The Surplus of Culture

The Surplus of Culture:
Sense, Common-sense, Non-sense

Edited by

Ewa Borkowska and Tomasz Burzyński

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Fig. 5.1
Lewis Carroll's chess diagram. The image based on *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll, in: Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1992), p. 106.

Fig. 7.1
The Marx Brothers. A studio still photograph taken from *Duck Soup* dir. Leo McCarey (1933).

IN PLACE OF A FOREWORD

Despite its overtly and overly economic implications, the category of surplus can be reflected by deeply-seated and culture-wide mechanisms of cultural production in which the added value of sense, common sense and nonsense is represented as languages of irony, irrationality and absurdity potentially subverting the well-entrenched "regimes" of cultural meaningfulness. As a consequence, the term "surplus of culture" refers to situations in which our understanding is no longer commonsensical and it requires a scholarly effort to interpret, to unveil idiosyncrasies implicit in the supposedly ordered sphere of symbolic reality. The essays collected in this volume share this need for critical re-examination, a want to present the elusive surplus of culture in the spotlight of theory and academic practice.

Canon Re-visited

Ours is an ultra-modern world in which technological and social progresses shatter the well-established foundations of institutional and symbolic orders. Hence, the times of (post)modernity connotes as an era of rampaging post-traditionalism, an advent of future-oriented culture which does not look at history with awe and veneration but, contrariwise, with a critical attitude to re-examine (and sometimes ridicule) the legacy of the past. Hence, there is always some surplus left in the classical literary works which allows for parodies, mocking, but also re-examination and revision. Victorian novels, for instance, can be mocked and parodied as **Agnieszka Gołda** demonstrates in selected instances of neo-Victorianism in fiction in which the critical or parodic lenses have been directed not so much at the poor Victorian scapegoat from the past as, in a type of self-referential gesture, the neo-Victorian culture itself. In this context, Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* (2001) departs even more radically from earlier practised politics of reparation and plunges both metaphorically and literally into the text world of *Jane Eyre*. The reference to the past, which has always offered an excess of the literary and cultural, can also be observed in **Andrzej Wicher's** writing on John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* where Ruskin makes sense of the conception of femininity. In his re-examination Ruskin, one of the most eminent scholars and aesthetes of the

19th century, goes back to medievalism in which the surplus of courtly love ideology inspires his future postulate about the "infallibility of women," the idealization of the feminine as launched in *Sasame and Lilies*. The surplus can be well provided by another medieval concept (**Rafał Borysławski**) such as monstrosity that may provide an interpretative schmata for contepmporary visual arts. In this sense, the monsters present mainly in the *Liber Monstrorum* inspire and assign sense to arts movements in the 1990s and 2000s which draw from the surplus of medieval imagination.

The nonsensical disregard for the rules of logic, credibility or common sense summarises the follies of critical responses to the sensation novel. In her search for the idiosyncrasies in the 19th century criticism, **Małgorzata Nitka** comments on the uneasy response to the sensation novel which conveyed an awareness that not only did it pervert the complacent image of domestic life, but also, and more dangerously, it perverted the experience of reading which took a sensory rather than an intellectual turn, therefore exposing, as many would have it, society's mental poverty.

(Post)modern literary studies very often encourage us to a take a "second look" at previously interpreted works in order to re-discover novel interpretative solutions that would dispense the rigid form of canonical hermeneutic. From this perspective, **Leszek Drong** wishes to re-visit Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* by means of looking at the sensuous rationality of chess themes which reveal their own internal logic, peculiar to the world presented on the pages of literary texts referring to them. Consequently, by analysing the classical chess problem presented at the beginning of *Through the Looking Glass*, Drong argues that chess is neither a convenient antithesis of fiction, nor a particularly adequate analogy of the rules which organise the fictional universe. Instead, chess may function very much like the linguistic sign itself, i.e., an arbitrary device, whose significance is subordinated to a unique artistic vision.

The post-traditional overtones implicit in the contemporary culture signal that literary traditions are reflexive institutions engaged in the perpetual process of repetition in which the past, as Robert Lovell teaches us, "changes more than the present." In this essentially nostalgic context, **Stanley S. Bill** re-examines Bruno Schulz's theory of sense and engages us in a close reading of one his most famous stories, *Cinnamon Shops*. Schulz's language directs us on the straight path back to "primordial myths" of humanity, all within the framework of his own very particular mythological system in which the sense of the story is created by these linguistic redirections and would seem to be linked with the metaphorical process in general. If the nostalgia mode may serve as an interpretative

schemata for (post)modernity, this is especially true of cinema which, as Frederic Jameson remarks, thrives on the aesthetic principle of back reference. From this methodological perspective, **Anthony Barker** traces the tradition of zany comedy in the twentieth century, from the beginning with the vaudevillian Marx Brother to the latter part of the century, with the British performing troupe Monty Python. In this case, the interpretative link between the two groups is the animated film-making which kept alive the zany tradition in the creative out-put of Tex Avery and his followers at Warner Brothers.

Politics of Language

The tradition of post-structural methodologies teaches us that language cannot possibly assume an ideal system in which the interplay of signs remains objectively and scientifically neutral, devoid of extra-linguistic considerations. In this sense, contrary to commonsensical view on the matter, language reveals its hidden agenda of political and ideological interests lurking at the hinterlands of supposedly autonomous discourses. From this essentially post-structural perspective, **Itay Snir** applies the Deleuzian methodology in order to challenge the ongoing debate on common sense which constitutes a philosophical reaction to the unnerving fact of multiplicity which could be seen as a basic feature of reality. In his view, common-sense conceals multiplicities behind images of unity, images it creates in three different spheres – the subject, the object and the community. An analysis of the political implications of Deleuze's concept of common-sense allows one to conclude that the commonsensical action is bound to remain within the order of politics and can never become political. The collapse of the distinction between common-sense and non-sense re-opens the possibility of political action. Philosophical inspirations are also crucial for **Janyne Sattler's** view on Wittgenstein's thought which serves, quite subversively, to show what the non-sense is not and hence her choice of *Alice in Wonderland* which provides an example of the problem's analysis. From an ethical point of view each philosophical attempt of establishing (ethical) sound arguments shows our misunderstanding of what it is to search (and find) the sense of life, something which literature – but not philosophy – would have full rights to accomplish.

Our everyday perception of sense is very often hidden behind the political façade of language and rhetoric as in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels in which human subjectivity is dethroned with the help of the Heideggerian concept of *Gelassenheit*, an attitude of letting-be, i.e. an existential

position which allows us to see existence from the perspective of being itself and not from that of the subject (**Wojciech Majka).** Consequently, idleness is a mood that can allow us to adopt an existential stance and make it possible to approach life in fuller meditative sense which allows us to see that there is more to being than instrumentality and manipulation. Dwelling at the intersection of the literary and the political, rhetoric constitutes a powerful philosophical strategy as in the case of Scottish philosophy of Hutcheson and Reid (**Jacek Mydla**). Distinct as they are, the aforementioned philosophies of sense and common-sense complement one another: the former with its universality or commonness of the Moral Sense and the latter a veneration of Common Sense in a rhetoric strongly suggestive of moral obligations. Besides the shared genealogy of their thought in the tradition of empiricism, Hutcheson's and Reid's philosophical sense dwells in their sharing interest in the civic and the legal, i.e., in the source of mutual obligations among members of a community, which is not only social but also ethical and cultural gesture.

In the technological politics nowadays, the philosophy of sense, common-sense and non-sense still bears various meanings and the legal-rational (non)sense of the political, to use Max Weber's words (as in **Marcin Sarnek's** view), can be perceived in the context of some effects of the recent piracy-panic on the contemporary, future, and – perhaps paradoxically – past creativity. Today, the technological, legal, social, and cultural conflicts surrounding intellectual property violently narrate (through the use of informal anecdotes referring to the absurdities of the current copyright regimes) the birth of curious by- and end-products of a *culture of excess*. Social and political overtones cannot be overlooked in the "culture of everyday life" (**Rekha G. Menon** and **N. Sreekumar)** in which the politics of language assumes a venture into the intellectual origins of common sense as it is expounded by Kant, Gadamer and Habermas in their philosophical approaches. By means of commenting upon distinctive traditions in social philosophy and arguing along with Anthony J. Cascardi, the authors attempt to point out that Habermas' idea of common sense differs from Kant's interpretation which is reflected in latter's failure to incorporate the affective dimension in inter-subjective interaction.

Sense and Multi-Cultural Dilemmas

Socio-cultural gestures which are highly valued with sense are studied in the context of globalisation which relies, to a great extent, on the universal acceptance of Euro-centric rationality as the preferred method of making

sense of the world. But apart from Europe, there have been also such countries like Thailand, never colonised, nor coming to the position of a significant world power. Thai socio-cultural values cannot be treated purely in terms of post-colonial heritage, and their apparent irrationality and incompatibility with the Western system of sense-making should not be merely seen as a result of cultural hybridization. To make sense of Thai culture, as **Katarzyna Ancuta** admits, one must be aware of how Thai socio-cultural values evolved irrespectively of the Western principle of rationality. The sense of "Thainess" can be sensed through Thai media, commercial and publicistic advertising, literature, film, and critical theory and the way these representations reflect the cultural values underpinning Thai society. Thai society presents us with an independent value system, whose evaluations of sense, non-sense and common sense developed irrespectively of Western rationality.

Related to Thai socio-cultural constructs are also values that can be found in the Carribean literature and culture of, for instance, Jamaika Kincaid (in **Jude Nixon's** essay) whose *Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) reflects a deep sense of national West Indian literature emblematic of cultural and political history and experience. Kincaid's is the story with the sense that dwells deep down things as it tells the truth about the feverish struggle of West Indians for freedom from occupation, imperialism, slavery, paternalism, and the gender inflicted paradigms of power accompanying them. Jamaica Kincaid is the only West Indian novelist to attend closely to the plight of the indigenous Carib, after whom the region takes its name. Nowhere is the plot of this deracinated, displaced, and destroyed people so dramatized as in *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), where disparate versions of the authorial self ("my life with her") and its Carib ancestry enact the pathologies of that history. So fundamental is the Carib plot that as the novel ends, Xuela and her English husband Philip return to the motherland, to the Carib reserve in the hills of Marigo and Castle Bruce, far from the madding crowd of Roseau, which Xuela had earlier anticipated in a dream. J.Nixon's essay addresses the Carib presence in the novel and the way it mirrors their absence, their erasure. Demanding an explanation, Kincaid discovers that she does not posses "the luxury of an answer." Ultimately, a sense of justice is what the Kincaid and the novel demand.

Structure, Non-Sense and Uncertainty

In spite of attempts to grasp the ontology of culture in a rigid form of synchronic, quasi-positivistic theorems, cultural processes seem deprived

of a universal, totalising structure rendering order at a price of a reified agent whose identity is neatly reduced to the acquired status in discourses, social structures or power relations. Ontologically speaking, the terms "structure" and "uncertainty" address the liminal (perhaps dialectical) character of culture conceived as an entity fusing contradictory powers of structural determination and interpretative autonomy. It seems that the aforementioned interplay is illustrated by Alfred North Whitehead's claim suggesting that "[A] chain of facts is like a barrier reef. On one side there is a wreckage, and beyond it harbourage and safety. The categories governing the determination of things are the reasons why there should be evil; and are also the reasons why, in the advance of the world, particular evil facts are finally transcended". **Tadeusz Sławek** addresses this quotation in his essay in which – endorsing the view that facts make sense, i.e. that what has been actualised separates meaningfulness from nonsense and, in the long run, cancels evil, and seems to be good-oriented – it is argued that due to the discrepancy between the human time and the world's time is only a hypothetical notion which can be neither proved nor refuted and therefore the „barrier reef" of facts is not as tight and hermetic as Whitehead wished it to be. Hence, the points of its perforation which make the barrier permeable, regions where the wreckage meets the harbourage, are places of no-sense, of the tragi-comic. Reading works of such diverse authors as Annie Dillard, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce, the significance of the tragicomic could be demonstrated as a major philosophical category which helps us to get closer to understanding our life experience.

The aforementioned dialectic character of cultural processes is indicative of the liminal character of our cognitive categories, such as nonsense. Therefore, the ambivalence of nonsense is founded on the assumption that – contrary to analytic philosophers' view which portrays nonsensical propositions as radically devoid of meaning – nonsense is not only able to carry sense but is also a meta-reflection on the very processes of understanding and ordering our experience (**Alina Mitek-Dziemba**). These two processes can be referred to as the activity of "making sense of" as opposed to "making nonsense of", a phrase that sounds accusatory even if used for purely descriptive purposes. The cognitive category of nonsense is, as **Maciej Nowak** postulates, in league with the notion of folly, a feminine, protean trope and a rhetorical strategy that assumes various axiological standpoints to show the relativity of social ranks and empty titular dignities. In this context, *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus can be seen as a very successful humanistic address that questions the backward and dull scholastic outlook of the Middle Ages.

This ambivalence of cognitive and cultural constructs paves the way for a methodology of researching into human agency from the perspective of the liminal character of cultural processes as events *in statu nascendi*, that is fusing the historical necessity of structure and the autonomy of an individual (**Tomasz Burzyński**). In this sense, a new, middle-of-the-road cultural ontology can be founded upon the continuity of agency and structure conceived as dialectically intertwined aspects of cultural reproduction. The dialectic intertwining of surplus ("the divine grandeur", *instress*, meaning) and the poetic act of creation can be shown in the choreographic act of circling ("windhovering") as enacted in Hopkins' famous sonnet (**Ewa Borkowska**). The joyful surplus of motion, the circling of the bird (as in Hopkins' sonnet) and the "gyring to the ancient tower" of the divine (as in Rilke's poem) are intended as choreographic scenarios to show the creation ("oozing") of meaning that will not only delight the seer but also elicit emotional or kinesthetic responses. The ritual of metamorphosis from the visible (structure, *inscape*) to the mysterious (uncertain) is enacted in a work of art which seduces the viewer/reader by the surplus of choreography and dance performance (sensuality), yet delays the expression of the ineffable (surplus, "grandeur", *instress*).

The interplay between structure and uncertainty is also indicative of attempts to re-interpret, to proceed beyond the established structures or schemes of understanding. In this essentially anti-traditionalist sense, **Sławomir Masłoń** argues against the common interpretation of Buster Keaton's *The General*, which, referring to Walter Benjamin, presents it as a critique of mechanisation and therefore dehumanisation of everyday human life. The text tries to show that it is precisely the "spiritless" body which is presented as the object of interest in the film and that it is this body, not the spontaneous spirituality, which is the source of autonomy of the main protagonist and his poetic charm. Moreover, it is argued that, taking into consideration the form of the movie, it is the perfectly self-contained mechanically constructed plot of becoming-engine of Johnnie which is "polluted" by the supposedly organic sentimental and heroic conventions artificially forced upon it. Not only can this offer comment on the claims of spontaneity and sentimental organicity, but it can also be understood as a verdict on this side of the Civil War conflict whose identity is founded on such concepts.

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The essays presented in this volume share the sense of investigation into more latent aspects of cultural meaningfulness where supposedly well-entrenched and socially rationalised phenomena suddenly reveal their implicitly subversive nature of cultural surplus. From the perspective of such an essentially critical methodology, the surplus of culture dwells at the intersection of interpretation and tradition in which the literary cannon is re-visited, language reveals its hidden agenda of political origin, the Orient reclaims its own perspective of sense and established structures of cognition become questioned in the tragic-comic and autonomous gesture of interpretation. In this sense, the texts in this volume refer to an ambiguity of interpretation, the elusive surplus of explanations which – to use Sławoj Žižek's terminology – may gesture to the arrival of the Real lurking at the hinterlands of symbolic culture.

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PART I:

CANON RE-VISITED

CHAPTER ONE

THE FUNNY, THE EXAGGERATED, THE ABSURD: ON THE FRINGES OF THE NEO-VICTORIAN CULTURE

AGNIESZKA GOŁDA-DEREJCZYK

Neo-Victorianism: From the Politics of Reparation to the Aesthetics of Repercussion

Ever since the term "neo-Victorian" was coined by Dana Shiller in 1997 to label the subgenre of novels that, as she writes, "adopt a postmodern approach to history and that are set at least partly in the nineteenth century"[1] several monographs and collections of essays on the subject have been published,[2] numerous articles written, and a few conferences including the major University of Exeter Conference entitled: "Neo-Victorianism: The Poetics and Politics of Appropriation"[3] have taken place. In addition, the year 2008 witnessed a launching of the peer-

[1] Dana Shiller, "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1997), p. 558.

[2] See, for example: Julian Wolfreys, *Victoriographies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), John Kucich & Dianne F. Sadoff, eds. *Victorian Afterlife*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Christian Gutleben, *Nostalgic Postmodernism. The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), Daniel Candel Bormann, *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel: A Poetics (and Two Case-Studies)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), Christine L. Krueger, ed. *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), and Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana. Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007).

[3] The conference organised by the Centre for Victorian Studies at the University of Exeter took place between 10-12 September 2007.

reviewed scholarly Internet journal *neovictorianstudies.com* devoted, as its editors advocate, to "the exploration of the contemporary fascination with re-imagining the nineteenth century and its varied literary, artistic, socio-political and historical contexts in both British and international frameworks."[4] Universities have expanded their course offer with a new proposal which may bear a variety of names: neo-Victorianism, Victoriography, Victoriana or such like, and some bookshops have even secured a separate bookshelf for fiction labelled "neo-Victorian" or "retro-Victorian." These and other instances of academic appropriation of neo-Victorianism (including the very emergence of neo-Victorian studies as an academic discipline in its own right) may be perceived as a clear sign of neo-Victorianism gradually but steadily being transformed into, what can be seen as, an established literary and cultural mode, and as such subject to processes of theorization, classification and categorization; well-groomed and pampered. As a consequence, much of neo-Victorian fiction, born out of the need to re-conceptualise the nineteenth-century literary canon, has itself become canonised[5] and as such exposed to critical re-reading and open to redemptive or parodic transformations of the same or similar type it once employed against the Victorian or, in a broader context, nineteenth-century novel. The "neo" in the term "neo-Victorian" thus seems to have lost its initial, though only transitory significance of novelty or innovativeness. For Shiller back in 1997 the neo-Victorian novel's engagement with the past possessed the quality of enhancement for the postmodern present.[6] Today instead, what we can observe is what I see as, for want of a better expression, a passage on the part of neo-Victorianism from the reign of **the politics of reparation** to the privilege of **the aesthetics of repercussion**, and accompanying change of tone and mood from frequently applied austere seriousness of earlier re-visionary fiction to parodic exaggeration and comic absurdity of more recent novels.

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[4] See http://www.neovictorianstudies.com. The e-journal is hosted by Swansea University, Wales, UK.

[5] It should suffice to mention the two earliest examples of neo-Victorian literature: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) which have been widely criticised, analysed, taught, re-written, adapted for film, television, opera and the stage, and so on. But also more recent neo-Victorian novels have met the same destination of canonisation, e.g. Byatt's Booker-winning *Possession* (1990), or even more recent faux-Victorian trilogy authored by Sarah Waters: *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002), which all entered university curricula and have been filmed.

[6] Shiller, "The Redemptive Past", p. 558.

By the politics of reparation I mean the tendency derivative of the ideological revolution of 1970s, the outcome of which was the political fashion for reparatory revision: the process of reclamation and a challenge to the authority of canonical literature coming from a variety of ideological grounds: feminist, post-colonial, Marxist and so on. Cora Kaplan, for example, observes that "a revived interest in Victorian literature and society is associated with the ascendancy of feminists as literary scholars and the priority of gender and sexuality in their work."[7] This resulted in launching a full-scale rewrite of not only the literary canon, but also social history of the long nineteenth-century.[8] "Reparation" thus in this context with its double meaning of, as Webster Dictionary prompts us, "the act of renewing, restoring" and "the act of making amends or giving satisfaction or compensation for a wrong or injury, etc; also often used in the context of war"[9] is more expressive of this literary phenomenon than a less ambiguous "repair" or "renovation." "Reparation" understood in this double sense may be thus seen as the principle underlying the ideological and narrative strategy of a substantial portion of revisionary neo-Victorian fiction, which initially aimed, in the words of Kaplan again, at "highlight[ing] the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire, as well as challeng[ing] the conventional understanding of the historical,"[10] in line with the trend set famously, for example, by Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken" (1971).

The aesthetics of repercussion, on the other hand, the term which may be used to define more recent renderings of neo-Victorianism in fiction and elsewhere, evokes the departure from politically grounded narratives towards the prominence of the play with word and text, including the play with neo-Victorian component itself. In this context "repercussion" with its significance of "the act of driving back; reflection; reverberation as, the repercussion of sound; rapid reiteration of the same sound"[11] and in the plural "repercussions" meaning "a remote or indirect consequence of some action" seems an exceptionally apt description. The sense of reflection, reverberation or reiteration is what may more accurately describe the

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[7] Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana. Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007), p. 93.
[8] Kaplan, *Victoriana*, p. 93.
[9] Webster Dictionary on-line: 30 Aug 2009
<http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/reparation>
[10] Kaplan, *Victoriana*, p. 3.
[11] Webster Dictionary on-line: 30 Aug 2009
<http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/repercussion>

strategy behind more recent novels whose critical or parodic lens have been not so much directed at the poor Victorian scapegoat from the past as, in a type of self-referential gesture, the neo-Victorian culture itself, where like in an echo-chamber the sound, or the nineteenth-century textual original gets reiterated so many times as to lose its attachment to the original source. In this type of fiction politics thus gives way to the prominence of aesthetics, the aesthetics of repetition, recycling, reiteration, deprived of the earlier gravity or frequently parodying the political charge of the neo-Victorian novel.

The process of the passage from the reign of the politics of reparation to the privilege of the aesthetics of repercussion can probably find the most apposite illustration in three novels, all referring to the same Victorian textual original but approaching it from a varied perspective and with the use of often diametrically different set of interpretative and revisionary tools in their fictional box. These three novels may serve to emblematise, though only for the purposes of clarification, three stages in the development of the neo-Victorian fiction, or rather three different approaches to the Victorian constituent as seen from the modern perspective. Certainly, we need to offer a disclaimer here, and state that this division does not apply to all instances of neo-Victorianism – since it is too vast and too varied mode – but rather, it serves to highlight some recognizable and classifiable tendencies at work.

The first of these is a classical revisionary approach, which, for the purpose of this analysis, may be represented by Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). As at once a feminist and post-colonial revision of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* it represents the politics of reparation *per se*. As Veronica Marie Gregg writes in *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination* Rhys's biggest quarrel with the Victorian novelist is over the inscription of the mad white West Indian woman, the portrayal of which Rhys insistently challenged in her revision.[12] But her novel does not only constitute the critical response to the Victorian textual original. Rhys's strategy to shift the original dates in order to place her Antoinette/Bertha Mason within the context of post-slavery West Indies makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* deliberately anachronistic, and it thus also "imaginatively reinvents a category evacuated of social and political meaning in the 1950s and 1960s, the period of writing when colonial structures are being dismantled."[13] The second and the third approach represented respectively by D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: the Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000) and Jasper Fforde's first

[12] Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 82.
[13] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p. 83.

novel of Thursday Next series *The Eyre Affair* (2001) challenge the neo-Victorian politics of reparation by using and abusing the Victorian and neo-Victorian constituents, installing and subverting both the Victorian and the neo-Victorian canon. D.M. Thomas's novel, pertaining to a postmodern playful approach, may be seen as a pastiche of a neo-Victorian pastiche of the nineteenth-century novel. Fforde's novel, difficult to categorise by critics and readers alike, may be seen as pure wordplay, depending on its textual original only for the purposes of entertainment, humour and exaggeration. In other words, if Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to challenge Victorian assumptions about colonial otherness, D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: the Final Journey of Jane Eyre* and Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair*, both published almost forty years later, cannot and do not retain any of Rhys's seriousness. Thomas's novel mocks and parodies the very recriminative impulse behind Rhys's text and other literary instances of neo-Victorian remedying. On the other hand, Fforde's amalgamation of all possible genres: fantasy, science fiction, detective story departs radically from both the revisionary tradition represented by Rhys and comparatively mild playfulness of Thomas's novel to offer in the words of one bewildered critic: "a grand literary joke, post-modernism played as raw, howling farce."[14] Let's then spare a few lines on a closer analysis of the ways these two novels: D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* and Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* sensationalise and non-sense the neo-Victorian; how they appropriate, paraphrase, plagiarise and twist both the Victorian and neo-Victorian constituents of their plots and narratives.

We need to begin where the three novels actually began – the nineteenth-century narrative. It is not a coincidence that all three of the texts discussed here recycle, in a more or less obvious manner, the novel which has come to be seen as the most productive novels in English literature, often serving as a foundational myth for numerous other texts[15] – Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[16] It has been not only productive in

[14] Margarete Rubik, "Invasions into Literary Texts, Re-plotting and Transfictional Migration in Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair*," in *The Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, eds. Margarete Rubik & Elke Mettinger-Schartmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 170.

[15] Barbara Schaff, "The Strange After-Lives of *Jane Eyre*," in *The Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, eds. Margarete Rubik & Elke Mettinger-Schartmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 28.

[16] The list of *Jane Eyre's* reworkings includes a dozen film versions, several musical adaptations, including opera and ballet, a number of adaptations for television, and numerous fictional rewrites: prequels, sequels, continuations, etc.

literary terms but as a potentially fruitful text for literary criticism - in the twentieth century the novel has been contextualised in all major critical schools:[17] historicist, liberal, humanist, feminist (e.g. Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar), Marxist (Terry Eagleton in *Myths of Power*), postcolonial (Gayatri Spivak) and so on. In other words, rather than being based on some fixed textual ontology, its canonical status depends, as Barbara Schaff observes, on its "adaptability which has guaranteed the novel's place in the cultural consciousness over time."[18]

For Rhys the nineteenth-century text served as an impulse for renovation, for Thomas and Fforde its potential attractiveness lies both in its status as one of the most recognisable texts of Victorian literature but also a crucial intertext in a number of neo-Victorian novels (starting with Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938)) and a text with such an extensive twentieth-century critical history. Thus choosing *Jane Eyre* as their material for recycling, reiteration and re-appropriation they would immediately evoke not only the nineteenth-century realist fiction tradition, but also late-twentieth-century literary fashion for re-inventing Brontë's text. In other words, they immediately place their texts in the context of a double reworking: a revision of a revision or a repetition of a repetition or, and I shall play with prefixation now, a post-neo-Victorian repetition of a neo-Victorian repetition of the Victorian textual original.

Postmodern Playfulness: Sensationalising *Jane Eyre* in D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre*

> "I decided to do something special for my father's sixtieth birthday. He collected Victoriana. I rewrote the ending of one of his favourite novels – a dozen or so pages – then laboriously copied it onto special old paper I found in a drawer."[19]

D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* unfolds in parallel a Victorian and a contemporary story, thus offering the reader two temporal levels. In its Victorian setting it recreates – in a form of a pastiche – the final lines of Charlotte Brontë's novel, beginning with the Victorian catchphrase: "Reader, I married him" only to dissent from the nineteenth-century realist convention within a space of a page or two and indulge in a blatant violation of all possible rules: principles of credibility

[17] Schaff, "The Strange After-Lives of *Jane Eyre*," p. 28.
[18] Schaff, "The Strange After-Lives of *Jane Eyre*," p. 26.
[19] D.M. Thomas, *Charlotte: the Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (London: Duckbacks, 2001), p. 125.

and nineteenth-century codes of decency and reticence being the more conspicuous of those infringed:

> Reader, you will expect me to draw a veil over the intimacies which transpire between a man and his wife. I am sorry to disappoint and offend you. I will tell you that everything seemed blissful to me; it was bliss to lie side by side with Edward; to feel his passionate embrace and kisses; to feel my entire soul and being given up to him. The only surprise was the absence of anything that a married woman, except she were of the most puritanical disposition, could find displeasing or disturbing. There were a few moments of pain as I was deflowered – strange word, for something that seemed like a flowering of my womanhood.[20]

In Thomas's rendering of Jane's allegedly freshly discovered diary the Victorians turn out sexual freaks and Jane Eyre experiences something of a feminist awakening. To relate these "transgressions of 19th-century fictional codes" and "infringements of codes of decency" one would end up with material an editor of a gossip column would not omit to appreciate since Thomas's version goes beyond happy-ever-afterness of Brontë's text. In her supposed dairy Jane discloses her suspicion of Rochester's impotency, confronts him with this accusation upon which he rides off in anger, falls off the horse, and breaks his neck. Rochester's death induces Jane to leave England in order to search for Bertha and Rochester's son, whom they apparently left behind on the island of Martinique in the West Indies as the child was born dark-skinned. Jane sets sail for Martinique accompanied by Grace Poole and manages to pin down the whereabouts of Robert Rochester, now DuBois (named after the priest who reared and educated him). She falls for Rochester's son and gets pregnant by him, and only a premature death impedes her from becoming a mother to her husband's grandchild. D.M. Thomas eroticises Jane Eyre, but his strategy does not leave other Charlotte Brontë's characters intact. Grace Poole turns out a whore Rochester hired to attend to his insane wife, and Rochester, a type of sexual masochist, who apparently has never lost his desire and his obsession with Bertha Mason: "Every few months, usually during a drinking bout, he would visit her, and Grace would be compelled to restrain her, to an extent, while he enjoyed his marital rights. (...) He said he had no other outlet, *could* have none other. All of his supposed mistresses were bravado, gross exaggerations. No one can love like Bertha, he told Grace."[21]

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[20] Thomas, *Charlotte*, pp. 17-18.
[21] Thomas, *Charlotte*, p. 193.

Such an overt reference to sexuality serves not only to disconcert the reader but also, in a self-reflexive and explicitly exaggerated manner, to comment critically and parody the somewhat commercialised fashion for representing in contemporary literature and visual arts the nineteenth-century from the backstage and in a marriage-chamber, or at least in garters. With its insistence on explicit sexual references in the Victorian-stylised narrative D.M. Thomas's novel in fact uses and abuses, installs and subverts the contemporary neo-Victorian preference for the presentation of the saucy and bawdy version of Victoriana, and that critics, Christian Gutleben among them, see as "a provocative association of pornography and hagiography," one which "combines the prestige of illustriousness and the promise of licentiousness in order to entice a wide audience."[22]

After the initial tour de force the novel takes a temporal turn and the twentieth-century perspective is introduced. The alleged original diary of Jane Eyre is uncovered to be authored by the twentieth-century heroine of the novel: a disconcerting figure – Miranda Stevenson, a literary academic and feminist working in the field of Victorianism. Miranda immediately evokes and at the same time parodies more veritable characters of such neo-Victorian novels as: Byatt's *Possession* (the figure of Victorian feminist critic: Maud Bailey) and *The Biographer's Tale* (literary theorist Phineas Nanson), Graham Swift's *Ever After* (literature professor Bill Unwin) or David Lodge's *Nice Work* (feminist critic and lecturer Robyn Penrose). The modern story begins in Martinique where Miranda has arrived to attend the feminist conference on Brontë's fiction, and where she introduces herself to a West Indian as Charlotte. In D.M. Thomas's text double meaning, twosomes, parallelisms, and doppelgänger motifs abound. Miranda Stevenson, for example, is, as her names discloses, a double self. Her behaviour often parallels, in a modern context of course, that of Charlotte Brontë's protagonist, but she is also Jane Eyre of her own fictional manuscript. Also, as a self-made author of the sequel of the Victorian classic, Miranda comes to impersonate Charlotte Brontë herself.[23] In fact, Miranda Stevenson is built as a composite figure of her nineteenth-century literary antecedents, repeating their gestures and fates: Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason and Adele Rochester. She re-lives in the novel's

[22] Christian Gutleben, *Nostalgic Postmodernism. The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 175.

[23] Miranda is an author and forger of Charlotte Brontë's allegedly authentic manuscript that provides the continuation of Jane's diary after she married Mr Rochester. The meticulously prepared manuscript was Miranda's present for her father, a collector of Victoriana.