritocratic lines, and endorse upward mobility for 'deserving' individuals, there is no call for the abolition of the distinctions that exist between the classes or for the hegemony of the middle class.

Weyman's presentation of the Victorian class system provides a link to the later Victorian-centred romances discussed in this chapter. Published after World War II, these texts construct an image of the Victorian period which merges features typical of the Regency romances – a background of "gay balls and parties", as the blurb of *The Dark Hour* promises its readers – with well-established notions about the Victorians, emphasising the class consciousness and strict adherence to notions of 'respectability' and 'decorum' that were regarded as characteristic of the era. In addition, a number of authors draw their readers' attention to the apparent incongruity of setting love and adventure stories in an age renowned for its stuffiness and prudery, and generally perceived as the antithesis of the racier days of the Regency. In Catherine Gayton's *Poor Papa* (1953), a dialogue between the hero, Jerdan Fulke, and his great-uncle makes this explicit:

> "Sorry, Uncle, but it does strike a theatrical note, you'll allow. A lady in need of rescue at this point of time, the 'forties of the nineteenth century, when we consider ourselves so tamed and civilised! With our penny post and policemen, what's to prevent her from writing a letter or signalling for help from the window? Such a business as 'rescue' smacks of Sir Walter Scott and the old sword-and-scabbard romances. Mr. Dickens wouldn't touch such a theme, he's too much of a realist. I feel I should buckle on a suit of armour from Fulke Castle. Don't scowl at me for joking, I'm ready to do whatever you ask!"
> "I'm not annoyed with you, Jerdan, I'm grateful for your help; but I can't tell you much. You'll just have to carry out my instructions blindfold. But what you said about these times being tamed is true enough. The days and ways of the Regency and of our two late Sovereigns have passed; and we must all watch our step now and be careful in the conduct of our private affairs. The country's getting downright respectable, and good morals are all the fashion. Bah, in my young days… But the people will no longer tolerate those little lapses they used to laugh about. That's why this matter I have the honour of handling must be kept well hushed up. There have been too many such scandals in the past. So you'll understand that I'm not at liberty to divulge even to you, my trusted messenger –" (24–5)

While ostensibly pointing out the inappropriateness of the setting, the quote in fact highlights the attractiveness of the Victorian period as a setting for romances and adventure novels: its restrictive social codes and conversational taboos make it – as outlined in the preceding chapter in regard to Victorian-centred crime fiction – an era of well-kept secrets and apparently insurmountable obstacles to romantic love, thus creating narrative suspense and providing a framework within which to arrange the formulaic elements of the historical romance. A further attraction lies in the novelty value and text schema-disrupting potential – heavily emphasised in the quote above – in the eyes of an audience accustomed to regard the Regency as the 'proper'

setting for romantic adventure, and the Victorian period as less suitable because of its "tamed", "civilised", and "downright respectable" image. In that sense, Victorian-centred romances of this type can be said to participate in the project of 'rediscovering' the Victorians discussed in the previous chapter; however, their aim lies less on the uncovering of lurid secrets than on the re-inscription of adventure and romance into an age that was coming to be associated with staidness and boredom in antithesis to the intriguingly 'racy' days of the Regency.

While occasionally taking up the anti-Victorian tone characteristic of earlier Victorian-centred novels, and the critique of the Victorian period's sexual repressiveness that became increasingly pronounced in the postwar era, many of these texts reveal themselves to be deeply conservative in their presentation of women, endorsing established notions of domestic femininity as the prerequisite for happiness. Most Victorian-centred romances adhere to the pattern that Hughes (116ff.), following Radway (97ff.), identifies as typical of mid-twentieth-century romantic fiction, in which the heroine – often a 'natural' woman brought up outside the constraints of nineteenth-century society – has to learn to submit to male authority, undergoing a process of 'socialisation' through romantic love, while the hero has to learn to take some interest in 'feminine' concerns and to respect the heroine as a person. As Janice Radway points out, this outcome effectively precludes further female agency, and is thus not far removed from the domesticated submissiveness advocated by the Victorian ideal: "Passivity *is* at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong and yet nurturant too, finally recognizes the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter, she is required to do nothing more than *exist* at the centre of this paragon's attention" (97; italics in original).

In her survey of middle-class housewives' reading habits, Radway (97) concludes that the appeal of this scenario lies in the fact that it provides an escape from women's everyday lives, typically devoted to the practical and emotional demands of their families, and provides them with an opportunity to vicariously enjoy the experience of being loved and taken care of.[724] This is best achieved by texts whose settings are dissimilar from the readers' everyday surroundings (thus catering for the need to escape), but who feature heroines whose emotional make-up corresponds closely to that of the readers, facilitating identification.[725] It seems likely, in this context, that the positive emotions triggered by the experience of being liberated from everyday demands and responsibilities extend to the situation that evokes those feelings, and that the act of alignment with the heroine also implies (partial) acceptance of her value scale. Allowing readers to experience positive emotions in the strictly patriarchal framework of the Victorian-centred romance, texts of this type thus not only imply, but encourage a positive evaluation of this social structure. In addition, the theme of 'taming' the hero – and thus moulding him to the heroine's ideal – is in itself an empowering fantasy, implying that women have power to shape their lovers (and by extension their lives), and that this power rests exclusively on their individual personality and 'womanly' qualities.

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[724] Although Radway's survey was conducted in the 1960s among American housewives, their living conditions were roughly similar to those of their British contemporaries. The applicability of Radway's findings to the present context will therefore be assumed.

[725] Cf. Radway, 98.

As Radway points out, the gradual 'socialisation' of the rebellious heroine into her 'feminine' role not only endorses patriarchy and the gendered division of spheres, but likewise leaves space even for an empowering interpretation of women's submission to the social status quo: showing that men like women who up to a certain point defy convention, it "encourages [readers] to believe that marriage and motherhood do not necessarily lead to a loss of independence or identity" (102). The 'taming' of the heroine – typically in the form of marriage to a man who is her superior in wealth and/or social position – is thus reinterpreted not as an act of submission, but as her proper reward for non-conformity (which, however, the heroine – having reaped the fruits of her unconventional behaviour – then has to cast off).[726] The appeal of the heroine, and the applicability of the ideological message implicit in her fate, is frequently heightened through her rebellion against or criticism of aspects of the Victorian period that serve to mark its difference from the everyday reality of the twentieth-century reader, so that she is presented as more 'modern' than the stereotypical characters who surround and oppose her. The ideological stance of these romances is thus deeply conservative, suggesting that rebellion may be sanctioned as long as it confines itself to the limits deemed attractive by men, and is directed towards successful re-integration into a traditional 'feminine' role, albeit one that is occasionally conceived along lines that are 'modern' rather than 'Victorian'. Through her rebellion, the heroine thus arrives at a position roughly similar to that of the twentieth-century reader, the appeal of which is heightened through comparison with the restrictions the heroine has had to combat.

This text schema is repeated, with variations, in a large number of Victorian-centred romances: in Gayton's *Poor Papa*, as in *The Dark Hour*, the heroine has to be 'tamed' into 'proper' femininity before being allowed to find conventional happiness with her lover. Unlike *The Dark Hour*, however, *Poor Papa* is one of the numerous examples of Victorian-centred romances which – in accordance with the general trend identified by Hughes – replace the hero's heroic mission by light-hearted social comedy. In *Poor Papa*, the action centres on the love interest of Jerdan Fulke and Clemency Royle, believed to be an illegitimate daughter of the late King George IV. The novel dwells at some length on Clemency's ungovernable temper, emphasising the necessity and justness of Jerdan's attempts to 'tame' her, and making conformity and traditional femininity particularly attractive by contrasting them to the unattractive figure as which Clemency first appears. The consistent use – relatively rare in romantic fiction – of the male hero as focaliser throughout the first part of the novel underlines the message, and aligns the reader with Jerdan's evaluation of her rebellion and repentance.

Once again, the plot hinges on Victorian class consciousness and sexual morality. Once Clemency has learnt to govern her temper, her scruples concerning her illegitimacy are the main obstacle to love; it is only when Jerdan discovers her true parentage, learning that the couple who have allegedly 'adopted' her to be her natural parents, that she consents to marry him because she knows that the marriage will not endanger his career or social standing. The novel emphasises the difference between the Victorian period and earlier ages, when the illegitimate offspring of royalty were still accorded a certain degree of distinction, as Jerdan's uncle explains:

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[726] For a similar plot, cf. also Dorothy Hewlett's *Victorian House* (discussed at length in ch. 3.1.2).

> "She's been kept dark, and I've explained the reason. Those broods were hatched in the last era of the eighteenth century and the first years of this one, when the public was stout and hearty enough to stomach a few Royal bastards. But this stray chicken came too late for semi-official recognition. Times were beginning to change when she was born, and now the temper of the people is altogether too prim and squeamish for anything like that to be paraded about." (Gayton, 28)

As so often in Victorian-centred fiction, the Regency is presented as the antithesis to Victorian prudery, and elderly relatives are used as spokespersons for the point of view mapped out for the twentieth-century reader. This observation holds true for almost all romances set in the Victorian age. While endorsing a conventional ideal of femininity that is in essence not far removed from that of the Victorians, many of these romances are rife with criticism of the period's sexual morality and its exaggerated concern for propriety and decorum. This becomes especially apparent in those romances which cast their heroines as damsels in distress, unjustly ostracised by Victorian society on grounds with which the modern reader is discouraged from sympathising. In Warwick Deeping's *Caroline Terrace* (1955), the reader encounters the beautiful governess Isabella Luce (aka Hatherway), who is dismissed from her post when it turns out that she is the daughter of a convicted murderer. Set at the beginning of the Victorian era, the novel – like *Poor Papa* – highlights the changes that have taken place:

> The new era had arrived, and Mrs. Pankridge was all for proprieties. No longer were gentlemen expected to end the evening in a drunken stupor beneath the dining-room table, or to house pretty ladies in Mayfair. Maybe Mr. Pankridge, who had known the latitudes of Europe's First Gentleman, regretted those more gorgeous days, but as the husband of Clarissa Pankridge, and the father of two dear children, he had become an outward conformer, and a pillar of the proprieties. (Deeping, 13)

While not necessarily negative in its assessment of the surface differences between the two eras – the contemporary reader being unlikely to find anything offensive in greater sobriety, as opposed to the "drunken stupor" apparently acceptable in earlier days – it is important to stress that Clarissa Pankridge is one of the most objectionable characters in the book. By casting her as the mainstay of Victorian 'propriety', the author immediately detracts from the positive connotations this notion may have had for the audience. Moreover, the quote also emphasises the hypocrisy of the Victorians: Mr Pankridge, Clarissa's hen-pecked husband, is merely an "outward conformer", dreading the consequences of any breach of the rules laid down by his wife. (In one scene at the beginning of the novel, Clarissa locks him out onto the balcony for offending against 'propriety' by smoking in her presence, much to the amusement of his neighbours.) While Clarissa invokes the alleged 'impropriety' of having a murderer's daughter as a governess, her main reason for dismissing Isabella is sexual jealousy, because she has repeatedly intercepted admiring looks from her husband in the governess's direction; the notion of 'propriety', identified as one of the key features of the Victorian age, is thus deconstructed as hypocritical and self-serving.

However, the novel is by no means consistent in its evaluation of the Victorian and the Georgian period: the novel pits Mr Travers, a notorious womanizer nicknamed "Georgius Semper Randide Primus" (Deeping, 57), whose attitudes hark back to the laxer social mores of the Regency, against the 'Victorian' Reverend John Jordan, a Muscular Christian who is unpolished in his manners and physically unprepossessing, but turns out to be warm-hearted, heroic, and genuinely in love with her. Initially attracted to Mr Travers, she is repelled when he offers her a paid post as his mistress after her dismissal. Her romance with Jordan, however, progresses

slowly. In the beginning, Isabella rejects his advances because of his ugliness, but soon comes to appreciate his strength of character and inner qualities. Once again, however, Victorian convention appears to stand in the way of happiness, as Isabella scrupulously turns down his proposals, fearing that her family background would prove an obstacle to his future career. It is only after she has saved Jordan's life by nursing him through the cholera (which he has contracted while selflessly working in a hospital during an epidemic, with Isabella at his side) that she finally agrees to marry him.

At the same time, however, it is the Georgian characters – first and foremost the elderly and eccentric Miss Cripps, who takes Isabella in after her dismissal – who are able to overlook the social disadvantage of Isabella's parentage, and who are thus contrasted favourably with the typically Victorian Pankridges. In general, the novel is deeply critical of the Victorians, frequently alluding to their hypocrisy and backwardness. While it emphasises the downturn that society has taken at the beginning of the Victorian age, however, it is also worth noting that its criticism is usually deployed along class lines: the middle and upper classes and the clergy (with the exception of John Jordan) are especially shown in a negative light, while 'simple' country folk and lower-class characters are often presented as a positive contrast,[727] but are – somewhat ironically – commended for possessing exactly those 'public school' virtues most typically associated with the Victorian middle class. The novel thus endorses the bourgeois Victorian ideal, but criticises the Victorians for failing to live up to it.

Like *Caroline Terrace*, Constance King's *Mary and the Lion* (1953) focuses on a female character ostracised from Victorian society for reasons presented as unjust to the twentieth-century reader. More than any other of the novels discussed in this chapter, King's book adheres to the conventional structure identified by Hughes, featuring an aggressively 'masculine' hero who has to be 'domesticated' through the feminine influence of the heroine. Mary Aylmer, the heroine of King's romance, is a young woman who, having given birth to an illegitimate child, is now ostracised by the other villagers. Her neighbours are scandalised when Sir John Maitland, a rich manufacturer who has bought the mansion of the local squire, Lord Harland, and married his eldest daughter, engages her as a nurse for his son. In the beginning of the novel, Maitland is presented in highly unattractive terms: one of the first things the reader learns about him is his single-minded obsession with producing a son and heir. When his wife after a series of miscarriages is finally about to give birth to a male child, complications ensue. In a scene reminiscent of Galsworthy, the doctor asks Maitland to decide whether to save the child or the mother. Like Soames Forsyte, Maitland is unwilling to take the decision; however, the doctor misconstrues his refusal as an order to save his son and let his wife die. When rumours about the incident spread around the neighbourhood, it further antagonizes the villagers, already resentful of what they regard as Sir John's usurpation of Lord Harland's rightful place. Maitland's decision to employ Mary is originally intended as an act of defiance against society. Very soon, however, the association turns out to have positive consequences for both, as Maitland does everything in his power to restore Mary's self-esteem (initially mainly to spite her neighbours), and Mary exerts her influence to arouse Maitland's interest in his three daughters.

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[727] This ties in with the nostalgia for a rural, pre-industrialised England that Hughes (68) detects in many historical romances.

Although it soon becomes apparent that they are mutually attracted to each other, Mary initially rejects Maitland's offer of marriage, because he only emphasises the social and material advantages this would entail for her. It is only after she has forced him to say "I love you" – characterised by Maitland as Mary's final "victory" over him – that she accepts his proposal.[728] Like many other Victorian-centred novels, the book deploys a number of stereotypes about the era, foregrounding both its narrow-minded moral hypocrisy and casting Sir John as its antithesis. Despite his delight in scandalizing his neighbours and his ungovernable temper, the reader – seeing him through Mary's eyes – comes to realise that "[b]lasphemous in his speech, terrifying in his actions he might be, but there was no underlying viciousness, no corruption" (King, 122). Unlike Mary's narrow-minded neighbours, he can see through her status as a 'shamed woman' and appreciate her warm and loving personality. While his Victorian contemporaries are uniformly antagonistic towards him, he wins the approval of two women who are set apart from the society of the day: on the one hand, there is the old dowager Lady Harland (one of the many Regency relicts in Victorian-centred fiction who act as the spokespersons for 'modern' attitudes towards Victorian sexual hypocrisy) and Mary, an outcast from Victorian society because of having 'loved not wisely but too well'. His status as a romantic hero is further underlined when he is explicitly compared to Mr Rochester, who may also have provided the model for the Byronic, unapproachable heroes of many of Georgette Heyer's romances.

While many of these books – and a large number of others, such as Jan Laing's *Queen of the Chase* (1953), J. Delves-Broughton's *Past Returned* (1954) and *A Sojourn in England* (1956) or Betty Trask's *The Merry Belles of Bath* (1957) – belong to that sub-genre of historical fiction typically disparaged as 'costume fiction' and are targeted at an almost exclusively female audience, it is important to stress that the genre does not restrict its use of the Victorian age to commentary on (and endorsement of) established gender roles, but implicitly addresses a wider range of social and political issues. In her analyses of historical romance fiction, Helen Hughes distinguishes between those earlier works which, as outlined above, combine a central love interest with adventure, and later, 'female-centred' romances which are essentially comedies of manners with a love plot. Hughes argues that the latter make "little more than passing reference to the political settings", while texts of the former type "even though they are not *about* politics, [...] nevertheless give a picture of a political situation in what purports to be a specific historical moment" (43; italics in original). It has already been shown above, however, that Hughes's clear-cut chronological division is only of limited applicability where the Victorian-centred romance is concerned; nor is it possible, in this case, to wholly distinguish between 'political' and 'apolitical' texts. While it is certainly arguable that romances like Strachey's *Madonna of the Barricades* (set within the context of Garibaldi's revolution in Italy) or Weyman's *Great House*, with its sustained discussion of the Corn Laws, are more overtly political than the ostensibly 'domestic' fictions of, for instance, Deeping or King, it is nonetheless worth noting that every rewriting of the Victorian era (or, for that matter, any other historical period) cannot avoid partaking in the ideological discourses of its moment of production even in the absence of explicit allusions.

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[728] The novel thus serves as an exemplary specimen of the structure Fletcher regards as typical of romance fiction, which characteristically builds up to and culminates in the speech act "I love you".

Helen Hughes perceptively notes that historical adventure romances typically postulate the "inevitability of the bourgeois state", endorsing the present state of society by presenting it as the outcome of a historical struggle for a more just social order:

> The image of government presented is pre-eminently progressive: institutions are shown in the course of development towards a fair, tolerant and representative system of government. Though this course may have an occasional hiatus, active intervention is shown to be counter-productive because it cuts across the delicate web of factors which will in the end produce a 'modern' government. But although such a government is supposed to be based on 'freedom', power is inevitably shown to be the prerogative of a ruling class: the course of development is in reality towards [...] 'bourgeois hegemony' [...]. The texts imply approval of tendencies favouring such a state. (43)

It is also worth noting that the Victorian-centred romance frequently connects the love story to its implicit endorsement of a capitalist economy dominated by the middle class: in *Great House*, for instance, the heroine's rival suitors are evaluated on the basis of their views on the Corn Laws, and Peter, who is in favour of their repeal (regarded as a crucial step towards abolishing the hegemony of the aristocracy in favour of the middle class), is given the preference. In *Madonna*, the hero and his beloved are shown to be fighting simultaneously for Italy's freedom from Austrian oppression – and, by extension, for freedom and democracy on a more general level – but also against the rise of communism and the rule of the 'mob'. (The novel's political stance is made even more explicit when its hero later becomes a member of Gladstone's Liberal administration.) However, it is not only during the 1920s that the Victorian-centred romance offers implicit commentary on political and economic issues. In later texts, it is frequently the latter that is foregrounded: in *The Dark Hour*, the hero secures his personal happy ending by preventing Britain from entering the American Civil War on the side of the South. While the reader is led to regard this as a victory of liberty over oppression (which finds its parallel in the hero and heroine's successful escape from Germany, a police state secretly already laying its plans for achieving the *Weltherrschaft*), it is not only the freedom of the Southern slaves that is celebrated: in a dialogue at the end of the novel, Kurt emphasises that this also implies the freedom of the Southern manufacturers to conduct their business without state interference, and is thus another victory for bourgeois capitalism.

In contrast to these overtly political texts and the examples analysed by Hughes, however, the Victorian-centred romance shows to what extent the writing of Victorian history continued to be a political act, intentionally or unintentionally, well into the postwar period. This is mainly due to the fact that some of the constituent features of the established 'Victorian' schema – such as the period's exaggerated class consciousness, hypocrisy in its dealings with social injustice, its materialism and strongly profit-oriented business ethos, industrialisation and technological progress, and the rise of the middle class – are virtually inseparable from their political implications. Omission of these features, in turn, would considerably detract from these novels' claim to historical authenticity. Nor can authors, in presenting these issues, wholly refrain from evaluative comments, or escape the evaluative implications of associating these typically 'Victorian' characteristics with individual characters, thus inevitably mapping out an ideological subject position for the reader not only in relation to typically 'feminine' concerns. Constance King's *Mary and the Lion*, briefly summarised above, provides an apt illustration for this point. Sir John Maitland, the Byronic hero of King's romance, is in many ways emblematic of the

upwardly mobile Victorian businessman. Of relatively humble origins, he has risen through a combination of ruthless ambition, shrewd business sense, and unassailable integrity to a position of considerable wealth, and has secured a degree of social standing through marriage to the daughter of Lord Harland, an impoverished aristocrat, who, it is implied, has 'sold' his daughter in return for a share in Maitland's business.

While Maitland is not initially presented as a particularly likeable character, his career is depicted in a way clearly calculated to arouse the reader's admiration, and also, by dwelling on his difficult childhood and on the sheer will-power which lie behind his achievement, to some degree account for his emotional coldness, hardness and lack of social skills. Moreover, the reader is repeatedly assured that Maitland, though ruthlessly ambitious, is also characterised by the utmost honesty and personal integrity, and considerably less hypocritical than most of his contemporaries. The novel repeatedly emphasises his difference from his first wife's aristocratic relations, whom it presents in the most negative terms. Lord Harland lacks energy and initiative in his business dealings as much as his son-in-law's instinctive understanding of the market; he is presented as the stereotypical representative of a bloodless, effeminate aristocracy which has outlived its social usefulness. His remaining daughters are likewise unappealing as the novel dwells on their mercenary schemes to 'catch' their sister's widower. While Sir John's difference from his in-laws and the established members of the gentry is frequently alluded to, this is presented in terms designed to heighten his attraction to the reader: of impeccable elegance, he is distinguished by his physical stature and his boundless vitality, as well as his refusal to conform to the hypocritical moral standards of the day. (As the latter attribute shows itself mainly in his refusal to join in the universal condemnation of the heroine, this is of particular significance in arousing the reader's sympathy.) His lower-class antecedents are recast as a distinct advantage, since his rise 'through the ranks' of the industry has provided him with a deeper understanding of the manufacturing processes, which he turns to good account both in his dealings with his employees and in his business decisions.

The novel dwells at some length on Maitland's relations with his workers, who are demanding higher wages. The conflict serves simultaneously to 'authenticate' the Victorian setting by alluding to the labour unrest characteristic of the period, to channel readerly sympathy towards the hero, and to advance the romance plot. Against the advice of his father-in-law and his manager, Maitland refuses to give in to the workers' demands; when they finally go on strike and try to prevent him from entering the factory, however, he challenges their leader to a man-to-man fight, winning their reluctant admiration and free passage into the building. The episode is calculated to draw attention to the hero's 'manly' physical prowess, his lack of snobbery, and his fairness and sportsmanship. Shortly afterwards, however, he is attacked by a mob of workers during a nightly journey home and left for dead (but recovers due to Mary's efficient nursing, thus to some extent cancelling out the 'debt' she has incurred towards him when he took her into his house, and putting them on a more equal footing). Later, his factory is burned down. In both cases, however, the ringleaders turn out to be not the disgruntled workers, but two of Mary's former suitors, acting out of a jealous desire for revenge on the man whom they believe to be her lover. The acts of violence are thus not presented as retribution for Maitland's implacable attitude towards his employees, but turn out to have a purely personal motivation. Moreover, the episode

reinforces the implicit right of the bourgeoisie to their position of social power, implying that the workers, if left to choose their own leaders, are apt to be gulled by men who exploit them in order to wreak personal revenge. In the end, Maitland' s conduct is justified by the plot: his factory having been insured, the fire causes him no perceptible financial loss; as it turns out, it even gives him the opportunity to rebuild his works along more efficient lines, thus significantly increasing his future profits. The workers, in the meantime, are forced to return to work on their employer's terms, and appear to be content to do so. Linking Maitland's triumph over the workers to his victory over his rivals (who die in the fire), and thus to the happy ending of the novel's love plot, the novel affirms the hegemony of the bourgeoisie as the most desirable outcome of social upheaval. The 'escapist' mode of presentation, which presents the events as historical 'facts' dissociated from the reader's present, serves to disguise the ideological message, but not to lessen its impact on the reader, who is positioned to share in the triumph of love, conservative gender roles and bourgeois capitalism.

5.2.2. Victorian reminiscences

The two novels discussed in this chapter, Betty Askwith's *The Blossoming Tree* (1953) and Ralph Hale Mottram's *Scenes That Are Brightest* (1956), are loosely related to the Victorian-centred romances of the previous section, in the sense that they also focus on aspects of romantic love and sexuality in the Victorian period. Unlike those of Victorian-centred romance fiction, however, the plots of these novels are carefully constructed to present, once again, the typical experience of a woman born in the late-Victorian period. The two novels are similar in their focus on women's experience, and their narrative structure, which consists of a mid-twentieth century frame narrative introducing – and, in the case of *Scenes That Are Brightest*, alternating with – the Victorian story that makes up the main part of these works. Like the Victorian-centred romances of the previous chapter, fictional 'memoirs' of this kind are also products mainly of the post-war period, written at a time when the last generation of eye-witnesses to the Victorian era was rapidly disappearing. Both works are presented as autobiographic, either told by or focalised through the old women whose youthful adventures they purport to recount. Significantly, however, both of the novels were written by authors who – due to their birth dates as well as their gender – had little or no direct experience of the Victorian worlds they describe.[729]

Memory, in these novels, is thus a narrative construct, as authors present their audiences with what they assume readers would want their protagonists to remember about the Victorian era rather than that which 'real' Victorians might have remembered or wanted to narrate. To an even greater extent than the other Victorian-centred novels discussed in this chapter, these novels reflect what authors assumed to be the tastes, preoccupations, and areas of interest of a predominantly female audience. As stated above, the main theme of these texts is the difference between women's lives then and now; unlike the novels discussed in chapter 3.2, which focus on the process of 'outgrowing' the Victorians and for the most part advocate a radical break with the

[729] Ralph Hale Mottram (born in 1883) was to some extent an eye-witness of the late Victorian period, but not of the mid-Victorian era he depicts in his novel; Betty Askwith was born in 1909. Frank Wilson Kenyon (born in 1912) resorts to a similar narrative strategy in *Without Regret* (1957), another fictional 'memoir' of a Victorian childhood and youth.

preceding era, these fictional memoirs are far more conservative in tone. While they – like most other Victorian-centred novels – construct a teleological image of women's history, charting women's progress from the constraints of the Victorian period to the (relative) freedom of the postwar era, the emphasis in these novels rests on the private sphere. Women, in these texts, remain associated with domesticity; while it is acknowledged that greater educational and professional opportunities are now open to the female sex, women's 'progress' is measured in terms of their greater freedom of choice within the traditionally 'feminine' sphere of the home and family. Whereas Victorian women, it is implied, had to conform through patriarchal coercion, modern women are free to choose conformity and conservative values because they have come to recognise them as the most desirable option.

The Blossoming Tree focuses on the life story of Catherine Vanroyd, née Dysart. While the frame narrative is set in the mid-twentieth century, and opens upon Catherine, and later Catherine's best friend Rose Arden, telling Catherine's granddaughter Elizabeth about Catherine's life, this introductory section is followed by an abrupt shift to the deixis of a youthful version of Catherine. From this perspective, the reader follows her life story from 1887 until the year of Elizabeth's mother's birth, 1908. Born into an old 'county' family, she as a young girl falls in love with the local veterinary surgeon, but is dissuaded by her best friend Rose from eloping with him, and finally makes an advantageous match. However, her marriage to Sir Henry Vanroyd is characterised by boredom and lack of emotional warmth. When Catherine encounters a socialist friend of her brother's, André Lesvignes, she recognises in him a soul mate. The attraction is mutual, and Catherine briefly considers divorcing Henry to live in Paris with André, but is again dissuaded by Rose and her husband, the rich industrialist Sir Julian Carr, whom Rose has married for his money while secretly carrying on a love affair with her former admirer, Ned Arden. Not entirely convinced by their arguments, Catherine returns to London to talk the situation over with her husband, only to find that he has resigned from his government post over a matter of principle, has thus ruined his chances of a promising political career, and is about to accept the post of Governor-General of Bengal. Realising that Henry needs her, she decides not to leave him, both because of her sense of duty towards him and her fears of a life of insecurity and economic hardship with André.

Although she continues to dream of a life with her lover, she finally has to give up all hopes of realising her plans when, after nearly twenty years of marriage, she discovers that she is pregnant by Henry: "No, a baby wasn't the answer, but it was something, it was a great deal. It passed on the possibility to the next generation. It gave another person another chance to find all that Catherine Dysart had so hopelessly missed. […] Perhaps, she thought, perhaps my child will find the answer, will do more than glimpse the frozen ballet dancer, the blossoming tree [i.e. symbols of happiness in the novel]" (Askwith, 221). In the final section, however, which brings the reader back to the twentieth-century frame narrative, we learn that Catherine's daughter has failed to find happiness in her three marriages. Elizabeth, Catherine's granddaughter, is firmly resolved not to repeat her mother's mistakes: while she finds her grandmother's idealistic love for two men of low social standing "touching" (Askwith, 222), the book ends with her resolution to "marry someone rather grand, […] with enough money to keep a nanny" (223).

In *Scenes That Are Brightest*, a self-contained sequel to *Our Mr Dormer*, the reader learns the life story of Doughty Dormer's second wife, who is only mentioned in passing in Mottram's first novel about the Dormer family. Staying with her eldest grandson, Archie, at Cockle Hall, Frances Dormer has surrounded herself with all her great-grandchildren, who have come to London for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. When they incidentally discover an old music score of the Victorian opera *Maritana* and start singing the songs, this triggers Frances's memories of her own youth when she – then a young music teacher at her friend Hannah's very advanced school for girls – took part in a concert performance of the piece, and there made the acquaintance of her future husband. As Frances drifts in and out of the reveries triggered by the music, the narrative shifts between the events of the twentieth-century frame narrative and the Victorian period, so that the two intertwining stories can be read as commentaries on each other.

In the Victorian part of the plot, the reader accompanies Frances from her post as an underpaid music teacher in London, where she barely earns enough to survive, to more congenial employment as arts mistress at her friend's school in Easthampton. Although she enjoys teaching and feels inspired by Hannah's enthusiasm for opening up new possibilities for women, she gives up her job when Doughty Dormer, head clerk of the local bank, proposes marriage to her. Although she is not in love with Doughty, she appreciates the comfort, security and social standing which the marriage gives her, and is firmly resolved to be a good wife to him, and to care for her two step-daughters. Marriage is clearly presented as a better option than school-teaching: "Here was Doughty Dormer offering her everything else, home, children, position, affection. If she refused all that, she didn't deserve to have it offered. She deserved to lead the rest of her life like Hannah. But she hadn't Hannah's devotion, or the blend of ill-health and high aspiration that demanded it" (Mottram, *Scenes*, 67) – a view that is confirmed by the envious reaction of her colleagues at the school.

As Frances cleverly manages both her household and her husband, the marriage turns into a success; by 1953, moreover, Frances sees her decision to marry Doughty justified by the existence of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, through whom the Dormer family will survive into a new era of peace and prosperity. The focaliser's stance towards the Victorian period is at times ambiguous, alternating between deprecation and nostalgia according to her mood. On the whole, she is convinced that the twentieth century "is a better world, even with those Atom Bombs and things I can hardly pronounce, let alone understand. No inhibitions. Little sentiment, lots of common-sense" (Mottram, *Scenes*, 145). Moreover, the book reveals that a change in values has taken place: while the Victorian characters struggle to protect the bank from the fire that has broken out during the night of the Diamond Jubilee, Doughty Dormer's grandchildren and great-grandchildren work hard to rescue the poorest residents of the village from a sudden spring flood. Nonetheless, she cannot fully free herself of the impression that the younger generation may be missing something.

Both texts focus on women's experience in the Victorian period, presenting an image of the era that is essentially schema-confirming. In particular, this applies to the period's sexual hypocrisy and the restrictions Victorian society imposed upon middle- and upper-class women. In line with twentieth-century readers' 'knowledge' about the Victorians, it is the period's sexual repressiveness which is most frequently held up as an example of the age's difference to the present: "All that subterranean sex and shiftiness. Here, among these young people, how different" (Mottram, *Scenes*, 143), Frances reflects in *Scenes That Are Brightest*. *In Blossoming Tree*, it is once again the contrast

between the Regency and the Victorians that is invoked: "The child of 1807 and the child of 1870 had been taught to look on such things [i.e. extramarital sex] very differently" (Askwith, 68). It is precisely these aspects of the 'Victorian' schema – sexual repressiveness, double morality, and an obsession with maintaining a decorous façade – that Rose targets when, speaking about the growing social acceptance towards divorce during the Edwardian period, she exclaims: "After all, it isn't as if we were still Victorians" (Askwith, 195). As the present is explicitly contrasted with the past, these novels construct a teleological narrative of women's emancipation, frequently drawing attention to the greater freedom enjoyed by modern women:

> It had been a very different thing, sixty years ago. It was true of course, that, at the time of which she was thinking, women had already been allowed control of their own property, had secured, even if it were grudgingly, an entry into some professions, a footing in education. She herself was evidence of that. But there had lingered, to the end of the century and in odd holes and corners even longer, a kind of hang-over from Victorian prudishness and condescension towards the "weaker sex", the "fair and frail". Even now her lips hardened in a sardonic grin at the memory. (Mottram, *Scenes*, 33–4)

In both novels, however, the teleological conception of history is undercut by doubts. In *Blossoming Tree*, Catherine is full of hope that her daughter will have the courage to break free of convention and find the happiness she has only dreamt of; the frame narrative, however, reveals that far from making a success of her personal life, she has only three broken marriages to, it is implied, socially unsuitable and personally unreliable husbands behind her. In retrospect, Catherine's idealistic search for the "blossoming tree", though sentimental and hampered by her Victorian sense of duty, becomes more appealing than her granddaughter's openly mercenary approach.

In *Scenes That Are Brightest*, Frances reflects that "'It's all very well, but as I told them, they've missed something. Gentleness! Or was it merely gentility? Respect! Or was it merely kindly contempt? It had all been very different, all those years ago'" (60). In other passages, the elegance and graciousness of the Victorian period, its gentler manners and greater consideration for the weaknesses of others, is lamented less ambiguously, as is the unselfconscious sentimentality and "innocent exuberance" (Mottram, *Scenes*, 31) of Victorian opera. Not only as regards technological progress, but also in the area of personal relationships, the present is depicted as much more complicated than the past, as Frances and Doughty's decorous but straightforward courtship is contrasted with the complex tangle of relationships that evolves between the members of the younger generation.

In other areas, too, the Victorian era continues to serve as a standard against which the present is measured, and to some extent as a role model: again and again, Frances's attention is drawn to recurrent family traits which link her grandchildren to her husband, showing that the initiative, ambition and self-assurance of the Victorian businessman are still necessary qualities in postwar Britain. This sense of the return of the Victorians is strengthened when she reflects that, after the end of the era, her family left England to settle in distant places, but is now gradually coming back to live here. In one respect, at least, Frances appears to lament the disappearance of Victorian values: when she observes the reaction of the villagers to the flood, she notices their egotism and readiness to blame those in authority for everything that goes wrong, and to look to

the state to provide for them – developments that had been noted, and lamented, by other commentators from the late 1930s onwards.[730]

More crucially, however, the novels reveal one of the main attractions of the Victorian past for a 1950s audience. On the one hand, there is every indication that by that time, the Victorian period was well on its way to establishing itself, if not as a time of lost elegance and graciousness like the Georgian era, then at least as a time of material comfort, even luxury, that contrasts with the relative austerity of the years before the beginning of the 'age of affluence' in the 1950s:[731] "Already the Victorian way of life was gone and nearly out of sight. [...] Is that the final verdict on the Victorians? We had so much that was superfluous?" (Mottram, *Scenes*, 209), Frances asks herself in *Scenes That Are Brightest*, musing about the many things the Victorians enjoyed as a matter of course – "wine and social occasions, concerts and holidays abroad" (209) –, but which many of her grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's generation have learned to do without. In *Blossoming Tree*, too, there is a sense of a lost golden age, when Catherine's and Rose's elegant married life is implicitly contrasted to the relatively reduced circumstances (metonymically expressed in Rose's complaints about public transport and the impoliteness of bus conductors) in which they now find themselves. Even, so, however, there remains a feeling of old-world comfort in Catherine's old-fashioned house which Elizabeth greatly enjoys: "I must say it is rather marvellous to have servants," (Askwith, 9), she writes to a girlfriend.

In addition, it is the sense of order and security that is consistently associated with the Victorian period that forms a large part of the attraction. In *Scenes That Are Brightest*, in particular, this is highlighted by contrasting the orderly world of Hannah Scrivener's school and Bank House with the tumult and confusion that reigns at Cockle Hall, as Frances's great-grandchildren prepare to cope with the emergency caused by the unexpected flood. In addition to the realities of Victorian middle-class life, however, the period has also taken on the aura of well-ordered stability that retrospective vision invariably conveys on the past, and which lends it its main attraction for a contemporary audience confronted with unrest and insecurity:

> It was pleasant, not that one wanted old times back. That was nonsense. One wanted to warm oneself at the memory of fires long ago extinct. It gave a sort of glow the present couldn't emulate. For it was real. It had happened. That was the only reality. The Present was never here, it was the future one moment, and the next moment it had become the past. As for the Future… well, she hadn't much. And she sank gratefully back into memory. (Mottram, *Scenes*, 35)

The protagonists of both novels repeatedly stress the superiority of the present over the Victorian past; nonetheless, there is a prevailing sense of unease which consistently resurfaces as the problematic of the text. This becomes apparent especially in Mottram's novel, whose narrator, even as she repeatedly praises the present, cannot forbear in the same sentence to draw the reader's attention to the "Atom Bombs and things" that threaten the future of the current generation, while the solid comfort of her Victorian youth stands in stark contrast to her grandchildren's fight against the rising waters. In *Blossoming Tree*, too, a similar tension is discernible as the twentieth-century present – site of Catherine's bright hopes for the future – is

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[730] Cf. Coote, 102; qtd. in Gardiner, 51f.; also Day, 8.

[731] Cf. Sisson and French (eds). *The Age of Austerity 1945–1951* and Bogdanor and Skidelsky, *The Age of Affluence 1951–1964*.

revealed to have brought economic hardship and marital unhappiness. The novels thus exemplify that "[l]onging for the past is always connected to the present and, effectively, the future – or rather, disenchantment with the present or fear of what the future might bring" (Berberich, 27).[732]

Through its use of elderly narrators, however, the novels absolve readers from any lingering feelings of guilt over their escapist longings: it is "not that one wanted the old times back", as Frances reassures the audience. The fact that these are personal memories is crucial in this regard: firstly, the responsibility for the act of nostalgically remembering is offloaded onto the narrator; it is not the readers but Frances Dormer and Rose Arden who choose to indulge in daydreams and garrulous reminiscences. Moreover, any conservative views and reactionary opinions contained in their narrative can safely be glossed over by the reader because they are presented as part of the ideological point of view of an elderly lady – readers are thus at liberty to align themselves with her stance, while the label 'old-fashioned' adheres not to them but to the focalising WHO. In addition, the intimate nature of Frances' and Catherine's reminiscences provides readers with the satisfaction of vicariously experiencing the positive emotions triggered by the narratives, while at the same time absolving them of responsibility for the protagonists' actions. Occupying Frances's and Catherine's deixis, readers too can sink back into reminiscence, warming themselves "at the memory of fires long extinct", without, for once, being called upon to take action, to assume responsibility, or to pass judgement.

The fact that these texts are presented as essentially personal memories is also crucial in evoking the feeling of nostalgia that the reader vicariously enjoys through immersion into the texts. While Berberich correctly argues that nostalgia is "inevitably linked to memory, and not necessarily *personal* memory [in the sense of referring to the individual who experiences nostalgia]" (28) it is important to stress that it is precisely the *personal* component of these novels which allows readers to immerse themselves into nostalgic recollection by offering readers a clear point of identification and thus triggering their emotional involvement in the narrative. The position mapped out for the reader is an essentially passive one, as s/he enjoys the spectacle of another person's life. This is re-enacted on the textual level of both novels: in *Blossoming Tree*, Elizabeth becomes a passive listener to Rose Arden's reminiscences; in *Scenes That Are Brightest*, Frances passively dozes and daydreams in her armchair while the younger generation bustle about her. However, the novels' emphasis on the link between memory and passivity easily obscures the fact that the act of recalling and narrating these memories is by no means a passive one: "nostalgia is never simply a passive reflection of 'the good old days'. It is an active process of styling and 'making' the past" (Bromley, 4), which becomes simplified as certain elements are selected and metonymically stand in for the entirety of past experience.

Moreover, nostalgia "is not a desire for the past per se; nor is it ever an emotion rooted in empirical reality or concrete autobiography. Rather, it is a longing for objects that are idealized, impersonal, and unattainable" (Santesso, 16); it is "a sort of stylized homesickness" (Santesso, 15) that is arguably more easily triggered by memories which are intimate – in the sense of evoking an emotional response – but removed from the immediacy of the reader's own experience. It is precisely through immersion into the narrators' reminiscences of their Victorian youth –

[732] Cf. also Santesso, 16.

simultaneously "impersonal" and emotionally affecting – that this feeling of "stylized homesickness" (as opposed to the real homesickness triggered by one's own memories) may be evoked. By focusing on the personal and familial, these novels, as Roger Bromley remarks of similar texts dealing with memories of the 1930s, emphasise the 'pastness' of the time they depict – and hence its idealised unattainability – by making it appear "unitary, non-contradictory, and *closed*" (5; emphasis in original). Moreover, the ostensibly 'personal' nature of these narratives also serves to mask the extent to which they partake in the ongoing process of shaping the collective image of the Victorians. As Bromley (10) points out, individual memories are inevitably shaped by collective memory; more crucially, memories "of a specific, unrepresentative nature" can be "produced so as to generate a sense of representativeness by the use of a number of recurring features, which create a sense of 'habituation' and familiarisation" (2) through narrativisation.

Finally, the novels discussed in this chapter emphasise the status of memory as narrative, and thus inevitably subject to re-shaping from the vantage point of the present: as Catherine in *Blossoming Tree* points out, the gap between her own memory of the "little girl" she once was and the image that Elizabeth constructs while listening to her story can never be entirely bridged. The structure of Askwith's novel presents the past as a self-contained unit within the narrative, closed off from the present and presented for the reader's and Elizabeth's inspection. In addition, it draws attention to the differences in mind style and ideological outlook between Catherine and her granddaughter. In contrast, *Scenes That Are Brightest* emphasises the connectedness between past and present. In both cases, however, readers are positioned so as to be aware of their position as spectators on a distant past that is only accessible through the memories of these elderly ladies. *Blossoming Tree* draws attention to the necessary incompleteness of this picture:

> "Only that there seemed to be two of me. A kind of divergence. The picture I am painting for you of a little girl in a red coat tramping sturdily up the avenue, very small under the elm trees. And my actual memory of the cold, of the feel of the ground under my feet. In this of course I can't see what you see: I don't think of a little girl, an illustration to a picture-book, but I am I myself […]" (13)

Even though Elizabeth struggles to immerse herself in her grandmother's story, and to elicit as much detail in order to flesh out her image of the Victorian story world her grandmother conjures up, she can never recapture her experience completely; Catherine, on the other hand, experiences and draws attention to the split between her older self – at that moment the focalising WHO – and her younger self, the focalised WHO of the preceding passages. The passage thus becomes an example of textual deixis, deliberately drawing attention to the status of the text as narrative, and therefore necessarily incomplete, and highlighting that what which Iser calls the 'gap' between reader/listener and text can never be entirely bridged.

However, while both novels occasionally resort to what Bromley calls the "interrogative mode" (8) of memory, emphasising the gap between personal experience and memory as narrative, the strategies which the text employs to facilitate immersion through emotional alignment with the focalising WHOs distract the reader's awareness from the fact that the story world s/he has entered is, in fact, the product of the act of *narrating* the past – the impression that the reader takes away from the novels is that of having shared 'authentic' reminiscences of the

period by living within the focalising WHOs' memories rather than having been the recipient of information that is shaped by the act of narration.

5.2.3 Look Back With Laughter: humour and irony in Victorian-centred fiction

A desire to laugh at the Victorians – either as a means of subtracting from the perceived threat they still pose to the present, or as a way of emphasising the reader's superiority over the past – becomes apparent in many Victorian-centred novels, and frequently manifests itself in ironic comments on the Victorian period. As Isabel Ermida (13) points out, the Anglo-American critical tradition sees irony as a rhetorical technique which consists of saying the opposite of what is meant,[733] and which therefore establishes a relationship between readers and narrators/authors in which readers emerge as "rationally superior" to the characters because of their ability to decode the authors'/narrators' real communicative intentions.[734] As a preliminary comment to this chapter, it is perhaps worth pointing out that irony and humour are by no means synonymous, even though they share an important feature: "The analogy between verbal humour and irony derives from a common characteristic: having one *signifier* which conceals more than one *signified*. [...] both the humourist and the ironist hide their true communicative intention beneath at least two possible interpretations, while using one and the same verbal form" (Ermida, 11). In Victorian-centred fiction, however, irony is often used for humorous purposes;[735] moreover, there are very few instances of humour which are devoid of irony. As a consequence, this chapter provides an overview of both of these interconnected features.

A number of Victorian-centred novels adopt a tone that is frankly ironic, either towards the Victorians in general (as in *Told by an Idiot* or *The Rebel*), or towards a specific portion of Victorian society (for instance the Victorian middle class in *Caroline Terrace* and *Victorian House*, or Victorian artists in *Victorian Love Story* and *Royal Academy*). More frequently, the ludicrous aspects of the past are mentioned merely in passing, and ironic comments tend to be limited to a number of key areas. One of these is the Victorians' naive attitude towards religion, ridiculed, for instance, in *Sleep in Peace*, where the reader's attention is drawn to Mrs Hincliffe's "darning egg of wood from the Mount of Olives" (119) and her conviction that the Armisteads' chimney would not have fallen down had theirs been a more god-fearing household. On the other hand, it is also the superficiality and ostentatiousness of Victorian (Anglican) religious belief that is targeted: in *Coronation Summer* (1937), Emily's father (the rector) "actually sent her home from the very church door for wearing a bonnet which he considered unbecoming to the daughter of a rector of the Church of England. Poor Emily […] had taken to wearing plain bonnets as a sign of regeneration. She was forced to go home and put on a bonnet with feathers and ribbons" (89–90).

Victorian art, architecture, and women's fashions are likewise frequently the butts of ironic commentary and ridicule, even though few descriptions are openly humorous. Another, and even more frequent, source of amusement for twentieth-century readers is the Victorians' belief in their own modernity: in several novels, the emphatic reminder that "this is the nineteenth century" – usually spoken by typically Victorian characters in order to underline their difference from

[733] Cf. also Colebrook, 1.
[734] Cf. also Colebrook, 17f.
[735] For the humorous potential of irony, cf. Ermida, 14.

preceding periods and emphasise the 'advanced' state of technology and society achieved by the Victorians – occurs in contexts calculated to draw a smile from the twentieth-century reader. Along similar lines, there are also frequent scenes in which Victorian characters are unnecessarily afraid of technological developments that the reader has already come to regard as old-fashioned. Railways are an especially popular source of amusement at the expense of the Victorians, as – for instance – when one of the characters in a romance remarks on the train going "perhaps even at the appalling speed of thirty miles an hour" (Delves-Broughton, *Past Returned*, 52), or when Mrs Charteris in *The Strangeling* is afraid that the carriages of the train she has boarded might all be going in different directions.

It is important to stress, however, that none of the Victorian characters involved in these situations are *deliberately* funny; the humorous impression rests on the gap in knowledge or differences in attitude between the Victorians and the twentieth-century reader. This, in turn, serves to confirm the audience's schematic knowledge of the Victorians, or – in the absence of the relevant schemata – to add to the readers' knowledge about them.[736] This becomes especially apparent in humorous situations involving children, where there are gradations of knowledge between the young Victorians, the older Victorians, and the reader. One example occurs, for instance, in Netta Syrett's *The Victorians*, when the nine-year-old protagonist is sent to bed in disgrace for a minor misdemeanour, leading to the following dialogue between her and her governess:

> "What a pity, Rose, that you should choose this of all days for disobedience," [the governess] began in her thin, prim voice. [...]
> "Oh, do be quiet!" interrupted Rose, goaded to frenzy. "Any one would think I'd murdered some one, or committed adultery or something, instead of just going out before breakfast. Now, why are you getting red?" she added in surprise, as Miss Piddock's face crimsoned.
> "Don't mention the Commandments in that light way," she returned in hasty confusion, "especially when you don't know what you are saying." (10)

The humour of the situation arises out of Rose's ignorance of the meaning of 'adultery', and the incongruity of imagining a nine-year-old girl guilty of this particular breach of the Ten Commandments. However, the situation also serves to confirm the reader's perception of the Victorians as exaggeratedly prudish, as the governess (ironically the very person responsible for enlarging Rose's knowledge) is too embarrassed to explain. The butt of the joke is therefore not the ignorant little girl, but her governess, ridiculed for her over-zealous adherence to Victorian notions of 'propriety'.

Occasionally, humour and irony become connected not only to the Victorian-centred novels' project of debunking the Victorians, but also to their xenophobic tendencies.[737] A favourite foreigner to lend comic relief to Victorian-centred fiction is Prince Albert, who combines the twin (dis)advantages of standing metonymically both for the royal family (and hence Victorianism in general) and for everything that is 'un-British'. In Hewlett's *Victorian House*, for instance, he is depicted as extremely good-looking, but cold and not at all likeable, and – inevitably – has a

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[736] Ermida, drawing on a 1988 article by Yan Zhao, makes a similar point in regard to ethnic jokes, "which, if told to hearers that are not familiar with the culture and corresponding stereotypes which such jokes spring from, inform him/her of the nature and existence of such stereotypes" (87).

[737] Cf. ch. 2.2.4.

pronounced and faintly ludicrous German accent. His brief appearance is merely incidental to the plot: as he pays a short visit to the Crystal Palace, still under construction at that time, he waves to the workmen and is gratified to hear them cheer; he drives off contentedly without realising that their enthusiasm is directed not at his own royal person, but at the brewer's cart loaded with ale which has just rounded the corner.[738]

As Jeroen Vandaele points out, narrative humour is inseparably connected to perspective, depending on the positioning of the reader as an outside observer capable of perceiving the gap between the narrator's or character's intentions and the situation as seen from a twentieth-century point of view; it "creates and/or exploits incongruity and superiority relations between the participants [i.e. author, narrator, reader, characters] of narrative texts" (Vandaele, 732). From the point of view of deictic shift theory, therefore, humour – like irony – represents a pop from the story world or the consciousness of an individual character onto a higher-level deictic plane, aligning the reader in these situations with the point of view of the narrator or the author of the text.[739]

At this point, it appears expedient to briefly reiterate one of the key assumptions of deictic shift theory, namely that the reader does not necessarily construct a separate deictic layer at the level of the narration, unless this is explicitly signalled in the text: "[t]he Deictic Shift model of fiction [...] bases its notion of the presence or absence of a SPEAKER or narrator on specific deictic indicators in a text [...] narrators as fictional beings must be created by the text. They do not spring automatically to life as part of the reader's fixed cognitive model of fictional structure" (Galbraith, 46). In the absence of specific clues to the presence of a narrator, the story world is assumed to be created 'by fiat' through the language of the text.[740] This model becomes complicated, however, through the presence of ironic (or, arguably, humorous) features in fiction, which establish a further deictic layer on the basis of which the reader is able to recognise and resolve the apparent incongruity of ironic (or humorous) statements. As Mary Galbraith, following Banfield, points out,

> irony is a way of reading rather than a linguistic (read syntactic) phenomenon. There is nothing syntactic in a sentence such as "torture is fun" to tell the reader that the sentence is to be taken ironically. Rather, a reader accumulates a sense of the values that underlie a literary work, and if some story statement contradicts these values, the reader will either attribute the values expressed to a currently foregrounded character whose values match those of the statement, or he or she will pop out of the story world to search for other motivation for this contradiction. Although dual-voice theorists argue that there is always a narrator, I argue that there is always an author, whose attitudes and subjectivity saturate the text, albeit from another realm. The reader may always pop to consider how to take a given passage by comparing its values with a mental representation of the author's intentions. This kind of consideration is a necessary part of the task of reading. (Galbraith, 49).[741]

Along roughly similar lines, Isabel Ermida (11ff.), in her survey of comic narratives, attributes humorous intentions to the author of a given text, arguing that humour establishes a relationship between reader and author in which the reader unveils the author's intentions, thus perceiving her/himself as "rationally superior" (13) to the characters. This is re-inforced through the emphasis

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[738] Cf. D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 326. Interestingly, however, there are no examples of humour or irony at the expense of the Queen.

[739] For irony, cf. Galbraith, 47ff.; also ch. 1.4.2 and especially ch. 5.2.4.3.

[740] For detailed discussion of this point, cf. ch. 1.4.2.

[741] For a similar point, cf. Fludernik, 352ff.; Bray, 57ff.; Knowles and Moon, 122.

on temporal distance (and hence difference) from the Victorians that these episodes imply: the humour of the situation becomes perceptible to readers only because they see the Victorians from an 'un-Victorian' perspective, and judge them according to a twentieth-century scale of values.

This becomes apparent especially in scenes which exploit Victorian attitudes towards sexuality for comic effect; as has already been pointed out in preceding chapters, these descriptions foreground not only the Victorians' reluctance to openly address 'indelicate' subjects and lack of *theoretical* knowledge, but as time progresses increasingly includes also their *practical* ineptitude: a case in point is the lengthy description of Ruskin explaining to his parents why he found himself incapable of consummating his marriage in Shute's *Victorian Love Story* (57ff.) and his circumlocutory attempts to explain the "unpleasant side" (66) of marriage to his bride (who shows a very 'modern' attitude towards sexuality, and thinks that her husband's vague allusions to the potential 'unpleasantness' of their married life are references to the tediousness of his conversation).

However, it is not only the Victorians in person who are targets of ridicule. In a number of Victorian-centred novels, passages appear which parody Victorian literature. In Arthur Nash's *Dangerous Haven* (1953), for instance, Williams, the detective character (ineptly masquerading as a tidal expert), confronts the protagonist with the erroneous assumption of his having been a captain in the Royal Navy in the West Indies, setting out a detailed catalogue of apparently ingenious deductions on which he has based his assumption. What initially strikes the reader as a Sherlock Holmes pastiche is transformed into parody by Blake's reaction:

> "My dear Mr Williams, I congratulate you. A masterly piece of deduction."
> For the first time I noticed a slight lessening of confidence in his manner.
> "I was right then?"
> "No, sir, I regret to say that you were wrong in almost every particular, but I congratulate you just the same!" (Nash, 218)

In other cases, it is the genre conventions not only of Victorian, but also of Victorian-centred fiction which come in for ridicule, bearing witness to the "determined intertextuality" (Humble, 47) of middlebrow fiction, since the humour of these references depends on the reader's familiarity with other contemporary novels: as outlined above, twentieth-century authors' predilection for psychoanalysing the Victorians frequently receives ironic treatment at the hands of their contemporaries, as does their facile assumption of superiority in other areas. In *Dark Hour*, it is even the convention of authorial claims to historical 'authenticity' which attracts ironic notice, as Kennington includes an author's note which deliberately subverts this claim by linking the events of the novel to other non-historical and non-verifiable incidents:

> Though it may be suggested that two incidents in this book make over-free with History, both have at least a foundation in fact. Miss Slidell did discover, in the Federal lieutenant boarding the Trent, her beau at a Washington Ball. Palmerston, planning a lightning campaign with Judge Mann of Georgia, had a witness – even if tradition refers to him as an anonymous small boy.

In particular, the playful intertextuality of the Victorian-centred genre becomes apparent in works like Angela Thirkell's short novel *Coronation Summer* (1937), in which the author achieves the triple feat of ridiculing the Victorians (especially Victorian women), a particular Victorian author (Charles Dickens), and Victorian literature in general.

5.2.4 Angela Thirkell: *Coronation Summer* (1937)

5.2.4.1 Summary

The novel purports to be an eye-witness account of Queen Victoria's coronation, written by Fanny Darnley, a young Victorian matron, for the benefit of her one-year-old daughter Victoria. She is reminded of her trip to London by the arrival of a book written by Tom Ingoldsby, one of the acquaintances she made on the trip, which includes a humorous poem about the coronation (allegedly) written by his Irish servant Thady. After reading *The Ingoldsby Legends*, Fanny – who entirely misses the joke of the poem's deliberate errors – sets out to correct Thady's mistakes. However, only one tenth of her narrative is devoted to the coronation; the remainder consists of her own and her best friend Emily's sightseeing and shopping tours in the Metropolis, their various social engagements, and – most importantly from Fanny's point of view – their engagements to Mr Darnley and Fanny's brother Ned respectively.

5.2.4.2 Schemata

As has been shown, the target of the authors' and narrators' humour are mainly those aspects of the Victorian period which are perceived as marking it as dissimilar from – and in some way inferior to – the present. This technique of exploiting the Victorians for comic effect by exaggerating those traits which the author leads the reader to perceive as distinctly 'Victorian' is highly revealing about the 'Victorian' schema that readers were supposed to possess, both in terms of text and world schemata. In regard to the former, it is worth noting that Thirkell deliberately (over)uses stylistic features typically associated with Victorian literature, such as direct address of the reader, rhetorical questions, exclamations, and narratorial comments which present 'moral' sentiments or generalise on the basis of the events described.[742]

In terms of world schemata, she sets out to confirm her readers' schematic expectations of the mind style of a Victorian middle-class woman, characterised by frequent euphemisms and an almost obsessive concern for propriety that is displayed also by the other characters in the novel: the girls' landlady is horrified when Fanny looks out of the window at a passer-by, because, in her opinion, "'[...] chance meetings [...] lead to all sorts of things that I wouldn't mention to a young lady like you'" (Thirkell, 37), such as the elopement of her neighbour's daughter: "'[...] if she and her sister hadn't looked out of the window so much, many things mightn't have happened, though one of them did marry a real lord'" (38). Fanny, in turn, proudly stresses her own 'sense of propriety', is scandalised when her friend mentions hearing about a man "walking in his sleep without his breeches" (Thirkell, 6), and insists on calling trousers "inexpressibles" (31); of her second pregnancy, the reader only learns when she refers to her "sewing, I may say, of a minute nature, and undertaken with a view to the future rather than the present" (14). At frequent intervals, she proudly draws the reader's attention to her "painfully sensitive" (3) feelings, which are supposed to mark her as superior to her 'best

[742] Cf. also H. Bell, 2; Bell, however, does not read the novel as a parody, remarking merely that the style is "authentic".

friend' Emily, whom she continually disparages even while she stresses how 'dear' she is to her.

Towards herself, however, she is utterly uncritical, so that she continually exposes her artificiality and hypocrisy to the reader: "with very little effort I sobbed aloud" (Thirkell, 42), she recounts of a mild disagreement with her father. In other passages, she displays the hypocrisy which underlies her dealings with him: after her marriage, she hopes he will remain "at a distance where affection can still hold her sway, unchecked by propinquity" (Thirkell, 22). She complains bitterly when he gives her "one of those hearty kisses which are so destructive of filial affection; but my dutiful feelings as a daughter towards my Papa were restored in full when he presented me at the same time with a twenty-pound note for purchases in London" (Thirkell, 26–7). On other occasions, too, Fanny and Emily show themselves to be unashamedly mercenary: "*Ten Thousand a Year?* That must be of interest" (Thirkell, 4) they immediately conclude upon catching sight of the title of a new book. When Emily – initially afraid that the arrival of the railways will corrupt "the lower orders" (Thirkell, 16) – hears that Fanny's husband stands to profit from it, she immediately forgets her fears and instead demands that he install a new kitchen range in the rectory which he owns and which he has promised to her prospective husband. In addition, Fanny repeatedly exposes her snobbism and exaggerated class consciousness: for instance, she predicts that the advent of the penny post will put an end to letter writing among the gentry, because "there is something low about a thing every farmer's daughter can afford" (Thirkell, 17).

In her dealings with servants, Fanny likewise confirms the reader's expectations of the Victorians: "Matthews, the footman whom we had brought with us, was comfortably disposed in a closet somewhere under the stairs, and my maid Upton somewhere in the attics" (Thirkell, 29), she recounts after her arrival in London; later on, she recalls the week "that Upton very inconsiderately had the toothache [...] and Emily, who is used to visiting the poor, had to look after her, my nerves being too much affected" (Thirkell, 125). The dressmaker from whom she orders a new outfit in London, however, is little better in her dealings with her employees, declaring her intention of dismissing one of her seamstresses because "[s]he has fainted twice in the workroom, which I cannot allow" (Thirkell, 74).

Fanny and Emily's continuous preoccupation with their dress and appearance serves to underline their lack of interest in all other matters. When they are shown Westminster Hall,

> Emily and I stood in silent ecstasy, hoping to conceal our ignorance, while Mr. Vavasour imparted a great amount of useful information to us. I did not thoroughly grasp all he said, for Emily was still anxious about the spots on her dress, and I was endeavouring to persuade her that they were already less unsightly and would shortly disappear altogether, but it was highly instructive. It is so pleasant to have things told to one, for one need not listen, and yet feels the benefit of the information. (Thirkell, 129)

Moreover, they both reveal themselves to be ludicrously ignorant on most other topics, as becomes apparent during a visit to the Zoological Gardens at Surrey:

> "I do long," said Emily, "to see the female gorilla. She must be a doat of an animal. And I would dearly love to see the kangaroos swallow their young."
> At this Ned again rudely burst into a loud guffaw, while Mr Darnley, pained as I could see by Emily's shocking use of the word female, endeavoured to cover up the confusion which she did not feel by relating to me a charming anecdote about a black spaniel [...]. (Thirkell, 54)

In addition, Thirkell also shows them to be incapable of independent thought: when a quarrel between the two erupts at the beginning of the novel, this is because Emily's fiancé's opinion on a recent novel differs from Fanny's husband's.

Thirkell's male characters are, in turn, firmly (and perhaps, in this particular novel, not unjustifiably) convinced of their superiority: Darnley hopes that Ned will "form and improve" (17) Emily's character after their marriage. Mr Darnley's attitude towards Caroline Norton exemplifies Victorian men's philistinism, prudery and patronising attitude towards women. When a female acquaintance confuses her with Miss Landon, he exclaims:

> "My dear madam, [...] how can you say such a thing? Mrs Norton may have genius – it runs in her family – but she is a woman who has suffered her reputation to become a by-word. Whether guilty or not guilty, she is nonetheless to be blamed, and is indeed hardly a fit subject for a conversation where ladies are in question. As for Miss Landon, her character is unstained and she has lately married the governor of Cape Coast Castle. There can be no possible comparison between the two." (Thirkell, 75)

For Darnley, the most important difference between the two writers lies not in their literary oeuvre, but in their reputation: while Caroline Norton is "guilty" merely on the strength of having been accused of adultery, and thus not a fit subject for conversation among ladies, Miss Langdon warrants his praise for her unsullied reputation and advantageous marriage. In the figure of Darnley, the 'typical' Victorian is thus exposed to the ridicule of the twentieth-century audience for being incapable of appreciating literary merit, hypocritical, obsessed with 'respectability', materialistic, and in favour of a double moral standard according to which the blame for an extramarital affair lies solely with the female partner. Once again, the humour of the passage depends on the incongruity of Darnley's remark and on the unexpectedness of his references to these author's private lives rather than their literary oeuvre, but also on the superior position it maps out for the twentieth-century observer vis-à-vis the speaker.

However, Mr Darnley is not the only philistine among Thirkell's cast of Victorian characters. In Mr DeLacy Vavasour, the effete romance writer who courts Fanny until her father gambles away his entire fortune (after which he jilts her in favour of Lady Almeria Norbourne), the author ridicules the literary set of the early Victorian period, but also the aesthetic movement of the 1880s and 1890s (in fact, one of Oscar Wilde's epigrams is attributed to Darnley – and promptly plagiarised by Vavasour – in order to emphasise that her parody extends beyond the early Victorian period of the novel's setting). Despite his artistic aspirations – derided also in a lengthy summary of the utterly implausible plot of one of his four-volume romances –, however, Vavasour shows himself unable to appreciate artistic merit in paintings, in what Thirkell's readers would have perceived as characteristically Victorian fashion insisting that the moral of a picture is more important than its execution.[743]

5.2.4.3 Deixis

On a purely textual level, the deictic structure of the main part of *Coronation Summer* is fairly simple: Fanny acts as the I-narrator and focalised WHO throughout the novel. In terms of temporal deixis, the novel consists of a frame narrative – set in 1840 – from which the reader

[743] In fact, this criticism of Victorian art recurs frequently in Victorian-centred fiction, most notably in D.L. Murray's *Royal Academy* and Doris Leslie's *Concord in Jeopardy*.

pushes back to the events of the year 1837, and to which s/he returns at the end of the novel; the spatial component shifts from Kent (the setting of the frame narrative) to Norfolk (Fanny's home prior to her marriage) and finally to various locations in London. Throughout this part of the book, brief deictic shifts along the personal axis occur merely when Fanny receives notes, letters, or love poems from her admirers. A major shift, however, occurs after Fanny's postscript: in an appendix, Thirkell's novel contains Thady's rhymed account of the coronation, annotated for the reader's convenience so as to establish its connection to extra-fictional historical reality. While the poem itself represents a shift to the deixis of the poem's persona, who observes the events of the coronation from the perspective of a member of the audience, the presence of the footnotes obliges the reader to construct a further deictic layer, ambuiguously positioned between the story world and the real world.

On the one hand, it is possible to attribute the inclusion of both the poem and the notes to Fanny, the focalising WHO of the first section, without violation of the storyworld logic: the poem has been established as known and accessible to her at the beginning, and the historical background information contained in the footnotes (which never goes beyond the year 1840, in keeping with the temporal setting of the frame narrative) might conceivably have been compiled by her. On the other hand, however, the sober, 'academic' style of the notes, as well as the correctness of the information contained (which is virtually incompatible with Fanny's lack of education and interest in current affairs as displayed throughout the book), prompts the reader to attribute them to the extra-fictional presence of the author. This impression is strengthened by the quotations from real-world sources such as Victorian newspapers and non-fictional accounts of the coronation (e.g. the *Greville Memoirs*).[744]

This consideration is of particular importance in relation to *Coronation Summer*, in which much of the irony and humour are aimed not at the characters but at the narrator herself: by contrasting Fanny's intentions as well as her self-perception with her actions on the one hand, and her own account of them on the other, the reader is positioned so as to perceive the gap that exists between her/his own viewpoint and Fanny's. While Fanny functions as the focalising WHO at the deictic centre at the level of the narration, the experience of reading Thirkell's novel is characterised by a series of innumerable pops and pushes, as each of the narrator's statements has to be evaluated against the shared (anti-Victorian) values of the reader and the author presupposed by the text, without which the work would not be perceived as humorous.[745]

5.2.4.4 Intertextuality

It is not only Thirkell's schema-reinforcing depiction of Victorian society, which incorporates all the established anti-Victorian features outlined in chapters two and three, but also her debunking of

[744] It is important to stress, once again, that from the point of view of deictic shift theory, intentional states and evaluative judgements implied by a given text must in the absence of explicitly signalled narrators be attributed to the (mental image that the reader constructs of) the author (cf. ch. 1.4.2 and 5.2.3).

[745] As Ermida (38), following Walker (4), points out, humour depends on shared knowledge, understanding, and values between the humourist and her/his audience. In the absence of a further intra-fictional deictic layer, the existence of this gap must be attributed to Thirkell's apparent intention of debunking the Victorians by drawing attention to their un-selfconscious hypocrisy, superficiality, materialism, and (particularly where middle-class women are concerned) their limited mental scope.

Victorian literature which merits attention. While the main part of the novel parodies what the reader assumes to be the mindstyle of a typical Victorian middle-class woman, with her pretensions to gentility, overuse of euphemisms, and affected sentimentality, there are passages which stand out from the rest for stylistic reasons, imitating on the one hand the conventions of Victorian popular romances, and on the other hand the works of Charles Dickens. Both of these parodies are, however, cleverly integrated into the main part of the text purporting to be Fanny's diary; since both text types are early on established as Fanny's favourite reading, it becomes plausible to suppose that she is familiar with their stylistic features, and might strive to imitate them.

In her depiction of DeLacy Vavasour and his fiancée, Thirkell deliberately exaggerates features of Victorian romance fiction.[746] The humour of the passage hinges on the different intentions that the reader attributes to the narrator – who evidently intends it as an elegant imitation of her favourite authors' style – and to the author, who includes it to show up not only the floweriness of Victorian romance writers' prose, but also Fanny's incapability to achieve the effect for which she aims in her description of Lady Almeria:

> Of middle height, but exquisitely proportioned, the Lady Almeria had a face of pure oval form. Her high white brow was shaded by hair of a rich chestnut, falling in glossy curls upon her alabaster shoulders, and lightly confined by a fillet with a jewelled clasp. Her delicately pencilled eyebrows were arched over large eyes of deepest cerulean blue. Her nose was pure in outline as though chiselled by the hand of Gibson. Her lips, of the deepest vermillion, were full and imperious, and could yet bend to an *espiègle* archness. Her rounded figure was moulded by a dress of pure white silk from the richest looms of Cashmere, while a scarf of fine gauze half hid, half revealed a bust which might have served a Canova as a model. She wore no ornaments except a necklace of cameos richly set with diamonds, and her arms were clasped with magnificent bracelets. As she seated herself I had a glimpse of a fine white stocking and elegant black shoes which might have been Titania's own. (Thirkell, 94)

The passage piles on well-worn clichés (the high white brow, glossy curls, alabaster shoulders, rounded figure, the scarf which "half hid, half revealed" etc.), mocks the 'elevated' style of romance fiction by its use of terms like "cerulean", "vermillion", and "alabaster" instead of 'blue', 'red', and 'white', and the affectation of (over-)using French expressions (*espiègle* instead of mischievous). Repeatedly, Fanny's attempt at pastiche – already ludicrous because of the way in which it clashes with the down-to-earth style of the descriptive passages by which it is bracketed – veers into incongruity, as Lady Almeria's smile (in a context where one would have expected something more obviously 'romantic') is characterised as arch and mischievous, or when her shoes and stockings (not necessarily the garments most readily associated with fairies) are described as worthy of Titania. Moreover, the narrator also shows herself oblivious of the contradiction which resides in her use of "she wore no ornament" (a favourite amongst romance writers who want to stress the natural beauty of their heroines) and her account of Lady Almeria's fabulous necklace. A similar aim becomes apparent in Thirkell's choice of names for her 'romance' characters, DeLacy Vavasour and Lady Almeria Norbourne, her lengthy summary of Mr Vavasour's literary efforts, and her quotes from the preposterously sentimental poems admired by his circle.

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[746] Cf. H. Bell, 3; however, Bell merely notes that Vavasour's own novel, *Jocelyn FitzFulke*, is a parody of Victorian romance fiction.

In other instances, it is Charles Dickens – Fanny's "dear Boz" – who becomes the target of Fanny's pastiche and Thirkell's parody.[747] This becomes apparent especially in the numerous accounts of London life, in which lengthy conversations between 'Cockney' characters (ostensibly intended to be humorous, but in fact utterly pointless and without the slightest relevance for the plot) are reported verbatim: on the one hand, the reader is given the impression that Fanny vainly strives to imitate her role model; on the other hand, Thirkell's parody also suggests that Dickens himself over-uses Cockney slang and fails in his attempts at humour. In addition, Fanny's diary also features a 'mob scene' which parallels those in Dickens's novels, but becomes ridiculous because it utterly fails to convey any sense of menace: as the mob wreaks its revenge on a grounded balloon for refusing to rise, "with frenzied shouts" attacking the "unresisting monster" (Thirkell, 55) and tearing it to shreds but in no way harming either the crew or the bystanders, the novel debunks both Fanny's and Dickens's fear of the mob, and exposes it as another marker of Victorian snobbism and unfounded anti-democratic prejudice.

Thirkell's parody thus functions on two levels: on the one hand, it is targeted at the narrator, mapping out a position of superiority for the reader vis-à-vis an inhabitant of the story world of Thirkell's novel. On the other hand, however, there is a second level that extends beyond the fictional: by discouraging readers from aligning themselves with the views about the historical figures, books, and art works expressed by the narrator, it maps out a position of critical distance towards the Victorian past. This effect is typical of all the examples discussed in this chapter: the ironic or humorous tone adopted by authors or narrators serves to construct a sense of distance, precluding identification and, by highlighting the difference between the Victorians and the contemporary reader in terms of world view and value scales, mapping out an ideological position for the reader that is the opposite from that presented as typically Victorian. Even more than in the other examples discussed in this chapter, the Victorian period is thus presented as a 'different country' designed to distract the reader from the problems of the present by offering an amusing escape into a simpler past. At the same time, however, it is worth speculating whether there may not also be a defensive element underlying these mocking descriptions: by selecting a number of allegedly characteristic features these novels imply that these have been overcome, thus possibly soothing contemporary anxieties about the continuing existence of negative aspects of Victorianism especially in the increasingly conservative climate of the late 1930s and the post-war period.

5.3 Conclusion

In many of the texts discussed in this chapter, the Victorian period emerges as a fictional construct designed to lend a 'period' atmosphere to novels whose action is otherwise not notably concerned with the Victorian age, or its consequences on the present on a level beyond the purely personal or familial. The examples of the Victorian-centred Gothic and crime fiction, as well as Victorian-centred romances, fictional memoirs, and parodies, deploy similar stereotypes about the period, albeit to achieve different effects. Unlike the texts discussed in earlier chapters, they do not aim to

[747] Here I disagree with Hazel Bell's analysis of Thirkell's novel; Bell does not read *Coronation Summer* as a parody of Victorian fiction, nor does she comment on the heavily ironic tone of the book.

chart the historical process that transformed Victorian society into that of the twentieth century, nor are they primarily interested in holding up the Victorians as a 'distant mirror' to the present.

Precisely because of this characteristic, however, the novels grouped together under the heading 'Reinventing the Victorians' are those most ideally suited to an investigation into the ways in which the present shapes writers' and readers' conceptions of the past.[748] It is both interesting and important to note that most of these texts were published at a time when both temporal distance and incisive historical events – most notably the beginning of World War II – had attenuated the emotional impact of the Victorians, and were written by and directed at a generation less likely to view itself as the 'victims of the Victorians' than the audience of the interwar years. While on a superficial level, many of these texts take up criticism of the Victorians along the lines established by their predecessors and contemporaries, it is remarkable that it is the private sector – mainly the Victorians' double morality, sexual repressiveness, and the restrictions imposed on Victorian women in a notoriously patriarchal society – that is foregrounded. In regard to all of these issues, the novels discussed in this chapter – either implicitly or explicitly – subscribe to a teleological conception of history, emphasising the difference that the twentieth century has achieved from the nineteenth and showing the present state of society as an advancement over that of the nineteenth century.

Constructing an image of the Victorian past in accordance with the narrative of historical progress which they aim to project, these novels inevitably reveal a lot about the underlying assumptions authors and audiences had in regard to sexuality, gender roles, and especially women's place in society. As Claud Cockburn observes in his account of *The Books that Everyone Read* between 1900 and 1939:

> Obviously, the best-selling historical romances did not shed so much direct light on personal behaviour at the time they were written. Obliquely they shed a lot. True, the historical romancer does not purport to be dealing with the manners and customs of his contemporaries. He is reporting events in an imaginary world. But he and his contemporary readers have constructed that world and peopled it with figures of their own devising. The way they ensure or demand that these puppets should behave is inevitably an indication of their attitudes to human behaviour in the 'private sector' in their own day. (14–5)

It is also worth noting that the emphasis of the texts analysed in this chapter – despite their differences both as regards the presentation and the evaluation of the Victorian period – is on its 'pastness': in all of the disparate groups of texts discussed here, readers are positioned so as to perceive the Victorian era as clearly distinct and utterly distant from their own. Both in the examples of the Victorian-centred Gothic in chapter 5.1 and in the Victorian-centred memoirs discussed in chapter 5.2.2, this is achieved (mainly) through the inclusion of a twentieth-century narrator, who draws the readers' attention to the fact that the settings of these texts (and the socio-cultural and ideological framework that characterised them) have long since disappeared, and are accessible only as mediated through the narrative. In the case of Victorian-centred romance fiction, in contrast, the sense of distance that the reader experiences from the historical setting is achieved by highlighting those aspects of Victorian women's lives which were least likely to correspond to those of the present-day audience.

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[748] Cf. ch. 1.3.

In all of these instances, the sense of distance and the teleological conception of history that underlies these novels' presentation of the Victorian period makes the past a restful place to escape to, since readers are not called upon to act or assume responsibility.[749] In addition, the audience – positioned to perceive themselves as living in circumstances that are not only the outcome of a historical *process*, but of historical *progress* – is given the opportunity to feel superior over the Victorians, who are depicted as less enlightened in certain key areas of life, among them sex and gender, religion, art, literature, fashion, medicine, science, and technology.

This becomes most clearly apparent in those texts which construct the Victorians as objects of ridicule or amusement for the twentieth-century reader. As Ermida (19), following Henri Bergson (101), points out, emotional identification with the target precludes laughter;[750] conversely, laughter – often based on a sense of superiority over that at which it is aimed[751] – also precludes emotional identification with its object. Laughing at the Victorians may well be seen as an act of residual exorcism, especially in Angela Thirkell's pre-World War II Victorian parody: by laughing at certain facets of Victorianism – most saliently its rigid system of gender roles, and the views and attitudes patriarchal society inculcated in Victorian women – readers are invited to distance themselves from these views and from the people who held them, even while enjoying the experience of travelling to the 'distant country' of a fictional(ised) past.

Simultaneously, however, even ostensibly anti-Victorian texts such as *Coronation Summer* contain an element of affection, perhaps even nostalgia, for the Victorians: "In imitating, even with critical difference, parody reinforces. [...] Parody is fundamentally double and divided: its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature as authorized transgression" (Hutcheon, *Parody*, 26). Crucially, this applies not only to Thirkell's lampooning of Victorian literary styles and genres, but also to her evocation of the period as an age of stable gender roles, fixed class barriers, material well-being, and a sense of intellectual, religious, and moral self-assurance that appears no less enviable for being retrospectively exposed as unfounded.

In fact, it is this aspect of the period – its "almost preposterous peace and security" (Mottram, *Mr Dormer*, 224) and not primarily its materialism, moral hypocrisy, or sexual repressiveness – that emerges as one of the most crucial defining features of Victorianism in Victorian-centred fiction throughout the whole period under consideration, and that lies at the core of these novels' ambiguous evaluation of the era:[752] "She was quite certain that she was right on every possible occasion, and not only that any other point of view was wrong but that there was no other point of view" (Askwith, 27), we learn of Catherine's Victorian stepmother in *The Blossoming Tree*; "'I wish I could recognize good and evil as easily as you, my dear,'" John Ruffy exclaims in *Ruffy and Sons*, only to be told impatiently: "'Right's right, and wrong's wrong. What more do you want?'" (Woden, 93) by his quintessentially Victorian wife; and it is no coincidence that Rose

[749] For this point in regard to the popularity of historical romance fiction in particular, cf. Radway, 98.

[750] Cf. also Ermida, 99, following Giora, 482f.

[751] For a detailed discussion of the 'disparagement theory' of humour, cf. Ermida, 15ff.

[752] A similar point is made by As Sally Shuttleworth (258f.), who convincingly argues in her analysis of more recent neo-Victorian novelists' fascination with the figure of Charles Darwin that nostalgia for the Victorian age may be triggered by a sense of envy for the emotional intensity of the Darwinian crisis of faith which the absence of a fixed belief system in twentieth-century society arguably renders impossible.

Macaulay, in *Told By An Idiot*, attempts to deconstruct the prevailing stereotype of the Victorians by creating a character notable for his ludicrous *lack* of spiritual certainty.

It is also one of the aspects on the basis of which it is tempting to construct a narrative of anti-Victorianism to nostalgia: many books written during or in the immediate aftermath of World War I share the assessment of Ralph Hale Mottram in his 1927 novel *Our Mr Dormer*, who disparages "Victorian cocksureness" (167) and points out that it is through the fault of the Victorians – their politicians having been too sure of the correctness of their actions on the international level, and the majority of voters too preoccupied with making money to concern themselves with their country's foreign policy – that "[t]he country was in a state of war. Nothing he or anyone else could now undo what was done – the gradual culmination of the history of a century, in which Doughty's Bank had played its part, and was in the long run, implicated" (283). By the end of the 1930s, however, as concerns about the Britsh economy and the aftershocks of World War I (for both of which the Victorians could be held directly responsible) were replaced by fear of the rise of Fascism in Europe (an external threat unconnected to the country's Victorian legacy), there is a growing sense of nostalgia for the period's "real gaiety, its sense of security, its good fellowship, its convictions" (Dean, 84) at a time when "all was unstable, uneasy, uncertain. What a change from the day of her birth, thought Laura, from that various but homogeneous Victorian world!" (Bentley, *Sleep*, 553). When Britain was faced with an external threat from Hitler's Germany, the Victorians gradually came to be regarded not as those responsible for the problems of the present day, but as a "vigorous people, proud in their wealth and the heritage of England" (D. Hewlett, *Victorian House*, 534), and 'Britishness' in many texts became equated with the attributes and values perceived as characteristic of the Victorian middle class. Simultaneously, Victorian views on patriotic duty and military heroism, which had come under fierce attack in the immediate aftermath of World War I, were gradually re-instated. Not infrequently, it is this essentially positive evaluation of the era that is carried over into the novels of the postwar period.

As has been argued in this thesis, however, to construct a linear narrative of anti-Victorianism to nostalgia on this basis would be an oversimplification that fails to take into account the thematic range convered by Victorian-centred fiction. On the one hand, it has been shown that there are themes which recur in a large number of Victorian-centred novels, and which play a crucial role in defining the notion of Victorianism, in regard to which it appears possible to establish a clear contrast between the 'anti-Victorian' novels of the interwar period, and the 'nostalgic' texts of the postwar era. The period's materialism and fiercely profit-oriented capitalist mentality is certainly a case in point, if one juxtaposes the politically engaged Marxist novels of the thirties and the ideologically conservative, pro-capitalist texts of the fifties. On the other hand, however, it is important to stress that such a reading fails to take into account both the existence of openly anti-communist novels during the interwar years, and of the ideologically conservative 'romances of commerce' that were published throughout the whole period under consideration. Where women's position in society is concerned, too, it is arguably possible to trace a development from the openly anti-Victorian texts of the immediate post-World War I era to the ideologically far more conservative novels of the 1950s: it is certainly worth noting that the range of issues reflected in women's Victorian-centred fiction (especially the career novels discussed in

chapter 4.1.1 and the romances and memoirs analysed in chapters 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) bear witness to an increasingly conservative view of women's role from the end of World War II onwards, as the range of topics narrows down to more obviously domestic concerns, and traditional 'Victorian' gender roles are evaluated increasingly positively. Again, however, this account glosses over the existence of deeply conservative texts (such as *Mainwaring*, *A Challenge to Sirius*, or *The Madonna of the Barricades*) written during the 1910s and early 1920s.[753]

As has been shown above, investigations into the family life of the Victorians form an important thematic concern of Victorian-centred fiction at any time during the inter- and postwar years. However, here too the depiction and the evaluation of the Victorians arguably changes in the course of the decades: whereas texts from the interwar period – especially those of the 1910s and 1920s – frequently evince a profound interest in charting the psychological damage wrought by the Victorians on their children, but also in exploring the complex interplay between unconscious psychological mechanisms and social pressure that motivates Victorian parents, later texts tend to take the Victorians' patriarchal tyranny for granted, and show a much greater interest in characters (especially young girls and working women) who successfully break out of its confines. Ironically, however, despite their rebellious protagonists these latter texts are frequently more conservative than their more pessimistic precursors, affirming the patriarchal framework by suggesting that women can achieve happiness and a satisfactory degree of personal freedom even within its limits. It is crucial to stress, however, that even in this area, there exist a number of texts which disrupt the established pattern, such as the openly pro-patriarchal novels discussed in chapter 3.1.4, or psychologically acute investigations into the crippling effects patriarchal ideology had on men, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner's 1954 novel *The Flint Anchor*.

In point of fact, the very notion of 'anti-Victorianism' becomes highly problematic when one takes into account the gradual change of the connotative meaning of 'Victorianism' outlined in the introduction: a feature that might have been attacked as distinctly 'Victorian' in 1920 (such as the period's excessive materialism) might not have appeared in the same light to a 1950s audience accustomed to define the Victorian era mainly in terms of its sexual repressiveness. The shift in connotative meaning becomes most clearly apparent when one contrasts the use of the term in works from a single author, such as, for instance, those of Ralph Hale Mottram: in *Our Mr Dormer*, the Victorian period is primarily defined as the "Industrial-Commercial era" (297); roughly twenty years later in *Scenes that Are Brightest*, in contrast, its most salient feature has become "[a]ll that subterranean sex and shiftiness" (143).[754]

To a large extent, this shift coincides with – and arguably is both reflected in and influenced by – the gradual change in thematic emphasis that takes place in Victorian-centred fiction during the period under consideration: whereas earlier novels tend to be concerned with the legacy of the Victorians both in the public and the private domain (frequently highlighting the complex interweaving of private and public issues that characterises for instance the work of Bentley and Warner), the emphasis progressively comes to be placed on the private sector as temporal distance

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[753] Cf. ch. 3.1.4.

[754] In the first work, moreover, the women of the Dormer family appear only as minor figures; in the second one, Frances Dormer features as the main character.

increases. On the one hand, this goes hand in hand with the political and economic developments outlined above; on the other hand, it also coincides with a shift towards an overwhelmingly female audience and an apparent attempt on the part of the authors to address concerns that were perceived as distinctly 'feminine': love and marriage, childrearing methods, housework and the 'servant problem', women's education, and opportunities for work outside the home. As has been shown, this trend is perceptible already in the interwar period (for instance in novels like Netta Syrett's *The Victorians* and Dorothy Hewlett's *Victorian House*), and intensifies during the postwar years, as the Victorians are gradually re-invented in order to comment on contemporary issues such as birth control, working mothers, or women's entry into the professions.

While the above-mentioned examples arguably show that certain trends are discernible within the generic tradition of the Victorian-centred novel, it is nevertheless important to stress that a chronological narrative of linear progress from post-World War I anti-Victorianism to post-World War II nostalgia can be constructed only on the basis of highly selective samples, but becomes untenable if one looks at a wider range of texts. Moreover, it also fails to take into account that the notion of 'Victorianism' itself consists of a number of constituent features, and rejection of one does not entail a negative evaluation of all others: a novel may, for instance, be highly critical of Victorian capitalism, but openly endorse Victorian gender roles; conversely, it may attack 'Victorian' sexual hypocrisy, but affirm the period's rigid social hierarchy. At all points between 1914 and 1959, anti- and pro-Victorianism coexist, sometimes even within the same work as writers reject some facets of the Victorian period but endorse others, or at least unconsciously continue them. On the one hand, this is due to the variety of attitudes and interests that authors themselves held, or attributed to their intended readership; on the other hand, it also reflects the variable range of characteristics that were, at a given point in time, perceived as typically 'Victorian'.

What unites the disparate texts discussed in this thesis is therefore their interest in, but not their depiction or evaluation of the Victorian period; as has been shown in the analyses compiled in this study, 'Victorian' may mean entirely different things to different authors, or even to the same author at different historical moments, as the Victorian past is used to explain, comment on, or merely escape the present. At best, it is possible to cautiously conclude that as the temporal distance to the Victorians increases, the tone of anti-Victorian criticism becomes more tolerant, and the element of nostalgia increases; as George Woden observes in *Ruffy and Sons*, "[t]ime mellow[s] the past" (95). By surveying the thematic concerns of Victorian-centred fiction, analysing the textual strategies through which these novels interact with the reader's antecedent knowledge and beliefs about the Victorians, and probing the breaks, gaps, and contradictions that appear in the ideological stance implied by these texts, the present study has aimed at answering the question that underlies all narrativisation of history: what in the present makes the past? Its objective is not to chart a linear progression from the Victorians' Oedipal murder in 1914 or 1918 to their nostalgic resurrection in the 1950s; rather, it is to historically and socio-culturally contextualise the numerous Oedipal murders and nostalgic resurrections of the Victorians that take place during the first half of the twentieth century.

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Index – Authors, Primary Works, and 'Eminent Victorians'

A

Albert, Prince
as a fictional character 52; 332–3
Archer, Margaret
Gull Yard 174; 287; 289–90
Ash, Bernard 9
Silence for his Worship 29 n. 103; 103; 211; 242; 244–5; 247–8; 294
Askwith, Betty 324 n. 729
The Blossoming Tree 3; 98; 100; 211; 324–31; 342
Austen, Jane
Northanger Abbey 292
Emma 82 n. 286

B

Bailey, H.C.
The Rebel 104–5; 124–30; 179 n. 484; 212 n. 524; 252; 331
Barrie, J.M.
Courage 307
Bennett, Arnold 3; 5; 72; 78
The Old Wives' Tale 3
Bentley, Phyllis 21; 70 n. 258; 74 n. 264; 82; 85–8; 90; 98; 102–3; 115; 136; 147; 154
O Dreams, O Destinations 147 n. 411
Sleep in Peace 61; 72 n. 261; 88–90; 132–4; 169 n. 461; 171; 182; 183–93; 196; 199–208
The English Regional Novel 72; 79
The Inheritance 35; 49; 57; 70–81; 82; 85–93; 102–3; 136; 142–3; 149–52; 154
Bloom, Ursula *see 'Prole, Lozania'*
Boothroyd, Derrick
Shoddy Kingdom 93–6
Brontë sisters 152; 200
Brontë, Charlotte
Jane Eyre 52; 82 n. 286
Shirley 82 n. 286
Brontë, Emily
Wuthering Heights 82 n. 286
Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Edward
Alice, or The Mysteries 264 n. 611
Butler, Samuel
The Way of All Flesh 146–7

C

Chesterton, Gilbert Keith
The Victorian Age in Literature 2–3
Collins, Wilkie
The New Magdalen 264 n. 611
Cooper, Lettice
The New House 194
Coote, Howard
While I Remember 328 n. 730
'Cory, William' *see Johnson, William*.
'Cousins, Sheila' (Matthews, Ronald)
To Beg I Am Ashamed 254 n. 593

D

Dale, W.V.Y.
I Rest My Claims 212 n. 524; 226; 228; 232–3; 284
Darbyshire, Shirley
Journey to Melbury 3; 174; 195; 199; 203 n. 512; 210; 212; 225
The Years at Melbury 195–6; 199; 210
Dean, Violet
Love's A Man of War 100; 139; 141; 166; 186–7; 196; 200–8; 217–9; 243–4; 249
Deeping, Warwick
Caroline Terrace 136; 316; 319–20; 331
Delafield, E.M.
Thank Heaven Fasting 194
Delves-Broughton, J.
A Sojourn in England 321
Past Returned 321
Dickens, Charles 115; 164; 228 n. 550; 234; 240; 243–7; 316; 334; 339–40
adaptations 4; 9; 288; 243 n. 560
as a fictional character 226–8; 232–3; 284
David Copperfield 233; 240
Dombey and Son 52; 61; 114; 164; 233
Great Expectations 82 n. 286; 240
Nicholas Nickelby 243
Oliver Twist 243–4
Our Mutual Friend 158
Disraeli, Benjamin
as a fictional character 238
Sybil, or The Two Nations 240

Dryden, John
Marriage a-la-Mode 191

E

Egerton, George
Discords. 165
Eliot, George 78
Middlemarch 78
Daniel Deronda 82 n. 286
Felix Holt 82 n. 286
Mill on the Floss 82 n. 286
Eliot, T.S.
"A Song for Simeon" 308
Elsna, Hebe
Consider These Women 226–8; 233; 284
The Sweet Lost Years 226; 229
Emerson, David
Dark Bright Rose 226
Engels, Friedrich
as a fictional character 83; 90
Eyles, Margaret Leonora 119 n. 357
The Woman in the Little House 119 n. 357

F

Ferguson, Rachel
The Brontës Went to Woolworths 147
Ferguson Hannay, Doris. *see 'Leslie, Doris'*
Feuchtwanger, Lion
The Ugly Duchess 191
Flaubert, Gustave
L'Education Sentimentale 82; 272
Fowles, John
The French Lieutenant's Woman 5; 281 n. 665
Furnell, John
The Stringed Lute 226–7; 287

G

Galsworthy, John 5
In Chancery 320
Gaskell, Elizabeth
North and South 78; 81 n. 285
Gayton, Catherine
Poor Papa 243–4; 316; 318–9
Gladstone, William Ewart
as a fictional character 238
Gosse, Edmund
on Dickens 246
Father and Son 146–7; 211
Graves, Robert
Claudius the God 226
Count Belisarius 226
I, Claudius 226
The Story of Marie Powell, Wife to Mr Milton 226
Greville, Charles
The Greville Memoirs 338

H

Hall, Eleanor Dunbar
Mine Is the Power 29 n. 101; 137; 249
Hall, Radclyffe
The Unlit Lamp 194
The Well of Loneliness 84 n. 302; 268–70
Hanley, James
Boy 268
Hardy, Thomas
Desperate Remedies 268 n. 621
The Dynasts 78
Harwood, Alice
The Strangeling 98; 170 n. 464; 332
Herbert, George
"Discipline" 200 n. 509
Hewlett, Dorothy
The Flowing Tide 193; 211; 213; 217–9; 221; 224–5
Victorian House 61–2; 124; 146; 154–70; 172–3; 179; 186–7; 210–12; 218; 242–5; 247; 249; 331–2; 343; 345
Hewlett, Maurice 20
Mainwaring 20 n. 63; 86–8; 98; 101; 142; 175; 178–80; 230; 234–42; 343–4
Hibbert, Eleanor *see 'Kellow, Kathleen'*
Holtby, Winifred
The Crowded Street 194
Hooke, Nina Warner
Darkness I Leave You 174; 221; 254; 312
Howard, Mary
Sew A Fine Seam 198; 219–22; 224

J

Jesse, Fryniwyd Tennyson 7
Secret Bread 152; 204; 211

Johnson, William ('William Cory')
Ionica 268 n. 621

K

Kaye-Smith, Sheila 7 n. 24; 110 n. 346; 118 n. 356
A Challenge to Sirius 104; 105–19; 121; 124–8; 130; 139–40; 142; 175–9; 204; 222–3; 251
'Kellow, Kathleen' (Eleanor Hibbert) 98 n. 327
Lilith 98–100; 172–4; 210; 212; 242; 245; 249
Kennington, Alan
The Dark Hour. 138; 314; 322; 334
Kenyon, F.W. 8; 324 n. 729
Without Regret. 103; 133; 199; 201; 324 n. 729
King, Constance
Mary and the Lion 320–4

L

Laing, Jan
Queen of the Chase 321
Lang, Theo *see 'Piper, Peter'*
Laski, Marghanita
Ecstasy 306 n. 700
The Victorian Chaise-Longue 57; 289; 295–311
Lawrence, H.D. 5
Lady Chatterley's Lover 247
Lenanton, Carola. *see 'Oman, Carola'*
'Leslie, Doris' (Lady Ferguson Hannay) 196 n. 504
Concord in Jeopardy 86; 138–9; 141; 182; 196–8; 204; 212–3; 225; 230–1; 233; 236; 238; 244; 246 n. 565; 279
Royal William 196 n. 504
The Starling 197 n. 506

M

Macaulay, Rose 7 n. 25; 65 n. 246; 147 n. 413; 182 n. 493; 288 n. 681
Told by an Idiot 3; 147 n. 413; 171; 182–3; 193; 211; 331; 343
Marcus, Steven
The Other Victorians 246; 253
Marton, Francesca
Mrs. Betsey 225 n. 540
Marx, Karl
as a fictional character 90–1
Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' 83
Critique of the Gotha Programme 90; 191
The Communist Manifesto 85
Matthews, Ronald *see 'Cousins, Sheila'*
Maugham, W. Somerset
Cakes and Ale 232
Meagher, Maude
The Green Scamander 267
Mee, Arthur
One Thousand Beautiful Things 306 n. 700
Menen, Aubrey
The Abode of Love 251
Meredith, Anne 219
Impetuous Heart 98; 100–3; 133
Meredith, George 114–5
The Ordeal of Richard Feverel 264 n. 611
Miller, Thomas
Godfrey Malvern 264 n. 611
Morris, William
as a fictional character 230
News From Nowhere 88
Mottram, Ralph Hale 8; 96 n. 324; 324 n. 729
Our Mr Dormer 3; 96–7; 243; 342–4
Scenes that are Brightest 3; 199; 324–8
The Spanish Farm 96 n. 324
Murray, D.L. 8; 119 n. 357
Royal Academy 337 n. 742
Trumpeter, Sound! 62–3; 91; 94; 119–22; 229 n. 551; 242; 244–5; 253;

N

Nash, Arthur
Dangerous Haven 138; 229 n. 552; 334
Nicholson, Renton
Dombey and Daughter 243 n. 560
Norton, Caroline
as a fictional character 52; 226; 229; 288 n. 681; 337

O

'Oman, Carola' (Carola Lenanton)
Miss Barrett's Elopement 226

P

Peel, John Hugh Brignall
The Gallant Story 230; 221 n. 531
'Piper, Peter' (Lang, Theo)
Margot Leck 137; 288–91
Prince Albert *see Albert, Prince*

'Prole, Lozania' (Ursula Bloom)
A Queen for England 226
Consort to the Queen 226
The Little Victoria 226; 231

Q

Queen Victoria *see Victoria, Queen*

R

Roberts, C.E. Bechhofer
Bread and Butter 226; 233
This Side Idolatry 226–8; 232; 284
Rossetti, Christina
Goblin Market 268 n. 621
Rossetti, Dante Gabriel
as a fictional character 226; 229–30
Rubinstein, Harold Frederick
The Dickens of Gray's Inn 226 n. 544
On the Portsmouth Road 226 n. 544
Russell, Bertrand
Marriage and Morals 258

S

Sadleir, Michael
Desolate Splendour 255 n. 598; 314
Fanny by Gaslight 57; 135; 137; 221; 246; 250 n. 586; 253–5; 255–67; 285; 294
Forlorn Sunset 243 n. 559; 245–7; 255 n. 598
The Noblest Frailty 314
Scott, Sir Walter
Guy Mannering 240
The Bride of Lammermoor 240
The Fair Maid of Perth 240
Waverley 17 n. 55
Selfridge, H. Gordon
The Romance of Commerce 91 n. 318
Shaw, George Bernard
Pygmalion 3
Shute, Nerina
Victorian Love Story 226; 229–30
Sinclair, May 7 n. 24 and 25; 8 n. 27; 147; 152–3; 182 n. 493; 195; 288 n. 681
Mary Olivier: A Life 194–5
The Life and Death of Harriett Frean 194–5
The Three Brontës 152
The Three Sisters 152–4; 211–12; 217
Smith, Eleanor Furneaux
Caravan 230–1; 227 n. 547; 244; 246 n. 565; 249–50; 253
Smith, Shelley
An Afternoon to Kill 29 n. 104; 60 n. 237; 174; 253; 294–5
Smith, Wallace
Bessie Cotter 254 n. 593
Stokes, Leslie and Sewell Stokes
Oscar Wilde 226 n. 544
Stokes, Sewell
Beyond His Means 226
Stopes, Marie
Married Love, or Love in Marriage 206
Strachey, John St. Loe 8; 90 n. 315; 91 n. 317
The Madonna of the Barricades 69; 82; 90–1; 104; 125–8; 144 314; 321–2; 344
Strachey, Lytton 3; 5; 10; 90 n. 315; 200; 203; 205; 227
Eminent Victorians 142; 205; 227
Queen Victoria 226
Swinnerton, Frank 147 n. 413; 217
English Maiden 220–1
Syrett, Netta
The Victorians 3; 199–206; 332; 345

T

Thackeray, William Makepeace
as a fictional character 52; 226–7; 233
Vanity Fair 114; 54 n. 205
Thirkell, Angela 7 n. 24
Coronation Summer 243; 312; 334; 335–40; 342
Trask, Betty
The Merry Belles of Bath 321
Tucker, Norman 217
Jealous Goddess 122–3; 127; 174–5; 212; 221–3

V

Victoria, Queen
as a fictional character 52; 226; 229; 288 n. 679; 335

W

Warner, Sylvia Townsend 7 n. 24 and 25; 182 n. 493; 273 n. 641; 274 n. 646; 284 n. 674
Summer Will Show 21; 65; 82–6; 88; 90; 102–3; 140; 142–3; 154–5; 179; 217; 223;

267; 270–6; 283–4; 286; 288 n. 681; 344
The Flint Anchor 29 n. 101; 267; 280–4; 286; 288 n. 681; 344
The True Heart 253
Wells, H.G.
Ann Veronica 192; 203
Mr Britling Sees It Through 121
Weyman, Stanley J. 314 n. 722
A Gentleman of France 314 n. 722
Chippinge 314 n. 722
Ovington's Bank 314 n. 713
The Great House 314–6; 321
Whitey, Janet
The Quaker Bride 174; 287; 288 n. 680; 289; 292
Wilde, Oscar 5; 140; 278; 337
as a fictional character 226–7; 229; 285
The Importance of Being Earnest 191
Wildeblood, Peter 280–1
Woden, George
Ruffy and Sons 92–4; 212; 342; 345
Woolf, Virginia 3; 5; 65 n. 246; 147 n. 413; 200
"Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" 3; 19
Between the Acts 20; 200
Flush 225
Moments of Being 3; 203
Orlando 125; 225
The Years 5; 183; 200
Three Guineas 69

Y

Yates, Edmund Hodgson
Land at Last: a novel 264 n. 611

Appendix

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit der Darstellung des viktorianischen Zeitalters in populären (historischen) Romanen des frühen und mittleren zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Anhand von über siebzig Romanen wird ein Überblick über das sich wandelnde Bild der Periode skizziert. Besonderes Augenmerk liegt hierbei einerseits auf der Verankerung der gegenständlichen Texte in ihrem politischen, sozio-kulturellen und historischen Kontext, andererseits aber auch auf der detaillierten Analyse der textuellen Strukturen und Strategien, durch welche diese Romane auf kognitiver und emotionaler Ebene zur Positionierung des Lesers gegenüber dem viktorianischen Zeitalter beitragen. Dieser Dualismus spiegelt sich sowohl im methodologischen Ansatz als auch in der Struktur der Arbeit wider. Ersterer kombiniert Pierre Machereys Theorie der literarischen Produktion, die auf das Auffinden von Brüchen, Leerstellen und Widersprüchen im Text als Symptome des textuellen Unbewussten (welches den ideologischen Hintergrund der Entstehungssituation reflektiert) abzielt, mit Wolfgang Isers Rezeptionsästhetik und kognitiven Methoden der Literaturanalyse.

Auf struktureller Ebene gliedert sich die Arbeit in eine Abfolge von breit gefächerten Überblickskapiteln, welche die Behandlung einzelner Themen (wie etwa Krieg, Industrialisierung und Kapitalismus, die patriarchalische Gesellschaftsordnung und die Stellung der Frau, Generationenkonflikte, Sexualität, etc.) in einer repräsentativen Auswahl zeitgenössischer Romane darstellen. Diese werden durch detaillierte Interpretationen einzelner Texte ergänzt. Diese Analysen demonstrieren insbesondere die Funktion von Deixis in der Sympathielenkung und Positionierung des Lesers, und die Art und Weise, auf welche diese Romane bereits vorhandenes (vermeintliches) Wissen (*schemata*) über die viktorianische Zeit aufgreifen und dieses zu bestätigen oder verändern suchen.

Die Arbeit positioniert sich bewusst im Dialog zu bereits vorliegenden Studien zum historischen Roman und zu ‚middlebrow fiction' aus der fraglichen Epoche, sowie zum neo-viktorianischen Roman der letzten Jahrzehnte; auch ergeben sich immer wieder Anknüpfungspunkte zu bereits detailliert aufgearbeiteten kanonischen (insbesondere modernistischen) Texten aus derselben Periode. Auf der Basis der breiten Literaturauswahl gelingt es in der vorliegenden Arbeit, die gängige Darstellung einer linearen Entwicklung von ödipalem Aufbegehren gegen die viktorianische Elterngeneration bis hin zu nostalgischer Verklärung während der 1950er in Frage zu stellen. Anstelle dessen wird die komplexe Dynamik eines Revisionsprozesses der viktorianischen Zeit dargestellt, der zwar lineare Entwicklungstrends mit einschließt, allerdings auf Grund der breit gefächerten Thematiken, die mit dieser Epoche in Verbindung gebracht werden, keine Reduktion auf ein einziges ‚master narrative' zulässt.

Weiteres Augenmerk liegt darauf, eine Ergänzung zu Rudolph Glitzs Aufarbeitung des sich wandelnden Bildes der Epoche anhand kanonischer Texte von Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, D.H. Lawrence und Virginia Woolf in *Writing the Victorians* (2009) zu bieten, und auf der Vorstellung von Vorgängern des rezenten neo-viktorianischen Romans, als dessen Prototypen gemeinhin Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) und John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) gelten.

Die vorliegende Abhandlung bietet somit einen Beitrag zur Erweiterung des Interessensgebietes der neo-viktorianischen Forschung sowie kultur- und sozialhistorisch kontextualisierte Textanalysen bis dato kaum beachteter früher fiktionaler Darstellungen des viktorianischen Zeitalters.

Short summary

The present doctoral thesis presents a survey of the changing image of the Victorians in (historical) middlebrow fiction in the course of the first half of the twentieth century. It is based on a corpus of over seventy works published between 1914 and 1959. On the one hand, its main emphasis lies on establishing links between these texts and their political, socio-cultural, and historical context. On the other hand, detailed analyses of the novels in question explore the textual structures and strategies which serve to influence the reader's position *vis à vis* the Victorians on a cognitive as well as emotional level. This dual interest is reflected both in the methodological approach and in the structure of this thesis. On the methodological level, the approach chosen draws on Pierre Macherey's theory of literary production, which aims at exposing the textual unconscious by focusing on breaks, gaps, and contradictions within the text. This is combined with Iserian aesthetics and approaches from cognitive poetics, most notably schema theory and deictic shift theory, which aim to explore the strategies through which the text acts as a 'structured prefigurement' (Iser) that guides the reader's response during the act of reading.

On the structural level, the present study consists of chapters offering surveys of the treatment of key themes (e.g. war, industrialisation and capitalism, patriarchy, the position of women, generational tension, sexuality etc.) in a broad range of middlebrow novels from the period. These sections alternate with and are complemented by detailed analyses of individual texts. These focus both on the role of deixis as a means of mapping out a position for the readers, and determining their attitude towards the Victorians, and on the ways in which these novels interact with the audience's antecedent knowledge and beliefs about the Victorian era, seeking to confirm, disrupt, or add to existing schemata.

The present study deliberately seeks to engage in a dialogue with existing work on historical and middlebrow fiction from the relevant epoch, as well as with recent studies on late twentieth and early twenty-first century neo-Victorian fiction. In addition, there are numerous points of contact between the works under consideration in this thesis, and canonical (modernist) texts from the period, whose treatment of the Victorians has already received a fair amount of scholarly attention. Drawing on a broad range of texts, the present study aims to deconstruct the dominant narrative of a linear progression from oedipal revolt against the Victorian parental generation to nostalgic glorification of the period during the 1950s. It explores the complex dynamics of a process of rewriting and revisioning the Victorians which displays some linear aspects, but which, due to the thematic range and complexity of the relevant novels' engagements with the Victorian period, resists reduction to a single master narrative.

A further goal is to complement Rudolph Glitz's excellent study *Writing the Victorians* (2009), which deals with the treatment of the period in the family sagas of Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf. In addition, the present thesis seeks to raise

awareness of early precursors of the recent neo-Victorian novel, whose roots are usually traced back either to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), or John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). This thesis thus contributes to the extension of the chronological scope of the field of neo-Victorian studies and offers historically and socio-culturally contextualised analyses of early literary re-engagements with the Victorian period which have so far largely escaped scholarly attention.

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