THE SENSE OF HISTORY IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF *EVER AFTER* BY GRAHAM SWIFT, *CLOUD ATLAS* BY DAVID MITCHELL, AND *LADY'S MAID* BY MARGARET FORSTER

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ABSTRACT

THE SENSE OF HISTORY IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF *EVER AFTER* BY GRAHAM SWIFT, *CLOUD ATLAS* BY DAVID MITCHELL, AND *LADY'S MAID* BY MARGARET FORSTER

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Neo-Victorian fiction, which is preoccupied with the Victorian period, is a significant trend in contemporary British fiction. This dissertation considers neo-Victorian fiction as a subgenre of contemporary historical fiction and a form which engages with the Victorian age, society, and culture. The study aims to explore the sense of history in neo-Victorian fiction in the contexts of postmodern and practical realist historiography. It examines *Ever After* (1992) by Graham Swift, *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell, and *Lady's Maid* (1990) by Margaret Forster in order to find out what these novels suggest through the image of the Victorian age they evoke. This study argues that neo-Victorian fiction oscillates between the two ends of a spectrum, metafictionality and neo-realism, with some novels getting very close to either of these two ends and some others remaining more in between. Labelling novels closer to one end of the spectrum as "the metafictional neo-Victorian novel" and those closer to the other end as "the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel", the study proposes that while the former often adopts a deconstructive attitude towards history, the latter has a reconstructive agenda. Deconstructive and reconstructive approaches

to history often coexist in the novels that remain in between the two ends of the spectrum. While the return to the Victorian age often works to show history as fiction in metafictional neo-Victorian novels, this return works to reveal that fiction can function like history in the sense of complementing official history and contributing to readers' historical knowledge in neo-realist neo-Victorian novels.

Keywords: neo-Victorian fiction, history, *Ever After*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Lady's Maid*

ÖZ

NEO-VİKTORYEN ROMANDA TARİH ANLAYIŞI: GRAHAM SWIFT'İN *EVER AFTER*, DAVID MITCHELL'İN *CLOUD ATLAS* VE MARGARET FORSTER'IN *LADY'S MAID* ADLI ROMANLARININ BİR İNCELEMESİ

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Viktoryen dönemi ele alan neo-Viktoryen roman, çağdaş İngiliz romanında önemli bir akımdır. Bu tez, neo-Viktoryen romanı çağdaş tarihsel romanın Viktoryen dönemle, o dönemin toplum ve kültürü ile ilgilenen bir alt türü ve bir biçim olarak değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma, neo-Viktoryen romandaki tarih anlayışını postmodern ve pratik gerçekçi tarih yazımı bağlamlarında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Graham Swift'in *Ever After* (1992), David Mitchell'in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) ve Margaret Forster'ın *Lady's Maid* (1990) adlı eserlerini, bu romanların ortaya koydukları Viktoryen dönem imajı üzerinden ne yaptıklarını anlamak amacıyla incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, neo-Viktoryen romanların bir ucu üstkurmaca, diğer ucu yeni-gerçekçilik olan bir spektrumda konumlandırılabileceklerini, bazı romanların bu iki uçtan birine çok yaklaşırken bazılarının da arada bir noktada kaldıklarını öne sürmektedir. Spektrumun bir ucuna yakın romanları "üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen roman", diğer ucuna yakın olanları "yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman" olarak adlandıran bu çalışma, bunlardan ilkinin tarihe karşı yapısökümcü bir tutumunun, ikincisinin ise yeniden yapılandırmacı bir hedefinin olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Spektrumda bu iki uç arasında kalan romanlarda tarihe karşı yapısökümcü ve yeniden yapılandırmacı yaklaşımlar genellikle aynı anda mevcuttur. Üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlarda Viktoryen döneme dönüş, genellikle tarihin kurmaca olduğunu göstermeye yararken, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlarda bu dönüş, kurmacanın tarih gibi işlev görebileceğini, yani resmî tarihi tamamlayıp okuyucunun tarih bilgisine katkı sunabileceğini göstermeye yarar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: neo-Viktoryen roman, tarih, *Ever After*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Lady's Maid*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

British fiction over the last decades of the twentieth century is marked by a growing interest in history. This has led to "a remarkable recrudescence" in historical fiction "with a growing number of critically acclaimed authors […] exploiting the creative possibilities the genre affords" (Rousselot 1). Neo-Victorian fiction is a significant tendency in this explosion of historical fiction. The increasing number of neo-Victorian novels produced in the last few decades, their popularity, and the prestigious prizes they win testify to the importance of this trend in contemporary fiction. Neo-Victorian fiction, as distinct from other contemporary historical novels, returns obsessively to the Victorian past and enters a critical dialogue with Victorian society and literature and the mainstream assumptions of the period. This study will focus on the neo-Victorian novel, considering it as a subgenre of the contemporary historical novel and as a form which revisits and reimagines the Victorian past, Victorian society, culture, and literature in a variety of ways with the aim of "highlight[ing] the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire" (Kaplan 3). The neo-Victorian novel also includes "challenges to the conventional understandings of the historical itself", which reflects "a sense of the historical imagination on the move" (Kaplan 3). Therefore, these novels' obsession with the Victorian period can be regarded as a preoccupation with larger history and history writing.

This study aims to explore the sense of history in this subgenre by examining in detail three selected neo-Victorian novels: *Ever After* (1992) by Graham Swift, *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell, and *Lady's Maid* (1990) by Margaret Forster. Through these analyses, the study aims to explore what kind of an attitude the neo-Victorian novel adopts towards history, what kinds of suppressed stories it unveils, to

which ends these versions of the past are evoked, and, more importantly, what kind of a relationship between history and fiction is displayed in these novels. In other words, it seeks to demonstrate what neo-Victorian fiction does *to* the Victorian past, and what the subgenre suggests *with* and *through* the image of the Victorian period it evokes. This dissertation argues that neo-Victorian fiction oscillates between the two ends of a spectrum, labelled in this study as "the metafictional end" and "the neo-realist end", with some fictional examples getting very close to either of these two ends and some others remaining more in between. In this study, while the novels closer to the metafictional end of this spectrum will be called "metafictional neo-Victorian novels" (used interchangeably with "overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian fiction"), those closer to the neo-realist end will be called "neo-realist neo-Victorian novels". Metafictional neo-Victorian novels use clearly experimental narrative techniques. They have a deconstructive attitude towards history traceable in both their form and thematic concerns. As such, they display a continuity with historiographic metafiction, which is a typical quality of postmodernist historical fiction according to Linda Hutcheon. This thesis proposes that metafictional neo-Victorian novels ultimately show *history as fiction*, which means that the return to the Victorian age is a tool often used to this end in these novels. Works closer to the neo-realist end, on the other hand, resort to traditional narrative techniques and adopt a reconstructive approach to history. These novels are inevitably informed by postmodernist premises, which is evident, for example, in their preoccupation with forgotten or deliberately overlooked events and figures. However, they present plausible and meaningful stories rather than putting the main emphasis on form or the process of writing, or flaunting the fictiveness of the image of the Victorian age they are evoking. Since they provide us with a sense of what might have happened in the Victorian past through plausible stories, these works reveal that *fiction can function like history* in the sense of *complementing official history* and contributing to our historical knowledge and consciousness in one way or another.

Although some articles were written on certain neo-Victorian novels in the 1990s, neo-Victorian studies emerged mainly in the 2000s, and the scholarship is still in the process of development. The neo-Victorian novel has been discussed in various contexts and in relation to many topics, such as its formal qualities and ideology in

Christian Gutleben's *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001), ethics and aesthetics in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's N*eo-Victorianism* (2010), its engagement with and appropriation of Victorian forms of historical narratives in Louisa Hadley's *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), the relationship between memory, history, and neo-Victorian fiction, and the subversive use of nostalgia in Kate Mitchell's *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), among several others. More recent studies focus on more specific topics such as madness, deviance, science, and religion.

Despite the differences in their foci, neo-Victorian scholars are generally divided into two camps regarding the critical evaluation of neo-Victorian fiction. One group discusses neo-Victorian novels in the context of postmodernism and underscores the affinities between these and postmodernist fiction. Arguably, Dana Shiller's essay entitled "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel" (1997), where she coins the term "the neo-Victorian novel" with reference to A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* (1987) and discusses these novels in the context of postmodernism, has influenced the theories of neo-Victorian fiction postulated by this group. In this essay, Shiller sees "the neo-Victorian novel" as a "subset of the historical novel" and defines it as: "those novels that adopt a postmodern approach to history and that are set at least partly in the nineteenth century" (538, 558). She says that the umbrella term, "the neo-Victorian novel", is "capacious" because it includes "texts that revise specific Victorian precursors, texts that imagine new adventures for familiar Victorian characters, and 'new' Victorian fictions that imitate nineteenth-century literary conventions" (558). Yet she refers to neo-Victorian novels as "historiographic metafiction" and "postmodern historical novels" (552, 558). While her reference to "'new' Victorian fictions" is important for this study, she does not elaborate on this term. The connection she sees between postmodernism and the three kinds of texts she mentions precludes us from understanding the diversity in the subgenre and the differences between these three kinds of novels, but her views have been drawn upon by certain neo-Victorian scholars.

In his *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001), a work which has been very influential in the development of neo-Victorian criticism, Gutleben examines the neo-Victorian

novels written in the 1980s and the 1990s. Like Shiller, he discusses these novels in the context of postmodernism. He sees the neo-Victorian novel as the late phase of British postmodernist fiction, which he calls "nostalgic postmodernism" and sees as "less radical, less subversive, and less innovative than […] early postmodernism" (153, 161). By the term "nostalgic postmodernism", he means that these novels return to the Victorian model; and although some neo-Victorian novels use and abuse Victorian fictional conventions, this subversion is not as radical as that of the highly experimental works of "early postmodernism" (219). He sees the "new novelistic aesthetic" in the neo-Victorian novel as a kind of "syncretism", "an aesthetics of maximum plurality, exploiting, combining and revising all the aesthetic, generic or modal practices of the past -without setting any apart" (221). Importantly, Gutleben analyzes neo-Victorian works according to a twofold paradigm: those that resort to parody and debunk conventional forms and themes, and those that imitate Victorian models and present a pastiche of Victorian models. According to him, the former group is subversive, innovative, and progressive; the latter group is parasitic and conservative (7). To put it briefly, he hierarchizes neo-Victorian works, privileging the formally experimental ones since he believes that engagements with the Victorian past in only these works have critical implications and subversive potential.

Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, in their *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), follow the twofold approach of Gutleben. They think that the subgenre is "a very distinct case in the broader genre of historical fiction" and analyze it in the context of postmodernism (24). They go one step further than Gutleben and argue that:

> just as not all narratives published between 1837 and 1901 are Victorian, so all fictions post-1901 that happen to have a Victorian setting or re-write a Victorian text or a Victorian character do not have to be neo-Victorian; indeed, we would argue that many of them cannot be identified so precisely because they fall quite clearly into the category of historical fiction set in the nineteenth century rather than being texts about the metahistoric and metacultural ramifications of such historical engagement. (Neo-Victorianism, 6; emphasis added)

Thus, "self-consciousness", associated with formal experimentation, games-playing, and metafictionality in this book, is "at the heart" of their understanding of neo-Victorianism (*Neo-Victorianism* 5). Only those works that self-consciously rewrite

the Victorian past can be called neo-Victorian because "metatextual and metahistorical conjunctions" are crucial parameters to assess the neo-Victorianism of these novels (*Neo-Victorianism* 4). And this self-consciousness, they repeatedly underline, is apparent only in metafictional and playful works. This indicates that they see a close connection between the neo-Victorian novel and historiographic metafiction, just like Shiller and Gutleben. While these theoretical outlooks are valuable in the assessment of metafictional neo-Victorian novels, the underestimation of neo-realist novels by Gutleben and the exclusion of these novels from the umbrella term "neo-Victorian fiction" by Heilmann and Llewellyn are highly problematic. Moreover, this approach prevents us from understanding the variety of the senses of history in the subgenre since it addresses mainly metafictional neo-Victorian works. The downgrading of the critical agendas of neo-realist novels in Gutleben's work and the exclusion of these novels from Heilmann and Llewellyn's conception of the neo-Victorian novel are the gaps in neo-Victorian criticism this study aims to fill in by including neo-realist examples in the analysis of the subgenre and showing how these neo-realist texts, similar to the metafictional ones but in their own different ways, engage in critical dialogues with the Victorian past and history. Furthermore, some neo-Victorian works can employ experimental narrative techniques and revisit the past with an overt self-consciousness but without upholding all tenets of postmodernism. This is another gap in neo-Victorian scholarship, which this thesis aims to address.

The other group of neo-Victorian scholars considers the neo-Victorian novel as or in relation to the historical novel. They contend that all novels returning to the Victorian past are neo-Victorian, no matter which narrative strategies or modes they employ. Louisa Hadley, in her *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), sees the neo-Victorian novel as contemporary historical fiction and argues that "both its Victorian and postmodern context" impact "its engagement with historical narratives" (5). Hadley notes that "[a]lthough neo-Victorian fictions share a concern with the Victorian past, the way that concern enters the fictional world can vary dramatically" (4). To her, therefore, formal experimentation and overt self-consciousness are not the only paradigms that make a novel rewriting the Victorian past neo-Victorian. Furthermore, according to Hadley, the model of historiographic

metafiction cannot encompass all neo-Victorian novels (19). Like Hadley, Kate Mitchell, in *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), contends that the neo-Victorian novel is a subgenre of contemporary historical fiction. She discusses the ways in which neo-Victorian texts function as "memory texts", shaping and re-shaping cultural memory (4). Like Hadley, while noting the influence of postmodernism on the neo-Victorian enterprise, she tries to distinguish neo-Victorian fiction from historiographic metafiction by focusing on memory discourse and the critical usage of nostalgia in neo-Victorian fiction. Mitchell thinks that the neo-Victorian novel remains "committed to the possibility and value of striving for […historical] knowledge", which indicates a departure from historiographic metafiction (3). While Mitchell's claim does not apply to many metafictional neo-Victorian novels since they problematize historical knowledge, this claim, also maintained by Hadley (19), is one of the points of departure for this study regarding the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel.

Unlike Gutleben, Heilmann and Llewellyn, neither Hadley nor Mitchell assesses these works according to strict criteria in terms of form, theme, or the writer's resort to creative licence. They do not hierarchize works dealing with the Victorian past according to their formal qualities. Both defend the subgenre against the charge of ahistoricism. Both, in their own ways, underline that the neo-Victorian novel cannot be subsumed under the umbrella term historiographic metafiction or postmodernist fiction. Both point out the variety of the images of the Victorian past and Victorian society evoked in neo-Victorian fiction. Hadley writes about the forms of historical narratives in the Victorian period and discusses the connections between them and neo-Victorian works; and Mitchell mainly discusses a *desire* for cultural memory and a continual process of remembering discernible in the subgenre, the productive role of nostalgia in remembering the past, and the ways in which neo-Victorian novels "expand 'history'" so as to include "non-textual modes of memory and retrieval" (5, 7), such as photography, which are out of the scope of this study. Yet their above-mentioned suggestions will be drawn upon in the analyses of the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel here.

While drawing especially upon Kate Mitchell's theory of neo-Victorian fiction as memory text and her suggestions about "the role of fiction in historical recollection"

(13) in the sections on neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction, this study aims to provide new insights into various attitudes towards history discernible in neo-Victorian fiction. Mitchell focuses on memory much more than history in her book because she thinks that rather than a desire for the Victorian past or history, neo-Victorian fiction exhibits and embodies a desire for a continual act and process of remembering (8). More concretely, she claims that neo-Victorian works emerge as "memory texts" with a shift of "focus from the production of an accurate, objective account of past events to the always-unfinished *process* of remembering" (29; emphasis in original). This study contends that neo-Victorian fiction across the spectrum is aware that it is impossible to present an objective account of the past, and yet neo-realist novels and some other works that go beyond postmodernist approaches to history manage to convey some information about the Victorian past and the Victorians, as will be explained in the section on neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction. Furthermore, although she repeatedly mentions the variety of strategies used by writers and the diversity of the images of the Victorian age evoked in neo-Victorian fiction, Mitchell suggests that there is a "shift" in the subgenre from a postmodernist problematization of history in earlier examples to a kind of realism in what she calls "the faux-Victorian novel" and then to a desire for cultural memory in more recent examples (11, 37, 116). According to her, this shift shows an "opening up of history to the field of fiction" (37). This study concedes that rather than a shift, neo-Victorian fiction displays a coexistence of various forms and modes of engagement with the past, various senses of history, and diverse agendas. The reason for this suggestion is that even though many recent metafictional neo-Victorian novels, such as Jane Harris's *The Observations* (2006), are not as experimental, metafictional, and playful as the precursor of this end of the spectrum, namely, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), highly metafictional neo-Victorian works, such as Michael Cox's *The Meaning of The Night* (2006), are still being produced and widely read. Moreover, the study argues that not only neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction but also the metafictional examples of the subgenre open up history to the field of fiction. These metafictional novels engage in a dialogue with history and historiography to significant political ends, as will be explored in the analysis of *Ever After*.

Regarding the realism of "the faux-Victorian novel", Kate Mitchell draws from Marie-Luise Kohlke and remarks that these novels resemble historiographic metafiction in their postmodernist interrogation of history but remain silent about their own fictive nature (Mitchell 116). While her suggestion about the silence of these novels is important, the conception of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction in this study differs in several important ways from Mitchell's model of the faux-Victorian novel, as will be explained. Overall, her book suggests that rather than pursuing the question of what happened in the Victorian past, neo-Victorian fiction is interested in *how to remember* the past *in the present*. She mainly claims that "these fictions are less concerned with *making sense* of the Victorian past, than offering it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood" (7; emphasis in original). This study, however, maintains that there *is* an attempt to make sense of the past in the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction and in some novels that remain in between the two ends of the neo-Victorian spectrum. In other words, at stake in most of such novels is the question of *what might have happened in the past* rather than how to remember the Victorian past. Additionally, as she focuses on memory discourse when exploring the relationship between history and the subgenre, she looks only at the relationship between the past and the present (31-35), overlooking how some neo-Victorian novels establish meaningful connections between the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, although Kate Mitchell's theory of neo-Victorian fiction provides useful insights into the subgenre, there are some gaps in her theory. This study aims to address these gaps by presenting a more detailed analysis of the neo-Victorian novel, the revival of realism and its implications.

Hadley discusses the revival of realist conventions in neo-Victorian fiction towards the end of her book. She connects the wide readership of neo-Victorian novels to the revival of the "features of Victorian fiction", such as "rounded characters, a dramatic plot, and a neat ending" (121). She sees the revival of Victorian realism in neo-Victorian fiction as an indirect "engagement with Victorian literature", in which Victorian fictional conventions are both adapted and transformed (150, 144). While her claim that the revival of realism signals "a positive relationship with 'historicism'" is useful for the aims of this study, her discussion of this issue seems

rather limited because she does not delve into the issue of what kind of a positive relationship with historicism emerges in such novels. Furthermore, it would not be very accurate to argue, as she does, that all neo-Victorian works that adopt the Victorian realist mode "draw attention to the ways in which Victorian literary forms were affected by their historical context" (158). While Hadley's observations about the neo-Victorian novel's commitment to historical contexts are true, this study concedes that the aim of neo-realist works in this commitment is often to convey some information about that socio-historical context, the forgotten events, and silenced peoples rather than the literary forms and historical narratives of the period. Hadley's account of the revival of realism, in other words, pays very little attention to the connection between fiction and history, which is central to this thesis.

In his *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels* (2013), John Glendening, another scholar who sees neo-Victorian fiction as a "form of historical fiction", notes that these novels can be considered as "covering a spectrum", and that realism and postmodernism can be seen as the two ends of this spectrum (1, 10, 12, 13), which is very significant for this study. However, he does not present a detailed analysis of this issue or explain in detail the features of the kind of realism that he mentions. His book is about the treatment of the relationship between science and religion in neo-Victorian novels, not the relationship between the subgenre and the discipline of history or that between fiction and history. Concerning some novels that make use of realist conventions, he says that when compared to Victorian novels, these novels display "greater awareness of the problem of historical truth-telling"; and regarding some novels that use "postmodern literary tactics", he concedes that such novels "direct attention at how they impose the present on the past" (12-13). These suggestions do not ring true because, firstly, what differentiates the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel from the metafictional neo-Victorian novel is not only the employment of realist conventions. There are significant differences between their attitudes towards the Victorian age and history, which is not paid enough attention in his book. Secondly, neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction can be aware of the difficulties of truth-telling, but it does not draw attention to this awareness. This is one of the points that make these novels "neo-"realist. In addition, while his claim that some novels which use postmodern tactics "unsettle points of view from which it [the past]

can be perceived" (13) is true, it would be an over-generalization and a reductive interpretation to state, as he does, that these novels are concerned with imposing the present on the past, which suggests a presentist agenda. The metafictional neo-Victorian novel draws attention to the impossibility of fully knowing the past, the difficulty of capturing the Victorian past in a narrative, and the textuality of history, among other important issues. And yet this does not mean that these novels do not say anything about the Victorian past, or that they do not have political implications regarding history, history writing, and reality.

Some of the above-mentioned scholars, such as Dana Shiller and Kate Mitchell, discuss or mention the impact of postmodern historiography on neo-Victorian fiction. This study will present a more thorough analysis of this influence. In addition, to date, no study has explored the influence of contemporary realist historiography on the neo-Victorian novel. This study seeks to trace the echoes of contemporary realist historiography in neo-realist neo-Victorian works. This theoretical framework and the analyses of the selected novels will enable the study to demonstrate what can be thought as a cross-fertilization or a dialogue between (neo-Victorian) fiction and (the discipline of) history. This thesis will, therefore, discuss the neo-Victorian novel in the contexts of both postmodern historiography and practical realist historiography[1]. It will explore the ways in which the metafictional neo-Victorian novel is informed by the premises of postmodern historiography, just like historiographic metafiction, and how neo-realist neo-Victorian novels echo certain arguments of contemporary realist historiography without abandoning the critical engagement with the Victorian age. In light of this framework and drawing upon neo-Victorian studies, the study will firstly analyze the narrative techniques employed in the selected novels and, secondly, discuss the thematic concerns of the novels. The focus in each part will be on the attitudes towards the Victorian past and history exhibited in these works, each of which is considered more or less a representative example of the dominant tendencies in neo-Victorian fiction. By exploring their agendas, this study will elucidate the larger project of neo-Victorian fiction.

[1] This kind of history writing is a contemporary form of realist historiography, as will be explored in Section 2.4.

This study is a contribution to the existing neo-Victorian studies and to the general scholarship on contemporary British fiction because the reverberations of contemporary realist historiography in neo-Victorian fiction have not been explored yet. Moreover, the revival of realism and the critical implications of this revival have not yet been adequately discussed in neo-Victorian criticism. Although several studies have dealt with this issue, the tendency to imitate Victorian realism in neo-Victorian fiction is still a topic of debate. More specifically, it is not clear what kind of realism it is, in which ways it differs from Victorian realism, and why a contemporary writer chooses to imitate old conventions which have been harshly criticized by postmodernism. In addition, although there is a collection entitled *Neo-Victorian Families* (2011) which deals with alternative kinds of families configured in neo-Victorian fiction, the preoccupation of certain neo-Victorian novels (often the ones that renounce the deconstructive approach to history) with human relations both including the family and beyond the context of the family, their configurations of alternative communities, their formulations of a kind of togetherness based on care for the disempowered, love, freedom, and equality have not received enough critical attention in neo-Victorian studies. Given the fact that neo-Victorian criticism is still in the process of development, it is hoped that this study will present a more inclusive framework and flexible approach to the subgenre than the existing ones and illuminate the diverse approaches to history and the meaning of obsessive returns to the Victorian past in neo-Victorian fiction. It is also hoped that this thesis will open up new avenues of inquiry by drawing attention to new directions and new sensibilities emergent in this subgenre.

In accordance with the aims and arguments mentioned above, Chapter 2 will begin with a brief survey of the scholarship concerning the definition of neo-Victorian fiction and propose the working definition of neo-Victorian fiction adopted here. It will point out some theoretical problems arising due to a narrow definition of neo-Victorian fiction and the advantages of a broader and more flexible conception of the subgenre. In the second section of Chapter 2, the metafictional neo-Victorian novel's attitude towards history will be explored in the context of postmodern historiography. The postmodern approach to historiography, advocated by such figures as Roland Barthes and Hayden White, is upheld by many metafictional neo-

Victorian novels, which share many affinities with historiographic metafiction. After analyzing the ways in which historiographic metafiction deals with history, this part will delineate in which respects and to what extent metafictional neo-Victorian fiction follows the postmodern approach to history writing. This will be followed by the section that turns to debates revolving around the issue of realism in neo-Victorian scholarship. This section will conceptualize "neo-realism" with regard to the neo-Victorian novel and clarify what this study means by "the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel". The fourth section will firstly deal with practical realist historiography postulated by American historians and professors of history, namely, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. Secondly, it will explore the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel's attitude towards history in the context of this approach to history writing.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will present in-depth analyses of three neo-Victorian novels. Chapter 3 will explore Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992) as a neo-Victorian novel closer to the metafictional end of the spectrum. *Ever After* tells the story of Bill Unwin, an academician, who wants to hold onto a stable entity in the face of an identity crisis, the loss of the sense of reality, and the consequent meaninglessness of existence. He assumes that his Victorian ancestor can function as a stronghold in his life and help him to overcome his identity crisis. Just as Bill cannot build up a unified and stable subjectivity, the past he invents is fragmentary, uncertain, and dissolving. This novel is close to historiographic metafiction regarding its scepticism about all kinds of certainties. However, the constructedness of history, which is juxtaposed with the textuality of subjectivity in the novel, does not seem to be much celebrated, the implications of which will be explored in this study.

Chapter 4 will analyze David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) as a complex neo-Victorian novel that upholds certain postmodernist assumptions about history and yet goes beyond the deconstructive stance on history dominant in the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. Only one of the six narratives the novel involves returns to the Victorian period; however, as the text starts and ends with a narrative set in the Victorian age, and as the six narratives are interrelated in several important ways, this study suggests that it can be regarded as a neo-Victorian novel. This novel uses

postmodernist techniques, questions the notion of truth, and reflects on the way history is constructed, much like *Ever After*. Yet, unlike *Ever After*, it does not stop at deconstruction. The novel strives to offer some solutions to the problems it portrays and give certain messages about the future of humanity. Additionally, concerning its engagement with the Victorian era and history, this novel has certain implications beyond postmodernism. Due to these points, this novel remains in between the two ends of the neo-Victorian spectrum, as will be argued and demonstrated in the chapter on this novel.

Chapter 5 will examine Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990) as a representative example of the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel. *Lady's Maid* tells the story of Elizabeth Wilson, the loyal maid of the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It is also concerned with the life and works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. This novel imitates Victorian literary realism in terms of its formal qualities. The concern with history in this novel is closely related to the issue of subjectivity, more specifically, female subjectivity. The novel presents an intervention in official history, both complicating and complementing it through a plausible story about a marginal historical figure, as will be argued and discussed in Chapter 5.

This dissertation has chosen to analyze *Ever After* (1992) by Graham Swift, *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell, and *Lady's Maid* (1990) by Margaret Forster for several reasons. The study does not aim to present the developments in neo-Victorian fiction in a chronological order because it might be wrong to see the variety in neo-Victorian fiction as a development or a shift. As mentioned above, although writers have tended to produce works that increasingly renounce postmodernist assumptions, especially after the 1990s, this does not mean that metafictional neo-Victorian works have not been produced since then. That is why rather than observing a chronological order, the study includes novels which can in many ways be thought of as pertinent examples of the dominant tendencies across the neo-Victorian spectrum. *Ever After* is closer to the metafictional end of the neo-Victorian spectrum, *Cloud Atlas* remains more in between, and *Lady's Maid* is a representative example of the neo-realist end.

Although *Ever After* has received more critical attention in neo-Victorian studies than that paid to the other two novels, this study aims to present a more thorough

analysis of the novel, which can help better understand the sense of history in what this study calls "metafictional neo-Victorian works". Moreover, certain important thematic concerns of the novel, such as the historical sublime and the collapse of grand narratives, have not yet been adequately discussed by neo-Victorian scholars in relation to the neo-Victorianism of this novel or with reference to the subgenre. By presenting an in-depth analysis of the novel, this study seeks to fill in these gaps in the scholarship.

Concerning *Cloud Atlas*, its in-betweenness in the neo-Victorian spectrum is one of the main reasons for the selection of this novel. By focusing on the coexistence of a deconstructive and a reconstructive attitude towards history in this novel, the analysis of the novel will enable this study to make it clear that, contrary to the suggestions of certain neo-Victorian scholars, neo-Victorian fiction cannot be subsumed under the umbrella term "postmodernist historical fiction". Furthermore, although several neo-Victorian scholars have discussed this novel, the neo-Victorianism of the whole text, not only the Victorian narrative that frames the novel, has not received enough critical attention. More importantly, the novel's highly complex and complicated approach to history and its significant implications deserve more critical attention than it has received from neo-Victorian scholars so far. This study will focus on the various connections between the Victorian narrative and the other five narratives in the novel, aiming to elucidate the neo-Victorianism of *Cloud Atlas* and to demonstrate the centrality of the Victorian narrative to the understanding of history in the novel. By interpreting this novel as a neo-Victorian work, which broadens the scope of both the subgenre, as also suggested by Elizabeth Ho (26, 172), and what we assume to be history, the study aims to fill in these gaps in neo-Victorian scholarship and to reveal the variety of the understandings and senses of history in both neo-Victorian fiction and this novel.

Margaret Forster (1938-2016) is a less popular writer than Graham Swift and David Mitchell.[2] She was a prolific novelist, biographer, memoirist, historian, and critic,

[2] Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and it won the Guardian Fiction Prize. With *Last Orders (1996),* Swift won the Booker Prize for Fiction. Some of his novels have been adapted into films, and his works have been translated into many languages. Several works by David Mitchell have been longlisted for the Booker Prize. His *number9dream* (2001) and

who is best known for her award-winning biographies of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1988) and Daphne du Maurier (1993), but her works have been largely overlooked by scholars. Kathleen Jones's biographical work entitled *Margaret Forster: A Life in Books* (2012) is the only resource that addresses Forster's oeuvre.[3] This rather short book provides some useful insights into Forster's writing and her preoccupations in general, but it does not present detailed analyses of her works. Jones says that Hunter Davies, Forster's husband, thinks that Forster "had not had the recognition she deserved" (10).[4] Therefore, by exploring her *Lady's Maid*, this study seeks to contribute to the recognition of this underappreciated woman writer. Secondly, *Lady's Maid* and its engagement with the Victorian past have been overlooked to a great extent in both the general scholarship on contemporary British fiction and the existing neo-Victorian studies.[5] Since it is a representative example of the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel, an analysis of how and to which ends the novel returns to the Victorian past will enable this study to demonstrate the ways in which such neo-realist novels differ from the overtly self-conscious ones. Thirdly, in the existing scholarship on this novel, there are some disagreements and problems concerning such issues as the treatment of Barrett Browning in it, which will be dealt with in the chapter on this novel. Furthermore, the inclusion of a neo-Victorian novel by a woman writer, who reconfigures the lives of actual Victorians[6], and who focuses on gender and class issues, will enable this dissertation to shed light on both the richness

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Cloud Atlas (2004) were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Like Swift, he has won many other prizes and awards with his highly acclaimed novels. In 2003, Mitchell was selected as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists.

[3] In her book entitled *Rebel Writers: The Accidental Feminists* (2019), Celia Brayfield looks at some works by several women writers, such as Edna O'Brien, Virginia Ironside, and Margaret Forster, who contributed to women's writing in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. Brayfield focuses only on Forster's *Georgy Girl* and gives some biographical information on the writer. While this book provides some insights into Forster as a feminist writer, it does not discuss her other works.

[4] One of the main reasons for this critical neglect is Forster's reluctance to be interviewed and to appear in literary festivals and workshops (Jones 7, 9). In *Good Wives?* (2001), Forster says that she is "antisocial", adding that she prefers staying at home and writing rather than socializing (195, 199). With the term "socializing", she means giving or attending parties and dinners, and appearing at festivals to talk about her works or for book signing. Jones also notes that Forster was not interested in giving talks, doing workshops, or publicizing her works (68-69).

[5] Perhaps this is because Margaret Forster is not a well-known writer. Although she has received several prizes and awards, these are not as "prestigious" as the Booker Prize.

[6] The Victorian characters in *Ever After* and *Cloud Atlas* are invented, not historical, figures. *Lady's Maid* revisits a cultural icon (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) and a peripheral woman (Elizabeth Wilson).

of the modes of engagement with the Victorian past and the variety of the existing senses of history in neo-Victorian fiction.

The obsessive return to the Victorian past is the common thread that unites these novels under the umbrella term "neo-Victorian fiction". Nevertheless, there are significant differences in their representations of the past, the meaning of the past in each one, more importantly, in their attitudes towards history and the uses to which the Victorian age is put by each writer. Another common thread is that there is a marginal figure in each one, and it is primarily through this other's experiences and/or an encounter with this figure that the past is re-interpreted. As also maintained by many neo-Victorian scholars, giving the central stage to a silenced or peripheral character is a salient feature of neo-Victorian fiction. Gutleben, for instance, observes an "emphasis on the ill-treatment of women, homosexuals or the lower-classes" in neo-Victorian novels (11). The conception of "the other" in this study is more flexible and wider than that of Gutleben. The other is not necessarily someone who undergoes ill-treatment. This figure can be an individual who cannot conform to the expectations of the mainstream, who is marginal and different in one way or another. It can also be a woman, a person of color, a servant, a homosexual, or a working-class character, who experiences oppression or who is ostracized by mainstream society. The treatment of this figure differs from one novel to another. However, it can be said that although the Victorian age has been propagated by some politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher, as a glorious period with great values to be emulated, these novels frequently either touch upon or reflect the cost of this glorious age on the daily lives of its others.

Chapter 6 will conclude the study by summarizing the different attitudes towards history displayed in these selected neo-Victorian novels and their implications so as to shed light on the various understandings of history in the subgenre. This chapter will discuss such issues as the reasons why these novels return to the Victorian age, whether this return suggests nostalgia or escapism, entertainment or education. This discussion will be followed by some suggestions about the underexplored avenues of research in neo-Victorian scholarship.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEO-VICTORIAN NOVEL, POSTMODERNISM, AND NEO-REALISM

2.1. What is the Neo-Victorian Novel?

This section will look at the various terms adopted to refer to novels which reimagine the Victorian age. It will offer the working definition of the term "neo-Victorian fiction" as adopted in this study and elaborate on the ways these novels engage with the Victorian age. By turning to the problem of definition and the ideas of the above-mentioned two camps of scholars in their formulation of the subgenre[7], this section will point out certain problems arising due to a narrow definition of the term and reflect on the reasons why a wider and more flexible conception of neo-Victorian fiction is more suited for the aims and scope of this study. It will also briefly discuss certain important features of neo-Victorian fiction.

So far, this study has referred to novels returning to and rewriting the Victorian past as "neo-Victorian", but these novels have been variably called "retro-Victorian" (Gutleben 121; Shuttleworth 253), "post-Victorian" (Kirchknopf 14), "Victoriana" (Kaplan 2) as well as "neo-Victorian" (Shiller 538; Gutleben 121; Kohlke "Introduction" 1; Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 4; Hadley 3; Mitchell 3). While there are many overlaps between the implications of these terms, there are also certain differences. In one of the earliest essays on the subgenre entitled "Natural History: The Retro-Victorian Novel" (1997), Sally Shuttleworth uses the term "retro-Victorian", arguing that "retro-" points to both "self-reflexive consciousness about the problems of writing history in our postmodern age" and also "a deep commitment to recreating the detailed texture of an age, to tracing the economic and social determinants which might structure these imaginary lives"

[7] Please see pages 3-6.

(255). Since Shuttleworth's analysis is limited to the issue of natural history and such topics as Darwinism, religion, and science, and since "retro" may denote a regressive move, this term is not preferred in this thesis. Cora Kaplan, in her *Victoriana* (2007), adopts "Victoriana" to refer to "the self-conscious re-writing of historical narratives" (3), but "Victoriana" indicates a re-emergence of the Victorian in various fields ranging from furniture to fashion. In her *Rewriting the Victorians* (2013), Andrea Kirchknopf, who thinks that "neo-Victorian" has "proved too broad and unsatisfactory", opts for "post-Victorian" (31). With this term, she wants to indicate "a more explicit association with postmodernist discourses" and "a purpose of reviewing rather than replicating earlier accounts and routines" in these novels (31). However, an explicit association with postmodernist discourses and ideas is not discernible in all neo-Victorian works. The term "post-Victorian" has not gained much critical currency in neo-Victorian studies. Many recent publications on the subgenre and the online journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* use the term "the neo-Victorian novel", which is widely accepted in neo-Victorian criticism, and which will be adopted in this study, too.

Despite its acceptance in the scholarship, there are narrower and wider conceptions of the term "neo-Victorian". Christian Gutleben uses both "retro-Victorian" and "neo-Victorian" in his *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001), but he does not explain why he uses these terms almost interchangeably. Nevertheless, it can be deduced from his overall argument in the book that while "retro-Victorian" refers to the novels that imitate Victorian conventions and subject matter, "neo-Victorian" refers to the subgenre signalling its generic hybridity, that is, the mixture of traditional and postmodern narrative techniques in it. A problem with his usage of the term is that it encompasses only "contemporary British fiction" in which "a new type of postmodernism has been materializing" (216, 219). This means that works by authors who are not British are not included in what he sees as a neo-Victorian novel. Although this study does not focus on novels produced by non-British writers, it proposes that any novel that returns to and reimagines the Victorian era can be regarded as neo-Victorian.

Gutleben's definition and theory enable the inclusion of what this study sees as neo-realist novels under the umbrella term "neo-Victorian", although he sees such novels

as less innovatory and less subversive than those which use experimental narrative techniques. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn even go further to almost exclude novels which employ verisimilitude from their conception of neo-Victorianism. In their *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), they define the term as follows:

> the 'neo-Victorian' is more than historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians. (4; emphasis in original)

This suggestion applies to what is seen here as the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. However, it is problematic because, as their overall discussion in this book implies, novels which do not formally display their self-consciousness cannot be called neo-Victorian. They follow the lead of Gutleben in asserting that some texts are not "progressive (politically, culturally, aesthetically, literarily)" but rather "inherently conservative because they lack imaginative re-engagement with the period, and instead recycle and deliver a stereotypical and unnuanced reading of the Victorians and their literature and culture" (6). Therefore, they argue, such texts belong to the category of "historical fiction set in the nineteenth century" rather than neo-Victorian fiction (6). Such a rigid definition leads to the exclusion of many works from the umbrella term, neo-Victorian novel.

Perhaps due to these problems, some other neo-Victorian scholars favour a wider conception of the term "neo-Victorian". In her "Introduction" to the inaugural issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies*, for example, Marie-Luise Kohlke, a prominent neo-Victorian scholar, suggests a flexible definition that the journal will adopt:

> the widest possible interpretation of 'neo-Victorian', so as to include the whole of the nineteenth century, its cultural discourses and products, and their abiding legacies, not just within British and British colonial contexts and not necessarily coinciding with Queen Victoria's realm; that is, to interpret neo-Victorianism outside of the limiting nostalgic and temporal identifications that 'Victorian' […] conjures up for some critics. (2)

This rather flexible usage enables the inclusion of works by writers from the former colonies of Britain and other countries. It stretches the chronological and spatial

boundaries of the neo-Victorian novel, too. Louisa Hadley and Kate Mitchell similarly adopt wider conceptualizations of "neo-Victorian". Hadley defines it as "contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both" (4); Kate Mitchell sees it as a subgenre of contemporary historical fiction that "return[s] to the Victorian age stylistically and/or thematically" and "critically engage[s] the past" (3).

This study, then, will adopt the term "neo-Victorian fiction", defining it as a subgenre of contemporary historical fiction which revisits and rewrites the Victorian age, Victorian society, literature, culture, and ideologies in different ways and to various ends. By exploring these issues, most of these novels, in one way or another, touch upon the concerns, problems, and needs of today's world. While some texts display a crisis of representation in their treatment of history, a great many of these novels are not devoid of a critical engagement with the past. Thus, both the "neo", suggestive of look backing to the past from a modern perspective, and the "Victorian", indicative of a fascination with that era and the importance of that historical context, are important -but to varying degrees- in each neo-Victorian work.

By using Victorian themes and traditional narrative strategies or postmodern ones, the neo-Victorian novel can present a reconstruction of the Victorian era, unveil its unrecognized histories, lend a voice to its invisible others, or it can challenge the possibility of attaining historical knowledge, foregrounding the question of what reality/truth is in the first place. Most of these novels strive to reveal what is hidden or implicit in the Victorian novel, such as colonial atrocities, racism, racist pseudo-science, sexuality, homosexuality, rape, and incest. This thesis suggests that despite this diversity, these novels display certain tendencies concerning their attitudes towards history and their ultimate aim in returning to the Victorian age. For example, such novels as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) and *Ever After* (1992), and Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002), aim to contest Victorian realism and deconstruct the grand narrative of History by debunking such notions as causality, coherence, linearity, and progress. Some others, such as Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian trio, namely, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), *Fingersmith* (2002), on the one hand

challenge official history and realist history writing and on the other, expand what is assumed to be historical by imagining the unofficial histories of peripheral figures. Some others yet, such as Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990), Kate Pullinger's *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009), Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and *Sarah Thornhill* (2011) return to the past, often to historical people or historical events, aiming to shed light on the Victorian age through very convincing stories.

Some neo-Victorian novels, such as Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), can be completely set in the nineteenth century, or they can employ a dual time frame going back and forth in time such as D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000). Some novels provide prequels or sequels to Victorian novels, mostly to canonical ones, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Woman in White* (1860), and *Great Expectations* (1861). For example, D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte*, written as a sequel to *Jane Eyre*, portrays the sexual life of the protagonist in detail which is missing in the Victorian text. Other neo-Victorian novels rewrite well-known characters from Victorian literature. Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), for instance, reinterprets the story of Abel Magwitch, a rather peripheral character in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, renaming him Jack Maggs. It foregrounds Maggs's story, enabling the reader's identification with him. In *Jack Maggs*, Dickens appears as an unsympathetic character who abuses the downtrodden and Jack Maggs in order to make up stories for fame and money. Another group of neo-Victorian novels are biofictional works that portray well-known Victorian figures and writers, such as Charles Dickens, Henry James, and Charles Darwin, or silenced historical figures, such as Elizabeth Wilson and Syms Covington.[8]

It is perhaps due to this variety of concerns and strategies that some critics have situated neo-Victorian fiction in the context of postmodernism, and some others have argued that postmodernism does not prove adequate to address this variety. This study proposes that a more flexible and inclusive framework can prove more fruitful

[8] Elizabeth Wilson (1820-1902) served Elizabeth Barrett Browning for a long period as her maid in the mid-19th century. She is the protagonist of *Lady's Maid* (1990) by Margaret Forster. Syms Covington (1816-1861) was the servant of Charles Darwin. He helped Darwin as his assistant during the famous voyage on the *Beagle* and was in his service for some time after the voyage. He is given the central stage in *Mr Darwin's Shooter* (1998) by the Australian writer Roger McDonald.

to elucidate what these novels do in returning to the Victorian past. That is why it has suggested that neo-Victorian fiction *oscillates* between overt self-consciousness and neo-realism. By exploring the influence of the developments in the discipline of history in the twentieth century on the subgenre and drawing upon neo-Victorian studies, this thesis will attempt to present a more inclusive theoretical framework that can address many examples of neo-Victorian fiction.

2.2. Postmodern Historiography, Historiographic Metafiction, and the Metafictional Neo-Victorian Novel

Postmodern historiography challenges traditional conceptions of objectivity, causality, and linearity, all of which are associated with positivist historiography and the idea of progressive history. Under the influence of this view of history and also informed by Jean-François Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv), "[p]ostmodern fiction problematizes […] the relation of both history to reality and reality to language" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 15). This outlook informs the attitude towards history exhibited by metafictional neo-Victorian novels. In order to demonstrate the influence of postmodern historiography on fiction, this section will provide a brief overview of positivist or scientific history writing and analyze how it has been challenged by postmodern historiography and historiographic metafiction. This analysis aims to illuminate the approach to history and history writing in the metafictional neo-Victorian novel because many of these novels follow the premises of historiographic metafiction, which is informed by postmodern historiography.

Positivist historiography was dominant in the nineteenth century when Leopold von Ranke's advocacy of scientific history was prevalent. Ranke wanted to dissociate history from literature so as to make it a scientific discourse. According to this approach to history writing, the historian gathers evidence and makes truth claims about the past based on this evidence. Positivist historiography is based on the correspondence theory of knowledge, according to which language refers to external reality. In keeping with this conception of language, historical "writing is a medium for expressing a content, and its ideal goal is to be transparent to content or an open

window on the past" (LaCapra 3). The form of writing does not pose a problem in this kind of historiography as it has no effect on content. The past awaits to be discovered and represented by the historian who, like a scientist, explores it without any prejudice or ideology and produces an accurate account.

However, in the 1960s, with the advent of structuralism and poststructuralism, and under the influence of the postmodern intellectual atmosphere, positivist historiography was problematized and discarded to a large extent by some figures. This problematization stems mainly from the structuralist and poststructuralist view of language, which has certain implications about reality, meaning, and knowledge. The linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure challenged the traditional conception of language as a transparent medium. In Saussure's thinking, "language is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological" (15). He believes that a sign is formed of a signifier -word- and a signified -idea, concept- whose relations are arbitrary, not essential. The Saussurian delineation of the sign "leaves no room for a third term such as 'thing' or 'reality' or 'referent'" (Atridge 63). A sign has meaning only by virtue of its difference from other signs. Meaning is arbitrary. It is constructed, not stable. The structuralist idea of the "'constructedness' of human meaning" is a "major advance" according to Terry Eagleton, who notes that this means that language "pre-dated the individual subject" (*Literary* 93). It also challenges the correspondence theory because reality is not "'out there', a fixed order of things which language merely reflect[s]" (Eagleton, *Literary* 93).

Poststructuralism takes this view of language, reality, and meaning relation one step further and applies it to the cultural arena with a shift of focus from language to discourse and from work to text. The Saussurian conceptualization of the sign turns into a chain of signification in Derridean philosophy, in which the signifier cannot reach a final signified. Language is formed of "the play of signifying references" (Derrida 7). Rather than signifying one stable meaning, language displays an excess that cannot be stabilized as the final signified. Like Derrida, Roland Barthes rejects the representational function of language because:

> The realist or representational sign […] effaces its own status as a sign, in order to foster the illusion that we are perceiving reality without its intervention. The sign as 'reflection', 'expression' or 'representation' denies the *productive* character of language: it suppresses the fact that we only have a 'world' at all because we have language to signify it, and that what we count as 'real' is bound up with what alterable structures of signification we live within. (Eagleton, *Literary* 118; emphasis in original)

Such a perception of reality, language, and meaning is in stark contrast with the correspondence theory. Language is no more a transparent medium, and reality is constructed by means of language. Therefore, in each production, whether in history or literature, what is assumed to be real can change. History, truth, and reality are exposed as textual and discursive products. A work, whether literary or historical, cannot refer to "a signified outside the text" because "*[t]here is nothing outside of the text*" (Derrida 158; emphasis in original). With this famous statement comes the dominance of textuality in both literature and historiographic discourse. As everything from sexuality to history is textual, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed ceaselessly.

The task of the art work for the poststructuralists and postmodernists is to display the constructed nature of discourses and contest any kind of foundationalism. This can be realized in a form of writing that turns to itself, a text that writes about writing. In his seminal "The Death of The Author" (1968), Barthes argues that "there is nothing beneath" the structure of a text because "writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning" (188). Instead of an ultimate meaning, a text has multiple meanings. In this way, the form of the text becomes privileged over its content. This is celebrated by the advocates of postmodernism for its revolutionary potential as it displaces all universal and fundamental concepts such as "God and his hypostates -reason, science, law" (Barthes, "Death" 188). Therefore, poststructuralist theorists cherish experimental art works that do not try to pass themselves off as accurate representations of reality, but rather reveal the illusionary nature of what in realist works seems to be reality and truth. In fact, in poststructuralist thought, each of these concepts, such as accuracy, representation, and reality, is suspect because each reveals a monolithic sense of the world and reality, which always serves the status quo.

The poststructuralist view of language, meaning, and reality has had a great impact on the postmodern historiography of the late twentieth century. Rankean objective history is not tenable any longer because language is not an innocent medium. Firstly, postmodern historiography challenges the commitment to historical veracity and objectivity in traditional history writing. Historical writing cannot represent the past as it was. Alan Munslow states that a major claim of deconstructivist historiography, as he calls it, is rejecting that "there is a discoverable and accurately representable truthfulness in the reality of the past" (4). Objectivity is "the product of […] the *referential illusion*" which makes historical discourse "an ideological elaboration or, […] an *imaginary* elaboration" (Barthes, "Discourse" 132, 138; emphasis in original). A historian does not "find" or "uncover" the truth about the past in the archives and evidence because these are textual interpretations themselves (White, *Metahistory* 6). History writing relies on texts of the past which are themselves based upon other texts and interpretations. Hence the "relativism of all knowledge" (White, *Metahistory* 38). Since the "will to truth" is regarded as the "will to power", postmodern historiography eschews accuracy as a criterion of history writing and reveals the ways in which history can be written in various ways depending on different ideologies and perspectives (Munslow 137). This signals a turn from macro-history to micro-histories, from the Truth to a plurality of truths.

Secondly, according to postmodern historiography, history is a "chaos of events" (White, *Metahistory* 6). History does not have a beginning, middle, and end. It is not causal, teleological, or coherent in itself. This view debunks the traditional idea of history as progress. According to postmodernism, history does not progress towards a better future. The historical horrors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as genocides, colonial atrocities, and the Holocaust, none of which can be explained in a rational way, shatter the grand narrative of history as progress. Positivist history, which pretends to represent these events in a coherent way, inevitably plays into the hands of powerful groups of the time.

Thirdly, as history is not meaningful, causal, or coherent in itself, these are imposed onto it only by virtue of narrative. The historical work, according to Hayden White, is "a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse" (*Metahistory* ix). This

suggestion has two crucial implications. Firstly, as both fiction and history rely on narrative structure, history is of the same nature as fiction. What a historian does is to make up a story so as to explain the past in a certain way she or he chooses, which blurs any clear-cut distinctions between fiction and history. Secondly, the explanatory function of a historical writing is the product of the specific kind of story that the historian imposes on the past. The meaning of the same event changes according to the kind of story imposed on it. To exemplify, the meaning of a revolution changes according to whether it is written as a tragic or an ironic narrative, and also whether from the perspective of the winners or the losers. However, "real life can never be truthfully represented" in narratives (White, *Content* ix). The historian produces just one story, not the story of the past. The chosen narrative structure, form, influences the content of history. If one changes form, content will be changed, too.

Lastly, history can never be a stable entity, which has a fixed meaning for all parties and in all periods, because narrativity means selection, organization, inclusion, and exclusion. These are governed by the dominant ideology of the time of the historian, who cannot escape from it. The historian can write against the grain, but this time the history he writes is governed by his own prejudices and worldview. White elucidates the ideology-laden nature of history writing through Rankean "realistic historiography", contending that Ranke's conception of history writing was influenced by "his notion of the 'idea of nation'" as the "sole principle of organizing [human society] […] for the achievement of 'peaceful progress" (*Metahistory* 172). The task of the historian, according to Ranke, was "to write history in such a way as to re-enforce the principle of nationality as the sole safeguard against a fall into barbarism" (*Metahistory* 174). Rankean history, then, inevitably engages with great men and great events, wars and victories. Moreover, it makes up a glorious past for citizens to take pride in. Therefore, reminding one of the poststructuralist emphasis on form in the meaning-making process, postmodern historiography draws attention to the "representation rather than the past" which cannot be known by the historian (Munslow 4).

Postmodernist fiction takes these premises as its basis in its treatment of history. Linda Hutcheon, one of the prominent theorists of postmodern culture and literature,

asserts that "the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge" (*Poetics* xii). She has coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to refer to postmodernist historical fiction. The contradictory nature of such fiction is made clear in the term itself, which reveals that it is both metafictional and historical. She defines historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (*Poetics* 5). Some examples of this kind of novel are John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), which is one of the precursors of neo-Victorian fiction, E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), all of which problematize the representation of the past.

Hutcheon claims that historiographic metafictional novels challenge "interconnected concepts" associated with "liberal humanism" and its kin, positivist, progressive history (*Poetics* 57). These concepts are "autonomy, […] certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, […] uniqueness, origin" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 57). Just as the boundary between fact/history and invention/fiction is blurred in postmodern historiography, drawing a line between these two is almost impossible in historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon draws a parallel between "fiction and history writing today", stating that in both modes of writing, "our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken […] but perhaps not yet destroyed" (*Poetics* 106). According to her, this is the paradoxical nature of postmodernist fiction, which uses and abuses, inscribes and challenges conventional assumptions. Despite her remark about the paradoxical nature of postmodernist historical fiction, Hutcheon emphasizes that the ultimate aim of these texts is "*challenging* the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation" (*Poetics* 92; emphasis added).

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel, much like historiographic metafiction, attacks both positivist historiography and Victorian literary realism and challenges their assumptions. In keeping with postmodern historiography, the metafictional neo-

Victorian novel, just like historiographic metafiction, contests "the transparency of historical referentiality" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 110). Although these neo-Victorian novels in some respects lay claim to the past, the aim is rather to challenge the monolithic view of the past and the possibility of historical knowledge. The point is to reveal the discursivity of the referent, namely, the Victorian past and the Victorians, by foregrounding the epistemological question: "how do we know the past?" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 115). The past is available only in its textual traces (*Poetics* 119). Although this does not mean that "the past 'real'" did not exist (*Poetics* 119), in both historiographic metafiction and metafictional neo-Victorian novels, the emphasis falls on the textuality of history more than the past real. Like historiographic metafiction which interweaves the historical and the fictional, the metafictional neo-Victorian novel blends the historical and the fictional *in order to* demonstrate the *fictionality* of what is assumed to be historical, in other words, to blur the ontological boundary between fact and fiction. Like historiographic metafiction, the metafictional neo-Victorian novel can also make deliberate falsifications of recorded history. Falsity and accuracy are not suitable terms to discuss the conception of history in both historiographic metafiction and metafictional neo-Victorian novels. These novels demonstrate that "there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 109; emphasis in original).

Just like historiographic metafiction, many metafictional neo-Victorian novels both use and abuse techniques mostly used in Victorian realist fiction to the above-mentioned ends. For instance, they challenge the formula of a neat beginning, middle, and ending. To a great extent, the text is a playground, as it is in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where the narrator intrudes in the story, comments overtly about the process of writing, and offers three endings rather than a neat closure. In this way, metafictional neo-Victorian fiction challenges the principles, such as causality and linearity, that govern the narrative organization in Victorian realist fiction while simultaneously attacking the notion of progressive, continuous history.

Rather than narrative unity and coherence, narrative fragmentation is embraced by metafictional neo-Victorian fiction, as also put by Gutleben (138). The scripts,

letters, and the fragments of invented or factual documents incorporated in the main body of the text all break down narrative continuity. Gutleben concedes that metafictional neo-Victorian novels "break free from the Victorian form and […] challenge it" by using parody, playing "games with the surface of the text", applying "the generalized practice of narrative fragmentation", and celebrating "the loss of certainties" (11). These features all work to highlight the impossibility of knowing the Victorian past as it was (Gutleben 140). Metafictional neo-Victorian fiction shows history as an invented narrative, indeterminate, constructed, and ambiguous. In fact, it is more interested in what happens in the process of writing the past than what happened in the Victorian past.

Metafiction is one of the most important strategies used in both Hutcheon's model and in metafictional neo-Victorian works. Heilmann and Llewellyn argue that "the metafictional mode" is "essential to the [neo-Victorian] genre" (*Neo-Victorianism* 5). This study suggests that metafictionality is not essential to the subgenre, but it is one of the most salient features of metafictional neo-Victorian novels. In *Metafiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as: "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" and to "explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (2). A metafictional text resists a "simple dichotomy 'reality/fiction'" by "frame-breaking" through strategies such as "parody and inversion" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 29, 28, 31). Metafiction constantly exposes the frames by such techniques as making characters read about their own fictional lives, using Chinese-box structures and dismantling the reality of each through "a nesting of narrators" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 30, 31). By employing metafiction, these neo-Victorian works, just like historiographic metafiction, raise epistemological and ontological questions as to history and reality. Through this mode, these neo-Victorian novels draw the attention of the reader to their own fictionality, pointing to the fictionality and constructedness of the image of the Victorian age they evoke, and, by extension, the fictionality of what is assumed to be history. The past is over, and what is left to characters in some metafictional neo-Victorian works is to invent their own versions of the past. As a result,

metafictional neo-Victorian fiction turns to itself and deals with the process of writing and meaning-making.

Accordingly, another literary convention used and abused by these novels is the all-knowing omniscient narrator and the reliable first-person narrator of Victorian realist fiction. For example, in Chapter 13 of Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the narrator overtly mocks the Victorian convention of the omniscient narrator as follows:

> This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and "voice" of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes [….] (81)

Fowles's parodic engagement with the omniscient narrator underscores the impossibility of a knowledge of the past and undermines "such staples of our humanist tradition as […] the accessible historical referent" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 46). What an omniscient narrator can do is only to pretend to know all. Therefore, what is assumed to be a truthful picture of the past in the works of both the realist writer and the historian is revealed to be only an illusion. The writer and the historian can only create a "reality effect", in Barthes's view, not reality itself ("Discourse" 139), and this is what Fowles's narrator shows and mocks. The metafictional neo-Victorian novel debunks the authority of both the writer and the historian by defying the possibility of an impersonal reflection of the past. Moreover, through such comments of narrators, these novels reveal their difference from Victorian models and celebrate their "own artificiality" (Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 14). This connects to the artificiality of the image of the Victorian age they evoke, by extension, the artificiality of what is assumed to be history.

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel, like historiographic metafiction, is obsessed with the question of how one can know the past. As language is no longer a transparent window to an external reality, these texts employ self-reflexive language

so as to underline that it is language that constructs what is assumed to be reality. Linguistic games and playfulness, and textual indeterminacy are the salient features of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. Heilmann and Llewellyn remark that the resort to games and linguistic play helps to "break the illusion" of their "'Victorian' nature" and reveal their inauthenticity (*Neo-Victorianism* 4, 15, 19). In other words, these are "strategies of distanciation" (Gutleben 121). In many examples of metafictional neo-Victorian novels, these strategies make it very difficult for the reader to immerse themselves in the fictional world because they are almost always aware that they are reading an invented story. The reader must put together the bits and pieces of the story, but frequently the story brought together by the reader lacks cohesion and meaning, as is the case with D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte*. These techniques of "distanciation" signal a discontinuity between the Victorian age and the present, which, in turn, presents history as discontinuous. Since the story told in such novels underscores its inauthenticity through such techniques, it becomes almost impossible for the reader to believe in what it tells about the Victorian age or the Victorians.

Historiographic metafiction attacks the grand narrative of history that focuses on the great deeds of great men by giving voice to "the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures" and making historical figures ex-centric (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 114). This strategy aims to espouse "the postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference" and to empower hitherto marginalized groups in such works (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 114). By these means, historiographic metafiction contests an unproblematic representation of the past, and questions "*whose* truth gets told" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 123; emphasis in original). In fact, this feature is evident across the neo-Victorian spectrum. Gutleben thinks that foregrounding the silenced Victorians and historical injustices was a subversive act in early postmodernism, but it has turned into a cliché complicit with the contemporary vogue for the politically correct and the reader's expectations (34, 37). However, drawing attention to historical wrongs through the stories of outcasts is central to the neo-Victorian project of revision and making room for the hitherto silenced in the historical understanding of the reader. Moreover, he overlooks the function of foregrounded outcasts in neo-Victorian novels. It can be claimed that if the novel is concerned with

the issue of identity along with the Victorian past, the identity of the character often remains elusive and impossible to be fully captured in the narrative in metafictional neo-Victorian novels such as Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999). In neo-realist examples, however, there is a departure from the postmodernist idea that subjectivity is a discursive and textual construct because writers are generally concerned with character development and the story of the marginalized figure is often meaningful and coherent. This enables the reader to identify with this figure. This difference will be made clear in the analyses of *Ever After* and *Lady's Maid* in the coming chapters.

Metafictional neo-Victorian fiction has a deconstructive agenda, as discussed above. However, some novels do not stop at deconstruction and go beyond it. This "beyond" is considered in this study as a point in between the two ends of the neo-Victorian spectrum. More concretely, these novels can "take on the surface appearance of postmodernism" but do not adopt "all of its underlying philosophical positions" (Keen 171). They can use experimental narrative techniques and uphold some postmodernist assumptions about history and history writing, but they defy some other assumptions embraced by many metafictional neo-Victorian novels. The employment of multiple narrative voices in Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), for example, challenges the notion of realist, unified, and objective narration in both fiction and history. Yet the effect of this strategy is that the account of the protagonist, a native Australian, emerges as convincing and truthful while the prejudices and personal traits of many other narrators lay bare the unreliability of their versions of the events.

Another example is David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), which deconstructs the grand narrative of history while at the same time formulating a progressive history. Through its reflections on a Moriori tribe and the historical traumas inflicted on them, this novel gestures towards the possibility of historical knowledge, too. In "Postmodern Humanism" (2012), Hans Bertens refers to several postmodern works that evoke great catastrophes, one of which is *Cloud Atlas*. He does not discuss this novel in that essay but writes that the writers of these novels "want to signal their serious moral commitment" without giving up on "postmodern knowingness and

postmodern fictional strategies" (308). As such, they "deliberately" create "a postmodern humanism" (Bertens 315). This study aims to explore the concept of humanism as configured in this novel because it can illuminate some of the ways in which this novel can be considered as a work remaining in between the two ends of the neo-Victorian spectrum.

To sum up, postmodern historiography is the basis of metafictional neo-Victorian novels, which display continuity with historiographic metafiction concerning their approach to history. These neo-Victorian novels use postmodern fictional strategies to foreground the textuality of the image of the Victorian past they present and thereby deconstruct traditional assumptions about history, Victorian realism, and representation. However, some novels which employ similar strategies to similar ends, such as *English Passengers* and *Cloud Atlas*, simultaneously and to a certain extent, renounce the postmodernist view of history as a chaotic and incoherent entity. This tendency can be interpreted as a reconstructive treatment of the Victorian past coexistent with a deconstructive agenda in such works.

2.3. Conceptualizing "Neo-Realism" and "Neo-Realist Neo-Victorian Fiction"

Before examining the echoes of contemporary realist history writing in neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction, it can be better to clarify what is meant by "neo-realism" and "neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction" in this study. To this end, this section will first turn to the debate revolving around what is frequently called the revival of realism in some neo-Victorian novels. As mentioned above, while some scholars consider this tendency as a kind of conservatism, others do not underestimate such novels. However, in this latter camp, what this tendency means, how to conceptualize and define it, and in which ways such novels differ from those at the metafictional end of the spectrum are still being debated. This section aims to contribute to the existing scholarship by conceptualizing "neo-realism" and elucidating some important features of what it calls "the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel".

In *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, Christian Gutleben divides neo-Victorian novels into two groups: one group upholding postmodernist ideas and deconstructing the

assumptions of Victorian realist fiction and Victorianism through parody, and the other group displaying an "inclination for the serious imitation of pastiche", which, he believes, renders these works conservative, derivative, and nostalgic (9, 25, 19). Throughout this book, he implies that a sophisticated neo-Victorian novel should have "a subversive approach to the past" and criticize "Victorianism" (7).

The problem with Gutleben's theory is his understanding of "the ideology of the form" (10). Although he acknowledges that "the ideology of a work of art cannot be restricted to its formal choices", and that the "messages and meanings" of a work should also be taken into consideration when assessing its neo-Victorianism and/or its agenda, he argues that "the duplication of the Victorian model from an aesthetic point of view" in neo-Victorian pastiches "extends to the ideological field" (10, 11). He either underestimates or pays very little attention to the messages and meanings of what he sees as retro-Victorian novels, which is evident, for example, in his discussion of *Lady's Maid* (1990). His theory about novels that embrace "the mimetic quality of pastiche" is like the following: if a neo-Victorian work "resuscitate[s] and restitute[s] faithfully the Victorian voices", such as the first-person narrative voice, letters, and diaries, then it is not original; if it incorporates "quoted texts" and epigraphs drawn from Victorian literature to the effect of paying tribute rather than "desacralizing" Victorian writers, these borrowings either have "the I-couldn't-say-it-better implication", or they are used as decorations (8, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20). Yet, paradoxically, he finds the mixture of fact and fiction in *Lady's Maid,* its dependence on the referent (the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning) and subversion of that referent (its critique of the poet) as "opportunism" (27-29). In addition, he criticizes "the recreation of an exclusively Victorian world", which is discernible in many neo-realist works, since it demonstrates an "element of nostalgia, of love of the past, of conservatism" (41). As these novels are populated with Victorian characters and as they try to imitate the language used in Victorian literature, he states that they showcase "an aesthetic nostalgia", denoting the lack of "a progressive drive" in these works (45, 46). Thus, despite including such novels in his theory of the neo-Victorian novel, Gutleben's aim in doing so is, in his words, "to stress the conservative and opportunistic motivation behind" this form of rewriting the Victorian past (46-47).

Throughout his book, Gutleben underscores "the relationships between the form and the ideology" (10, 11, 53). As his suggestions mentioned above reveal, he privileges experimental form because he associates it with a critical agenda. Following the lead of his theory, which is built on the divide between parody and pastiche, Heilmann and Llewellyn, in *Neo-Victorianism,* associate self-consciousness with "the self-analytic drive", "the metafictional mode", and "playful manner", which are, they claim, central to neo-Victorian fiction (5, 14). They argue that "the higher end of neo-Victorianism seeks to illuminate its own trickeries in the process of seeking to articulate a 'Victorian' voice, or character, or plot, or standpoint" (23). This again leads to a paradoxical conception of neo-Victorian fiction because it is not clear whether they see novels imitating Victorian realism as historical, not neo-Victorian, fiction, as their definition of "neo-Victorian" mentioned in Section 2.1. suggests, or whether they consider such works as what can be called the lower end of neo-Victorianism.

The theories of these scholars overtly and/or implicitly correlate the adoption of deconstructive agendas and the employment of experimental narrative techniques with innovation, originality, and sophistication, and at the same time problematically correlate the employment of realistic conventions with a lack of critical engagement with the past. However, as Sue J. Kim says in *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* (2009), the assumption that "difference from literary realism constitutes political resistance because of the presumed correlation between realism and bourgeois ideology and subject formation" does not apply to some postcolonial texts concerned with race and marginality (2). One can extend her suggestion to address some feminist texts and the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction, which are interested in the experiences of the marginalized and frequently in identity politics. The neo-Victorian concern with these peripheral figures, prejudices, inequalities, and social injustice seems old-fashioned to Gutleben (37). His claim rings true in one sense because some of these issues and figures were already dealt with by Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that these matters are still vital in the twenty-first century, and a twentieth or a twenty-first century take on the same matters will inevitably involve novel perspectives.

The metafictional mode, self-referential language, parody, fragmented narrative, non-linearity, and other techniques, in short, the experimental form and overt self-consciousness privileged by Gutleben, Heilmann and Llewellyn do not prove to be the adequate tool-kit to discuss the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction. Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, in their "Introduction" to *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture* (2014), state that:

> Neo-Victorianism has moved beyond postmodern concerns such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity or metafiction. Despite postmodernity's ongoing relevance, *neo-Victorianism calls for newly calibrated tools of analysis* which enable us to approach it as a symptom of a contemporary literature and culture which more strongly integrates questions of *ethics*, reconsiders *the author*, allows *the referent* to become visible again […], and plays at and with practices of immersion. (2; emphasis added)

This study draws upon this suggestion, too, in the analyses of neo-Victorian works that go beyond postmodernism and neo-realist neo-Victorian novels. These novels can be indicating a change in the understanding of what the representation of the past can be used for other than, or in addition to, undermining the grand narrative of history. However, it would be wrong to assume that the subgenre as a whole has moved beyond postmodern concerns, as these two scholars suggest, since these concerns are still evident in many contemporary metafictional neo-Victorian works.

Some scholars do not concur with Gutleben, Heilmann and Llewelyn and attempt to define the new kind of realism discernible in some neo-Victorian works. Yet, as their arguments about the issue of realism show, they are still striving to find newly calibrated tools of analysis that Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss call for. To refer to such novels, these scholars adopt such terms as "new(meta)realist fiction" (Kohlke, "Into History" 156), "the faux Victorian novel" (Kaplan 111), "the faux-Victorian novel" (Mitchell 121), "neo-realist texts" (Steveker 70).

In her essay entitled "Into History through the Back Door: The 'Past Historic' in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity*" (2004), Kohlke coins the term "new(meta)realism" to refer to neo-Victorian works which are still committed to the postmodernist take on history but remain "*resolutely silent*" on their own fictionality and constructedness (156; emphasis added). Importantly, Kohlke says that *Affinity* (1999)

is a new(meta)realist work, in which "fiction comes to resemble history" ("Into History" 155). Such works, says Kohlke, "initially" seem to "reflect Victorian reality more comprehensively and, thus, more authentically than 'genuine' Victorian literature" ("Into History" 156). She accurately observes that this tendency to imitate Victorian realism has emerged due to the disillusionment of some writers "with a postmodern tradition heavily criticized as ineffective in producing anticipated social and political change" ("Into History" 156). While these suggestions are drawn upon in this study, her arguments that "both Carter and Waters work within the postmodern mode of 'historiographic metafiction'", and that both writers have a "metafictional impulse […] oriented as much towards the narrativity of history as towards their novels' own textuality" ("Into History" 155) make it clear that what this study labels as "neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction" differs in some important respects from what Kohlke sees as new(meta)realist fiction. Firstly, neo-realist neo-Victorian works, such as Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005), do not *initially* seem to reflect Victorian reality comprehensively and authentically and then abandon this attempt. Rather, the impression of the authenticity of the story pervades the whole novel. And a significant aspect of neo-realist neo-Victorian works, which contributes to this impression, is that they are oriented towards the experienced past rather than towards their own textuality or the textuality of history. Secondly, Kohlke associates new(meta)realism with a "pessimistic" take on history since the silenced figures in *Affinity* tell their story just like official, masculine, patriarchal history does, which, in turn, leads to their being written out of history once more ("Into History" 161). This is a too generalized suggestion which does not apply to the attempts of such neo-realist neo-Victorian novels as *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009), in which a hitherto silenced woman tells her own story, and *Lady's Maid* (1990), which writes the story of a peripheral woman into history by also making room for her own voice. More importantly, Kohlke associates new(meta)realism with "the final impenetrability of history" ("Into History" 162), which runs contrary to the understanding of neo-realism in this study. This study argues that the metafictional neo-Victorian novel is preoccupied with the final impenetrability of history. Neo-realist neo-Victorian works, however, lay claim to the *accessibility* of some aspects of the Victorian past *in and through* a narrative and the possibility of *historical knowledge*.

In her book, Kate Mitchell argues that "Byatt's *self-conscious realism*" in *Possession* (1990) "anticipates critiques and modifications of postmodernism's approach to history in new formulations of realism in more recent neo-Victorian fictions" (115-116; emphasis added). Yet she does not elucidate what self-conscious realism is.[9] Mitchell refers to what she considers realistic neo-Victorian works as "the faux-Victorian novel" (121). Drawing upon Kohlke's conception of "new(meta)realism", she explores Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) as examples of faux-Victorian fiction. Mitchell maintains that:

> The primary narrative strategy of the faux-Victorian novel is simulation; it imitates the stylistic and formal properties of the Victorian novel without overtly drawing attention to the temporal location of its production in the present through the use of distancing devices [… .] In contrast to the ironic distance that characterises historiographic metafiction the faux-Victorian novel *silently imitates*: it *never draws attention to its status as 'fake'*. Rather, it renders its own role in mediating Victorian fiction invisible, effacing its difference from its Victorian antecedent. (118; emphasis added)

Mitchell adds that Waters does not pursue "historical accuracy" but "the *illusion* of authenticity" (120; emphasis in original). Kohlke's above-mentioned arguments concerning fiction's resemblance to history in new(meta)realist works and the silence of such novels about what they do, and Mitchell's elaboration on this silence in the quotation above are crucial points of departure for the conception of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction here, as will be discussed below. However, Mitchell concentrates on the relationship between these novels and Victorian sensation and gothic fiction much more than the relationship between faux-Victorian novels and history. To her, "Victorian literature "functions as a medium of cultural memory"; and by imitating the Victorian novel, the "faux-Victorian novel enters and absorbs the mnemonic space inscribed by Victorian fiction itself"; in other words, it remembers Victorian literature (121-122). With this suggestion, she means that faux-Victorian novels extend and transform the Victorian forms of fiction and, thus, "revise and extend" our "*memory* of Victorian literature and culture" (121; emphasis added). While this

[9] Mitchell draws from Susanna Becker at this point. In "Postmodernism's Happy Ending: *Possession*!", Becker claims that *Possession* can signal "the end of postmodernism, or at least, the threshold between postmodern thought and new forms of more realist representation" (17). She calls this development "the English 'self-conscious realism'", which she observes not only in Byatt but also in "some post-colonial practices within postmodernism" (17).

argument can apply to some neo-realist works, this study suggests that neo-realist novels are interested in the Victorian past, *the experienced past*, the *"what might have happened"*, rather than the Victorian forms of fiction or literature. Mitchell's suggestion with reference to neo-Victorian fiction (the subgenre) that these novels "contribute to historical understanding" and to cultural memory about Victorian literature and culture is very important (12). Yet it bears repetition that, unlike her, this study does not see this tendency as a development but as a different form of engagement with the past. Concerning the issue of realism, Mitchell places much emphasis on how the faux-Victorian novel appropriates and transforms Victorian forms of fiction, like Hadley who analyzes the relationship between neo-Victorian fiction and Victorian fiction. This study, however, seeks to shed more light on the relationship between these novels and the Victorian past, by extension, fiction and history.

In addition to debates revolving around terminology and definitions, there is also ambiguity about how to position realistic neo-Victorian fiction in more recent studies. Some critics connect this tendency to postmodernism or post-postmodernism. For instance, in her essay entitled "'Eminent Victorians' and Neo-Victorian Fictional Biography", Lena Steveker avers that while "neo-realist texts"[10] "might" seem to reveal an unease with "fragmented identities and inescapable textualities of the postmodern", neo-Victorian fictional biography that uses neo-realist conventions "acknowledges the unattainability of the past subject" (70, 69). This suggestion recalls Kohlke's argument about the final impenetrability of history, neither of which applies to neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction according to the perspective of this study. In the collection entitled *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* (2020), some contributors have written about the revival of realism in neo-Victorian biofictional works. In their essay in this book, Kohlke and Gutleben draw attention to the recent production of "a sort of realist biofiction" which "expands the […] notion of factuality to include fact-based speculation and improvisation" ("Taking" 6). Concerning the "extensive use of pastiche" in contemporary neo-Victorian life-

[10] By the term "neo-realist texts", Steveker means neo-Victorian fictional biography which rewrites the lives of actual Victorians. This study, however, suggests that neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction can employ invented characters, too.

writing, they state that rather than revealing a Jamesonian loss of historicity, these pastiche neo-Victorian works strive to "rewrite and re-right history" and to formulate and voice "*different kinds of historical truths*", which results in "the critical re-enchantment of history rather than its 'collapse'" ("Taking" 47; emphasis added). While this suggestion rings true, they see such works that communicate a kind of truth as "typically postmodernist" and as upholding the "destabilising and deconstructive tendencies" of an early phase of postmodernism and at the same time a "latter-stage postmodernism" ("Taking" 31, 43). It is not clear whether these scholars see such novels as postmodernist or post-postmodernist. In addition, it can be problematic to argue that a postmodernist novel lays claim to truth because truth, historical truth, and historical knowledge are what this kind of fiction deconstructs in the first place. In the same book, Roberta Gefter Wondrich remarks that "[r]ealism in biofiction […] connects to historicity and factual referentiality and is consonant with the general reviving of narrative realism that informs neo-Victorian writing as a stylistic narrative technique" (113). However, she also likens these novels to historiographic metafiction and concedes that such writing can convey only "post-authentic truths" (103). These suggestions are valuable in that they reveal fiction's capacity to reveal some kind of truth. Nevertheless, this study departs from their general claim that such moves are indicative of postmodernism or a latter phase of postmodernism. Rather than *interrogating* "the way in which personal lives and history can be recorded, much like historiographic metafiction", as Wondrich claims concerning these novels (113), this study proposes that works closer to the neo-realist end of the spectrum attempt to *intervene in*, *complicate*, and *complement official history* through the *plausible* stories they tell. Some of these scholars underline the playfulness of such novels; this study, however, argues that rather than playing with the historical personages and events with "manifold narrative games and gambits" (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Taking" 2), neo-realist works are frequently engaged in a serious work of revision, reconstruction, representation, and recollection. It suggests further that this signals some kind of faith in the power of narratives to (re-)shape the historical consciousness of the reader.

This study will use the term "neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction" to refer to works which imitate Victorian realism regarding formal qualities and at the same time have

a reconstructive attitude towards history. As the debates revolving around realism and neo-Victorian fiction explained above reveal, most of these scholars see this tendency in neo-Victorian biofiction which reimagines the lives of actual Victorians. Departing from this approach, this study proposes that the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel can encompass some biofictional works, but it is not limited to neo-Victorian biofiction. More concretely, neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction can revisit the life of a historical figure, or it can return to the Victorian past by telling the story of an invented character. It can focus on events that took place in the Victorian age, or it can shed light on some aspects of that age by telling a plausible story about an invented event. While the metafictional neo-Victorian novel challenges, debunks, and questions the traditional assumptions and certainties about history, the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel presents additions to what is known as the Victorian past in the popular imagination and often complicates official (Eurocentric, masculine) history. Drawing upon Kate Mitchell, it can be stated that these neo-realist novels "disrupt a hierarchical approach that privileges history and marginalises historical fiction" by re-presenting the Victorian period (4). While this may imply an indirect kind of deconstruction, these works do not flaunt their own fictionality or the constructedness of the Victorian age they present. As such, the story told and the image of the Victorian age evoked in neo-realist works emerge as *highly convincing* and *truthful*.

With the term "neo-realism", this study does not mean strict adherence to traditional narrative devices or a naïve imitation of Victorian realism, with all its ideological baggage. Most of these neo-realist novels are inevitably informed by postmodernist premises, which is evident, for instance, in their preoccupation with ex-centric figures. However, unlike the overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel, works at or closer to the neo-realist end of the spectrum are cautious about the postmodernist scepticism about history and historiography. Their aim is not to de-naturalize the process of historical writing or to point to the fictiveness of what is known as history. As Kohlke says of "new(meta)realist fiction", these neo-realist neo-Victorian novels present themselves as "*more real*" and more realistic than the Victorian models they imitate by, for example, reflecting on what was not overtly articulated by Victorian novelists or the "taboo subjects of the time" ("Into History" 156; emphasis in

original). It is mainly due to their silence about their fictiveness that they resemble Victorian fiction. Likewise, it is due to this silence that *in* and *through* them, *fiction turns into history* in a sense. These neo-realist works resemble interesting history books which present a vivid picture of that age and give the reader a sense of what it felt like to be living in that period often from the perspective of a hitherto overlooked or a disempowered figure. This study contends further that neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction is inevitably self-conscious in that it looks back to the past from a modern vantage point. However, this self-consciousness does not manifest itself in the form of the work.

If their project of reconstructing the Victorian past and, in so doing, filling in the dark spots of the historical record is one of the most important aspects of neo-realist novels, another significant feature is the *plausibility* of the stories they tell. These teleological, coherent, and meaningful stories *provide* a glimpse of the Victorian past. Writers of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction are concerned with the story and character development, with what might have happened in the Victorian age, rather than the impossibility of determining historical truth. As noted by Ruth Robbins, "[o]ne reads [*Lady's Maid*] for the story: the *what happened*, not for the discourse" (228; emphasis in original). What is at stake in neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction is an earnest attempt to reimagine the Victorian past in meaningful ways rather than turning history into a playground, as is the case, for example, with Swift's *Ever After*. That is why a work like Forster's *Lady's Maid*, for instance, is called a "historical novel" (Rennison 59) and "faction" (Kossick 84, 88). And that is why Grenville's *The Secret River* has given birth to history wars in Australia. Several historians have attacked the novelist for inventing a national history to what they see as problematic ends, such as showing the violent clash between the natives and white settlers. This example also reveals the sophistication of these neo-realist works as well as their serious engagements with history.

The stories told in neo-realist neo-Victorian novels seem truthful, which does not mean that they capture the Truth. To elucidate these novels' claim to a different kind of truth, this study draws upon and extends certain arguments of Michael Lackey. In

Biofiction (2022), Lackey claims that writers of biofiction[11] "could give the readers a different type of truth" (89). He refers to this sort of truth as "a particular narrative truth", "a larger political, psychological and/or cultural truth", and "fictional truth", which makes biographical novels "truthful fictions" (*American* 12, 65, 229). He thinks that the fictional truth communicated by writers may not be about the period depicted or about the life of the historical figure; it is often a truth about "cultural sicknesses", the deep "structures of marginalization, exclusion and oppression" of the other (*Biofiction* 116, 93-94). Like Lackey, several neo-Victorian scholars have recently begun to discuss different types of truth conveyed by some neo-Victorian novels. They refer to this kind of truth as "a truth of the imagination" (Mitchell 121), "fictional truths", "poetic 'truth'" (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Taking" 1, 40), "post-authentic truths" (Wondrich 103). Drawing upon these scholars and extending their suggestions, this study argues that neo-realist neo-Victorian novels convey *fictional/invented truths*, not the Truth, but *still* a kind of truth derived from various sources: from official history, from scholarship on the Victorian period and society, from the cultural products of and about the Victorians, and, of course, from the imaginative faculty of the neo-Victorian writer. While this aspect of neo-realist neo-Victorian novels might seem to be in line with the postmodernist rejection of a totalizing and absolute truth, in fact, it denotes a departure from postmodernist scepticism prevalent in metafictional neo-Victorian fiction since these novels still *do* lay claim to a kind of truth.

Lackey argues that fictional truths communicated by the biographical novel have "a dual-temporal function" (*American* 166). He means that while using the story of a historical person to portray the "structures of oppression" in the past, the writer simultaneously addresses similar structures of oppression in the contemporary world. Therefore, he claims, a writer can resort to critical licence and alter some known facts or invent some characters, events, and settings because the aim is not to "access and represent […] the factual record of a given person, time, and/or place from the past" but rather to "to represent a symbolic truth" (*American* 165). Extending this claim, this thesis maintains that the fictional truth conveyed by neo-realist novels is

[11] In this book, Lackey defines biofiction as a biographical novel, the most salient features of which are blending fact and fiction and naming the protagonist after the actual person (1).

not only present- and future-oriented, as Lackey claims, but also past-oriented. More concretely, the fictional truth provided by neo-realist novels, in a sense, works like historical truth for the reader because it fills in some gaps in the historical record and sheds some light on the dark spots of history. It can be argued, therefore, that the writer sees a potential in these gaps, and that these gaps enable the writer to re-shape the Victorian past and, by implication, to do history by means of fiction. Additionally, some of these neo-realist novels can display fidelity to the historical record to some extent so as to illuminate human experiences in the past. As Lackey suggests with respect to biofiction, some neo-realist neo-Victorian works engage with the structures of oppression and socio-political problems in the Victorian past, and through these engagements, they address certain problems in today's world. By pointing to such concepts and values as social justice, equality, freedom, love, and care for the (suffering) other as some solutions to the problems they locate in the past, such works frequently call the reader to reshape their own worldviews and restructure society in accord with these values, which is a future-oriented move. In this respect, it can be argued that the fictional truth conveyed in these neo-realist novels can have a triple-temporal function.

This section has attempted to conceptualize neo-realism in neo-Victorian fiction and offer some insights about what neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction does by revisiting the Victorian past. By exploring the ways in which the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel echoes the arguments of practical realist historiography in the following section, this study will complete the discussion of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction. It is hoped that this approach will present some answers to current debates revolving around "realism" in neo-Victorian studies.

2.4. Practical Realist Historiography and the Neo-Realist Neo-Victorian Novel

While the metafictional or overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian fiction is influenced by postmodern historiography and is in continuity with historiographic metafiction in many ways and to a great extent, this context remains inadequate in making sense of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction which engages in a work of reconstruction. Moreover, although it was discarded by figures like Roland Barthes, Hayden White,

and Alun Munslow, Hadley says that "realism remains the dominant mode of narration" in "the sphere of historiography" (151). This section of the study argues that neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction seems to embrace the arguments and suggestions of contemporary realist historiography, more specifically, practical realist historiography, in many ways. It aims to look at this approach to history writing and trace its echoes in the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel.

In *Deconstructing History* (2004), Alun Munslow contends that despite the influence of poststructuralism and postmodernism on history writing, "[m]any historians still continue the search for *the real* historical past as it once existed and which they believe can be truthfully recovered" (32; emphasis in original). Throughout his book, Munslow contrasts what he calls deconstructivist history advocated by such figures as Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, Keith Jenkins, and himself with two different approaches to history, one of which is the "moderate practical realist reconstructionist position of practical realists"[12] (103). These practical realists are Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, who defend "realist narrative history" in their *Telling the Truth about History* (1994) (Munslow 103). This sort of history writing seems more adequate as the backdrop against which neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction can be examined for several reasons. Firstly, these historians' reconstructionist position can be traced in the reconstructive approach of these novels. Secondly, just as the practical realism in historiography is not a return to Rankean scientific history writing[13], the revival of realism in neo-Victorian fiction is not a naïve imitation of the realism of the nineteenth-century novel. Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob acknowledge "the postmodern critique […] of history's discursive construction" while simultaneously arguing for the pursuit of historical truth (Munslow 10). A similar urge to pursue truth, albeit a fictional kind of truth, is

[12] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob call themselves "practical realists" (251) in their *Telling the Truth about History* (1994). Munslow refers to these historians, who belong to the reconstructionist camp, as "practical realists" (20), "empiricist" (43), "new moderate […] realists" (47), and "moderate reconstructionists" (102). As Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob call themselves practical realists in their book, this study will adopt this term.

[13] These practical realist historians are aware of the fact that following the postmodern intellectual background, a Rankean kind of history writing is almost impossible.

observable in neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction which often rewrites history from below. Practical realist historiography acknowledges the basic tenets of postmodern historiography, but it renounces what it sees as total relativism, scepticism, and deconstruction in it. Similarly, neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction are inevitably informed by postmodernist assumptions, evident, for example, in the modern perspective of the narrator in *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006) by Belinda Starling[14], but, unlike metafictional neo-Victorian novels, they do not display total relativism or scepticism concerning such concepts as historical truth or knowledge.

Like the proponents of postmodern history writing, practical realist historians see history as constituted of "concrete details" and "imaginative recreation of the past" (Appleby et al. 152), that is, evidence and interpretation of evidence. However, although they acknowledge that history has a narrative structure like fiction, they believe that it is "more than a branch of letters" (Appleby et al. 229). A historian cannot invent the past the way he or she chooses. History produced is inevitably an interpretation of historical facts which rest upon documents, and documents do not always reflect the truth. Thus, the task of the historian is to update historical truth and interpretation in accord with each new-found document. According to them, rather than deconstructing history and challenging historical truth by raising epistemological questions, which, they believe, does not help much to illuminate human experiences in the past, a practical realist historian strives to tell the truth(s) about the past. This means telling the history of both the winners and the losers, both the kings and ordinary people.

Alun Munslow calls Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob "realists" (10), but they assert that they embrace a "modified, or practical realism" (251), which is different from that of Ranke. They state that their stance is grounded "in a combination of practical realism and pragmatism" (Appleby et al. 283). They elucidate this grounding as: "an epistemological position that claims that people's perceptions of the world have *some*

[14] The first-person narrator in this novel is the protagonist Dora Damage, a Victorian bookbinder. The story is linear, causal, and plausible. The narrator is obviously knowledgeable about twentieth-century feminist theory, especially French feminism, Frantz Fanon's writings, yet this knowing stance does not preclude the reader's immersion in her story or the impression of the truthfulness of her account.

correspondence with that world [,] and that standards, even though they are historical products, can be made to discriminate between valid and invalid assertions" (283; emphasis added). The "practical realism" they call for in history writing means that a historian can know the past to a certain degree when she or he searches the archives, documents, and records (Appleby et al. 251). Evidence, albeit constructed and ideological, still limits what can or cannot be produced out of it. In other words, what a historian produces cannot be a purely invented construct whose validity is questionable. Thus, practical realist historiography can be seen as a fusion of positivist and postmodern historiography.

The new theory of objectivity Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob build up is based on the idea that there is a "knowable world outside" (Appleby et al. 285). Although they acknowledge the limits of the correspondence theory of knowledge and assume "a tolerance for a degree of indeterminacy" (Appleby et al. 251), they believe that the possibility of the word reflecting the world cannot be rejected outright for the sake of relativism. They believe in the knowability of past events "through the medium of language" because records and evidence "offer a glimpse of a world that has disappeared" (Appleby et al. 250, 251). These historians claim:

> Knowing that there are objects out there turns scholars into practical realists. They can admit their cultural fixity, their partial grasp of truth, and still think that in trying to know the world it's best not to divert the lens from the object -as the relativists suggest- but to leave it on and keep trying to clean it. (Appleby et al. 269)

This can be interpreted as a departure from postmodern historiography in which emphasis falls on representation, form, which can change content and the meaning of that content when it is changed. The main tool used by both the historian and the writer is language which inevitably distorts reality while representing it. Historical knowledge is inevitably partial and ideological, and it can serve the will to power of certain groups. Nevertheless, these do not necessarily mean the ultimate relativity of all knowledge; they do not entail a wholesale rejection of objectivity or giving up the search for truth. A glimpse into a disappeared world cannot provide the ultimate truth, but it can reveal a sense of the past, which is exactly what the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction aim to do in rewriting the Victorian past.

According to the practical realists, knowledge can be "communicated, built upon, and subjected to testing" (Appleby et al. 254). Therefore, the aim of the historian must be to strive to write truthful accounts of the past in accordance with available documents.

The point for practical realist historians is not discovering the Truth, which is, they acknowledge, almost impossible, but rather some aspects or parts of the past. As such, they re-conceptualize the notion of truth, which is in line with postmodern historiography in that instead of one absolute truth, they see truth as multiple and provisional. An interpretation of the past is not the final and ultimate truth. Truth is always open to new interpretations, it can be revised with new evidence and reassessed from different perspectives. If there is a multiplicity of accurate histories, this is because each historian has a different perspective and agenda. New versions of the past "are not arbitrary exercises of historical imagination, but the consequence of the changing interest from cumulative social experience" (Appleby et al. 265). Yet their view of truth differs from that of postmodern historiography because the plurality of truth does not mean that each and every claim about the past can pass as one's own truth, as Hutcheon implies (*Poetics* 109). Interpretation does not precede facts in this approach. While acknowledging the impact of interpretation on what is regarded as truth, they reiterate that an interpretation of facts must rely upon documents and evidence. Hence their insistence on the pursuit of historical truth.

Unlike the advocates of the postmodern approach, practical realist historians believe in the power of narrative to explain the past. They emphasize "the human need for self-understanding through a coherent narrative of the past and the need for admittedly partial, objective explanations of how the past has worked" (Appleby et al. 229). Narrative is not suspect but valuable because it can communicate human experiences in the past. It is impossible for a narrative to provide "completely satisfying causal explanation" (Appleby et al. 229). However, when a narrative is coherent and explanatory, it can illuminate the past shedding some light on past events.

In addition, these realist historians renounce the postmodernist "argument against the unified self" and "autonomous subjectivity" (Appleby et al. 202, 213). They claim

that "[w]ithout a subject, there could be no identity politics, no politics of cultural self-affirmation" (Appleby et al. 202). This suggestion is arguably a defence of the historian who pursues historical truth. It also reveals these historians' faith in the possibility that a narrative can capture human experiences in the past, albeit provisionally.

It is important to note that, unlike postmodern historiography, practical realist historiography still maintains some faith in some ideals associated with the Enlightenment and modernity, such as democracy, equality, and progress towards a better future (history as progress). According to Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, the pursuit of these ideals largely depends on maintaining historical veracity. That is, only by distinguishing a truthful account of the past from a false account and addressing the history of the subordinated and silenced groups can a historian render history more inclusive and, in this way, contribute to the progress of a society. They clarify this point through American history. American historians have presented a favourable image of the country for a long period to ensure a "tying of national identity to the achievement of equality and liberty" while turning a blind eye to America's role in slavery (Appleby et al. 296). Slavery "became an incubus for the United States better denied than confronted" in that period (Appleby et al. 297). An account of the past, however, must include undesirable truths about a nation's past as well so as to address and encompass all peoples of that nation. Only in this way can history become a democratic discipline in itself and contribute to democracy in a society.

Practical realist historians think that the atrocities inflicted on certain groups, such as genocides, slavery, and the Holocaust, do not entail a rejection of the ideals of progress, democracy, and equality. These ideals are vital today particularly for marginalized or disempowered groups. By embracing the grand narrative of history in one sense and to a certain degree, these historians depart from the Lyotardian idea of the collapse of metanarratives because they believe that some "meta-narratives are the kinds of stories that make action in the world possible" (Appleby et al. 236). Concerning the relationship between history and power, practical realist history "provides a forum for readjugating power and interests" (Appleby et al. 289) as it

includes the histories of both the marginalized groups and the mainstream. A more inclusive history can contribute to structuring a more egalitarian society. This means that this kind of history writing pursues the past real and historical truth with a future-oriented motivation or vision. This future-oriented vision, in a sense, reverberates in the future-oriented agendas of some neo-Victorian novels that portray and cherish equality, humane contacts with the other, and different kinds of solidarity.

In line with the practical realists' view of history, the Victorian past portrayed in neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction is often based on twentieth-century scholarship on the Victorian age and the Victorians, the extensive research of the writers embedded in the narrative (Kaplan 114; Mitchell 119), documents and texts from the Victorian period, and the Victorian novel, which in many ways reflects that period and Victorian society. These novels, documents, interpretations, and scholarship provide some pictures of that world for the neo-Victorian writer, who builds on these images and shapes the narrative by resorting to imagination. These neo-realist novels do not deal with the "problem" of "the nature of their evidence, their documents" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 122). Kate Mitchell criticizes Hutcheon for making the "pattern of inscription and subversion, together with an emphasis upon the problematisation of historical reference indicative of a critical distance" (27). In addition, she rightly notes that a critical engagement with the past does not necessarily entail employing an "experimental and self-conscious narrative" (27). The neo-realist neo-Victorian novel is not concerned with problematizing historical reference, which does not mean that it is devoid of a critical engagement with the Victorian age. Stories, characters, and events in these novels, such as Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006), among some others, are often based on actual events and/or historical figures, which is frequently explained in their afterwords or prologues. The neo-realism of these novels, therefore, can be interpreted as a kind of reaction to or dissatisfaction with the anti-foundationalism, anti-representationalism, and anti-humanism of postmodernism, which is often embraced by metafictional neo-Victorian novels.

The neo-realist neo-Victorian novel is preoccupied with content, the story, and characters, rather than form. Likewise, it is concerned with the content of history (the

"what might have happened" in the Victorian past), rather than the form of history (how to represent the Victorian past). As Kate Mitchell says concerning the subgenre, these novels are "more *earnest* and affectionate than ironic and parodic in their representation of the Victorian past" (26; emphasis added). Suzanne Keen goes one step further; and regarding what she sees as new historical fiction, she says that "at this late date" some writers of historical novels "still *attempt* to achieve *verisimilar* and historically accurate representations that might win the approval of historians" (173; emphasis added). Those historians would not be Hayden White or Alun Munslow, but perhaps Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. Although an engagement with the Victorian past is not absent from metafictional neo-Victorian works, it is more evident in neo-realist novels. Recalling the stance of practical realist historiography, rather than contesting certainties, neo-realist neo-Victorian novels attempt to provide the reader with an understanding of the Victorian age. They strive to reconstruct what might have happened in the Victorian past and convey some information about that age.

The revival of realism in certain neo-Victorian works can signal a "new faith in language", as maintained by Mark K. Holland in his *Succeeding Postmodernism* (2013) (1), which recalls the practical realists' faith in the referential function of language. Then, it can be claimed that whereas the metafictional neo-Victorian novel points to "a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) *know* […] reality, and, therefore, to be able to represent it in language", (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 119; emphasis in original), the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel implicitly embraces the correspondence theory, that is, the idea that the word corresponds to the world, to a great extent.

If language retains its referential function to a large extent in these texts, then, narrative can explain the past in some respects, as noted by practical realist historians with respect to history writing. Narrative does not seem to be suspect or problematic for the writers of neo-realist works who use convincing stories to illuminate the dark spots of history and the experiences of the others of official history.

Neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction employs the narrative techniques often used in Victorian realist novels in a way that creates the reality effect. For instance, Kate

Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Kate Pullinger's *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009) observe such principles as coherence, causality, and linearity. The stories told in these two novels have a neat beginning, middle, and end. Moreover, neo-realist neo-Victorian novels frequently use the omniscient narrator and the first-person narrator in a way that recalls the Victorian realist novel. The first-person narrator of Kate Grenville's *Sarah Thornhill* (2011) is reliable. This love story presents the personal history of a young woman torn between the burden of the past due to the wrongs of her father, a white settler who participated in some acts of violence in Australia, and the possibility of reconciliation with the victims. Her account is credible and the usage of a first-person narrative voice enables the reader's immersion in the fictional world and identification with the protagonist, Sarah. Unlike *Ever After*, which is an example of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel, this novel manages to present a meaningful story and, thus, provides a glimpse into the past of Australia, the lives of white settlers and the natives. Furthermore, while the fictional or factual documents, scripts, and letters incorporated in the main body of a metafictional neo-Victorian novel function to underline the fragmented and discursive nature of history, in a neo-realist work, such as *Lady's Maid*, these elements work to reinforce verisimilitude and the authenticity of the image of the Victorian age evoked in the novel.

That the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction create a reality effect without subverting it at some point in the narrative, of course, does not mean that their version of the past is the accurate one. As practical realists say of history, these novels provide one interpretation of the past, and this can be contested by the representations of the Victorian past in other novels. Still, the Victorian past and history, as represented in these novels, do not resist knowability, coherence, and teleology. These narratives render history meaningful rather than chaotic. As explained in the previous section, these works communicate fictional truths without problematizing the notion of truth in the first place. Through such truths, they contribute to the reader's historical understanding because these fictional truths are functional in that they fill in the gaps in the historical record in a sense. More concretely, these fictional truths are the reimagined perspectives of the silenced others, the reinterpreted experiences of the subordinated peoples. These truths are

about the historical traumas inflicted on an individual or a group, the hitherto overlooked events that took place in the "elsewhere" of the British Empire, or the ordinary lives of ordinary Victorians invisible in official (or Western) history. These peoples and events are written out of official history; neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction writes them back into history.

The future-oriented vision of the practical realists reverberates in the future-oriented agendas of some neo-realist neo-Victorian novels, too. The emphasis some of these novels place on intersubjectivity, building relationships based on love, equality, mutual understanding and tolerance shows that their obsession with the Victorian age aims not only to illuminate the past in some respects but also to address the present and the future. Neo-Victorian scholars have not paid much attention to this emphasis and its implications, which in several ways recalls practical realist historians' faith in some Enlightenment ideals and their aim to contribute to a more democratic and egalitarian society by writing a more inclusive kind of history. To date, only the collection entitled *Neo-Victorian Families* (2011) has focused on alternative kinds of togetherness imagined by some neo-Victorian writers, but the contributors to this collection deal with this topic in the context of the family, such as chosen/alternative families, same-sex couples and their children. The new forms of togetherness and alternative kinds of living imagined in some neo-realist examples and some novels that renounce a totally deconstructive agenda, however, are not limited to the context of the family. The union of lesbian lovers at the end of *Fingersmith*, the love, solidarity, and equality between characters who belong to different races and social strata in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, the focus on the possibility of a sisterly feeling and emotional connection between a Victorian lady and her maid in *Lady's Maid* can be claimed to display a new sensibility oriented towards the present and the future. This has two important critical implications. Firstly, it denotes the progressive potential located in the Victorian age, an alternative hidden in history, which renders the past and history valuable rather than elusive and nightmarish. Secondly, it demonstrates the future-orientedness of these novels, which is in line with the larger neo-Victorian project. In other words, these alternative kinds of connections and social relations are often offered as solutions to the problems which haunt the lives of many people today. In pointing to solutions to the problems they portray, these

novels again differ from neo-Victorian novels closer to the metafictional end of the spectrum, most of which are not interested in such acts.

At this point, it is important to note that certain important figures from literary studies, in their own ways, share the practical realists' above-mentioned faith in the ideals of societal progress, democracy, and equality, which is closely connected to the pursuit of historical truth. For example, Terry Eagleton, in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), attacks postmodern thought as it rejects such "Enlightenment norms" as "truth, reason, identity and objectivity, […] the idea of universal progress or emancipation, […] grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation" (vii). He believes that this rejection cannot be of much help to the disempowered groups for whom "the great liberal motifs of justice, freedom, equality, human rights" are vital today (87). Likewise, Edward W. Said, in his *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), criticizes postmodernism's "dismissive attitudes to […] the grand narratives of enlightenment and emancipation" (10). He asserts that such ideals as justice and equality can move people for a change (10). Importantly, Said calls for a reformulated humanism which is not "nationalistic or Eurocentric", but one which makes room for the voice of the other (6, 47, 81). In a similar line of thought, Ihab Hassan, in his "Beyond Postmodernism: Towards an Aesthetic of Trust" (2003), calls for "a postmodern, spiritual attitude" which is compatible "with geopolitical realities […]; with the needs of the wretched of the earth; with the interests of feminists and minorities […]; with an ecological, planetary humanism" (9). He underlines that what he calls "fiduciary realism", "a postmodern aesthetic of trust", and "a postmodern realism" that relies on "faith and empathy and trust" is indispensable to this attitude (9, 10). Like Eagleton and Said, Hassan remarks that such an attitude and this kind of realism require the reinvention of "'soft' universals", by which he means such values as "reciprocity and respect, sympathy and empathy", certain concepts such as justice, equality, freedom, and, more importantly, a pragmatic truth that is plural (7, 6). Arguing that all neo-Victorian novels, which have a reconstructive agenda, configure a new kind of humanism and cherish Enlightenment norms would perhaps be too huge a claim and a generalization. But still, it can be said that such novels exhibit a new sensibility which seems to be something more than the politics of recognition or the celebration of a "decentralized community"

(Hutcheon, *Poetics* 12). More concretely, this new sensibility, evident in some of these novels' emphasis on alternative groups and relationships built on such values as empathy, equality, freedom, love, and social justice, can be interpreted as their writers' call for a newly formulated humanism or perhaps humanisms much needed in today's world.

Toward the end of her book, Kate Mitchell argues that neo-Victorian fiction demonstrates that "the field of literature can productively contribute to ongoing debates about what will count as history" (182-183). This suggestion rings true, especially in the case of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction. It can be argued that history is remade and redefined *in* and *through* such novels because they reshape what the reader knows as or about the Victorian past, impacting the historical consciousness of the reader. In addition to this, by opening up British history to its others and their experiences, enabling the reader to empathize and identify with those others, and at times configuring alternative kinds of human connections and togetherness, some of these novels work to future-oriented ends. Therefore, it can be claimed that the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel and some novels that remain in between the two ends of the spectrum look back to the past in order to move forward, as also stated by several neo-Victorian scholars within different contexts (Heilmann and Llewellyn, "Hystorical" 142; Ho 26).

CHAPTER 3

EVER AFTER AS A METAFICTIONAL NEO-VICTORIAN NOVEL

Graham Swift, born in 1949, is one of the contemporary British writers whose works are preoccupied with history and history writing along with storytelling, memory, family, and interpersonal relationships. In *Graham Swift* (2005), Daniel Lea remarks that Swift's "overriding theme is history and adequate means we have of understanding the past and our place in the historical process" (2). Swift's works deal with the past of England and, more specifically, with the past of his characters who, in his own words, feel the "urge to tell" their stories "particularly in dealing with some sort of crisis" (Gossmann et al. 53). His *Waterland* (1983) is a neo-Victorian novel that was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. This novel moves back and forth between the Victorian age, the two world wars, and the narrative present, questioning the nature of history and representing history as a necessary fiction. Although it is not as experimental as *Waterland*, *Ever After* (1992) is an example of metafictional neo-Victorian fiction in many ways. This chapter argues that *Ever After* adopts a highly deconstructive attitude towards the Victorian era, which is discernible in both the form and thematic concerns of the novel, and that it *shows history as fiction* through its critical engagement with the Victorian past.

Ever After, written in first person, is the story of Bill Unwin, a middle-aged man who inherits the notebooks and a letter of one of his maternal ancestors, Matthew Pearce, and sets out to edit them. It is a dual narrative: a contemporary story set in the late 1980s and a Victorian story set in the mid-nineteenth century. The contemporary story turns to the childhood memories of the narrator, the war years, his marriage, and the narrative present. Bill Unwin, the narrator, is a lecturer of English literature. He is interested in theatre. He lives in a period in which there are no epistemological foundations that can determine what is real and what is not. In other words, in Bill's

world, there are no certainties, no authoritative frameworks that can determine what is true, what is real, or what is authentic. In the pastiches of the Victorian journal and letter, Matthew's crisis of faith and the ensuing tragedy are recorded with reference to actual events, historical figures, and socio-cultural details. The narrator sets out to tell a story in the face of a crisis: he has lost all his family members and his wife in a short period, he has learned that his father was not indeed his father, the ensuing identity crisis has resulted in a suicide attempt. Therefore, in rewriting the Victorian age, the narrator tries to come to terms with himself, to understand who he is. History and subjectivity are closely connected in the novel because the narrator hopes that rewriting the past (both the Victorian age and his own life story) can be a kind of remedy to his traumatic life.

Ever After has been examined from a psychoanalytical perspective by scholars such as Wendy Wheeler and Daniel Lea, who have focused on "melancholic modernity and contemporary grief" (Wheeler 63), and subject formation in relation to the Lacanian Real, respectively. Many scholars have discussed its concern with history in the context of postmodernism. The most thorough study of the novel through a neo-Victorian lens is that of Christian Gutleben. However, despite his detailed analysis of *Ever After*, Gutleben focuses rather on the stylistic features of the novel. He does not discuss such important issues as the historical sublime, nostalgia, the prevalence of simulacra negotiated by Swift; he refers to them in passing. This study aims to present a more detailed analysis of the overt self-consciousness and the neo-Victorianism of *Ever After* by focusing on the meaning of the Victorian past for the narrator and for the novel, the novel's understanding of history in relation to the image of the Victorian age it evokes, and the relation between the past and the present, as represented by Swift. Moreover, departing from Gutleben's suggestion that the novel is a nostalgic text (199), which has been put forward earlier by Sally Shuttleworth as well (267, 268), this study will show that it is not a nostalgic but a rather subversive text regarding its engagement with the Victorian past and history.

This chapter will first focus on the formal features of *Ever After* in order to reveal its deconstructive agenda and also to clarify what is meant by "overt" self-consciousness in this study. This will be followed by the analyses of the thematic

concerns of the novel, which are subjectivity, history and history writing, and the collapse of grand narratives and its ramifications. This chapter will show that the form and content of this novel complement one another in that both reveal the novel's postmodernist scepticism about the traditional assumptions about history and history writing.

3.1. The Formal Features of *Ever After*

The formal features of *Ever After* reflect its postmodernist scepticism about history and mark its overt self-consciousness. As is the case with many other metafictional neo-Victorian works, the employment of an unreliable narrator, narrative fragmentation, the metafictional mode, and intertextuality, among other devices used in this novel, work to question positivist history writing and subvert the traditional assumptions about realist representations in the spheres of history and fiction. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction and Christian Gutleben's, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's theories of neo-Victorian fiction, this section will explore the ways in which *Ever After* calls into question realism in both fiction and history and points to the inauthenticity of the Victorian past it rewrites.

In *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001), Christian Gutleben repeatedly underlines that parodic examples of neo-Victorian fiction challenge Victorian models they revisit (89). This is in line with what Hutcheon thinks as the contradictory nature of postmodernist fiction, by which she means using and abusing, working within and challenging conventional techniques and assumptions (*Poetics* 3, 5). In *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn agree with Gutleben's conception and theory of the neo-Victorian novel, placing more emphasis on the centrality of parodic, metafictional, and metacritical engagements with the Victorian past to the neo-Victorianism of a work (6). What Heilmann and Llewellyn see as "sophisticated" neo-Victorian works, which use Victorian voices, characters, plot, or standpoint and at the same time subvert them, again recalls the double-coded nature of historiographic metafiction. This study suggests that like historiographic metafiction, metafictional neo-Victorian novels uphold postmodernist premises and

display postmodernist scepticism in both their form and content. As one of these novels, *Ever After* at once portrays the Victorian age and challenges this portrayal through certain devices.

One salient feature of neo-Victorian fiction across the spectrum is lending a voice to the peripheral figures and the others of history. *Ever After* foregrounds the stories of two marginal figures. In fact, the otherness or marginality of Bill Unwin and Matthew Pearce differs from that of the silenced figures of history, such as the colonized subjects, people from the low-class, prostitutes, and servants that populate the neo-Victorian novel. It can be argued that an academic was hardly a marginal figure in the 1980s, and the loss of religious faith was not uncommon in the Victorian age when the theories of Charles Darwin turned the world upside down for many Victorians. However, in several ways, both Bill Unwin, the protagonist in the contemporary plot, and his ancestor, Matthew Pearce, the protagonist of the Victorian narrative, are marginal characters.

Bill Unwin is an eccentric and "ex-centric" character, to use Hutcheon's term concerning the characters that populate historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 114). Bill is an "under-achiever", "loner, socially dull", "a person whom time, history, purpose have passed by", and an individual who is "emotionally bound to the events occurring in the middle of the twentieth century (particularly the World Wars)" (Tolan 136). He has a traumatic past. He is one of Swift's "children of war" (Widdowson 13) as he was born in 1936, on the eve of the Second World War. He has not fought in the war, yet his life has been shattered due to the war. Colonel Unwin, the man he knows as his father, has committed suicide towards the end of the war. Colonel Unwin's motives for suicide are hidden from the narrator until he is fifty-two. His mother, Sylvia, marries Sam, an American, soon after the Colonel's death. When his stepfather, Sam, tells him that his biological father was not Colonel Unwin but an engine driver who was killed in the Second World War, he sees himself as a "bastard" (*EA* 200), which is another shock for him. Moreover, his position at the university is questionable as his qualifications do not meet academic standards, which adds to his sense of alienation and inauthenticity, as also noted by Lea (*Graham Swift* 128-129). He is a lonely man with no family, friends, or lover to

satisfy his emotional or sexual needs and to engage in a meaningful relationship. The question of paternity, the death of his mother, stepfather, and wife in the last two years, and living in a world devoid of "the true, permanent, real thing" (*EA* 2), by which he implies the absence of any sort of frameworks in his life that can render it meaningful, result in a crisis of identity. He attempts to kill himself, but he is not successful. He starts telling his story while editing his ancestor's notebooks right after this attempt. Bill Unwin has been and feels like a peripheral character in the family, the university, and his own social context.

Like the narrator, his Victorian ancestor, Matthew Pearce, is an ex-centric. Matthew is a surveyor who marries Elizabeth after graduating from college. The loss of his mother before this marriage, seeing a fossil, and the death of his son lead to a crisis of faith. Since he cannot confess his doubts about the truthfulness of the Bible to his wife, Elizabeth, he leads a double life for some time. He has lost his faith, but he carries his mother's Bible till he dies. He discusses Charles Lyell's and Charles Darwin's theories with his father-in-law, a priest, but hides the truth from his wife. In the eye of Bill, he is a marginal figure as well because he chooses to pursue truth at the expense of his happy marriage, which is impossible for the sceptical narrator. Perhaps encountering a marginal figure whom the narrator initially sees as someone much like himself is one of the reasons why the narrator is attracted to his ancestor's story.

Bill is an unreliable and "overtly controlling narrator", who is "not confident of his ability to know the past with any certainty", like the narrators in historiographic metafiction (*Poetics* 117). This is a typical device used in overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novels that dates back to their precursor, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which employs a highly self-reflexive, playful, and intrusive narrator. Bill Unwin demonstrates his scepticism about historical truth and knowledge in a highly self-reflexive manner. On the very first page, he warns the reader that they will be reading "the ramblings" of an aged man (*EA* 1), which casts doubt on his reliability from the outset. He must rely on memory in his retrospective narrative, and he knows that "memory blurs" (*EA* 82). He cannot present a coherent narrative which can

explain what happened in the Victorian age or his own past. This inability paradoxically both stems from and results in his manipulation of facts.

The narrator's desire to tell a story that can explain the past and his, by extension, the novel's awareness of the impossibility of telling a truthful and coherent story lead to narrative fragmentation. Gutleben rightly argues that "narrative fragmentation is the common strategy put into practice by all retro-Victorian fiction", adding that this feature, along with several others, makes *Ever After* "the epitome of […] postmodernist aesthetics" (142). Swift's novel, like many other metafictional neo-Victorian works, baffles the reader's expectations through the fragmented narrative. One formal feature that contributes to narrative fragmentation in Swift's novel is the non-linearity of the story Bill Unwin tells. Although or perhaps because the narrator is obsessed with origins and ends, he cannot tell the story in a chronological way. Both his life story and his version of his ancestor's story are discontinuous. Both plots go back and forth in time. The narrative starts in the narrative present when the narrator is in a recovery period after the suicide attempt. Chapter 2 goes back to his childhood in Paris during the war years. Chapter 5 is a pastiche of Matthew's farewell letter to his wife, Elizabeth. Chapter 6 takes the reader to the 1930s and the 1940s, the narrator's birth, war years, and his mother's marriage to Sam. Chapter 8 turns to the narrative present when he gives the manuscripts to Katherine, Michael Potter's wife. This is the last event in the chronological sequence, but there are fourteen more chapters after this chapter. In the remaining chapters, the story repeatedly goes back and forth between the narrative present and several periods in the past: his childhood, the mid-nineteenth century, the Second World War, and the 1950s when he fell in love with Ruth and married her. His story and his version of the nineteenth-century story go back and forth in time in each chapter as well. Chapter 9 starts with a return to 1844 when Matthew saw the fossils of an ichthyosaur. After this, the narrator starts talking about his ancestor's birth in 1819 and familial origins, and he inserts extracts from Matthew's journals. These extracts are from the notebook entries of 1854 and the 1840s. As such, the text resists the linearity, causality, and continuity of realist narratives. The non-linear narrative suggests the impossibility of knowing where the past starts and where it ends for both the narrator, the reader, and the neo-Victorian writer. This impossibility can be

indicative of the fact that the Victorian age inheres (at times covertly) in the present in several ways. In other words, the past might not have passed, as the ghostly presence of Matthew Pearce in the 1980s suggests.

The employment of parenthetical explanations, ellipses, unanswered questions, and incomplete sentences contributes to narrative fragmentation in *Ever After* as well:

> If natural selection had had its nasty way, we should have been wiped out long ago, a fragile, etiolated experiment (I have slipped into the insidious 'we'). (*EA* 2)
> But then I was only nine when my father- (*EA* 28)
> All for love, yes. *Amor vincit* . . . (*EA* 57)

These examples reflect "severe breakdowns of language" (Malcolm 15). The parenthetical asides are at times used for explanation. This paradoxically raises doubt about the adequacy of language as a means to reflect reality even as the narrator tries to explain what he means by the previous sentence. On many other occasions, they draw the reader's attention to the process of writing/narrating and to the invented nature of the narrator's version of history, as evident in the first example. The second and third quotations, where the narrator cannot complete the sentence, point to the losses that the narrator cannot articulate. As noted by David Malcolm in *Understanding Graham Swift* (2003), Swift's narrators are "unwilling to say certain words, or to look at certain issues directly" (15). Since the suicide of Colonel Unwin is a traumatic experience for Bill Unwin, he leaves the sentences which refer to his suicide incomplete. If the narrator tells his past but cannot always explain what happened in the past, then the narrative is suspect. In other words, historical accounts cannot provide the reader with a mirror to reality or the past because the medium (language) itself is the problem. In addition, these breakdowns of language signal the narrator's confusion regarding what is real, and his desire for love and genuine human relations lacking in the competitive atmosphere of academia and in the narrative present.

Unlike the parts narrated by Bill Unwin, the notebooks of Matthew Pearce are devoid of such narrative fragmentation. Matthew's farewell letter to his wife and his notebooks do not involve ellipses, incomplete sentences, or unanswered questions.

He seems to write with certainty: "An impossibility, a contradiction: to *pray* for belief. […] He [God] punishes me with Felix's death […] Or: Felix's death: merely a proof" (*EA* 102; emphasis in original). When Matthew asks questions, he offers answers to them from a Darwinian perspective. In one entry, he asks why there is diversity rather than uniformity in nature and ponders on this question in parts entitled "Answer" and "Objection" (*EA* 141-142). His questions are those of an inquiring mind, not of the baffled subject, i.e. Bill Unwin, who desires epistemological certainty aware of its impossibility. This must signal for the narrator that in the Victorian age, it was possible to have certain knowledge on even such confusing issues as whether science or religion offers the true explanation of human existence.

Concerning the narrative fragmentation in this novel, Gutleben remarks that the extracts from the Victorian manuscripts are "transcribed in a different typography and page-setting", which continually interrupts the narrator's account (142). This feature is discernible in many examples of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. For instance, in Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002), the subtitles of the chapters, the pictures inserted into the main body of the text, and the extracts from other (fictional) sources transcribed in italics serve narrative fragmentation. Similarly, in Swift's novel, along with the extracts from the pseudo-Victorian manuscripts, the insertion of some quotations from other texts, such as those from Virgil, William Shakespeare's sonnets and plays (*EA* 194, 195, 234), Sir Walter Raleigh's poem (*EA* 71, 233), Charles Lyell's *Elements of Geology* (*EA* 170), in the main body contributes to the disruption of the flow of the narrative. Some of these are commented on, and some are just inserted in the narrative without a transition or explanation regarding their relevance. As is with the non-linear structure, this strategy challenges the traditional "principles of contiguity and causality" and the "pattern of logicality" (Gutleben 56). These irrelevant quotations disrupt the reader's expectations and make it difficult for the reader to immerse themselves in the text. They indicate that "we are *not* going to get […] a classic imitation of the reader's own ideas about Victorian realism", as Heilmann and Llewellyn say of the "sophisticated" neo-Victorian novel (*Neo-Victorianism* 14; emphasis in original). Drawing from Hutcheon's, Heilmann and Llewellyn's emphases throughout their

books, it can be argued that the metafictional neo-Victorian novel demands an active reader who participates in the meaning-making process. However, most of the time it is very difficult for the reader to comprehend why these extracts are put in these texts, as is the case with most of the quotations Bill Unwin inserts in his story.

The mixture of various genres and modes in the novel is another means of disrupting the narrative continuum. Many neo-Victorian novels include letters, excerpts from newspapers, diaries, and other Victorian or pseudo-Victorian documents. As also put by Gutleben, such neo-Victorian works embrace "stylistic hybridity" (142). The function of the excerpts inserted in the main body of *Ever After* and many other metafictional neo-Victorian novels can be to create narrative complexity and to problematize Victorian realism.

Swift's novel brings together letter, journal, romance, the fairy-tale, tragedy, the campus novel, and television script to deconstructive ends. The narrator "parodies the language and pattern" of these forms (Gutleben 145), drawing attention to the difficulty of an objective representation of the Victorian past and the intertextuality of any kind of historical narrative. The juxtaposition of diverse genres also highlights the narrator's desperate attempts to find a pattern that can render his existence meaningful, as will be explored in detail in the following parts. On one occasion, the narrator tries to write a television script. He imagines the scene when Matthew Pearce has a final discussion on the science versus religion issue with the Rector, his father-in-law:

> You have to picture the scene. […] If it were not for Matthew's Notebooks, nobody might have known it had happened at all […]. So what, on the part of this unforeseen testifier, is *a little bit of creative licence? A little bit fiction?* The place: a rectory garden in Devon (it is like the setting for some vapid period piece- of course, Potter's TV 'realization'). The time: a June afternoon in 1860. The persons: Gilbert Hunt (the Rector); Matthew Pearce, his son-in-law; (off-stage, Emily, the Rector's wife). I don't know what they really said, but all around them […] was the undesisting drone of bees. (*EA* 185; emphasis added)

This scene makes clear the novel's self-consciousness, its games-playing and tricks, which are among the salient features of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel (Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 18, 19). On the one hand, the narrator

tries to understand and explain what might have happened in this scene. On the other hand, he interrupts the scene in a self-reflexive way, underscoring the arbitrariness and partiality of his account. The narrator tries to invent a dialogue between these characters, but "the undesisting drone of bees" makes it impossible for him to hear the dialogue between these Victorian figures. He confesses the limits of imagination: "But I do not know, I cannot even invent. I falter in my script-writing, just as the Rector himself, perhaps, faltered on the verge of his imprecation" (*EA* 187). His creative imagination comes to a halt because the past is inaccessible to the narrator except for his ancestor's fragmented and discontinuous notebooks. Through such episodes, the novel raises the question: how can a historian know past experiences he has not witnessed? Furthermore, the quotation above reveals that in handling one of the most popular themes of neo-Victorian fiction, namely the science versus religion debate,[15] the aim of the novel is to underscore the impossibility of fully knowing the individual reactions to this topic in the Victorian era. In fact, "a little bit of creative licence" mentioned by the narrator is suggestive of what the neo-Victorian writer does when revisiting the past. After all, just like Bill Unwin, neo-Victorian writers, despite doing research about the Victorian age in the archive, have to resort to imagination when producing their works.[16]

A little bit of creative licence the narrator allows himself connects to playfulness and the metafictional mode. Heilmann and Llewellyn contend that the "metafictional mode" is "essential" to the neo-Victorian novel (*Neo-Victorianism* 5). As mentioned in the previous parts, this thesis proposes that the metafictional mode is essential to the overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel, not all neo-Victorian works. Through this mode, these overtly self-conscious works draw attention to the act of writing history, cast doubt on the authenticity of the image of the Victorian past they evoke and the truthfulness of official history, and debunk the reality effect created by Victorian realist novels. The metafictionality of *Ever After* is evident in the self-reflexivity of the narrator and his repeated acknowledgements that he is making up a

[15] A. S. Byatt's novella "Morpho Eugenia" (1992), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), among many others, take up this theme and use it in ways that serve their own agendas.

[16] However, neo-Victorian writers do not always announce it in the way that Bill Unwin does.

story. On one occasion, for example, the narrator tries to "play the traditional role of the author-god and bring the long-dead Matthew back to life" (Holmes 28). In this episode, he tells the first encounter of Matthew and his wife-to-be, Elizabeth, imitating the omniscient narrators of Victorian realist novels:

> He [Matthew] moves with sudden confidence (John is amused to note how his son's spirits are reviving) and *with the aim* of reassuring his audience, to give a practical and lucid account of that masterpiece of engineering, the steam locomotive, with a brief commentary on the dependability of Mr Brunel's Broad Gauge. Elizabeth thinks: he has a way […] of making the extraordinary seem perfectly acceptable […]. But the Rector, who cannot get beyond seeing a steam engine as a sort of tamed dragon […] says, 'Yes -yes, indeed. But tell me, is that Philpott fellow still peddling Divinity at Brasenose?' (*EA* 106; emphasis added)

This scene is narrated in the present tense as if the narrator were there, as if he knew what these characters feel and think. However, he disrupts the image he has created by announcing, "I invent all this. I don't know that this is how it happened. It can't have been like this simply because I imagine so" (*EA* 109). In such episodes, which abound in the novel, the reader is reminded that what they are reading is not a true story but a text in which the boundary between fact and fiction is blurred. The metafictionality of this novel makes it very difficult for the reader to believe in the narrator's account. Through its self-reflexivity, the novel challenges the assumedly unproblematic relations between "language and fiction, language and history", to use Hutcheon's words on historiographic metafiction (*Poetics* 187). The aim of the novel in this regard is to make the reader recognize that written history is much like fiction, that is, a story, a textual construct.

Metafictional neo-Victorian fiction often enters a dialogue with Victorian novels, (pseudo-Victorian) texts and documents, and sometimes with other neo-Victorian novels. Their intertextuality works to signal the textual, constructed, and intertextual nature of what is assumed to be the Victorian past and history. *Ever After* is a highly intertextual novel which makes references not only to Victorian and neo-Victorian works but also to many texts produced in different periods.[17] For example, the

[17] For a list of texts referenced by Swift, please see Hannah Jacobmeyer's "Graham Swift, *Ever After*: A Study in Intertextuality", in which the critic mentions more than twenty texts.

narrator is obsessed with William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which, he wants to believe, can help him understand who he is.[18] He refers to Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohéme* when reflecting on his childhood years in Paris and to Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* while talking about his actress wife (*EA* 13, 111). Concerning the variety of the texts quoted from and/or mentioned in the novel, it can be argued that this variety points to the difficulty the narrator faces in the process of writing and explaining what happened in the past. This multiplicity also indicates the elusive nature of history because it makes it almost impossible for a reader who is not knowledgeable about these texts to understand why the narrator refers to them and how these references connect to what happened in the personal histories of both the narrator and his ancestor.

The novel also borrows from some Victorian novels. Malcolm states that some themes of Victorian fiction reverberate in Swift's writing, such as "the family, the disrupted family in particular" which have their "antecedents in Dickens's *Bleak House* and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*" (11). He adds that the writer draws upon Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins when touching upon "the dark secrets hidden within" the family (11). This suggestion rings true because *Ever After* abounds in dysfunctional families, problematic marriages, adultery, and disappointing relations between family members. Bill's mother betrays his father firstly with an unnamed engine driver and then with Sam. Alice, his grandmother, similarly betrays her husband with a "Latin lover" (*EA* 215). In one sense, these examples point to the novel's indebtedness to the Victorian tradition. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the novel reworks the Victorian material in ways that reflect its difference from Victorian novels. For example, while the reader learns family secrets in *The Woman in White* (1860), some secrets, such as whether Ruth has betrayed the narrator and whether Elizabeth betrayed Matthew, remain unknown in Swift's novel. This adds to the ambiguity of the narrator's account. In addition, while portraying the disruption of the Tulliver family in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), George Eliot deals with this theme in line with her project of moral realism. At times she gives personal motives

[18] As the novel's engagement with *Hamlet* is closely related to the issues of subjectivity, it will be explored in detail in Section 3.2.

of some characters, such as Wakem, who is partly responsible for the bankruptcy of the Tullivers. In so doing, she tries to extend the reader's sympathy to the characters who might seem to be the villains in the story. Moreover, sympathy for other people is one of the main concerns of the heroine in that novel. As Maggie Tulliver chooses familial bonds over her personal aspirations, she submits to the norms of society and sacrifices herself. In *Ever After*, however, some characters pursue their own ends at the expense of the well-being of other family members. Sylvia betrays her husband and meanwhile uses Bill as a tool. This betrayal has traumatic effects on the narrator, and it turns him into a misogynist in one sense. The adult Bill sees every woman around him as a potential adulteress. Furthermore, *Ever After* does not provide the reader with the motives of the actions of some characters, such as the suicide of the Colonel. This indeterminacy, in turn, creates a distance between the reader and the text. Unlike the reader of Eliot, who can easily identify with the heroine, Swift's reader can hardly identify with Sylvia, Bill, or Matthew or extend their sympathy to these figures. Therefore, with regard to the relation between this novel and Victorian models, it can be said that Swift's novel signals its difference from, rather than indebtedness to, Victorian novels. The difference between Victorian characters and Bill Unwin regarding their worldviews and understandings of morality also denotes the alterity of the Victorians and the Victorian past, which, in turn, points to a discontinuous history.

In addition to Victorian novels, Swift draws upon some neo-Victorian works. One of these is Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, as also noted by several critics (Holmes 35; Malcolm 10; Lea, *Graham Swift* 136). Fowles's novel is concerned with the loss of faith and the impact of evolutionary theory on the protagonist. In that novel, there is an episode set in Lyme Regis and allusions to the discovery of the remains of an ichthyosaur. Fowles's novel deals with the protagonist's existential crisis, which is echoed in Matthew's crisis in *Ever After*. Moreover, Fowles's novel is the prototype of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. Drawing upon this highly playful novel, too, *Ever After* signals its scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge and truth. The intertextual dialogue between these two overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian works demonstrates that neo-Victorian writers can draw

upon one another with respect to such issues as how to tell a story about the Victorians and what to do with that story in the present.

Swift's novel seems to draw upon A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) as well (Eder para. 2). Byatt's novel is partly concerned with the issue of possessing the remnants of the past and who (English or American characters) has the right to possess the texts left by the Victorian poets. In fact, a concern with the notion of "possession" in different senses of the term, such as capturing the past in a narrative, fully knowing what happened in the Victorian past, being haunted by the past, by a Victorian figure, or by a forgotten or unforgettable event that took place in the Victorian age, is observable in some neo-Victorian works. In *Ever After*, this concern appears as the questions of who has the right to possess the Pearce manuscripts and to which ends these manuscripts can be used, which lead to a conflict between the narrator and his rival, the historian Michael Potter. Initially, the narrator lays claim to his ancestor's notebooks but later gives one copy to Katherine, Potter's wife. The novel, *Ever After*, includes the copy that he keeps. The reader does not know what Potter will make of the copy he gets. Yet his version of the Victorian world will be very different from that of Bill Unwin, who rewrites the past mainly by resorting to imagination. It is important to note that by employing two figures working in the departments of literature and history, the novel draws attention to its awareness of the debates in the second half of the twentieth century about the questionable boundary between fact and fiction, and the complex relationship between literature and history. Furthermore, in Byatt's novel, possession is also associated with love. While pursuing the truth about two fictional Victorian characters who were lovers, the protagonists of the contemporary plot fall in love. Love in both the Victorian and contemporary plot is, therefore, connected to the love of literature, too. In *Ever After*, the absence of love in his life leads Bill to search for it in the Victorian world. However, as he cannot possess the past in the sense of knowing what actually happened, unlike the modern protagonists in *Possession*, his is an abortive attempt. The narrator's love of literature also does not seem to provide a remedy to his sense of alienation and marginality.

Ever After thwarts the reader's desire for narrative closure, just like *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Waterland*. The narrative begins after Bill Unwin's attempt

at self-slaughter, mentions his birth in the middle, and ends with an ambiguous image of death. When the reader brings the parts of the story together, the last event in chronological sequence is his giving the manuscripts to Katherine. However, the last chapter is about the first night with Ruth in the 1950s, and it ends with an enigma: "He took his life, he took his life" (*EA* 261). Although Gutleben says that the narrator can be celebrating "the transcendental power of love" by ending his story with the first night of love with Ruth (151), the ending does not seem celebratory. It is rather problematic. Noting the ambiguity of the final sentence, Wendy Wheeler asks, "Does the pronoun ["he"] refer to the father or to the son or to both?" (75). If this "he" is the narrator, does this repeated sentence signal a second suicide attempt, or does it refer to his failed attempt? Although the novel uses the union of lovers and death, two traditional endings commonly used in the Victorian novel, the reader already knows that Ruth commits suicide a few months before the narrative begins, and the sentence "he took his life" does not provide a clear-cut closure but rather indeterminacy and mystery.

Moreover, there are two endings in the novel. One is the above-mentioned first night with Ruth in 1957, and the other is the narrator's giving the Pearce manuscripts to Katherine in 1988 in the eighth chapter (Widdowson 74). For Swift, endings are "fabricated things" (Craps and Swift 655). The employment of multiple endings, neither of which is satisfactory when compared to that of a realist novel, "reflects the way life is" according to the writer (Craps and Swift 655). By frustrating the reader's desire for an ending, Swift challenges the imposition of a single meaning to the narrative and to one's life story and opts for indeterminacy and plurality.

Considering the function of the narrative techniques employed in *Ever After*, it can be argued that in revisiting the Victorian age, the target of the novel is history and historiography. By contesting the veracity of Bill's account of the past, precluding the reader's immersion in the narrative, and subverting readerly expectations, these narrative devices debunk the conventional assumptions about history and Victorian realism. This postmodernist scepticism is discernible in the thematic concerns of the novel, too. The narrator's turn to the Victorian past can be an attempt to "use the representation of history to repair the damage of history, for his identity crisis is

causally linked to the historical forces that have shaped his family" (Holmes 31). What he seeks in the past is solid ground for a stable and unified identity. While this quest takes him "back even farther, to the sixteenth century and Sir Walter Raleigh" who is supposedly his ancestor (Holmes 33), he focuses on the Victorian period and the story of Matthew Pearce because he assumes that the nineteenth-century world can provide some answers to the questions he asks throughout the text about his identity and origins, love, death, authenticity, innocence, and a foundation of *any* kind. However, the novel sheds doubt on all certainties (unified subjectivity, historical knowledge and truth, grand narratives) and, as such, thwarts his attempts to see the Victorian period as an age of solidity.

3.2. The Unresolved Question of Subjectivity: Who is Bill Un-win?

Daniel Lea claims that Swift's "prevailing questions" in his novels revolve around the issue of subjectivity: "how can we ever know ourselves as singular, coherent beings? how do our public and private worlds intersect? how do we go about living in a way that is true to a sense of authentic selfhood" (*Graham Swift* 6). *Ever After* is one of these works preoccupied with subjectivity. In the face of the loss of epistemological certainties and the traumas that the narrator experiences, he feels an urge to tell stories to make sense of himself and the world, his own past and the past of his Victorian ancestor. In the story told by Bill Unwin, therefore, subjectivity and history are closely connected. This section aims to analyze this relationship by focusing on the treatment of subjectivity. It argues that *Ever After* represents subjectivity and history as inseparable textual constructs. It suggests further that the novel reveals that subjectivity and history are fragmented, changing, ultimately dissolving and elusive entities.

Like historiographic metafiction, which contests the liberal humanist notion of "the unified and coherent subject" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 11-12), the metafictional neo-Victorian novel often challenges the idea of unified and continuous subjectivity. The effect is to cast doubt on the accuracy of the account of the past given by or through the representation of such a character. *Ever After* dismantles the Cartesian autonomous and sovereign self through the portrayal of Bill Unwin and Matthew

Pearce. It shows that the subject is a product of language, texts, discourses, and "'fragments of experience'" (Gutleben 140). While Hutcheon reiterates that this conception of subjectivity is liberatory for the individual, Kohlke and Gutleben draw attention to one important point regarding the postmodern subject: "the traumatised subject now assumes the position of the contemporary norm" ("Introduction" 3). They argue that beside some historical traumas such as the world wars and the Holocaust:

> the ubiquitous sense of trauma arguably has an epistemological component: the knowledge of the relativity or impossibility of all knowledge, the fraught certainty of the uncertainty of any cognitive system, and the insistence on the aporetic nature of signification all help nurture our culture of loss and dispossession. (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Introduction" 4)

This study does not focus on trauma. However, Kohlke and Gutleben's suggestion about the impact of epistemological uncertainties on the postmodern subject is significant for this study because the narrator's identity crisis is to a great extent connected to the loss of certainties and the crisis of truth, which leads him to turn to the past in a quest for solid ground, as will be explored in this and the following sections of this chapter.

Bill Unwin's life and world are fraught with uncertainties. He is obsessed with the question of who he is. One major factor that destabilizes the narrator's sense of subjectivity is the loss of his family because it renders him "lonely, loveless with a strong conviction of his inauthenticity" (Lea, *Graham Swift* 128). He desperately needs to know who he is and tries various ways to "recover" his "substance", that is, the core of his identity (*EA* 10). Since he cannot place himself in a family that can provide him with a sense of belonging, he turns to his origins and looks for a father figure in the past (Lea, *Graham Swift* 130-131).

A true father figure can function as a center, an authority, and thus, can determine who the narrator is. At this point, it is worth mentioning that for Swift, men (fathers) are the instruments for "the transmission of culture" and "cultural history" (Wheeler 67). However, this "paternal task" is often difficult to perform (Wheeler 67) when knowledge, truth, and reality are called into question. *Ever After* foregrounds this

difficulty by presenting several father figures for the narrator. One of these figures is Colonel Unwin, who is not his biological father. Nevertheless, it seems that the narrator considers him as his father even after learning the truth. The Colonel's suicide due to his mysterious duty after the war or perhaps due to recognizing that his wife has cheated on him is the first blow to the narrator's sense of selfhood. In addition, there is always a certain physical and emotional distance between the Colonel and Bill Unwin, which makes the transmission of knowledge and culture almost impossible. The second father figure is Sam, his stepfather. Sam is a substitute for a true father. He cannot help the narrator in his quest for an authentic self because he is associated with plastic, inauthenticity, and simulation. The third father figure is an unidentified engine driver who is the biological father of the narrator. The narrator does not seek out who this figure was or his familial bonds. Had he done research on this figure, he would have found some textual traces in the documents related to the war. This means that he would know his biological father only as a text. The shattering impact of history on his life and sense of selfhood is discernible in the death of both the Colonel due to the war and his biological father in the war. Unlike the narrator, these figures are men of action, which leads him to a sense of disconnection "from the historical continuum" (Lea, *Graham Swift* 130). The narrator is not a man of action who shapes or tries to shape the world like these two figures but is rather *subject to* history and its destructive force. As a counterbalance to this sense of disconnection, he turns to the past, the Victorian age, for another father figure. Concerning his identity crisis, perhaps he thinks that he can establish a connection between himself and Matthew, who similarly had an epistemological crisis. If he can chart a historical continuity between the Victorian ancestor and himself, he can become "a *part* of history" (Wheeler 71; emphasis in original). However, as these figures are dead, none of these father figures can be a transmitter of "knowledge, values, and standards" (Lea, "Feigning" 161). What could function as the center for his sense of selfhood is, then, paradoxically plural, absent, and/or a textual construction, which puts him outside the history of such men of action.

Without a stable foundation that can explain who he is, the narrator tries to construct his subjectivity by playing some roles: Hamlet, a husband, a lecturer. At the outset of

his narrative, he acknowledges that "I am not me" and adds, "was I ever me?" (*EA* 4). This question signals the various roles he has tried to adopt throughout his life to know who he is and to feel like a person who can control his own history. Each one of these attempts is futile because he associates play-acting with "foolishness" and talks to himself, "Don't try to be something you're not…" (*EA* 114). By performing a role of any kind, he can have a sense of purpose, a certain place in the world. However, the role he plays "never fits […] [him] with comfort; there is always a discordance between the consciousness of performance and the desire for an authentic being beneath that veneer" (Lea, *Graham Swift* 8). His inability to play the same role for long results in the indeterminacy of subjectivity and inability to meaningfully place himself in a historical context in the sense of both familial history and larger history.

Furthermore, the narrator tries to constitute his subjectivity based on some fictional texts he has read and inescapably on the interpretations of those texts. Malcolm says that "the past weighs heavily on the present" in Swift's fictional worlds, and his narrators are compelled by a "desire to understand, to retrace the past, to seek out some patterns in its destructive flux, to work out why and how they got where they are" (16). Holmes also mentions the notion of patterns when he states that the narrator resorts to various texts as they can help him "to discover […] an overarching pattern of significance" (Holmes 26). The narrator's resort to various genres and repeated references to different literary texts point to his desperate search for a pattern[19], a stable, totalizing story that can explain who he is, a question whose answer is related to knowing and explaining what happened in the past. This search for a pattern underscores the connection between subjectivity and history in this novel. As the narrator looks for a pattern in both literature and history, this search also blurs the boundary between these two spheres. A pattern can place him inside history (the familial line or large-scale historical events) as a subject. From the perspective of the narrator, it can provide a historical continuum and help him

[19] The notion of pattern-making and the possibility of its redemptive power in Swift's works are discussed by Stef Craps in relation to Swift's debut novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, and *Waterland* in an essay entitled "'As if History could be Circumvented'" (2003) (207-210). It seems that Bill Unwin is not the only Swiftian character who attempts to understand and explain his life, the past, and the world through some sort of pattern.

capture the meaning of history and his personal history. However, history comprises unknown events, forgotten details, unrepresentable parts, which thwarts any attempt to rewrite it in a logical and causal fashion, to totalize it through a meaningful pattern.

One of the major textual sources the narrator tries to use as a foundation for subjectivity is William Shakespeare's tragedy, *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* is a useful tool for Swift to point to the epistemological crisis of Bill Unwin because it explores "a mind in crisis" (Sanders 54). This is one of the reasons why the troubled narrator identifies with Hamlet: "I am Hamlet the Dane" (*EA* 160). In fact, there are similarities between the tragic hero and the narrator, as also noted by several scholars. When Colonel Unwin commits suicide, his mother marries Sam Ellison. Sam is an American, with whom she has already had an extra-marital affair for some time. This situation is in line with the plot of *Hamlet*. Hamlet's mother marries his uncle soon after the king's death. Much like Hamlet, who is visited by the ghost of his father, the narrator is haunted by the ghost of Colonel Unwin in the sense that he cannot forget about his suicide (Sanders 61). Like Hamlet, he is obsessed with taking revenge on his stepfather. Bill, as "a professional exponent of English literature" (*EA* 5), resembles Hamlet regarding his introspective narrative as well, which reminds one of the soliloquies and asides of the tragic hero. His attempt to use Hamlet as a foundation for a stable sense of self is ironic because Hamlet is one of the most enigmatic characters in English Literature. Nevertheless, the play can serve his ends. It can provide him with a certain pattern, "a teleological framework for the seemingly senseless chaos of his own life" (Lea, *Graham Swift* 137). He supposes that he can stabilize his subjectivity by appropriating the tragedy to his own ends. If this pattern works the way he wishes, "[t]hings fit, things have a purpose" (*EA* 108). If he is Hamlet, then his mother is Gertrude, his stepfather is Claudius, Colonel Unwin is the old Hamlet, and Ruth is Ophelia. This pattern is logical, coherent, and meaningful. As such, it provides the narrator with a purpose: to take his revenge on Sam.

However, the pattern of tragedy based on *Hamlet* is deconstructed right after it has been established. The narrator confesses that "I have always liked him [Sam]" (*EA*

6), which means that his life can only be a parody of the tragic play, as also noted by Gutleben (144). Sam is like a close friend or a brother who cares for him. Whereas Claudius wants to see Hamlet dead, Sam offers Bill to run the Ellison Plastics. While Claudius manages to kill Hamlet at the end of the play, Sam makes the narrator "a plastics heir", "a rich man" (*EA* 7). Moreover, by granting him the Ellison Fellowship, Sam tries to help the narrator set his life in order after the death of Ruth. All this leads to a "Revenge Refuted", which is the worst thing according to Bill (*EA* 11). It is the worst thing for him because when Sam does not fit into the role of the wicked stepfather, the pattern Bill tries to build up is broken down. When the pattern of a revenge tragedy in which he is the tragic hero is broken down, it cannot give him "an explanation" (*EA* 4). His "substance" turns out to be a dissolved, elusive, and fragmented construct; and as such, he can only have "Hamletesque pretensions" (*EA* 10, 72). He admits the plurality and textuality of his subjectivity when he says that *Hamlet* is "one of the plots" of his life (*EA* 6). At this point, he reminds one of the historian who can impose whichever form he chooses on the past, in his case, on his own history.

Lea claims that one function of the narrator's identification with Hamlet is "to move his own brand of failure centre-stage and elevate it to the status of tragic universality", in other words, to arrogate "to himself a notional nobility and to his story of underachievement the lustre of epic" (*Graham Swift* 138). Yet, as the critic himself acknowledges, the narrator sees himself as "extrinsic to the vital flux of life and history, a marginalised nobody who has failed in everything", which does not diminish his "desire to be *of* history in a fundamental way" (*Graham Swift* 138, 32; emphasis in original). Therefore, his identification with the tragic hero seems to be an attempt to imagine himself as a subject of and in history, who shapes history in one way or another, rather than elevating his life story to the status of an epic. After all, despite all his procrastination and indecisiveness, Hamlet intervenes in the history of his country in the last scene by killing the king, which leads to the usurpation of the crown by Fortinbras. The narrator's appropriation of this role, aware that it does not fit him, is indicative of his desire to be intrinsic to history, that is, his yearning to be an active agent, to meaningfully belong to a historical context. If he cannot be intrinsic to history through his actions, then he can intervene in

history as a kind of historian by writing a kind of historical narrative that includes both his own and his ancestor's past. After all, the meaning of the past is reliant to a certain extent on the historian's interpretations of events. However, as will be explored in the following sections, this attempt to find a meaning in history and in the narrative present fails due to epistemological uncertainties that haunt his life.

Since the pattern of tragedy fails to provide a totalized and coherent subjectivity, the narrator tries to appropriate another genre, the fairy-tale, which again reveals the textual and constructed nature of his subjectivity. The title "Ever After" arouses a readerly expectation that the novel will read as a fairy-tale, telling a love story that ends with "and they lived happily ever after". He repeats several times that he was born in the same week "that a King of England gave up his crown in order to marry the woman he loved", which makes him feel that "the timing of my arrival imbued my life […] with a sort of fairy-tale propensity" (*EA* 57). He identifies himself with the "throneless ex-King", who refused the throne for romantic love (*EA* 57). In an essay entitled "Representation of History as Plastic: The Search for the Real Thing in Graham Swift's '*Ever After*'" (1996), Frederick M. Holmes says that the narrator sees the abdication crisis not as a political crisis but "a favourable omen foreshadowing his own […] passion for Ruth" (27). As he is aware of his outsider status, and as this peripheral existence baffles his sense of subjectivity, the narrator foregrounds this coincidence, which is, in fact, not relevant to his life story. Holmes adds, "If, he thinks, his father, at least indirectly, had been a casualty of history's destructive might, his own life might be given meaning by a counterbalancing force which also had an effect, however small, on history: love" (27). This is ironic considering the narrator's assertions throughout the text that he has always been an off-stage figure and an "impostor" (*EA* 43). This is also ironic since while trying to fit his life into a fairy-tale pattern, he suspects that Ruth might have cheated on him just as his mother has betrayed Colonel Unwin. The shift in his sense of selfhood from the contemplative and suicidal tragic hero to a romantic king reveals the fragmented and always changing nature of subjectivity. This shift also points to the way a historian or a writer of historical narratives, such as a biographer, can manipulate events, foregrounding certain events and excluding some others, in accord with his own agenda.

The fairy-tale pattern is subverted on the very first page when Bill says, "[t]hese are, I should warn you, the words of a dead man" (*EA* 1). The narrator starts his story with some reflections on the university he works at and mentions some colleagues. Right after this, he mentions his identification with Hamlet. These irrelevant "ramblings" do not fit the traditional fairy-tale pattern (*EA* 1). The beginning inverts the structural rules of the traditional fairy-tale, too, because it starts after the death of the heroine and the suicide attempt of the hero. As Gutleben maintains, "Bill's testimony begins where the traditional fairy-tale ends and explores the forbidden and untrodden land of after-happiness" (143). The contemporary plot does not end in happiness. In addition, it consists of suicides and deaths of family members, war, adultery, secrets, and lies. Bill has been happy for a short time when he was with Ruth. Nevertheless, even then, the glamour of this successful actress has made him an "off-stage" character, a parasitical figure feeding on the fame of his wife (*EA* 199). Thus, the "hero" in this fairy-tale is not a charming prince but "a nobody", a "non-entity" (*EA* 232). Gutleben argues that the ending of the novel with the first night with Ruth evokes the fairy-tale pattern "since there is literally nothing after the end" (143). However, the final sentences do not seem to fit into the traditional ending of the fairy-tale: "How impossible that either of these young people, whose lives, this night, have been so richly possessed, so richly embraced, will ever come to such a pass. He took his life, he took his life" (*EA* 261). The ending registers his unfinished mourning for the loss of love, the loss of the beloved, and the loss of an unidentified "he". The pattern of the fairy-tale does not provide him with a unified sense of selfhood because he cannot make up a coherent story out of the dispersed fragments of his traumatic life.

That is why the narrator imagines himself as a character in a romance, trying to build up another pattern. Accordingly, he is in the role of a medieval "knight", who saves the damsel in distress (*EA* 80). This damsel is Katherine Potter, one of his colleagues, who has a problematic marriage. Her husband, Michael Potter, a historian at the same university, wants to get the Pearce Notebooks to write a book on them. In the scenario imagined by the narrator, Katherine is "one of those pitying and piteous women of medieval romance" (*EA* 80). This scenario is tinged with irony and indeterminacy because whether "wounded knight errant" is Bill Unwin or Michael

Potter is ambiguous (*EA* 80). The knight can be the narrator as he saves the damsel in distress by giving the notebooks to her. The knight can also be Michael Potter, who is offered "solace", the Pearce Notebooks, by "the Lady of the Castle" (*EA* 80). When he gives the manuscripts to her, the narrator considers himself a "true, chaste knight, a true Sir Galahad" because he has ensured that Potter will be "the happy scholar again", and the Potters will live happily ever after (*EA* 246). This scenario is ironic because giving the Pearce manuscripts to his rival's wife under a bean tree is not a great deed. Moreover, this decision is made in part due to his sexual attraction to Katherine, his friend's wife, which means that he is not a chaste knight.

In each case discussed above, the text "installs" an "order" and then demystifies "our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 7). The narrator cannot hold on to a totalizing narrative that can render his sense of self and the past meaningful because the patterns of tragedy, the fairy-tale, and romance do not work well. That is why the narrator seeks out a foundation *from within history*, and, importantly, this foundation is associated with the Victorian age by him. Matthew Pearce stands for "balance" and "stability", so identifying with him can provide the narrator with a stable sense of identity (*EA* 91). Ironically, however, his ancestor is available to him only as a text and through the texts he has left. In addition, the Victorian man's sense of self, which was "founded on" his religious faith, is already destroyed due to his loss of faith in God and the Bible (Holmes 35). Matthew questions the idea that there is an essence of identity. When his wife warns him "to call upon my better nature and 'be myself again'", he asks, "What, in any of us, is our 'better nature'? And what does it mean […] to 'be oneself'?" (*EA* 211). The Victorian ancestor cannot provide the narrator with a core, a stable sense of self, because that period was one of huge transition and complexity, which shattered Matthew Pearce's sense of selfhood and his perception of human existence.

Bill Unwin's subjectivity is split into two. He continually mentions his "former self" and a "new me" (*EA* 4, 7). Neither this former self nor the new self can be known unproblematically. He is one of the Swiftian narrators who, according to Lea:

> never find what they seek of themselves lying buried undisturbed in the past; instead all they encounter are the disarticulated shards of former selves which, even when reassembled, fail to proffer a full picture of their lives as continuous, logical and coherent. That sense of lack, of being incomplete, or of glimpsing the potential forever outside the grasp of the self, or of the means of expression, is a recurrent theme of Swift's fiction. (*Graham Swift* 6-7)

The narrator cannot see his fragmented experiences as a whole. The losses he has experienced and the destructive force of history bring about holes in his subjectivity. When he mentions the first night with Ruth, even what he calls "my former self" (*EA* 4) splits into two:

> You have to picture the scene. How it was then, on a wet August night in 1957, in the days before she was famous. […] *He* had not expected it quite, this frenzy and breathlessness to be unclad, as if some off-stage voice, some prompter's whisper, should have gently enjoined: take your time, you have all night. Nor was *he* prepared for the arresting candour, the simplicity and amazement, of nakedness. And this, you see, is *me*. And this is *me*.
>
> *He* was not prepared, either for the tender and inspired fluency […] with which each one of them offers the other on this indelible night the complete unabridged story of their lives up until this point. (*EA* 260; emphasis added)

The conflation of "me" and "he" reflects that his former self, that is, Bill before the suicide attempt, was itself dispersed. His subjectivity, which seems to be split into two parts, namely, his former self and new self, comprises many selves or fragments of self. As explained above, the dissolution, mutability, and fluidity of his subjectivity are underscored through his various identifications: He is both Hamlet and Polonius (*EA* 85), who talks nonsense. He is at once a chivalric knight in a romance, a happy prince in a fairy-tale, who marries the most beautiful girl, and a king, who renounces the throne for the sake of love. He is both somebody and nobody.

As he cannot see his life and himself as continuous or coherent, Bill Unwin can never be "the origin of meaning" despite his various attempts (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 164). The contemporary plot cannot follow or build up a linear and teleological pattern because it is constructed out of the above-mentioned textual fragments. If the *Hamlet* scenario had worked, if he had been a knight in a romance, if the notebooks of his ancestor had been able to provide him with a place in a kind of historical

continuum, Bill could have known who is. Perhaps at one point he comes to recognize that this is an impossible task to achieve. This impossibility is implied by the novel through the song his mother sings, "who is Sil-via? What is she-e …?" (*EA* 32). It is highlighted through his inability to know the un-"graspable self" of Ruth (*EA* 36) and his question: "who is Elizabeth? What is she?" (*EA* 208). While the constructedness of subjectivity remains a problem for Bill, towards the end of the narrative, he mentions that he can be "anybody" (*EA* 231). Perhaps he recognizes that just like an actor, just like Ruth, he can act out different roles in each play. Although this recognition does not rescue him from his obsession with the question of who he is and with historical truth, it may indicate his acknowledgement of the multiplicity and textuality of subjectivity.

Perhaps it is for this reason that he leaves the question of paternity, his search for an origin, unanswered. Although he is initially obsessed with paternity, he does not research his unnamed biological father and chooses to leave the issue of paternity indeterminate and ambiguous: "What difference does it make? True or false? This one or that one. The world will not shatter because of a misconception…" (*EA* 204). In fact, this response is unexpected from a figure like Bill Unwin, who is obsessed with truth and knowledge. However, he says that "the past is a foreign country" (*EA* 229). He cannot know what happened in the past, what kind of a man his biological father was, how and why his mother met him and betrayed Colonel Unwin. Furthermore, his conception of the past as a foreign country reveals the impossibility of forming a relation of continuity between Matthew and himself, between the Victorian period and the narrative present.

The narrator's and, by implication, the novel's scepticism about historical knowledge is also evident in Bill's view of biography: "an impossibility, a falsehood, a sham" (*EA* 253). Biography presents a personal history with a certain beginning, a middle, and a certain ending. It is a coherent story that explains the personal history of the individual in question. Nevertheless, no biography can fully explain the biographical subject. There is always "an excess of personality", and "this *elusive, hard-to-spot* character called 'the real you'", to use the narrator's own words, cannot be fully grasped by the biographer (*EA* 253, 117; emphasis added). His distrust of

biographical works indicates both his and the novel's distrust of narratives (historical, biographical, and fictional) regarding their capacity to explain the past and to capture (past) reality.

Yet still, the novel seems to value storytelling as a crucial attempt to explain and understand existence and life. Swift underscores the importance of telling stories in several interviews. In a 2006 interview with Fiona Tolan, he says, "[w]e need to tell stories [….] It answers a deep need"; he adds that stories "can tell us how we got to where we are now" and give the human being "a bit of strength and understanding to carry on" (131). In *Ever After*, the narrator's "ghostly disconnection" from himself and public history, and the dissolution of his subjectivity stimulate him "to set pen to paper" (*EA* 231, 245). In the face of epistemological uncertainties, which affect the narrator just like a kind of trauma, all he can do is "to spin some yarn", to "fictionalize" what might have happened in the past (*EA* 257, 229). In this respect, his narrative is epistemologically suspect. In his turn to his Victorian ancestor, to the Victorian past, he is trying to understand how his own life came to that point of crisis, and the meaning of human life, love, and death. In that respect, it can be stated that the narrator, like Swift himself, privileges storytelling because, despite his doubts about narrative and the possibility of historical knowledge, the narrator believes that he can "outwit mortality" by telling a story (*EA* 231).

3.3. An Un-win Version of the Victorian Age: The Historian, History, and History Writing in *Ever After*

This study argues that in *Ever After*, history turns into fiction, which marks the self-conscious neo-Victorianism of this work. In the aforementioned conversation with Fiona Tolan, Swift points out the link between subjectivity (life story) and history as follows:

> we all need to work out how we got into the situation we're in. So we go back into the past and try to go through the stages to find the beginnings of thing. Of course this is what history -history in a professional, quasi-scientific sense- does. Obviously there are limits to it; there are limits to our actual knowledge of events at any one time. There are limits to the reliability of our memories. (131)

In *Ever After*, in search of a stable foundation for his subjectivity, or "a model of identification" in Gutleben's words, the narrator turns to the Victorian world of his ancestor and sets out to tell his own version of the past (148). The past is only partially available through its textual traces, the Pearce manuscripts. As he cannot know for certain what happened in the past, what is left to the historian, in this case, the narrator, is to surmise, to write a fictionalized history based on other texts.

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel's concern with the historical sublime is an important point that deserves more scholarly attention in the critical discussions of both *Ever After* and the subgenre than that it has received so far. Regarding this issue, this study suggests that *Ever After*, like some other metafictional neo-Victorian novels[20], shows that a historical narrative can never fully capture what happened in the past, especially if the narrative deals with historical or personal traumas. This point resonates with Amy J. Elias's theory of the historical sublime, which draws upon Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the unrepresentable event[21] and Hayden White's idea of the historical sublime. In her *Sublime Desire* (2001), Elias asserts that "the Lyotardian event is the eruption in history of that which cannot be articulated within history; it is the 'not said' that silently explodes into the realm of representation" (25). She argues that "the postmodern attitude to history is paradoxical" as it both desires and remains sceptical about history (xvii). Therefore, "the historical sublime" is "a desired horizon that can never be reached but only approached in attempts to understand human origins and the meaning of the lived existence" (Elias xviii). The historical sublime, in other words, stands for history as the unknowable, unrepresentable, chaotic past, which eludes our cognition. There is always an excess in history that cannot be articulated in any narrative. This excess is a chaotic and unknowable part of history which is both desired and muted in literary texts. The text can only *allude* to this unrepresentable excess as a "gap", an "absent

[20] Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993), and Joseph O'Connor's *Star of The Sea* (2002) are among these novels. *Waterland*'s failure to represent the world wars and the latter two novels' complex treatment of the Irish Famine reveal that these novels are haunted by an unspeakable event, which resists a realist representation.

[21] Jean-François Lyotard claims that "the postmodern" is that which "puts forward the unrepresentable in the presentation" without offering "the solace of good forms" (81). Lyotard's concept of "the unrepresentable" can be thought as an event that evades understanding and representation.

signified", and through an ambiguous figure (Elias 72, 164). Elias calls such texts "metahistorical romances", which confront "the historical sublime as repetition and deferral" (Elias xi). According to Elias, this desire is evident in these works' obsession with the violent events in the past. Drawing upon these arguments, this study suggests that the Second World War and, to a certain extent, Matthew's shattering experience of seeing the fossils of an ichthyosaur are treated as unrepresentable events and the historical sublime in *Ever After*.

In order to underscore its scepticism about positivist historiography, the metafictional neo-Victorian novel frequently employs a historian figure, a researcher, or an academic who pursues the traces of the past. Tom Crick, a history teacher and the protagonist of *Waterland* (1983), for example, tells the history of his family and the Fens in a way that history is interwoven with fairy-tales and stories. *Possession* (1990), too, employs a group of academics, who resemble historians as they search for knowledge concerning the relationship between two fictional Victorian poets. In *Ever After*, there are two historians. One of them is Michael Potter, a historian and a colleague of the narrator. Potter is a womanizer and a scholar interested in fame. He shows up in TV shows, radio programmes and offers "watered-down or souped-up scholarship for the masses. Potter's potted history. Talks any old bilge. […] He is […] a genuinely accomplished historian. Yet he feels obliged to prostitute himself, for the sake of a little dubious limelight" (*EA* 42). Moreover, he sees history as a matter of "possession" (*EA* 83). His special field is "Victorian idealism and Victorian doubt" (*EA* 80-81), so he is after the Pearce manuscripts. The question of who has the right to possess the manuscripts causes a conflict between Bill and Michael. Michael needs to publish a book in order to be a professor. When he asks for them, Bill does not give the documents to him. That is why it is perhaps Michael who sends Katherine, his wife, to seduce Bill and get the notebooks. To use Dominic LaCapra's terms, Michael Potter holds a "fetishized idea of the archive or the written document as the sole repository of historical 'truth'" (LaCapra xx). The narrator, aware of this fetishism, criticizes Potter and, through him, the institution:

> You see, we old doddering savants, we harmless cloistered fools, are real cut-throats, when it comes to it [fresh data]. […] We are bandits, pirates, pillagers, when it

> comes to that all-important stuff: recognition. I can see now why men have duelled over the questions of attribution, why they have come to the blows in laboratories, why they have fought over who shall be first to name some particular species of plant or spider- why they have journeyed to the ends of the earth just to *find* some hitherto unknown species on which to bestow their names. (*EA* 48-49; emphasis in original)

The narrator criticizes historians' desire for data and their confidence about the truthfulness of their works by associating conventional academic history with science, scientific discovery, and colonialism. This is, in fact, Swift's critique of positivist history writing and the assumption that the historian can know the ultimate meaning of the past and write an accurate account of it.

Bill is another kind of historian. He is after the personal, rather than public, history. He mocks the historian's belief in the possibility of unmediated access to historical knowledge and lust for newly found documents which shed light on the past: "I was the owner of hitherto undiscovered *material*, of fresh *data*, of (I am quoting Potter now, but what the hell?) 'an historical document of enormous value -a testimony of the effects on a private life of ideas that shook the world'" (*EA* 48; emphasis in original). Rather than contributing to the pool of knowledge that he associates with theft and lust for possession, it is "the personal thing that matters" for him (*EA* 49). It bears repetition that his interest in the Pearce manuscripts has several reasons. Firstly, it is an attempt to understand the past, a Victorian ancestor, which, in turn, may enable him to understand the present and himself. Secondly, it is, at least partly, escapism due to his dissatisfaction with the present. Lastly, he is in a quest for "the real stuff" (*EA* 9), an ultimate meaning. He wants to believe that these can be found in the Victorian age, in his ancestor's world.

The novel reveals that it is only by chance that certain documents are available. Some documents can be lost, damaged, or disposed of for various reasons before they are found and organized in and through archives. The Pearce manuscript is "an important historical document, charting as it does the impact of nineteenth-century thought on the life of an individual" (Malcolm 134-135). Therefore, the process by which the narrator gets the Pearce manuscripts indicates the arbitrary nature of archives. Matthew sends the notebooks and his farewell letter to Elizabeth some time

after their divorce. Since Matthew has caused a scandal by leaving her, she might have disposed of them (*EA* 47). Moreover, Sylvia makes a bonfire and disposes of all that "'rubbish': papers, files, letters" (*EA* 36), which are passed on to her by her parents. The narrator says that the Pearce manuscripts "had survived miraculously Uncle Ratty's depredations and my mother's successive 'clear-outs' and incinerations" (*EA* 44). It is only by chance that Bill gets the Pearce Notebooks undamaged. The burned papers could shed some light on the history of the narrator's family, and their loss is indicative of the gaps in official history. If official history relies on available documents, those events whose textual remains are not available cannot be included in narrated history. This, in turn, points to the impossibility of telling the whole truth in a narrative, whether literary or historical.

The authority of the historian (in this case Bill Unwin) is one of the targets of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. The Pearce manuscripts have gaps. They are discontinuous and fragmented. As such, they do not enable the narrator to represent "the truth with uncontested authority" (Holmes 25). For instance, the narrator does not know much about Elizabeth, how she reacted to Matthew's confession of his loss of faith, or why she kept his notebooks and letter. However, he deliberately makes contradictory predictions about her, such as associating her with the "virtuous heroine of a Victorian novel" and "the fallen woman" (Holmes 30). As a lecturer of literature, Bill Unwin must be aware of the dominant tropes used to represent femininity in Victorian fiction. That is why he makes use of them despite the lack of evidence concerning this Victorian woman. This can be a self-conscious reference to what some neo-Victorian writers do: resorting to familiar tropes from Victorian novels in order to create a realistic setting and plot, in other words, rewriting history by drawing upon Victorian fiction. On another occasion, the narrator makes a generalization about women and portrays Elizabeth as an adulteress, a "bitch" just like his mother and perhaps his wife (*EA* 211, 196). The gaps in the notebooks allow him to project his own prejudices onto the past, which highlights the novel's critique of the discipline of history and the historian.

In the face of these gaps in official records, in the Pearce manuscripts, and in the books Bill borrows from the university library, the narrator surmises what he finds

lacking in the notebooks. For instance, the first meeting of Matthew and Elizabeth is not mentioned in Matthew's journal, but Bill makes up several scenarios because

> that is how I like to see it. That is how I wish it to have happened. […] I choose to believe that Matthew first met Elizabeth in his father's office […] And I choose to believe that at the first meeting Matthew would have had the overwhelming perception that here, […] was the true, sure ground of his life. (*EA* 103)

According to one scenario, Rector Hunt, Elizabeth's father, comes to John Pearce's shop together with Elizabeth to take his clock. Matthew is at the shop helping his father, and they fall in love at first sight (*EA* 103-4). According to another scenario, John Pearce arranges this meeting. The last scenario is that it is Rector Hunt who arranges the meeting and introduces his daughter to Matthew (*EA* 104). In terms of Hayden White's understanding of historiography, these various scenarios reveal that the narrator/historian is trying to turn a tragedy into a romance that ends with the union of lovers in keeping with his own needs and desires.

As an overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel, *Ever After* foregrounds the postmodernist argument that written history is always already an interpretation. Since the historian is not a witness to the events he records, his account has to rely on other texts. These other texts are the interpretations of various historians and scholars, all colored by their ideologies and worldviews. Before the narrator starts telling the story of his ancestor, he has already heard it from his mother "such as she herself knew it" (*EA* 46). The Victorian past, as told by him, is, then, at the very outset a "tale" based on his "mother's version" (*EA* 46, 47) and perhaps on what she has heard from her mother, who must have heard it from her mother. Sylvia's interpretation is far removed from the past as it was because the narrator states that she "was capable of getting facts wrong" (*EA* 217). The narrator has the manuscripts and the stories about the manuscripts. What he does is to interpret what has already been interpreted several times. Therefore, his version of the past is a mixture of these manuscripts, gossip, and hearsay.

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel often includes excerpts from Victorian or pseudo-Victorian documents or literary texts. The aim in doing so is to challenge the

notion of referentiality by questioning the accuracy of these documents. Similarly, in *Ever After*, Bill Unwin questions the veracity of the account of the past in the Pearce manuscripts, as also noted by Malcolm (138): "How do I know it was ever like that?" (*EA* 212). As Matthew addresses a certain reader, his wife, and as he has a guilty conscience regarding the scandal he causes, the notebooks cannot be impartial and objective records. While challenging the authority of the writer, this point ironically puts doubt on the narrator/historian's own narrative. Considering the recent traumas the narrator has experienced, his yearning for meaning and love, it can be stated that even the parts of the manuscripts he inserts into the text can be questionable in terms of accuracy. The parts presented as journal entries are organized by the narrator/historian, which means that he might have included the entries he prefers to see and excluded certain others, which do not fit his expectations or which seem unimportant to him.

Through metafictional elements, the overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel blurs the boundary between history and story, as mentioned above. In this respect, *Ever After* resembles other metafictional neo-Victorian works, such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), and Michael Cox's *The Meaning of the Night* (2006), all of which are highly self-reflexive texts. The self-reflexivity of the narrator in *Ever After* is the major device through which the novel problematizes this boundary. The narrator first installs a realistic representation of the past by inserting a pastiche of Matthew's letter of valediction to Elizabeth in Chapter 5. He does not insert any comment in this chapter. In Chapter 8, however, he updates his project: "Part fact and part surmise […] my reconstruction of the life of Matthew Pearce" (*EA* 80). In so doing, he *overtly* contests the idea of the transparency of representation. He repeats this confession many times so as to underline his understanding, in fact, his problematization of historiography:

> The facts about Matthew Pearce as they stood in the year 1844. The *facts infused with* a good deal of theory, not to say *imagination*. The notebooks do not begin till 1854, though they begin with a backward reference to that summer day in 1844, which, scrupulous as Matthew's memory was, might have been subject to a degree of *narrative licence*. The *facts, mixed with* a good deal of not necessarily false *invention*. *Pace* Potter, I am not in the business of strict historiography. It is a

> prodigious, a presumptuous task: to take the skeletal remains of a single life and attempt to breathe into them their former actuality. […] *Let Matthew be my creation*. […] And if I *conjure* out of the Notebooks a complete yet *hybrid being, part truth, part fiction,* is that so false? (*EA* 90; emphasis added)

In this passage, Bill breaks the "illusion-making tendencies of historiography" and shows "the relation of history writing to narrativization and, thus, to fictionalization" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16, 93). The narrator also indicates the relation between language and reality from a postmodernist perspective. It is language which produces reality, it is the narrator's story which *creates* Matthew and history. It is important to note that although the narrator contests "the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 92), he does not take his own version as a less valuable one. On the contrary, he seems to put the invented, provisional, and contingent hi*story* (the one that he writes) on a par with official history (the one that Michael Potter would write). This suggests that since both history and (neo-Victorian) fiction are hybrid entities, each can complement, complicate, or contest the version of the past evoked in the other.

One important point about *Ever After* is that the self-reflexivity of the novel precludes the reader's immersion in the novel. In fact, this feature is traceable in many metafictional neo-Victorian novels in which the reader is always reminded in several ways that they are reading a fictive text, not a historical work or an imitation of the Victorian novel. In *Ever After*, there is always a distance between Bill Unwin and his own text, which, in turn, leads to a similar ironic distance between Swift's reader and *Ever After*. While this strategy is political in that it invites the reader to question the reality effect of any kind of narrative that lays claim to truth, it simultaneously signals the discontinuity between the Victorian past and the narrative present. In other words, the narrator's comments on the writing process are suggestive of what he wants to think of the Victorian age and the present: a simpler or inferior past versus a complex and incomprehensible present. The novel reinforces this discontinuity, perhaps even an opposition, between the past and the present by pointing out the difference between Bill Unwin and Victorian omniscient narrators in terms of cognition and epistemology, as the examples given and explained above reveal.

Even as they are highly self-reflexive about what they do with the past, metafictional neo-Victorian novels recreate "a detailed texture of the age, […] tracing the economic and social determinants" in that period (Shuttleworth 255). This study suggests that in these novels, this detailed texture is often recreated to challenge the claims of positivist historiography and literary realism rather than to inform the reader about the Victorian past. *Ever After* portrays the socio-political context of the Victorian age and refers to the scientific and industrial developments in that period such as "the copper-rush of south-west Devon" in the Victorian period (*EA* 129). It also refers to the opening of mines, the impact of scientific inquiries on several characters, and some historical figures who contributed to these developments such as Isambard K. Brunel and Mary Anning. However, these factual accounts are always mixed with fictional elements. They are mediated first by the books written on them and then the narrator's interpretive faculty and imagination, which blurs the boundary between fact and fiction. For example, right after he ironically mentions his search on the copper rush as: "you see, Potter, I have done my homework", he resorts to imagination and states, "Matthew *would have* acquired the sought-after skills of a mining surveyor" (*EA* 129; emphasis added). When he turns to the personal history of his ancestor, which is not found in official records, he has no choice other than invention. In the case of this novel, one can claim that what remains in the reader's mind after reading it is the narrator's epistemological questions, ambiguity, and self-doubt rather than the historical details he refers to.

Hutcheon states that historiographic metafiction turns to the archive and yet challenges its authority (*Politics* 77). The archive is similarly one of the targets of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. *Ever After* raises questions about the nature of historical inquiry and historical knowledge through its engagement with the archive. The novel uses and abuses the assumption that archives are sites of truth. This is evident in the narrator's contradictory references to the university library. He refers to the library as "the Palace -the Citadel- of Knowledge" (*EA* 160). The library stands for civilization and contributes to the advancement of knowledge. It is also "likened to a fortress, a prison, a power station" and a "necropolis" (*EA* 169, 170). What is stored in the library is "ammunition", according to the narrator (*EA* 170). The association of the library with ammunition is indicative of the narrator's and

partly the novel's perception of history as a nightmare. Additionally, the narrator does research in the library when reading and editing the Pearce manuscripts, yet the archive provides him with general information, not what he is after. Although he repeats several times that he has done his "background research" concerning the remarriage of Elizabeth after Matthew's departure (*EA* 211), that he has done "additional research" by "consulting shipping registers" regarding the sinking of the ship taking Matthew to America (*EA* 220), that he has "read up on Brunel" (*EA* 204), what he calls "the bare fact" (*EA* 220) does not provide a vivid image of what actually happened on the personal level. After reading Darwin, which might illuminate Matthew's loss of faith, he confesses that "[i]t is hard to see in this sober stodge the bombshell which tore apart Matthew's life and horrified Victorian society" (*EA* 223). He assumes that his present condition in is far more complex and difficult than that of his ancestor and the Victorians. The crisis of faith experienced by Matthew seems too trivial to Bill, who (perhaps) has already lost faith in God. This difference between the Victorian past and the 1980s makes it harder for him to chart a historical continuum and find a meaningful place in it for himself.

Swift's scepticism about the notion of historical knowledge is traceable in his engagement with the historical sublime, too. There is always something elusive about history, which remains unarticulated, which cannot be found in history books. As this unarticulated element, the historical sublime, resists cognition, Lyotard claims that the writer's task is "to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented" (Lyotard 81). Texts can only allude to these elusive parts of history. Although Elias connects the historical sublime with violent events in the past that defy comprehension, realist representation, and narrative organization, the historical sublime in the Victorian story in *Ever After* is arguably related to the great change caused by scientific theories because the impact of this change resists representation and understanding. In his "Notes on an Unfinished Novel" (1969), in which he writes about *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a novel that *Ever After* recalls, John Fowles observes a similarity between the 1960s and 1860s: "The great nightmare of the respectable Victorian mind was the only too real one created by the geologist Lyell and the biologist Darwin. […] Just as we 'live with the bomb' the Victorians lived with the theory of evolution" (152). Therefore, it can be claimed that Matthew's

encounter with ichthyosaur fossils is an experience equivalent to the experience of war in the contemporary plot in terms of its elusiveness and destructive force.

In the nineteenth century, Charles Lyell's theory of geology and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution undermined the traditional understanding of the world, time, and the place of the human being in the universe. Lyell's influence on Matthew is apparent in his comments on *Principles of Geology*: "the entire record of human history is a wink in the world's duration" (*EA* 135). The idea of geological time shatters the traditional belief in Creationism. Matthew comes to recognize that "the six days of Genesis" are, in fact, "millions of years" in the history of the earth (*EA* 135). In addition to this, Darwin's theory of evolution debunks the theological assumption that nature is created "for the service of man" (*EA* 138), replacing it with the survival of the fittest in nature. Although Matthew privileges scientific inquiry over religious dogma, what he experiences is a huge change of mind, which stands for the epistemological crisis in that period.

This crisis is alluded to through the figure of the ichthyosaur. Matthew's encounter with the fossils is an unrepresentable event, but it haunts the narrative, which turns to that moment repeatedly. Matthew refers to that moment as being left alone with the creature (*EA* 100). The narrator comments on this experience in an ambiguous way: "Here. Now. Then." and tries to picture the scene: "The long, toothed jaw, the massive eye that stares through millions of years. *He is the creature; the creature is him*. He feels *something open up inside him*, so that *he is vaster and emptier* than he ever imagined" (*EA* 101; emphasis added). This moment places Matthew in a void and opens up a void in him. Although he tries to put himself in his ancestor's shoes, the narrator cannot grasp the full meaning of that particular moment: "I can understand with Felix […] But with an ichthyosaur? An ichthyosaur" (*EA* 100). In order to make sense of this moment, the narrator does some research in the university library and borrows two editions of Lyell's *Elements of Geology*. However, he still cannot "understand" that moment or "whatever" the Victorian man felt (*EA* 132, 170). Although the figure of the ichthyosaur is a reference to science, thereby, to explanation, proof, cause and effect, that particular moment when Matthew comes face to face with the remains of the creature defies rational explanation. The narrator

has seen the fossils in the British Museum, but "museums are safe, orderly and artificial places" (*EA* 100). The museum stands for positivist history: order, explanation, and knowledge. Yet positivist history cannot grasp or explain the unrepresentable event. The ichthyosaur and the void, chaos, and meaninglessness that the ichthyosaur evokes for Matthew, therefore, evade cognition.

The unrepresentable event in the contemporary story is the Second World War, which haunts the narrator though he has not fought in that war. The narrative obsessively tries to "'make sense' or to come to terms with the moral and political realities of historical violence", but this historical trauma is "outside of representation", to use Elias's words on metahistorical romance (204, 97). The war is not depicted in a coherent way. The novel alludes to this event through the figures of Colonel Unwin and his mysterious suicide, Sam's younger brother, Ed, who died in the war, and Aldermaston, a village. These figures lead to a "simultaneous history" in the novel in the sense of an "aggregate not only of simultaneously existing narratives but also of simultaneously existing times" (Elias 117, 182). More concretely, these repeated allusions result in an unorganized narrative in which the mid-nineteenth century, the wartime, and the narrative present coexist. Simultaneous history is also evident in the mixture of historical fact, fiction, the fairy-tale, tragedy, and romance, each of which displays an attempt to make sense of the meaningless and incomprehensible event along with their other functions mentioned in the previous sections.

The first figure through which the novel alludes to the war is Colonel Unwin. He is associated with a ghost by the narrator. The ghost, like the old Hamlet in *Hamlet*, returns again and again, yet it is repressed and deferred. ''Tis here.'- ''Tis here.'- ''Tis gone…' says the narrator without any explanation (*EA* 195). The ghost is an adequate device to allude to "that which stands outside proof, empirical reason, the rule of truth, knowledge, and narrative expression" (Elias 28). The ghost is both present and yet absent. It haunts the story with its absent presence. Colonel Unwin is an "inscrutable" character whom the narrator "had never really known" (*EA* 23, 63). The narrator cannot summon the Colonel because Colonel Unwin represents a "vacant place" (*EA* 63). Until he is fifty-two, the narrator has thought that his father

shot himself because his mother has had an affair with Sam. When he learns from Sam and the relevant authorities that his father "may have harboured, since the final months of the war, a growing aversion, on conscientious grounds, to the nature of his special duties" (*EA* 192), that "from the spring of 1945 he was engaged in liaison with our wartime allies relating to the development of atomic bombs" (*EA* 192-193), the narrator finds himself in a void much like Matthew on the cliffs at Lyme Regis. Although he understands that Colonel Unwin was a British spy, who played a role in the death of thousands of people, the nature of the Colonel's duties remains unknown. To use Elias' words, Colonel Unwin's suicide stands for "the West's awareness of its own history and its confrontation with what seems to be the failures of the Enlightenment/modern project" (54). This suicide and the narrator's obsessive returns to it implicate a confrontation with historical trauma for both the narrator and the novel. Through this confrontation, the novel may be implying that the Western world must confront or remember this particular historical wrong.

The destructiveness and violence of the war are alluded to through the figure of an axe that the narrator mentions with reference to the suicide of Colonel Unwin. The narrator states that the Colonel was "sorting out the world", but "that world was gone. An axe had dropped on it" (*EA* 18). The axe arguably alludes to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki causing thousands of people's death. It is also an allusion to the bombing raids on Dresden and other cities during the war. The axe suggests a chaotic space where public history intersects with personal history, where big events shape the lives of ordinary people. This is an inexplicable space where the past haunts the present and shatters any hope for a better future. That is why Bill cries out, "Lift the axe! […] Lift the axe!" (*EA* 20). This phrase points to "the brute force of history" and the impact of this brute force on the individual (Malcolm 21). The repetition of this statement signals the narrator's yearning for a time before the war, a time of innocence and ignorance, and a time when faith in any kind of grand narrative was possible.

Ed Ellison is another figure the novel employs to allude to the war. He is the younger brother of Sam. He has died in the war. The narrator states that he "did not grasp the general point", by which he means either Ed's death or the war (*EA* 58). Recalling

the ghostly presence of the Colonel, Ed is present in a photograph, "a perpetual nineteen-year-old…" (*EA* 59). The war, its arbitrariness, and its destructiveness resist logical and causal explanation. Concerning the death of his brother, Sam can only say, "Yep, a lot of brave boys went down…" unable to complete the sentence (*EA* 58). Ed, just like Colonel Unwin, is "a reference that defers reference" (Elias 60). On one occasion, the narrator mentions the names of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Ed and refers to the suicide of Colonel Unwin. However, he directs the reader's attention to another scene right after these references such as his childhood in Paris, a "fairy-tale city" (*EA* 57), Sam's empire of "polymers" (*EA* 60), his (the narrator's) love of literature (*EA* 67). Neither he nor the narrative can cope with or avoid the reality of the war. "History is associated with danger and death" in the novel (Malcolm 47). The destructiveness of the Second World War mentioned yet not explained by the narrator and other characters lays bare this association.

The Second World War is alluded through Aldermaston, too. Aldermaston is the village where the narrator's biological father comes from (*EA* 158). The narrator is born in a county not so far from the village of Aldermaston (*EA* 197). The narrator says that "Aldermaston, in those days, was wholly innocent of the sinister connotations it would later have" (*EA* 197). In an interview, Swift remarks that "the things that people ordinarily choose to repeat are quite telling" (Bernard 37). The repeated references to this place can be telling only to those who know its sinister connotations, as stated by the narrator. Aldermaston is home to Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (*EA* 197). The novel alludes to the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima through an obsessive return to Aldermaston. The narrator goes to Aldermaston with his mother just one day before the first atomic bomb is dropped. Despite repeatedly mentioning the name "Aldermaston" and referring to the bomb, the narrator does not explain what happened in a linear and coherent way. The event explodes the narrative since it cannot be explained in rational terms. Therefore, drawing from Lyotard, it can be said that *Ever After* "puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself" and, in this way, "impart[s] a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (81).

To sum up, like many other metafictional neo-Victorian novels, *Ever After* blurs the boundary between history and story, underlining that written history is an

interpretation, never the final version with a single, fixed meaning. Since the narrator's needs and personal problems lead to an interest in the Victorian age, the past, as narrated by Bill Unwin, is inevitably colored by his own fears, anxieties, and desires. Since Bill cannot fully know what happened in the past, his version of history is always already textual and intertextual, as reiterated by Hutcheon concerning historiographic metafiction (*Poetics* 142-143). The novel reveals scepticism about historical knowledge and historical truth, challenging the authority of the historian, the archive, and documents. This postmodernist scepticism is evident in many other metafictional neo-Victorian novels, too. It bears repetition, therefore, that Swift returns to the nineteenth century primarily in order to challenge the grand narrative of history.

3.4. The Collapse of Grand Narratives and the Search for "the Real Thing"

The collapse of grand narratives is crucial to understanding the image of the Victorian past evoked in *Ever After* and the relationship between that age and the present. Gutleben mentions hearing "a distinct echo of Baudrillard's description of postmodernity" in Swift's novel (198). He does not elaborate on this echo but makes a generalization that this is a common tendency among neo-Victorian writers, who express their "[d]issatisfaction with the present state of affairs […] in terms of loss" (198-199). To him, this preoccupation with the concept of loss reflects "the nostalgia of postmodernism" because it "presupposes the existence of a culture predating these losses, an uncorrupted culture" (199). This section aims to elaborate further on Gutleben's analysis by exploring the collapse of grand narratives and its results as represented in the novel. It argues that the loss of faith in grand narratives has different ramifications for the Victorian character and the narrator. Unlike his ancestor, the narrator is not sure about what is real or what is authentic in his own world. The narrator lives in the age of plastic, simulacra, and substitutes, so he turns to the past. He wants to imagine the Victorian age as an age of stability and solidity, an age of science and certainty. This point raises the question of nostalgia. This issue is explored by some scholars, who observe the narrator's nostalgia for an ideal past and contend that *Ever After* is a nostalgic text. With respect to this issue, this study suggests that *Ever After* is not a nostalgic text because there is an ironic distance

between the narrator's and the novel's approaches to the Victorian past. The study argues further that although the novel, unlike its narrator, is not nostalgic for an idealized past, it still shares the narrator's pessimism and anxiety about the loss of certainties in the narrative present. Exploring the echoes of Jean-François Lyotard's and Jean Baudrillard's theories in the novel, this section of the study will firstly analyze the collapse of grand narratives and its results as portrayed in the novel. Secondly, it will deal with the question of nostalgia, which is closely connected to the loss of faith in grand narratives, and the difference between the attitudes of the narrator and the novel towards the Victorian past.

In the late 1970s, the postmodern is defined by Lyotard as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). According to Lyotard, grand narratives, such as the Enlightenment project, humanism, Marxism, science, and Christianity, which once defined what can be said and done in a culture, and promised salvation to people, faced a crisis after the Second World War (37). In this period, the question raised about knowledge is "Is it saleable" or "Is it efficient?", and no longer "Is it true?" (Lyotard 51). In contemporary industrialized societies, knowledge is in the service of those in power (Lyotard 51). As such, grand narratives have lost their explanatory and emancipatory function. They are no longer legitimate but suspect. Lyotard does not lament but cherishes the collapse of grand narratives. He thinks that the task for the contemporary artist is to turn to local, little narratives. In her works published in the late 1980s, Hutcheon observes this celebration of the collapse of grand narratives in postmodernist fiction. She thinks that historiographic metafiction makes room for the little narratives of marginalized peoples as a response to Lyotard's call to "wage a war on totality" (Lyotard 82). Both Lyotard and Hutcheon see the collapse of grand narratives as liberatory because this enables the coexistence of many truths and stories. In fact, this celebratory attitude is prevalent in many metafictional neo-Victorian novels. For example, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) troubles Enlightenment humanism by simultaneously lending a voice to a marginalized Victorian character, Magwitch from *Great Expectations*, and disrupting the traditional understanding of subjectivity through his story.

Unlike Lyotard and Hutcheon, Jean Baudrillard's perception of postmodernism and the new cultural climate is pessimistic. He thinks that due to the deconstruction of

grand narratives, capitalism, mass media, and technological developments, the real is lost in the postmodern world. In *Simulacra and Simulation* published in 1981, Baudrillard writes that the real in this new age is "no longer really real" (2). The new age is the age of "hyperreality": "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1). Hyperreality is the third order of simulation in which it is impossible to compare the representation/copy and the real/original because the reality principle is eclipsed. Therefore, faith in the assumption that a sign can "refer to the depth of meaning" is demolished (Baudrillard 5). In this situation, the individual cannot understand the world because hyperreality dominates all spheres of life and precludes gaining access to truth. The contemporary plot in *Ever After* is similarly dominated by the loss of authenticity and certainty, which is one of the main reasons why the narrator nostalgically looks back to the Victorian past, assuming that it was an age when faith in a grand narrative was possible.

The novel deals with the collapse of grand narratives in both the contemporary and the Victorian story so as to show that Victorian society was complex as it confronted crises that damaged, if not shattered, the Victorians' sense of reality, truth, and the place of the human being in the world. The loss of faith in grand narratives has different implications for the Victorian and contemporary characters. This implies a similarity between the past and the present even as the novel reinforces the discontinuity between the Victorian period and the narrative present. Nevertheless, this similarity does not enable the narrator or the novel to establish a continuity between the Victorian age and the present.

One of the grand narratives that collapsed in the mid-Victorian period is religion. The science versus religion issue is one of the most frequent themes in neo-Victorian fiction, which is used by Swift to place emphasis on the unknowability of the past and the discontinuity between the Victorian era and the 1980s. Matthew Pearce starts questioning the grand narrative of Christianity when he sees the skeleton of an ichthyosaur in Lyme Regis in 1844. The death of his two-year-old son, Felix, contributes to this crisis. He mentions the moment he has seen the skull of an ichthyosaur as: "The moment of my unbelief. The beginning of my make-belief" (*EA*

101). His notebooks offer insight into a Victorian man's questionings and the moment when "the world falls apart" (*EA* 101). Matthew writes:

> I will acknowledge the insoluble mathematics of nature, the wanton waste and the resourcefulness of her economy; that compared with the brief life of countless creatures, my Felix may be said to have lived an age; that everywhere, if seeds and eggs be counted, examples abound of gross destruction so that few may survive; that humankind […] is not excused from this scheme. But I cannot believe that in this prodigious arbitrariness there is any purpose that grants life to a child only to withdraw it after two years; […]; that he holds, in truth, in the great course of things, no place, value, or identity […] (*EA* 102)

Matthew's journal registers the collapse of the theological idea that nature reflects the benevolence and the hand of God, that there is a great design and purpose in all the things God has created. Rather than seeing "the will of God" (*EA* 181) in nature, Matthew thinks that the world is governed by randomness and "the continual [...] *struggle for existence*" (*EA* 180, 181; emphasis in original), that nature is pitiless and illogical and destructive (*EA* 142, 182). He concludes that the Bible "is not a history but an allegory" (*EA* 135). Matthew's scepticism also reflects the dismantling of the humanist idea that the human being is at the center of the world. He doubts that the human being has a privileged place in Creation (*EA* 135). This suspicion shatters any hope for a better future (*EA* 135).

The collapse of the grand narrative of Christianity, a teleological story that implies progress towards an ending, brings to the fore a suspicion about history as progress, another grand narrative. The treatment of the grand narrative of progressive history is ambivalent in the Victorian story, which reflects the contradictions of that age. Although the Victorian world of Matthew is dominated by the randomness of nature and the inescapability of death, which shatter the self-confidence of the Victorian man, his notebooks reflect a world of change, an immense technological and industrial development, as also noted by Malcolm (147) and Widdowson (63). More concretely, the Victorian age is associated with rocks, work, bridges, railways, steam engines, and mines, along with the loss of religious faith, anxiety, and scepticism. The narrator informs the reader of the enterprises and developments in that period. For instance, Josiah Hitchens, a historical figure, who discovered a rich copper lode in 1844, ran "the biggest copper mine in Europe" (*EA* 129). Hitchens and his

shareholders opened several mines and built canals, quays, and their own railway to carry the mine (*EA* 129). Isambard K. Brunel, the great engineer of that period, built the great Saltash bridge, which is "a thing of vast proportions" (*EA* 140). It was designed with a great mathematical calculation and according to "the laws of physics" (*EA* 140). Another development is the Great Western Railway, the longest line in Britain, engineered by Brunel. In addition, Matthew mentions a visit to the Great Exhibition in 1855 without delving into details (*EA* 131). The Great Exhibition "meant to teach visitors […] about the fruits of knowledge, especially regarding science and technology; and history, and in particular about the British accomplishments in these areas. Behind the exhibition lay the idea of […] human progress" (Glendening 39). Human progress is associated with the greatness of the British Empire, a greatness demonstrated to the whole world through this exhibition. Each one of these developments testifies to the modernization of the country. Each one shows to the narrator that the Victorian age was a new age better than the past.

Matthew Pearce is caught in an "existential anguish" like some other Victorians, who deemed the questions science raised as to the truthfulness of the Bible as a blow to their sense of security and "centrality of humanity in the scheme of things", yet he contributes to this progress as a surveyor by building bridges and railways (Glendening 18). Although his belief in God and a benign design is shattered, he believes in the truthfulness of scientific evidence. What is at stake in his case is his inability to "reach a compromise between the two realms of knowing": science and religion (Glendening 15). Put differently, while he rejects what he sees as "Christian dogma", he has faith in "scientific rationalism" that can explain the world to him (Glendening 19). Even though the narrator comments on Matthew's loss of religious belief as "falling […] through himself", "[e]verything is lost and confused" (*EA* 102), Matthew decides to go to America to start his life anew, unlike the narrator, who has no hope for a better future since he has no faith in grand narratives, such as the grand narrative of history which promises a better future.

Matthew changes the course of his life in pursuit of scientific truth. His farewell letter to his wife highlights his faith in science and in the accessibility of the truth through scientific inquiry. Matthew writes: "though ignorance may be bliss,

happiness is not to be purchased by a refusal of knowledge. Where there is evidence, so we must look, so we must examine" (EA 52). In *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels* (2013), John Glendening claims that for Matthew, the real thing is "what he embraces as truth" (71). His commitment to truth is impossible for the narrator. As Boccardi notes, "[b]oth the nature of the Victorian man's spiritual crisis and the rigorous integrity with which he adheres to his beliefs are alien to the spiritually empty world described in the contemporary narrative" (88). Although the collapse of the grand narrative of religion shatters Matthews's sense of self, his life, and his happy marriage, his faith in another grand narrative, namely, science, enables him to hold on to life. In the world of the narrator, however, there is no stronghold in any sphere.

The grand narrative of history collapses with the world wars, especially the Second World War when science was used to develop atomic bombs. As a result of these wars and some other events, such as the waning of Marxist utopias and the late phase of capitalism, the individual has lost any kind of framework to understand the world and himself. Therefore, the world of the narrator is "a postmodern wasteland: indelibly marked by destructive twentieth-century wars; consumerist, careless and selfish; […] emotionally null […]; the possibility of reaching any certain 'truth' a chimera" (Widdowson 108). Unlike the Victorian age, which is associated with human progress along with religious doubt, the aftermath of the war and especially the 1980s are portrayed in the novel as the age of plastic in two senses: consumer society/capitalism and "the precession of simulacra" or the loss of the real (Baudrillard 1).

Consumerism is primarily associated with the narrator's stepfather, Sam, who is the "founding father of Ellison Plastics (UK)" (*EA* 6). The narrator renames him "Mr Plastic" (*EA* 147). Sam says, "the real stuff is running out, it's used up, it's blown away, or costs too much. You gotto have *sustitoots*" (*EA* 7; emphasis in original). With the money derived from such substitutes as cups, artificial legs, or socks made of plastic, he buys a neo-Tudor mansion and makes himself "a Real English Gentleman" (*EA* 17, 8). The narrator indirectly criticizes America for making Europe a market in the post-war period, a process that he calls "inverse colonialism" (*EA*

62). Although the text does not deal with the British Empire or colonialism, the idea of inverse colonialism reminds one of the British Empire's economic growth during the colonial period. Perhaps, the narrator hints at the decline of the British Empire and the emergence of the USA as the new empire in the capitalist system, a system which causes his alienation in several ways.

The narrator portrays his mother as a representative of the consumer society because she has an extra-marital affair with Sam and marries him. The text criticizes her insatiable desire for new goods and tastes although the narrator does not state this openly. For Sylvia, "a newly bought frock" is "divine", anything desirable in any shop is "*heavenly*" (*EA* 14, 16; emphasis in original). In the shopping sprees in Paris, Sylvia teaches the narrator "to see the world as a scintillating shop window", "the delights of ogling and coveting and […] spending" (*EA* 16). The text juxtaposes Sylvia's interest in shopping, her affair with Sam, and the fairy-tale atmosphere of Paris with the war: "It was only winter, not a world war, that has passed: shutters flung open; […]; merchandise once more filling the shops, to be pillaged by my mother" (*EA* 18). Her lust for possessing new goods blinds her to the material reality, the war. Her blindness is signalled by the narrator when he refers to Sylvia as "a woman given to severing herself from the past", evident in her burning the documents related to her ancestors and "wring[ing] the most out of the present" (*EA* 45, 26). She avoids reality and wants to live in an "eternal" present, which are the effects of late capitalism from a Jamesonian perspective (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 154).

Although the narrator seems to criticize these representatives of capitalism and consumerism, he confesses that he has a "life in plastic" (*EA* 61). His stance on contemporary mass culture is, therefore, one of both conformism and critique. He initially refuses Sam's gifts made of plastic, Sam's "offer of a future in plastic", and "the polymerization of the world" (*EA* 7), but he is financed by Mr Plastic. Even the publication of *Ever After*, his supposedly academic project, depends on the money coming from polymers and plastic. In addition, the university where he works initially "seemed the true, real permanent thing" (*EA* 2). However, he sees the institution as an ivory tower that cannot offer solutions to social problems: "Out

there, […] the world is falling apart; its social fabric is in tatters, its eco-system is near collapse. Real: that is flimsy, perishing, stricken, doomed. Whereas here…" (*EA* 2). One can complete the unfinished sentence as: specialists like Potter are preoccupied with their personal agendas. The questionable position of Bill at the university and his liberty earned thanks to his stepfather's money show the interdependence of that institution and capitalism, knowledge and money. This puts doubt on the image of the university as a pool of knowledge. Whereas Bill takes notes for a personal rather than academic study sitting under the bean tree in the college garden, Potter participates in conferences. Whereas Bill "is at liberty to pursue whatever line of scholarly research he wishes", Potter tries to get the Pearce manuscripts, albeit by unethical means, in order to write a book on the mid-nineteenth century (*EA* 44). The narrator criticizes the university and its indifference towards important issues in the larger society, but he frequently exempts himself from this criticism. He does not leave his comfort zone even though he is dissatisfied with the capitalist system, a major factor in the loss of the real he suffers from. His above-mentioned reflections on the university can also be interpreted as an indirect comment on the postmodern cultural climate. More concretely, he and, by implication, the novel can be pointing to the inability of this cultural climate to offer alternative routes for the individual, Bill Unwin in this case, who is baffled and, in a sense, emotionally and spiritually crippled by the precession of simulacra and inauthenticity.

The world of the narrator is dominated by Baudrillardian simulacra, which is emphasized in the text through such symbols as plastic and substitutes. This is a polymerized world where he cannot decide "what is real and what is not" (*EA* 90). The epistemological crisis of the narrator and his abortive attempts to overcome it can be interpreted as the traumatic effects of the prevalence of simulacra on the postmodern subject, as mentioned in Section 3.2. Faced with this crisis, he searches for the real thing. The real thing in the novel is not identified. It can be romantic love, literature, or the Victorian age.

Since one of the reasons that lead to this crisis is the death of his wife, the real thing is most possibly romantic love, particularly his love for Ruth. He says, "Ruth and I

were the real thing" (*EA* 149). His passion for her renders his life meaningful for some time. It also provides him with a certain position: a lover, a husband, and a stage manager. He thinks that "[s]he represented life to me" (*EA* 120), a claim open to contradictory interpretations. As Widdowson says, it is ambiguous whether Ruth stands for life, makes him feel alive or pretends, performs a role (71). The narrator wants to believe that something genuine, like love, can exist in the age of plastic. Daniel Lea argues that "his narrative tends towards an affirmation of love's power over death" as he concludes his story with an "articulation of the regenerative potential of love" (*Graham Swift* 143). This claim is debatable because although the narrator associates love with life, he casts doubt on the real thing-ness of love, its authenticity. He defines romantic love as a "made-up thing. A concoction of the poets" (*EA* 111). Perhaps, when he fell in love with Ruth, he has thought that love could rescue him from the nightmare of history. Upon her death, however, he obsessively questions the authenticity of love and their relationship, concluding that love is a made-up thing, just like his version of the Victorian past. He assumes that perhaps he might have experienced a simulacrum as if it were the real thing when he was with Ruth. He thinks that as Ruth was a successful actress, their ostensibly happy marriage may have been an instance of play-acting, her love for him may have been a sham. Obsessed with his mother's betrayal, he thinks that Ruth might have betrayed him with an actor: "The freedoms of these theatrical folk, the way they touch and kiss and hug and slip in and out of roles … No, I don't believe she ever really -But what if she had? What if she had?" (*EA* 212). Love is not transcendent but transient. Love involves lust and adultery (Lea, *Graham Swift* 145,146). As such, love, just like history, cannot function as a grand narrative; it has lost its transformative capacity in the age of substitutes.

Bill's conception of love can be the equivalent of Matthew's conception of truth in that they represent the real thing for these characters (Glendening 71). However, while Matthew's pursuit of the real thing demonstrates his agency and integrity, the attempt to find the real thing leads the narrator to a withdrawal from the real world, political issues, and ethical action, as also observed by Boccardi (98). He underlines this contrast, stating that he would "swallow any old make-belief, in order to have Ruth back. Whereas Matthew -Whereas this Pearce guy-" (*EA* 256). When reflecting

on the first night he spent with Ruth in 1957, he refers to some "marchers" who were marching "to save the world, along the road to where, once upon a time, I spotted trains, took tea with my mother" (*EA* 256). While these marchers were protesting the development of nuclear weapons in Aldermaston, the young lovers were "too busy being happy, to worry about the Bomb" (*EA* 249). To them, "the world has already been saved, […] the great cosmic battle for good and evil has already been fought and won" (*EA* 256). Unlike his father, who kills himself on conscientious grounds, unlike Matthew, who abides by the ethics of truth, Bill Unwin and Ruth do not care about the larger world, too preoccupied as they are with their own world. Swift explains his understanding of morality as imagining "ourselves into the lives of others" (Craps and Swift 651), which lacks in the narrator. Bill Unwin does not try to understand the motives, experiences, or opinions of these marchers. He does not try to imagine what it is like to be someone in another part of the world whose life is threatened by the development of nuclear weapons. His "atomised solipsism" renders almost impossible an "empathetic identification" with these marchers and other people in the rest of the world (Lea, *Graham Swift* 11). Only when he loses what he assumes to be the real thing does he come to realize his shameful ignorance. Even then, he does not seem to condemn himself for his passivity in the past.

As love is absent from his life, he projects his desire for "love pure and true" (*EA* 153) onto the past and tries to "invent an 'ever after'" in the Victorian story (Widdowson 74). His attempt to locate the real thing, namely, a transcendent love that conquers all, lacking in the narrative present in the Victorian story points to his association of the Victorian period with innocence and simplicity in the sense of the possibility of faith in a kind of narrative. His attempt to portray Matthew and Elizabeth as a happy couple, despite the fact that he suspects Elizabeth's loyalty to her husband (*EA* 212), reveals that the Victorian story he tells is only a fantasy that addresses his own desires, that is, a case of presentism.

Since romantic love, a potentially real thing, can turn out to be an illusion or fantasy, the real thing can be something that does not hide its illusory nature: literature, defined by the narrator as the "redeeming balm" (*EA* 71). Malcolm states that "[i]llusion is absolutely necessary" for the narrator because his "is a world of

transience, death, chaos, and betrayal" (155). Lea, similarly, mentions "the inseparability of illusion and reality" in this novel (*Swift* 131). Literature, poetry, Shakespeare's plays, and other fictional texts have attracted the narrator, especially after the suicide of Colonel Unwin and the second marriage of Sylvia. These are the moments when the narrator feels the brutality of history and its impact on his life. In that sense, literature/illusion, much like romantic love, can function as a counterbalance to the terror of history that haunts his life, hence its necessity and significance for him.

Literature is prioritized by the narrator because it serves several functions in his life. Firstly, it is not transient, unlike romantic love. While his love for Ruth was like a center that used to hold him and his world together, the disappearance of this center leads him to suicide. Unlike love, *Hamlet* is always there for him. Sir Walter Raleigh's lines can help him carry on in his search for meaning:

> Even such is time, which takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys, and all we have,
> And pays us but with age and dust;
> Who in the dark and silent grave
> When we have wandered all our ways
> Shuts up the story of our days. (*EA* 71)

As a lecturer, he says, "the words hold us with their poise, their gravity -their beauty. They catch us up and speak to us", "and just for a moment […] the obvious is *luminous*, darkness is matched with light and *life is reconciled with death*" (*EA* 71; emphasis added). He believes, or wants to believe, in the power of literature to illuminate the mysteries in life and to function as a center, which reconciles the opposites, albeit for a very short time.

Secondly, literature provides the narrator with a "second world to fall back on -a more reliable world in so far as it does not hide that its premise is illusion" (*EA* 69). On the one hand, this shows that literature is a "refuge" (*EA* 71) from the problems in his life and the destructive force of history, just like his mother's desire to possess more goods. On the other hand, this comment implies his prioritization of his own fictive work, *Ever After*, in a very self-conscious manner. Throughout the text, he

never pretends that his story is an accurate account but repeatedly underlines the fictiveness of his story, which does not render it less valuable than recorded history, according to him. If literary texts offer a space where life is reconciled with death, then his own story can enable him to come to terms with his traumatic past, personal losses, and the postmodern condition. Perhaps, therein lies the value of his own text, *Ever After*, and of telling stories for the narrator and for Swift.

According to Swift, stories do not necessarily make life better, but they can help the individual in his relationship with himself and with his own past. They can help the individual understand the past and its impact on the present (Vásquez 91). Swift's privileging of storytelling can be regarded as an embracement of small narratives. However, in *Ever After*, storytelling is also a means for the narrator to find out "workable parameters within which he can desensitize himself to painful engagements with the real and distressing stuff of his life" (Lea, "Feigning" 157). While the narrator's small narrative of his life and his ancestor's life can be seen as an attempt to reconcile with his former self and his traumatic past, it can also be an escape mechanism in the face of the relativity of knowledge. Therefore, the reader cannot know for sure whether his small narrative and literature function as redeeming balm for Bill Unwin.

As mentioned above, the real thing the narrator yearns for can be many different things. Perhaps in each case, but especially in the case of the return to the Victorian age, the novel raises the question of nostalgia. While Hutcheon thinks that the return to the past in historiographic metafiction does not imply nostalgia (*Poetics* 45), Baudrillard says that in this new cultural climate, "[w]hen the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality -a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity" (6-7). Perhaps influenced by Baudrillard's arguments, Gutleben associates nostalgia with the neo-Victorian novel. Observing the echo of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra in *Ever After*, Gutleben claims:

> Dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs is […] *a general tendency among contemporary writers*; the fact that it is systematically [...] expressed in terms of loss

> -loss of a feeling subject, loss of authenticity, loss of aesthetic integrity- presupposes the existence of a culture predating these losses, an uncorrupted culture. It is essentially in this perception of a lesser present that resides the nostalgia of postmodernism. (199; emphasis added)

This claim does not ring true either for Swift's novel or as a generalizing principle for the neo-Victorian novel as a subgenre. This study suggests that the bulk of neo-Victorian fiction does not yearn for an ideal past, and that these novels do not look back to the past nostalgically because one of the main concerns of the subgenre is highlighting the dark spots of the Victorian past and the underbelly of Victorian society. This means that the image of the Victorian past evoked in neo-Victorian works is often not an idealized or privileged one.

In the case of Swift's novel, Gutleben is not the only scholar who sees it as a nostalgic novel. Sally Shuttleworth claims in an essay that *Ever After* is an exercise "in nostalgia" that looks back "to a point of crisis", that is, science versus religion debates and the loss of religious faith in the Victorian age (267, 260). She contends that Swift's novel is a nostalgic work, but one that is "guiltily so" because it is "aware of the problems of producing history within a post-modern frame" (268). Similarly, Lea thinks that Swift and his works exhibit a "nostalgic yearning for lost certainties" (*Graham Swift* 4). Observing a distance between the narrator's and the novel's approaches to the question of nostalgia in *Ever After*, this study contends that it seems to be the narrator, not the novel itself, that is nostalgic for the past and its grand narratives.

The nostalgia of the narrator is evident in his association of the real thing with the Victorian age. As a postmodern subject "haunted by a perceived absence of the real" (Lea, *Swift* 32), Bill Unwin thinks that the world he lives in is in stark contrast to that of his ancestor, who "would live according to the way things truly were" (*EA* 183). He means that it was possible for his ancestor to know what the truth is, and that he only had to choose science or religion to understand the world and human existence. These two fields of knowledge are dysfunctional in the life of the narrator. His life is dominated by a plethora of truths and substitutes in a Baudrillardian sense. Therefore, he looks back nostalgically to what he assumes to be an age of certainty

and innocence. Nevertheless, it can be argued that at one point even the narrator comes to recognize that his nostalgia for solid ground, which he associates with the Victorian age, is an "illusion of the illusion" (*EA* 9). Holmes notes that the narrator's nostalgia for an organic past clashes with "his awareness that the representation of history is itself a substitute for the real thing, the vanished past" (Holmes 25). This means that recorded history, the account of the Victorian past given by the narrator, is like the third order of simulation in the sense that "the map" (the narrator's needs and desires) "precedes the territory" (what actually happened in the past) (Baudrillard 1). The novel demonstrates that the real thing (the Victorian past) cannot be grasped because the historical record is not authentic in the first place, as explained in the previous section.

The novel's critique of the narrator's perception of the Victorian age as an ideal age is evident in the presence of the Pearce manuscripts in it, which contradicts the assumption that the past was simpler, less complex, or inferior than the present. In other words, these manuscripts signal the ironic gap between the implied author and the narrator because they point to the complexity of the Victorian age and society by bringing together science and religion, scepticism and belief, chance and human progress. They demonstrate that the Victorian world was itself haunted by epistemological uncertainties.

Moreover, the novel shows the futility of the narrator's quest for the real thing. This futility is laid bare, for instance, through his definition of the real: something "flimsy, perishing, stricken, doomed" (*EA* 2). Although the narrator yearns for something he "can believe in with an unquestioning absolutism" in the face of the relativity of knowledge (Lea, *Graham Swift* 13), that is, a grand narrative of any sort, this desire is inevitably thwarted because the real thing turns out to be unavailable in each case. He cannot know the Victorian past with any certainty. He cannot go back to a time before the fall of the axe. He cannot bring back Ruth or love anybody else. He cannot turn a tragedy (both his personal history and the story of Matthew) into a romance or a fairy-tale.

Nevertheless, while the novel criticizes the narrator's nostalgia for an ideal past, it does not seem to celebrate the loss of the real or the loss of faith in any kind of

narrative. This aspect of the novel can be suggestive of a different stance from that predominant in the metafictional neo-Victorian novel which often celebrates the plurality of truth, the elusiveness of knowledge, and the deconstruction of all sorts of certainties. Commenting on Swift's claim that he sees through the eyes of his characters, Widdowson says that there is "a very close identification between author and narrator" in Swift's novels (109). Drawing upon this suggestion, it can be said that there is a close identification between the implied author and the narrator in *Ever After* regarding their attitudes towards the loss of the real in the contemporary narrative. The novel seems to share and/or approve Bill's pessimism regarding his dissatisfaction with the relativity of knowledge, his uneasiness about the precession of simulacra, his sense of alienation and "placelessness" (Lea, "Feigning" 161), all of which stem from the collapse of grand narratives to a great extent. The narrator's and the novel's perception of the postmodern condition can be summed up as being "robbed of the frameworks" through which an individual can make himself "meaningful" (Lea, "Feigning" 158). Bill cannot establish a continuity with his Victorian ancestor the way he wishes. He cannot understand his own world or Matthew's world completely. He looks for redemption in literature, the Victorian story, and his own story, but they do not seem to save him from his sense of insecurity. Since the narrative present is not better (in fact, it is worse) than the past in this respect, history cannot be moving towards a better future, which reinforces the bleak vision of both the narrator and the novel. The novel, through the narrator, seems to display a yearning for some sort of certainty that can render life and human existence meaningful without, however, associating this certainty with an idealized image of the Victorian past. Many other metafictional neo-Victorian novels celebrate, or at least do not lament, the loss of certainties. Whereas Gutleben observes such an endorsement in *Ever After* (11), Boccardi says this novel does not endorse "postmodern epistemological […] uncertainty" (68). Agreeing with Boccardi, this study contends that *Ever After* does not seem to cherish the loss of solid ground or the collapse of grand narratives. In this respect, the novel differs from other metafictional neo-Victorian works.

To conclude, in terms of both form and content, *Ever After* questions the traditional assumptions about history and historiography. The return to the nineteenth century in

this novel works as a tool to problematize the grand narrative of History, traditional history writing, and Victorian realism. *Ever After* is an anti-fundamentalist, anti-representational, and anti-humanist work regarding its treatment of subjectivity and history, which are dealt with in closely connected ways by Swift. Both history and subjectivity are revealed to be textual, fragmented, and dispersed constructs. Narrative and history as a narrative are suspect. The image of the Victorian age evoked in the novel is one of both human progress and self-doubt. By maintaining an ironical distance between the narrator and the implied author, the novel places emphasis on the fact that the Victorian age was a period of crisis and a complex age. Even as the novel approaches history from a postmodern vantage point, like many other metafictional neo-Victorian works, its portrayal of the postmodern cultural climate is rather pessimistic. It does not seem to cherish the loss of epistemological certainty. The antidote to this pessimism can be storytelling. However, the reader is not provided with insight into the positive effects of telling stories on the narrator. The bleak vision of the novel concerning the loss of faith in any kind of narrative cannot be argued to pervade metafictional neo-Victorian novels; but it is traceable in this particular work. Except for this aspect and in many ways discussed above, *Ever After* is a representative example of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel in which history turns into a story.

CHAPTER 4

CLOUD ATLAS AS A NEO-VICTORIAN NOVEL WITH IMPLICATIONS BEYOND POSTMODERNISM

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel views the Victorian past and history through a postmodernist lens, which is often evident in both the form and content of these novels, as demonstrated through the analysis of Swift's *Ever After*. However, the critical engagement with the Victorian past in some neo-Victorian novels does not stop at the deconstruction of history. This chapter argues that David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) is one of these neo-Victorian novels which has certain important implications beyond postmodernism while still upholding certain postmodern assumptions about history and making use of experimental narrative techniques. The variety of tools and concerns of this novel and its return to the Victorian past serve both deconstructive and reconstructive ends, which means that in this novel, the postmodernist scepticism about and a reconstructive attitude towards history coexist. *Cloud Atlas* raises questions about official history and subverts the assumptions of positivist historiography and Victorian realism, which lays bare its self-conscious neo-Victorianism. However, regarding its concern with experiential history (history as past deeds), this novel uses history and the Victorian past as important tools for its larger project in keeping with the political and ethical aspirations of the writer: shaping a better world and a better future history through a new kind of humanism. These aspects of the novel differentiate this novel from neo-Victorian works close to the metafictional end of the neo-Victorian spectrum, such as *Ever After*, and place it in an in between position in the spectrum.

This chapter will first explore the reasons why *Cloud Atlas* can be seen as a neo-Victorian novel and then focus on the experimental narrative devices used by Mitchell in order to shed light on the novel's deconstructive attitude towards history

and historiography. The following sections of the analysis will focus on the thematic concerns of the novel in relation to both the Victorian past and the complex senses of history envisioned by David Mitchell. These sections will illuminate the coexistence of deconstructive and reconstructive attitudes towards the Victorian past and history in the novel.

The study will focus especially on "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing", the first narrative in *Cloud Atlas*, which is set in the Victorian age. It will explore the ways in which it is related to other stories in the novel and explore its function and importance with respect to the novel's complex attitude towards history. The treatment of history in the other five narratives will be examined with respect to the representation of the Victorian past and its relation to the larger history of humanity. Many critics have written on the complex treatment of temporality in the novel and put forward important arguments in this regard that will be used in this study. What most of these critics and neo-Victorian scholars, who have written on this novel, however, have neglected to consider is the novel's twofold understanding of history. This study argues that *Cloud Atlas* has a twofold perception of history: *history as narrative* (written history and history writing) and *history as past events* (experiential history). It suggests further that the novel engages with these two senses of history in different ways with different implications, which will be under scrutiny in this chapter.

Cloud Atlas is a complex novel that includes six narratives or novellas. Each one of these narratives is written in a different genre, and each one is set in a different period and place. The first section of the novel is entitled "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing". It is set in the peripheries of the British Empire in the 1850s. It tells the story of an American notary, Adam Ewing, on his way back home from the Chatham Islands. It is concerned with colonialism, slavery, the exploitation of the natives, and the tragic fate of the Moriori. The second section, "The Letters from Zedelghem", is composed of the letters that Robert Frobisher, an amanuensis, sends to his lover Rufus Sixsmith, a scientist. It is set in 1931 in Belgium. The letters are about the relationship between Frobisher and his mentor Vyvyan Ayrs, Frobisher's works, and the mutual exploitation between the mentor and the young amanuensis.

This section is followed by “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery”, which is a thriller set in 1970s California. Employing the omniscient narrative voice, this narrative tells the reporter Luisa Rey’s pursuit of the truth about a business scandal at an American corporation called Seaboard. This scandal is related to a design flaw in a nuclear reactor. The corporation tries to cover this scandal by silencing those who know it. The next narrative, “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”, is the memoir of a vanity publisher set in the 2000s in London. It is the comic story of Timothy Cavendish, who finds himself locked up in a nursing home. He tells the brutal treatment faced by the elderly kept there and his final escape from what he sees as this prison. The novel moves to a dystopian near-future in the fifth section, “An Orison of Sonmi□451”, which is the transcribed interview of a clone, Sonmi. The clone/fabricant will be executed for being a revolutionary right after the interview. Sonmi’s story is about hyper-capitalism, a corrupt regime called corpocracy, and the devastation it causes to humankind, the clones, and nature. This story is set in Nea So Copros, formerly Korea, in a dystopic future, perhaps the twenty-second century. The sixth section, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”, is set in a post-apocalyptic future in Hawaii. It seems to be an oral account of a goatherd, Zachry, from the Valleysmen tribe. However, towards the end, the reader understands that the oral story is somehow recorded by his son. This story is about the aftermath of civilization’s collapse and humanity’s regression to pre-civilization. The novel as a whole is concerned with predation, colonialism, slavery, consumerism, environmental crisis, power struggles, and, more importantly, history, among many other issues.

In their “Introduction” to the collection entitled *David Mitchell* (2019), Wendy Knepper and Courtney Hopf remark that David Mitchell is “a socially committed world author whose fictions intervene ethically and politically, to critique the realities of inequality and imagine alternative pathways for social transformation” (1). The political and ethical perspective of the writer evident in the novel, even as he makes use of postmodernist devices, seems to have caused a confusion regarding how to categorize the novel. *Cloud Atlas* is regarded as a cosmopolitan novel (Schoene 11); a metamodern novel (O’Donnell 15; Harris-Birtill 155), a post-apocalyptic novel (Hicks 163), a postmodern novel (McMorran 157; Dimovitz 11), a

new postmodernist novel (Bradford 48), partly historiographic metafiction (Wallhead and Kohlke, 230; Bentley 731[22]), and a contemporary historical novel (Jameson, *Antinomies* 302; Baucom 137).

This confusion is traceable among neo-Victorian scholars who seem rather hesitant about elucidating the neo-Victorianism of the whole text rather than the Victorian narrative, which frames the novel. In their "Introduction" to the collection *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma* (2010), Kohlke and Gutleben refer to the novel when discussing the treatment of trauma in neo-Victorian works (11), which means that they see the novel as a neo-Victorian work. However, they do not include an analysis of this novel in their essay. In the same collection, Gutleben and Wolfreys refer to *Cloud Atlas* as a neo-Victorian text, which reworks postmodernism in its engagement with trauma (52), yet they do not explain the ways in which the novel can be thought of as a neo-Victorian novel. Wallhead and Kohlke, in the same book, present an insightful analysis of the first narrative in the novel, "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing", in the context of trauma studies. Although they reflect on some connections between the six stories, their analysis focuses on the neo-Victorianism of only the frame narrative, which they call the "neo-Victorian section" (217). It seems that these scholars do not see the novel as a neo-Victorian work. Nevertheless, their arguments that "the neo-Victorian frame is 'central' to the novel, […] in the figurative sense of importance, and arguably in the traumatic sense also" (217) is one of the points of departure for this chapter. They explain why the Victorian narrative is "central" to the novel as follows: "the neo-Victorian section could be said to '*haunt*' the rest of the novel, resurfacing continuously like the return of the repressed or an involuntary flashback to *an originary traumatic scene*" (217; emphasis added). This suggestion is crucial for this study because it reveals that the arguments raised by the whole novel, the development of themes from one narrative to the other, and the novel's ethical and political call to the reader depend to a large extent on its double return to the Victorian past. This study will explore how the Victorian narrative haunts the novel in both positive and negative senses and look at how this

[22] In his essay "Trailing Postmodernism" (2018), Bentley says that the novel goes beyond postmodernism despite its reliance on postmodernist devices. Although he concludes that the novel is "philosophically and politically post-postmodernist", he thinks that the earlier sections of the novel can be identified "as a form of historiographic metafiction" (735,733).

narrative and the Victorian past emerge as points of origin in the novel, which will be used here to demonstrate the neo-Victorianism of the whole novel.

In her *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of the Empire* (2012), Elizabeth Ho[23] presents a brief discussion of this novel in the part where she discusses a certain group of works that she labels as "the-neo-Victorian-at-sea"[24] (171). Ho adopts a postcolonial framework to explore diverse "structures of relation to the past", more specifically, to the colonial past in postcolonial neo-Victorian works (25), which is significant for the analysis of Mitchell's novel here. As she says of neo-Victorianism in general, it can be argued that by returning to the colonial past in one of the narratives and "confronting empire again and new", Mitchell's novel "offers a way of thinking about history differently, a way of making it accountable to the present - and a way of being with the past in the present" (Ho 16).

While accurately noting that this novel exhibits "new directions for neo-Victorianism", Ho argues that since the novel presents "an unbounded globality" and frees the subgenre "from the referent of Britain" or a fixation on Britain (and England) as the center, it "also threatens to unravel the genre itself" (26). She concedes that, due to its "commitment to a global, deterritorialized Victorian" and its "cosmopolitan outlook", this novel "is not a neo-Victorian novel", and that it resists classification (189, 197, 199). Although she acknowledges the strength of a reading that sees the novel as "partly" neo-Victorian and that treats the Victorian past as "a moment of origin for the dystopias of the future", she finds fault with such readings (199, 198). According to her, this novel reconsiders the Victorian "as the future", not as a point of origin or as "hegemonic past", which makes the Victorian "decentered" (199). She mentions that this decentralization does not mean that the Victorian

[23] Ho is one of the scholars who criticize the domination of neo-Victorian studies by a tendency to explore neo-Victorian fiction in relation to postmodernism, which leads to the subordination of neo-Victorian fiction to historiographic metafiction (6-7).

[24] With this term, she refers to certain postcolonial neo-Victorian novels such as Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), Harry Thompson's *To The Edge of the World* (2003), and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Ho claims the emergence of such novels suggests a shift in neo-Victorian fiction from a preoccupation with the imperial center/Britain and the association of the "Victorian" with a certain location in earlier examples to "a turn to the sea", sea voyages, and ship narratives in more recent neo-Victorian novels (171-174).

narrative is "less crucial than the novel's other cautionary tales" (199), but she does not discuss in which ways it is crucial. She rightly argues that "clever connections" emerge in each narrative and "proliferate as each story unfolds" (196). For example, "the discourse of civilization and imperialism […] runs through Mitchell's novel" (Ho 198), which reveals that the concerns of the Victorian narrative haunt the rest of the novel. Yet Ho does not think that these clever connections make *Cloud Atlas* a neo-Victorian work.

While this study draws from Ho's above-mentioned suggestions, it parts ways with her because it concedes that largely due to the "clever connections" between the six narratives, this novel can be considered as a neo-Victorian text. Furthermore, departing from Ho's suggestion that this novel "challenge[s] our tendency toward progressivist models of historical thought" (200), the study suggests that the novel envisions such a model, even as criticizing such models, in ways that highlight the cruciality of the Victorian narrative to the whole novel. As maintained by Ho, the novel "creates a new structure of relation to the 'now'" and to the future (200). What she neglects to consider, however, is that the novel also creates a new relation to the Victorian past as the past, too, which will be demonstrated in this chapter. Closely related to this suggestion and departing from Ho's claims, this study will show that the "cosmopolitan outlook" evident in the novel (Ho 197) is not incompatible with (its) neo-Victorianism or the neo-Victorian project of paving the way for a better, more egalitarian society and a better future.

Cloud Atlas can be seen as a neo-Victorian novel for several reasons. Firstly, it might be argued that only one of the narratives among the six narratives in the whole novel deals directly with the Victorian past; however, some neo-Victorian novels, such as Swift's *Waterland* (1983) and Michèle Roberts's *In The Red Kitchen* (1990), are concerned with not only the Victorian age and but other periods as well. *Waterland* deals with natural history and goes back further in time when it reflects on the life cycle of eels. It also turns to the First and the Second World Wars and the narrative present in addition to the Victorian age. This does not rule out its neo-Victorianism but shows the relevance of the Victorian period to its postmodernist understanding of history. As mentioned in the previous chapter, even the dual plot of *Ever After*

includes several periods such as Bill Unwin's childhood, war years, the period he was married to Ruth, and the narrative present (the 1980s), along with the Victorian age. Again, this does not rule out its neo-Victorianism but rather highlights the influence of public history on private history and sets the plot in motion since his traumatic past leads the narrator to search for a connection with his Victorian ancestor.

Kate Mitchell suggests that neo-Victorian novels are concerned with "the question of what will count as history" (181). The second aspect that signals the neo-Victorianism of this novel is its response to this question in a way that suggests the importance of the Victorian age in the world history as we know it and also in the future history it envisions. As stated by Fredric Jameson, *Cloud Atlas* broadens the chronological boundary of what is thought to be history by raising "the philosophical question about future history", in other words, by adding a third dimension to "historicity": a "dimension of futurity" (*Antinomies* 306, 297). *Cloud Atlas* has two narratives set in the past, but from the vantage point of the sixth narrative set in a distant future, the previous narratives are historical accounts. As such, while extending the duality discernible in many neo-Victorian works, which include a Victorian and a contemporary plot**,** *Cloud Atlas* looks back to the past, the present, and the future in more complex ways. Mitchell's novel tries to intervene in the external world, the world of the reader, by depicting what might have happened in the Victorian past and other historical periods in closely related ways and by using this three-dimensional history as a warning to the reader about future calamities. If the reader were not offered a glimpse into the imperial past of Britain and how this past directly and indirectly shapes the present and the future, this warning would not be much effective. This point indicates the importance, if not the centrality, of the Victorian narrative to the novel, and the cruciality of the Victorian age to the understanding of and engagement with history in the whole novel.

Thirdly, *Cloud Atlas* begins and ends with a look back to the Victorian period through Adam Ewing's journal, and this double turn to the period is a neo-Victorian gesture. While the first turn (at the beginning) is indicative of the subgenre's obsession with the period, the second turn (at the ending) demonstrates the neo-

Victorian novel's capacity to address today's world, to contribute to the reader's historical understanding, which, in turn, can enable the reader to shape a better world. Furthermore, the novel's ethical and political messages to the reader are most evident in the second half of the Victorian narrative. Therefore, there would be an important change in the meaning and uses of history if the Victorian narrative were withdrawn from the main body of the text, which again reveals the neo-Victorianism of *Cloud Atlas*.

The above-mentioned hesitancy of scholars about regarding the whole novel as a neo-Victorian work results to a great extent from the facts that firstly, there are six narratives in the novel; secondly, Mitchell uses a different genre in each one, which might give the impression that each narrative is a separate entity; and thirdly, two narratives are set in the near- and distant future. However, the novel suggests that the events that take place in the Victorian past give birth to the events that take place in the future history depicted in the novel. In other words, the recurrence of certain images and themes, and the close connections between the events taking place in the six narratives included in the novel demonstrate that the novel presents a wholeness, and that the Victorian narrative *encompasses* the concerns of the other narratives. Due to all this, this study argues that *Cloud Atlas* can be considered as a neo-Victorian novel.

4.1. The Experimental Narrative Techniques Employed in *Cloud Atlas*

Cloud Atlas, like many overtly self-conscious examples of neo-Victorian fiction, is sceptical about the possibility of capturing the past as it was in a narrative. Especially through its formal qualities and its engagement with narrated history, the novel problematizes realist representations of history and draws attention to the epistemological problems involved in history writing. This part of the analysis will focus on the experimental narrative techniques employed by Mitchell, arguing that these techniques raise questions about the traditional understanding of history and history writing in ways that recall Swift's engagement with history in *Ever After*.

Cloud Atlas, like many neo-Victorian works, makes room for small, local narratives and lends a voice to the silenced others. In the three-dimensional history the novel

presents, there is room for the slave Autua (a member of the Moriori tribe), the bisexual Frobisher, the elderly confined in nursing houses, and the fabricant Sonmi. As Theo D'haen remarks, Mitchell's novel "affirm[s] the humanity of all humankind on a non-hierarchical, non-denominational, non-discriminatory basis" (280). Lending a voice to various oppressed characters from various locations without hierarchizing these voices is also a future-oriented project in the case of this novel. The protagonists tell their own small stories and sometimes the peripheral stories of others. Ewing's journal, for example, makes room for the repressed history of the indigenous peoples he encounters on the Pacific Islands. *Cloud Atlas*, with its six narratives and polyphonic quality, defies the assumption that a narrative reveals a single dominant truth, recalling Swift's novel.

Although David Mitchell says that he is not an "experimental novelist" in an interview with Stuart Jeffries (para. 15), *Cloud Atlas* has a highly experimental narrative structure, which foregrounds the issue of representation. One of the main sources of inspiration for David Mitchell regarding this point is Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979), a postmodernist text in which there are twelve narratives left unfinished. This structure leaves the reader baffled as they desire an ending that can provide coherence and a final meaning. David Mitchell is one of these baffled readers. By reworking the structure of Calvino's novel, *Cloud Atlas* engages in an intertextual dialogue with that postmodernist text. David Mitchell explains this dialogue as:

> What if narrative A was interrupted halfway by narrative B which mentioned narrative A as an artefact -say, a torn-in-two book found under a bed? And what if narrative B was interrupted by narrative C -which referred to the interrupted half of narrative B- in the same way? How many narratives deep could I go? Four? Six? Nine? Italo Calvino got to 12 in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, but never 'came back' to recontinue his interruptions. Could a novel boomerang back through the sequence, picking up where narratives C, B and A had left off, in reverse order? (Mitchell, "Genesis", para. 3)

Through *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell shows that a novel can boomerang back through a sequence of six narratives. The novel pushes the limits of suspension of disbelief through this structure. In addition, the structure draws attention to the reader's meaning-making process. And yet, in the second half of the book, this strategy turns

out to be in the service of building a coherent and meaningful, though complicated, narrative. It bears repetition that although the six narratives may seem to be irrelevant in the first half of the novel, the second half of the novel demonstrates the close connections between these narratives. More precisely, Mitchell reconfigures the thematic concerns of the Victorian narrative in each narrative that follows in different but closely related ways.

The structure of the novel is regarded as a palindrome (Dillon 10; Wallhead and Kohlke 222), a matryoshka doll (Loughry 138; Edwards 190), and an ouroboros (a snake devouring its own tail) (Ng 107). The narrative starts with the Victorian journal, which is interrupted mid-sentence. Except for the sixth one, each story is interrupted halfway. Only Zachry's story is narrated without interruption. From that point on, the novel returns to the previous stories in the reverse order. More concretely, the structure is as follows: 1-2-3-4-5-6-5-4-3-2-1. It "comes full circle and ends where it started" (Wallhead and Kohlke 219). While the novel ends where it started chronologically, the various periods and places covered by the novel work to change the meaning of each narrative's beginning, middle, and ending in the first half of the book when it comes full circle in the second half.

This complex structure has several functions and implications regarding the issue of representation. As each of the stories is eventually concluded, the strategy of interruption is not an example of narrative fragmentation, which Gutleben observes in *Ever After* and which is often discernible in metafictional neo-Victorian novels. Still, the structure leads to narrative discontinuity in terms of the experience of reading and the flow of the narrative. The interruptions give the reader a pause and for some time preclude their immersion in the text. When the first part of Ewing's journal ends mid-sentence, Frobisher says, "[a] half-read book is a half-finished love affair" (*CA* 64). While the reader thinks that there might be a problem with the copy they read, Frobisher's annoyance, a reflection of the extradiegetic reader's disappointment and frustration, is an effect of a textual trick played on the reader. In *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), Heilmann and Llewellyn resemble the relationship between the neo-Victorian writer and reader to that between "conjuror and spectator" (175). Like a conjuror, the writer first creates "a compelling impression of 'reality'"

and subsequently deconstructs "this impression as an illusion" (Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 209). The fact that the Victorian journal gives the impression of authenticity and accuracy until it is interrupted is, then, indicative of one of neo-Victorian "conjuring techniques" employed "to interrogate our fantasies as well as our blind spots" (Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 176). The fantasies and blind spots Heilmann and Llewellyn mention are the reader's assumptions about capturing reality, the past as it actually was, through a neo-Victorian text. By abruptly leaving the first part of this journal in mid-sentence, *Cloud Atlas* challenges the readerly assumption that the text provides a mirror to the Victorian past, recalling Swift's novel. Through such games-playing, both novels highlight that "there is nothing 'real' about the Victorians outside our imaginary constructions of them", as Heilmann and Llewellyn say of "sophisticated" neo-Victorian works (*Neo-Victorianism* 201).

When the second part of the journal is inserted in the text as the eleventh section, the reader has already moved from the Victorian setting to the twentieth century and then to a distant future. As also noted by Jo Alyson Parker, it seems that the writer wants the reader to return to the second part of the journal (the Victorian age) with a renewed perspective informed by the stories of future history (216). Parker places emphasis on future-thinking but overlooks the novel's simultaneous emphasis on re-thinking the past. Extending Parker's suggestion, this study argues that this novel places equal emphasis on re-thinking the past and imagining possible futures. This, in turn, indicates the necessity or, at least, the importance of historical knowledge and consciousness for an individual to be able to understand what takes place in the present and figure out what may happen in the future. It must be noted, however, that this reconstructive stance and the above-mentioned postmodernist agenda coexist in this novel. This point will be examined in detail in the following parts of this chapter.

By interrupting the first five stories, the novel challenges the notions of teleology and causality traditionally associated with history and historical narratives. However, this suggestion applies to the first part of the novel. When the novel concludes each story in reverse order, it reinforces, even as it undermines, causality between the ostensibly dispersed stories. It manages to connect various characters from diverse geographies and historical periods and allows the reader's immersion in the text.

The first half of Mitchell's novel resembles a matryoshka doll, with each narrative embedded in the following one. The matryoshka doll structure of *Cloud Atlas*, in one sense, raises a question about framing and its function in the interpretation of literary texts and real life. Will McMorran argues in an essay that since the novel returns to the narratives in reverse order, it thwarts any attempts at mapping it because it "does away with the frame entirely" (168). McMorran adds that how we map the novel in our minds depends on whether we privilege Ewing's fragile optimism or the bleak post-apocalyptic world of 'Sloosha's Crossin' as the ultimate message of the novel" (165).[25] However, the novel is framed by Ewing's journal: it begins with the first half of the journal and ends with the second half of it. Therefore, rather than doing away with the frame, the novel raises some questions pertaining to neo-Victorianism by ending the novel with a second return to the Victorian era: Where does the (Victorian) past start? Where does it end? These questions draw attention to the impact of the (Victorian) past on the present, and the continual dialogue between the past, the present, and the future.

The boomeranging structure has certain implications about the novel's understanding of temporality and history. Jo Alyson Parker contends that, unlike a traditional frame narrative which recounts but cannot rework the past, the structure of the novel suggests that history "can be not only recounted but also reworked, at least within the constraints of fiction" (206). This indicates that a glimpse into possible futures can enable the individual to reshape the present, the future, the meaning and the uses of the past. The gaze at a virtual future, which can lead to a change, brought about by a boomeranging structure, gestures towards both a cyclical and a linear temporality. This means that the novel deals with both a cyclical and a linear/continuous/progressive history. This is a departure from the rejection of both a linear timeline and the traditional understanding of history as progress and continuity, which pervades the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. This departure, however, underscores the novel's neo-Victorian project of looking back to the past in order to shape a better future, which will be explored later on.

[25] The optimism of the first narrative and the bleak world of the sixth narrative are, in fact, closely connected. Therefore, what the novel invites the reader to do is to see the connections between these two worlds, the past and the future, rather than to choose one of these visions as the novel's entire stance on history and the future of humanity. This point will be under scrutiny in sections 4.3. and 4.4.

Another significant point about this structure, which is much discussed by various critics, is that each preceding story appears as an artefact, an object in the following narrative: a journal, letters, a manuscript, a film, an orison (a holographic device). Ewing's journal is found and read by Frobisher, whose letters are discovered by Luisa. Luisa turns out to be a fictional character in the manuscript sent to Cavendish, whose memoir is made into a film watched by Sonmi. Sonmi's interview recorded in an orison is watched by Zachry, albeit making almost no sense. The transmission of these texts from one story to the next one destabilizes the reality effect of each account and foregrounds some questions regarding the ontological status of the protagonists and these narratives. If Ewing's journal, which registers the atrocities inflicted on the Moriori tribe, is a text that is read by Frobisher whose letters are read by Luisa in a fictional story, then what initially seems to be a plausible representation of the past (Ewing's story) turns out to be fiction within fiction within another fiction in the fictional world of the novel. The effect of this strategy is an "ontological plurality", which corrodes "the fictional world's solidity and stability", to use Brian McHale's words on postmodernist fiction (136, 155). With each following narrative, another diegetic layer is added on top of the one projected by the former narrative. In each one of the following narratives, what the reader assumes to be reality or an accurate account of the past represented in the previous one is shown to be fiction or a mixture of fact and fiction. Each one of the narratives in Mitchell's novel is suspect to varying degrees concerning their representation of the past when read retrospectively. Moreover, the fact that the protagonists from the former narratives reappear in a text, an orison, a film, and so on demonstrates the textuality of subjectivity. Reminding one of the emphasis placed on the constructedness of subjectivity in *Ever After*, these characters are "shaped in and of discourse" (Hopf, "Stories" 110). As Hopf acutely notes, with the transmission of texts from one diegetic level to another layered on the former one as the novel proceeds, the reader, too, experiences a "blurring of subjectivity" in the sense that they read Ewing's narrative as a journal, but when they move to the next section, they read "as" Frobisher reads the former section, which is repeated in each following narrative (Hopf, "Stories" 111). As such, the novel blurs the boundary between "life and narrative" (Hopf, "Stories" 106), reality and fiction, history and story.

Mitchell's novel is a metafictional work that draws attention to the process of constructing a historical narrative. Some characters directly or indirectly draw attention to the act of writing, editing, and narrating. The novel self-reflexively draws attention to its status as a constructed artefact through the comments of these characters, especially those of Timothy Cavendish. It might be argued that Cavendish's is a twentieth-century story which does not seem to have anything to do with the Victorian narrative, the characters and events depicted in it. However, Cavendish's memoir includes Luisa's story which includes Frobisher's letters which mention Ewing's journal. This implies the presence of the Victorian journal in this story and, by extension, the presence of the Victorian past in the present. This ghostly presence can be traced in the self-reflexive narration of Cavendish. The parodic engagement with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) in his story can be suggestive of the novel's problematization of the assumedly truthful representations of Victorian fiction. Like Ewing, Cavendish lays claim to truth, which makes the reader assume that his memoir is a truthful account (*CA* 152). Nevertheless, the artificiality of his account is underlined when he decides what the title of his memoir will be: "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish, if you will. Now *that* is a snappy title" (*CA* 147; emphasis in original). Much like Bill Unwin, he often directs attention to his narration as a self-conscious narrator while addressing the "dear Reader" (*CA* 145, 146, 150, 175) and, in so doing, parodying *Jane Eyre*. Recalling Heilmann and Llewellyn's emphasis on the neo-Victorian novel's playing tricks on the reader, Cavendish mentions a new book he has published, which is "a well-written, gutsy fictional memoir" (*CA* 151). Only when the reader comes to Sonmi's story do they understand that Cavendish's supposedly truthful memoir is a fictional memoir within a film. As Cavendish says, "reading too many novels makes you go blind" (*CA* 363). This is another metafictional element, another trick, pointing to the blindness of the reader who, immersed as they are in the text, cannot recognize that each story in the novel is a fictional account even as each one produces a reality effect. Furthermore, although his story abounds in flashbacks and foreshadowings alluding to other stories, Cavendish states that he disapproves of such "tricksy devices" because "they belong in the 1980s with *M.A.s in postmodernism* and chaos theory" (*CA* 150; emphasis added). This playful comment points to the novel's self-conscious neo-Victorianism while at the same time echoing Hutcheon's claim that

"the postmodern may well be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is a thing of the past" (*Politics* 164). In other words, it is a doubly self-conscious articulation of the novel's attitude towards postmodernism and postmodernist fiction's preoccupation with the issues of representation and textuality.

The stories and characters comment on the structure of the novel, reinforcing the metafictional playfulness of the novel, as also observed by several scholars. One of the works of Vyvyan Ayrs is "*Matryoshka Doll Variations*", another is "*Digressions on a Theme of Lodovico Roncalli*" (*CA* 52). While the former title self-reflexively points to the embedded narratives of the novel, the latter implies that the novel has one main theme and that the digressions (the following stories) are all related to this theme. In "Genesis", Mitchell says that the main theme of the novel, which connects the six different novellas, is predation (para. 5). While the reader is drawn to different geographies and historical periods in each story, in each one they see "how individuals prey on individuals, corporations on employees, tribes on tribes, majorities on minorities, and how present generations 'eat' the sustenance of future generations" (Mitchell, "Genesis", para. 6). Then, the title of the latter piece of music points out that what appear to be digressions, that is, jumps from the mid-nineteenth century story through the stories set in the 1970s and 2000s to a dystopian and a post-apocalyptic story, are, in fact, the reworkings of the main concern of the novel: how humanity preys on itself in each period. Considering that predation is portrayed firstly and most forcefully through the British Empire's colonial project in the Victorian narrative, it can be claimed that this story is central to the novel, as also noted by Wallhead and Kohlke (217), because it directly or indirectly *addresses* or *encompasses* all concerns scattered across the whole novel, in other words, across the past, the present, and the future.

The neo-Victorian tricks played on the reader also appear in episodes where the novel self-reflexively interprets itself in terms of structure, the possible implications of employing such an innovative structure, and some other formal features. For example, the best work of Frobisher is fittingly called "*Cloud Atlas Sextet*", which he describes as:

> a 'sextet of overlapping soloists': piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe, and violin, each in its own language of key, scale, and color. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order. Revolutionary or gimmicky? (*CA* 445).

The sextet alludes to the six narratives of the novel. Like *Matryoshka Doll Variations* composed by Ayrs, this piece of music self-consciously points to the structural organization of the novel. As also observed by several scholars, the use of different instruments in this musical work is indicative of the different genres used in each story. Like the six different instruments used in Frobisher's work, the novel employs a journal, an epistolary narrative, a mystery/thriller, memoirs, science fiction, and oral narrative. Through Frobisher's comments on his work, the novel draws attention to its generic hybridity. Like *Ever After*, therefore, Mitchell's novel reveals the difficulty of capturing what happened in the past in one single form. Mitchell says that "there is no particular form which best represents the world, or even an aspect of it" (Wilson 96). This celebration of formal plurality is in line with self-conscious neo-Victorian fiction's stylistic eclecticism that Gutleben mentions as well as its distrust of narrative.

While including various genres, the novel subverts the reader's assumptions about these genres, like Swift's novel. For example, the journal of Adam Ewing gives the impression that it is the first-hand account of Ewing. However, two footnotes inserted in the story indicate that the journal is edited by another character, who does not appear in the text except for these footnotes. Similarly, Cavendish starts his story by arguing that this is a memoir (*CA* 146). In the second part of the story, he decides to turn his story into a film and starts advising "Director dearest" called Lars[26]: "I advise thee […] to render that November as a boxer-in-training-for-the-big-fight montage"; "Lars, lower the lighting" (*CA* 355, 368). His addresses to this imagined director and the "dear reader" denaturalize the authenticity of his account because they create an ironic distance between the reader and his account, recalling the distance between Swift's reader and Bill Unwin's story (*CA* 365, 385). In addition,

[26] This director can be Lars von Trier, a contemporary director, whose works are technically sophisticated and critically acclaimed. As the character gives orders to the director concerning film techniques, it can be argued that the novel criticizes extreme examples of postmodernist fiction which over-emphasize textuality, metafictional playfulness, and deconstruction. Mitchell says that he finds such works "a little sterile" (Hopf, "Creating" 187).

when Cavendish mentions "*Knuckle Sandwich*", "a truly fabulous memoir" written by Dermot Hoggins and published by Cavendish Publishing (*CA* 151), reminding one of Bill Unwin's calling into question the veracity of the Pearce notebooks, the reader questions the accuracy of Cavendish's own account. In Sonmi's story, where he appears in a film, the authenticity of his memoir is once more troubled because by this time, it has been reworked and edited by an unidentified director.

Cloud Atlas includes multiple beginnings and endings, which contests narrative continuity, coherence, and teleology. Although the novel does not foreground it, the beginning and ending of the novel are problematic in one sense because there are six beginnings and endings in the novel. This multiplicity raises questions about such notions as linearity, coherence, and causality traditionally associated with historical narratives. These notions are subverted particularly in Cavendish's account. Cavendish, an unreliable narrator, does not know where to start his story. His story starts with a reflection on three young girls who degrade him and steal his wallet. A few pages later, he says:

> Where was I?
> Odd how the wrong stories pop into one's head at my age.
> […] I meant to begin this narrative with Dermot Hoggins. That's the problem with inking one's memoirs in longhand. You can't go changing what you've already set down, not without botching things up even more. (*CA* 146)

He draws attention to the difficulties he faces in the process of writing. Just like Bill Unwin, he indicates the constructedness of his memoir, which is a form of historical narrative. Likewise, Cavendish self-reflexively highlights that endings are not natural but imposed onto narratives. Cavendish's story, the most metafictional story in the novel, ends twice. After his escape from the nursing home, which is the ending of his ghastly ordeal, he says, "Where all this will end, I do not know. THE END" (*CA* 385). Right after announcing the ending of his story, he addresses the reader: "Very well, dear Reader, you deserve an epilogue if you've stayed with me this far" (*CA* 385). In this epilogue, he tells what has happened after his escape. He also addresses the imaginary director, who, he hopes, will turn his ghastly ordeal into a film. This epilogue is a metafictional device that draws attention to the fact that there are no

clear-cut endings in life. It is also an indirect interrogation of the endings of Victorian realist fiction.

Making room for small *récits*, repressed voices, silenced histories, structural experimentation, the metafictional mode, intertextuality, and generic hybridity reflect the self-conscious neo-Victorianism of *Cloud Atlas*. The novel displays its self-conscious engagement with the past through its deconstructive approach to narrated history, too, which points to its scepticism about positivist historiography and history as a narrative. However, this novel is not concerned only with such issues as the discursivity of history, textuality, and representation. Mitchell adopts a more complicated approach to history compared to other neo-Victorian writers. That is why this study suggests that the novel's attitude towards history can be better understood if *history as narrative* and *history as past deeds* are studied separately. Such an analysis will shed light on the what this thesis means by the coexistence of a deconstructive approach to history and a significant departure from this approach in this novel. This is the reason why this thesis considers this novel as remaining in an in between position in the spectrum of neo-Victorian engagements with the Victorian past and history.

4.2. Actual and Virtual Pasts

In their works on Mitchell's complex treatment of temporality in *Cloud Atlas*, critics have often neglected to take into consideration the duality in the novel's understanding of history, that is, its concern with both narrated history and experiential history, which brings about a paradoxically dual approach to history. In order to point out the various senses of history evident in the novel, this duality will be under scrutiny in this and the following sections. This section aims to explore the treatment of narrated history in the novel. It argues that *Cloud Atlas does* uphold certain postmodernist tenets in its engagement with *history writing* and *history as a narrative,* which lays bare its deconstructive agenda.

To Hutcheon, postmodernist fiction does not deny that the past existed, but it questions the possibility of unmediated access to the past and foregrounds its

inevitably "*textualized accessibility* to us today" (*Poetics* 114; emphasis in original). Drawing upon postmodern historiography, she makes a distinction between event and fact in order to underline the impossibility of representing *the* truth in historical narratives. She says that events are "configured into facts" in both literary and historical narratives, which means that writers and historians "decide which events will become facts" (*Poetics* 122). The facts mentioned in a text, whether literary or historical, do not always overlap with historical events. Decisions made in the process of configuring facts are inevitably influenced by the ideologies, prejudices, personal needs, and desires of the historian. This means that there are certain events which are not configured into facts. Historical knowledge is always partial and provisional because historical narratives cannot capture the past as it was. That is why postmodernist fiction is sceptical about official history and history writing.

This scepticism about narrated history is prevalent in metafictional neo-Victorian novels, and it is overtly articulated in *Cloud Atlas* by Isaac Sachs. Isaac is a scientist in "Half-Lives: the First Luisa Rey Mystery", and he postulates a theory about time and historiography. His theory, which defines the novel's attitude towards official history and historiography, is as follows:

> • […] *the workings of the actual past + the* virtual *past may be illustrated by an event […], such as the sinking of the* Titanic. *The disaster as it* actually *occurred descends into obscurity as its eyewitnesses die off, documents perish + the wreck of the ship dissolves in its Atlantic grave*. *Yet a* virtual *sinking of the* Titanic, *created from re-worked memories, papers, hearsay, fiction -in short, belief- grows ever "truer". The actual past is brittle, ever-dimming + ever more problematic to access + reconstruct: in contrast the virtual past is malleable, ever brightening + ever more difficult to circumvent/expose as fraudulent.*
>
> • *The present presses the virtual past into its own service, to lend credence to its mythologies + legitimacy to the imposition of will. Power seeks +* is *the right to "landscape" the virtual past. (He who plays the historian calls the tune.)* (*CA* 392-393; emphasis and format in original)

Sachs and, through this character, Mitchell himself point out the distinction between event and fact. The sinking of the ship is an event, the actual past. When it is narrated as history, the event turns into a fact, the virtual past. As it is impossible to bear witness to the actual past (event), the virtual past (fact) is inevitably based on memory, fiction, various sources, and different interpretations. The historian, who

configures an event (the actual past) into a fact (the virtual past), narrates the past in line with his ideology. This reveals the "constructed, imposed nature of […] meaning", in Hutcheon's terms (*Poetics* 112). As the historian is also subject to the ideologies propagated by the government or the regime in a society, official history (the virtual past) serves those in power by legitimating their own myths. The line between history and fiction gets blurred, as highlighted by Sachs, and history turns out to be fiction in this process. Sachs's theory of history is self-consciously elaborated on in various ways in each one of the six narratives of the novel, revealing the novel's awareness of postmodern historiography and its premises.

Ewing's journal illustrates Sachs's theory of fictionalized history. When the ship, the *Prophetess* upon which he sails, needs repairing, Adam Ewing has to spend a week on Rēhoku, "the native moniker for the Chathams" (*CA* 11). Upon witnessing the flogging of a native man, Autua, by his master, he investigates who the Moriori are. He learns their history firstly from Mr D'Arnoq, a preacher and a tradesman living on the island. Ewing notes down D'Arnoq's "spoken history" of the Moriori, as it is told to him (*CA* 10). According to D'Arnoq, the Moriori are the descendants of the Maori, another indigenous tribe. Before they were enslaved and murdered by the Maori, the Moriori lived "a primitive life", and they were of a "unique pacific creed" (*CA* 11, 12). If one member of the tribe killed another, the community ostracized the murderer because they believed that the man "killed his own *mana* -his honor, his worth, his standing & his soul" (*CA* 12). Their language lacked "a word for 'race'", and they did not know what a war was (*CA* 11, 12). D'Arnoq claims that these native people "lay closer to More's Utopia than our States of progress governed by war-hungry princelings" (*CA* 12). This peaceful mode of life was shattered when the Union Jack was planted on the island. The British colonizers used the Maori to conquer Moriori people's lands. The white man did not intervene when the Maori, the "apt pupils of the English in 'the dark arts of colonization'", dispossessed and slaughtered hundreds of the Moriori (*CA* 14).

D'Arnoq's account of Moriori history is representative only of the virtual past. Its accuracy is questioned by other versions of the same event. For instance, a Maori "mulatto" asserts that D'Arnoq's version of "the entire history of the Aboriginals" is

"dreamt up" by the Preacher (*CA* 16). He adds that D'Arnoq "preaches his Moriori gospel only to legitimize his own swindling land claims against the Maori, the true owners of Chatham" (*CA* 16). This version is, in turn, challenged by a white settler, who argues that "the Maori had performed the White Man a service by exterminating another race of brutes to make space for us" (*CA* 16). Moreover, while D'Arnoq says that there remain "[l]ess than an hundred pure-blooded Moriori now", Henry Goose's epic entitled "True History of Autua, Last Moriori" undermines D'Arnoq's account by revealing that only one Moriori is alive (*CA* 15, 492). Goose is an evil character who poisons Ewing during the journey in order to steal his money. This, of course, undermines his supposedly "True History". Ewing records Autua's story, as narrated by Autua. Autua states that the colonizers brought both "vicissitudes" and "marvels" to his land (*CA* 29). Moriori men, with their skills in seal hunting, won the appreciation of the colonizers who took them to their ships as seamen. Autua, like his uncle, was one of these seamen, who travelled to distant places, and "everywhere observed that casual brutality lighter races show the darker" (*CA* 30). His story justifies D'Arnoq's in that he says not all of the Moriori tribe was perished by the Maori. When he returned home, the remaining Moriori were enslaved by the Maori. Although he tried to escape his native land, he was captured and punished. Autua also reflects on the erasure of their cultural traditions by the Maori and the displacement of the Maori by the white man, saying, "[m]any go back to Zealand. Kupaka [his Maori master] cannot, his land is no mo'" (*CA* 31, 32). Even though Autua is a witness to some of these events, which renders his story more truthful than those of the above-mentioned characters, some parts of his version of Moriori history are reliant on a "yarn told & retold" when he was an infant (*CA* 29). Thus, though plausible, his version of history is in part a story.

To use Sachs's terms, there are several virtual pasts concerning the history of the Moriori, none of which can be the actual past. Ewing writes, "[a]s many truths as men", highlighting the plurality of truth (*CA* 17), though he accepts D'Arnoq's version as the more accurate version.[27] Each version of Moriori history is a means for

[27] He accepts D'Arnoq's account because he is a preacher and a white man. This occasion takes place a few days before he hears Autua's version of Moriori history. He does not make any comment on the native man's version in that episode, so the reader does not know whether or not he finds it more truthful.

the historian's (in this case, a white preacher, a Maori, a white settler, and an English doctor) imposition of his will to power. While the novel brings to the fore the Moriori's silenced history, it highlights the difficulty of knowing the past with any certainty. With the massacre of many Moriori people, the actual past grows ever dimmer. What the reader, Ewing's, Mitchell's, and other neo-Victorian writers' readers, can know is the virtual past or one story among many other stories.

The novel, like *Ever After*, reflects on the gaps in historical documents and, thus, reveals how historical events descend into obscurity. Ewing most probably starts keeping his journal on the initial days of his journey. However, the journal does not refer to what happened during Ewing's journey to New South Wales and later to the Chatham Islands. While reading this story, the reader thinks that the first entry is the first page of the journal. However, Frobisher, a diegetic reader of the journal, says that the "dismembered volume" "begins on the ninety-ninth page" (*CA* 64). Only with Frobisher's comment does Mitchell's reader recognize the gap in what they assume to be an accurate record. Ewing does not refer to those former adventures in later entries, either. Therefore, a certain part of his story and, by extension, history is unavailable to the reader. This, in turn, renders narrative and recorded history suspect in some ways.

This suspicion is discernible in the narratives that follow. There are gaps in them as well. As noted by Hopf, the reader "never gains access to Sixsmith's letters to Frobisher", so they must "'read into' Frobisher's writing to understand them'' ("Stories" 114). While the reader can read into Frobisher's letters and imagine the content of Sixsmith's letters, this is not possible in the case of Ewing's journal.

The novel points out the inevitable "loss of historical knowledge" in the third story, too (Wallhead and Kohlke 247). Luisa Rey looks for Sixsmith's expert report on the HYDRA reactor. This report is about a flaw in the new project of Seaboard Corporation. The corporation conceals the flaw, which can lead to an ecological disaster and radiation showering over California (*CA* 107). Luisa manages to get a copy of the report. However, the journalist can only save some pages of the document when she is driven off a bridge by an assassin. Knowledge regarding the

report “must be reconstructed from evidentiary fragments and traces”, which will inevitably involve “elisions” (Wallhead and Kohlke 247). When the remaining part of the document is exposed in newspapers, the scandal is uncovered. Meanwhile the authorities or perhaps the journalist makes up what lacks in the document. Then, “the past we come to know is always in part a simulated substitute *of* and *for* the real” (Wallhead and Kohlke 247; emphasis in original).

The loss of historical knowledge culminates in what can be called the “end of history” in the sixth story, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After” (Boulter 131). Zachry thinks that Meronym, one of the Prescients, is studying his tribe to colonize them. He searches her bag to find evidence. He finds a “big silv’ry egg” in the bag (*CA* 263). When he cups this object, the orison, “a ghost-girl” appears (*CA* 263). This girl is Sonmi, whose testimony about her revolution against the corpocracy regime is a historical document in the post-apocalyptic period. Zachry lives in an age when the language of “civilization” has been lost to a great extent, suggestive of a regression to a “pre-civilized” state, so what she says is almost entirely incomprehensible to him. Zachry says, “For ev’ry word I und’standed ’bout five-six followed what I din’t” (*CA* 264). The next generation does not understand what the ghost girl says. His son says that “a beautsome ghost-girl appears in the air an’ speaks in an Old-Un tongue what no un alive und’stands nor never will” (*CA* 309). As a witness to the oppressive regime and the enslavement of the clones, Sonmi only “’mazes the littl’ uns an’ her murmin’s babbybie our babbits” (*CA* 309). Zachry’s tribe does not seem to possess clear historical knowledge about the past, but Zachry’s story suggests that they have historical consciousness. When Zachry flees from Big I and joins the Prescients, thinking that his tribe has been murdered by the Kona, the story he tells, an account of the past from the vantage point of his son, becomes the history of his tribe. This is a history that abounds in gaps in historical knowledge and uncertainties concerning the pre-Fall world despite Meronym’s frequent attempts to fill in these gaps. His son remarks towards the end of the narrative that “most o’ Pa’s yarnin’s was just’ musey duck fartin’”, but he also adds that “Most yarnin’s got a bit o’ true, some yarnin’s got some true, an’ a few yarnin’s got a lot o’ true” (*CA* 308, 309). Zachry’s story, partly fiction and partly fact, can only be a virtual history, the truth of which cannot be known for certain by either his son or the reader. Nevertheless, it is

still a history. This suggestion is also applicable to Ewing's account. Although it provides partial knowledge about the experiences and histories of the colonized peoples, it is still a history.

Like *Ever After*, which reveals the arbitrary nature of the archive and historiography, *Cloud Atlas* points to the coincidental transmission of historical knowledge. Frobisher finds Ewing's journal coincidentally. He "came across" the first part of it while he is "[p]oking through an alcove of books" in his room (*CA* 64). He finds the second part of the volume when he is about to leave Zedelghem. He says, "[o]ne last *serendipitous* discovery […], while packing my valise, checked nothing had rolled under the bed. Found half a ripped-in-two volume wedged under one of the legs" (*CA* 460; emphasis added). It is only by chance that he comes across this document. His own letters are the textual traces of the past in the 1970s, and it is only by coincidence that Luisa gets them. She meets Sixsmith, whom she does not know, in an elevator. Due to a power outage, they start talking in the elevator. He realizes that Luisa is the daughter of Lester Rey, who was one of the few journalists that "grasped the [Vietnam] war from the Asian perspective" (*CA* 92). That is why he trusts her and decides to give the expert report to her. When he is shot by an assassin in a hotel room, Luisa searches the room and comes across the letters in a drawer. These examples reflect the arbitrariness at work in the formation of archives and historical knowledge.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some neo-Victorian novels employ a historian figure (often in the contemporary plot) to challenge the traditional assumptions about historiography and official history. Michael Potter and Bill Unwin are such figures through whom Swift problematizes history and debunks the possibility of an objective representation of the Victorian past. *Cloud Atlas* similarly employs a historian figure, the unnamed Archivist, in Sonmi's narrative. Exploring this figure can help better understand the novel's scepticism about narrated history, the historian, and the archive.

The Archivist works for "*the Ministry of Unanimity*", the fittingly named regime that rules Nea So Copros (*CA* 189; emphasis in original). His perception of the world he

lives in and the clone's rebellion against the system is colored by his wholehearted embracement of corpocracy propaganda (*CA* 189, 326). Drawing upon Hutcheon's suggestion about historiographic metafiction, it can be stated that the Archivist's "partisanship and […] overt politics […] replace the pose of objectivity and disinterestedness", which, in turn, de-naturalizes the "status of the 'fact'" in history writing (*Politics* 71, 72). He believes that "*Corpocracy isn't just another political system that will come and go – corpocracy is the natural order, in harmony with human nature*" (*CA* 234; emphasis in original). As a "pureblood" (a pure human being), he has certain prejudices concerning the clones (*CA* 186). He thinks that the rebellious clones, Sonmi□451 and Yoona□939, are deviants and heretics (*CA* 187, 189). These clones are genetically engineered to serve the consumers at dineries for twelve years. After twelve years of service, they are slaughtered and recycled as food. This food is fed to both other clones and the purebloods, which is one version of cannibalism suggested in Ewing's journal. As the regime conceals these facts, the Archivist is ignorant of the enslavement of the clones. Moreover, he is ignorant of the fact that these particular clones are test objects, who are allowed to gain knowledge and become a "stabilized ascendant" (*CA* 219). When Sonmi tells him that "Xultation" of the clones is in fact their journey to not heaven but a slaughterhouse where they are butchered and turned into "liquefied biomatter", he exclaims, "*blasphemy!*", "*industrialized evil!*" (*CA* 343, 344; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, he still insists that the clones have certain rights and that "*The Beloved Chairman would never permit*" the food cycle the clone talks about (*CA* 344; emphasis in original). Sonmi is aware of the fact that "[c]orpocracy is built on slavery", but the Archivist believes that slavery does not exist in the country (*CA* 189). Her world is a version of the colonial period depicted in the Victorian narrative in terms of the prevalence of brutality and exploitation. In Nea So Copros, both the clones and the "downstrata" of the purebloods are subjugated by the regime called corpocracy, which preaches rampant consumerism (*CA* 209). The blind attachment of the historian figure to the dictates of the regime can be an indirect comment on historians who similarly cannot or do not represent the past of their own country objectively due to their own ideologies. Perhaps Mitchell implies that it is because of such historians that few people know the history of the Moriori and the Maori today.

The Archivist is ignorant of the workings of the corpocracy regime because the corpocracy suppresses knowledge in order to maintain its power, which points to the novel's awareness of Michel Foucault's concepts of power, knowledge, and discourse. He advocates *"[p]opular wisdom*" which "*has it that fabricants don't have personalities*" (*CA* 187; emphasis in original). Popular wisdom is, in fact, what the regime dictates to both the purebloods and the clones. His faith in corpocracy blinds him to what takes place in the country. He does not and, at times, cannot believe in what Sonmi tells about the underbelly of the regime. He confesses that he is "*puzzled*" and confused (*CA* 197, 208; emphasis in original). The access to knowledge (books, films, and archives) is controlled and limited by corpocracy. People gain knowledge through "AdV and 3-D" which "show only a dull portion of the world beyond" (*CA* 192). As media is an organ of the government, what is assumed to be the truth by society is what the regime decides to be the truth. Unlike the Archivist, Sonmi is aware that this world is "the true illusion" because she has gained access to some traces of the past (*CA* 235). The interview between the clone and the historian figure reflects how oppressive systems and countries shape the worldview of their members. In addition, it points to historical understanding as a major factor that enables a society's awareness of its current state.

In *Cloud Atlas*, the authority of the young Archivist is undermined by the ascendant clone. When she praises his "frankness", perhaps she is criticizing his naivety as a historian (*CA* 189). In fact, this interview is a sham organized by Unanimity. Unanimity plans to use Sonmi's testimony as a tool to reinforce its authority by first creating and then imprisoning a dissident clone. The display of authority through Sonmi's execution is expected to maintain the obedience of society and to "discredit Abolitionism" (*CA* 349). The "whole confession is composed of […] scripted events", and the Archivist does not even notice the "cracks in the plot" (*CA* 348). Sonmi is aware of this scheme before the interview begins. She has accepted to cooperate with Unanimity. Only at the end of the interview does she confess it to the Archivist. Just like Frobisher's comments on Ewing's journal, this confession casts doubt on the referentiality of her testimony. What is assumed by the Archivist to "be much use to future historians" (her truthful account) turns out to be fiction in one sense (*CA* 189). Since Sonmi is an ascendant clone, neither the Archivist nor the

reader can know with any certainty which parts of her story are true or false. As such, the authority of the historian and, by implication, the perception of official history as a site of truth are challenged.

The conjuror/spectator relationship between the neo-Victorian writer and the reader, as postulated by Heilmann and Llewellyn, applies to the relation between the clone and the Archivist as well as that between this story and the reader. Sonmi's aim in cooperating with Unanimity is to spread her abolitionist ideas all over Nea So Copros. By the end of the interview, she has achieved this aim: even children know her "*Declarations*" (*CA* 349). Sonmi starts the interview with this aim and manipulates the Archivist's desire to hear more of her story. She gives him some clues concerning the scheme, but he cannot recognize the trick played on him. For instance, she states that after her "facescaping", aesthetic surgery, Unanimity "refaced me for my peaktime courtroom appearances. A star actress must look the part" (*CA* 321). She implies that she is playing a role at that moment, but the Archivist, just like the reader, does not notice her tricks. In this respect, the Archivist resembles the sultan in *The Arabian Nights*, whose curiosity about what happens next leads to his manipulation by the storyteller, Scheherazade. He starts the interview with the intention of hearing Sonmi's version of truth. After some time, the allure of Sonmi's "story" makes him more and more curious: "*Yes, I'm curious to hear that, too*", says the Archivist (*CA* 216; emphasis in original). The reader can notice the clues provided by Sonmi only in a second reading. At the end of the second part of the interview, the reader comes to recognize that what they have been reading is the account of a game played out by corpocracy through Sonmi, which is recorded as the official history of that country.

With this interview, *Cloud Atlas* draws attention to the construction of the archive. It problematizes the archive and self-consciously thematizes "the processes of fact-producing" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 75). Archives and, by implication, official history in this country are forbidden zones to which even the Archivist cannot have access (*CA* 233). What is kept in these archives is "deviational material", which is forbidden to young historians (*CA* 234). This, too, recalls the Foucauldian relationship between power and knowledge. In Nea So Copros only those in power determine what can

and cannot be known, which documents can be designated as truthful or false. The distortion of events and facts, and limited access to truth contribute to the maintenance of the status quo and the oppressive system. This system keeps archives in order to render the past forgotten and shape the future in the way it desires. This oppressive regime reminds one of Hutcheon's comment on historiographic metafiction, that is, its preoccupation with the "question of *whose* story survives" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 120; emphasis in original). By cooperating with the corpocracy, Sonmi manages to intervene in recorded history and ensure the survival of her story and her version of truth. If the archive is a site of power struggle regarding whose story survives, then archives are comprised of both history and fiction. This challenges the assumption that the archive (official history) is the site of truth while blurring the boundary between fact and fiction.

Additionally, *Cloud Atlas*, like *Ever After*, installs a realist setting by portraying the socio-political context and challenges it through its self-reflexivity. The nineteenth-century travel journal of Adam Ewing, the first narrative, initially appears to be a historical document. Ewing says that he comes to his journal "as a Catholick to a confessor" (*CA* 18). He also lays claim to truth like a historian when he asserts that he "shall record it [the history of the Moriori] in these pages" (*CA* 10). In line with self-conscious neo-Victorianism, the novel questions what is assumed to be the truth concerning the Victorian past. When Frobisher reads the first part, he says that there is "[s]omething shifty about the journal's authenticity -seems too structured for a genuine diary, and its language doesn't ring quite true" (*CA* 64). His scepticism about the authenticity and truthfulness of the journal casts doubt on the accuracy of the history registered in those pages, recalling Bill Unwin's questioning of the truthfulness of Matthew Pearce's own account, which, in turn, contests the objectivity of Bill's own account.

The metafictional neo-Victorian novel is frequently concerned with the notions of authenticity and originality. It raises questions about the authenticity of the Victorian documents inserted into the text, the authenticity of art, or the originality of the neo-Victorian novel as a subgenre. Since Bill Unwin is disturbed by what he sees as the inauthenticity prevalent in the late twentieth century, he looks for authenticity in the

Victorian world of his ancestor, which is a futile attempt. The inauthenticity of the whole text is highlighted by Michael Cox at the very beginning of *The Meaning of the Night* (2006), where the fictional editor J. J. Antrobus notes that "the following work" mixes fact and fiction and signs the preface as "Professor of Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction" (1, 3). Likewise, when Frobisher suspects the authenticity of the Victorian journal, it is in one sense Mitchell who calls into question the authenticity of Ewing's narrative. However, the fact that Mitchell puts ethical and political messages in this particular narrative more forcefully than the other narratives, as will be explored later on, draws attention to the possibility of a potential hidden in historical narratives in spite of the fact that there can be something shifty about their authenticity. Furthermore, it should be noted that Ewing's account is closer to a plausible version of the past when compared to that of Bill Unwin. Therefore, it can be said that the truthfulness of his account is not totally debunked by the novel even though Mitchell raises questions about history writing through this journal.

Beside Frobisher's scepticism, the fact that the journal has some footnotes challenges "the supposed transparency of representation" in the journal and invites the reader to ask whether "it is (or was) ever possible to have unmediated access to reality: have we ever known the 'real' except through representations?", in Hutcheon's words on postmodernist fiction (*Politics* 7, 31). Hutcheon contends that employing footnotes is one of the "'paratextual' conventions" of history writing (*Politics* 79). Mitchell's novel uses this convention in order to raise questions about the referentiality of the journal and, by extension, narrated history. Poisoned by Goose, who claims that there is a worm in Ewing's brain, Ewing falls sick. In a state of "delirium" and awaiting death, Ewing addresses his son and writes about how regretful he feels for dying alone away from his family: "I thought of you & your mother with constant fondness & should it come to pass […]" (*CA* 504, 501). He leaves the last sentence incomplete. In a footnote, Jackson, his son, says that "[h]ere my father's handwriting slips into spasmodic illegibility" (*CA* 501). This footnote reveals that the past depicted in Ewing's journal is a construction because it is edited and organized by his son. While this recalls the mixture of fact and fiction in Swift's novel, it must be noted that, unlike the overtly controlling narrator Bill Unwin, Ewing does not

manipulate the facts he hears about the colonized peoples. He is a reliable narrator, unlike Unwin.

Like *Ever After*, *Cloud Atlas* is concerned with the historical sublime and the unrepresentable event. In between Sonmi's and Zachry's stories, an event called "the Fall" takes place. Scott A. Dimovitz, in an essay on the postmodern apocalypse in Mitchell's works, observes that the stories in *Cloud Atlas* "lack the moment of destruction" (2). While the novel reflects on "the effects of apocalyptic events", it does not depict "what actually caused the obliteration of most of humanity and the deadlanding of most of the planet" (Dimovitz 2). When considered from the vantage point of Zachry's story, the Fall is a historic event, a global catastrophe. Only the Valleysmen, a few other tribes, and the Prescients have managed to escape the Fall. It might be argued that there are many clues in Sonmi's story through which the reader can guess the reasons why this event has taken place. However, the novel does not or perhaps cannot describe the event itself, recalling the treatment of the Second World War in *Ever After*. The Fall can be an ecological disaster, a nuclear explosion, radiation, food scarcity, or a combination of all of these factors. In not representing the event itself, the novel "reinforces a radical epistemological indeterminacy" (Dimovitz 3), similar to the ambiguity revolving around the suicide of the Colonel in *Ever After*.

In *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), Brian McHale reflects on some postmodernist writers' interest in "the theme of nuclear holocaust" and the representational problem concerning the apocalypse (262). He argues that postmodernist fiction cannot represent nuclear apocalypse in realistic terms, and it displaces this unimaginable event (160). Nuclear apocalypse, he says, can be displaced "onto some other apocalypse scenario, some other form of large-scale or global disaster", or it can be displaced "to distant places or times" (160). The text can allude to the displaced apocalypse through metafictional strategies, such as the destruction of a text or a library, which refer to the destruction of the world (McHale 162). From this perspective, the Fall, projected onto an indeterminate time and place, that is, in between Nea So Copros and Hawaii, in between a near-future and a distant future, is the displaced apocalypse. When considered retrospectively from the post-

apocalyptic future of the sixth story, it is a chaotic part of history, which has somehow brought about the end of "the Civ'lize Days" (*CA* 246). Zachry does not know how the ship of the Prescients survived the Fall. He assumes that the Prescients know what happened but withhold knowledge from the tribes living on the Big I. When he questions Meronym about who "tripped the Fall", she says:

> *Old Uns tripped their own Fall. […] Old Uns' Smart mastered sicks, miles, seeds an' made miracles ord'nary, but it didn't master one thing, nay, a hunger in the hearts o' humans, yay, a hunger for more. […] Oh, more gear, more food, faster speeds, longer lifes, easier lifes, more power,'yay. Now the Hole World is big, but it weren't big 'nuff for that hunger what made Old Uns rip out the skies an' boil up the seas an' poison soil with crazed atoms an' donkey 'bout with rotten seeds so new plagues was borned an' babbits was freak birthed. Fin'ly, bit'ly, then quicksharp, states busted into bar'bric tribes an' the Civ'lize Days ended, 'cept for a few folds'n'pockets here'n'there, where its last embers glimmer.* (*CA* 272-273; emphasis in original)

Although the Prescients have some knowledge about the Fall, the explanation *provided by* Meronym does not clarify the event itself. Neither Zachry nor Mitchell's readers can understand or visualize the event which took place "quicksharp". The way in which the few remaining tribes have managed to escape the Fall is not explained, either because the fittingly named Fall is an unrepresentable limit event, much like the Second World War and Matthew's encounter with the remains of an ichthyosaur in *Ever After*.

On another occasion, when Meronym is asked to tell "a Prescient yarnie", she refers to the Fall again and tells a story about "when the Fall was fallin', humans f'got the makin' o' fire" (*CA* 284). This story is about a crow which brings fire from a volcano and, in so doing, helps humankind to remember how to make a fire. When she finishes the story, Zachry thinks, "times are less sense is more sense" (*CA* 285). Her story does not explain the Fall itself but once more displaces it onto an allegory. Mitchell's novel resembles other neo-Victorian novels which deal with historical traumas in that it cannot represent the limit event in realistic terms but cannot not deal with it, either. As they are haunted by these events, these novels can only allude to it or displace it onto another realm. In so doing, they point to history as chaos and nightmare and draw attention to the difficulty of capturing this chaos in historical

narratives. It might initially seem that the apocalypse Mitchell alludes to in the sixth narrative does not have anything to do with the Victorian story. However, the hunger for more mentioned by Meronym is most apparent in the Victorian narrative in the portrayal of the British Empire's hunger for more money and land, and in the English doctor's hunger for more money due to which he poisons Ewing. The destruction of the natural environment of the natives by the colonizers, which recurs as the poisoning of seas in other stories, similarly signals British colonialism's indirect contribution to the Fall.

As suggested in the beginning of this section, Sachs's theory of actual and virtual pasts in "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery" is traceable in the treatment of historiography and narrated history in the whole novel. The novel contests the assumption that the archive and official history are sites where the truth awaits to be discovered. It points to the fictionality of history, blurring the line between fact and fiction. It also deals with the unrepresentable event, indicating the impossibility of telling historical traumas and the past as it was in a causal and coherent narrative. These points are indicative of the novel's deconstructive attitude towards the Victorian past and history. Nevertheless, Mitchell's novel has a lot more to say on the Victorian age and larger history, as will be examined in the sections that follow.

4.3. The History of Predation

This and the following analyses will focus on David Mitchell's concern with history in the sense of past deeds (experiential history) in *Cloud Atlas* and the novel's reconstructive attitude towards the Victorian past and history. This section aims to explore "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" in order to demonstrate the *image* of the Victorian past evoked in the novel and the relationship between this image and history envisioned in the novel. This study argues that Mitchell revisits the Victorian age through a postcolonial neo-Victorian lens mainly to reveal and debunk the myths that legitimized imperialism and colonialism and also to provide a glimpse into the Victorian past. While showing British imperialism as a major historical wrong on a global scale, the novel demonstrates that the will to power of the Empire starts a cyclical history of predation (history as past events depicted in the whole novel). The

study suggests further that the novel points to the possibility of historical knowledge and underlines the value of narratives through its engagement with the Victorian narrative and through the connections it draws between this and the other five narratives. The possibility and the importance of historical knowledge the writer suggests have been overlooked by scholars; and Mitchell's emphasis on the importance of narratives has been noted by several critics[28] but not in relation to their capacity to provide historical knowledge. This analysis is intended to fill in these gaps in the existing scholarship on *Cloud Atlas*.

While writing *Cloud Atlas,* Mitchell was influenced by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), especially his two closely related concepts, namely, "the will to power" and "eternal recurrence", as maintained by some scholars who have written on the novel (Childs and Green 35; Edwards 193), and also as self-reflexively pointed out by the text itself (*CA* 84, 128, 444, 461, 471). These two concepts pervade the novel's portrayal of history in the sense of past deeds. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche defines "the will to power" as "an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc." (333). He argues that every organism "strives to become master over all space and to extend its force", and this force is "its will to power" (*The Will* 340). In other words, life, individuals, societies, and the world at large are driven by tensions produced by a struggle between the strong and weak forms of the will to power on every level: ideologies, states, various regimes, and institutions. Closely linked to the principle of the will to power is the philosopher's concept of "eternal recurrence". In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche puts forward a thought experiment: whether an individual can bear the burden of an endless cycle of repetition, that is, the recurrence of the life he or she has experienced (194-195). Concerning history as past deeds, eternal recurrence indicates a cyclical temporality. Richard Schacht underlines this point in *Nietzsche* (1983) when he says that the idea of eternal recurrence expresses Nietzsche's "complete rejection of all views according to which the world develops in some sort of linear, teleological manner, proceeding toward

[28] For example, Treasa De Loughry says that "the latter half of the novel […] suggests that the recirculation and transmission of previous narratives and characters […] can change the course of the future" (143). However, she discusses the novel's attitude towards "storytelling" in relation to its "environmental consciousness" (143) rather than historical knowledge and consciousness.

some pre-established final goal or end-state" (254). Schacht elucidates this idea as follows: "the great cycle through which the world repeatedly passes during which increasingly complex forms of 'higher potency' emerge" only to "give way to a broad-scale movement in the opposite direction" (256). Then, the eternal recurrence of history means a ceaseless repetition of the same, a perpetually repeating chain of events: a constant war between the weak and strong forms of the will to power, the rise and fall of civilization, advancement and regression, good and evil.

Mitchell reworks these two ideas in the whole novel and portrays a cyclical history of predation in various forms. Importantly, predation and the subjugation of the other start with the Victorian narrative. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that "[i]t should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (243). In a similar line of thought, Elizabeth Ho remarks that "we remember […] the nineteenth century as the apex of the British imperial project", and she adds, "the nineteenth-century British past cannot be thought of as separate from neo-imperial presents and futures" (5, 6). Drawing upon Spivak and Ho, it can be argued that for Mitchell, who adopts a postcolonial neo-Victorian agenda in this Victorian narrative, it is impossible to rewrite the nineteenth century without remembering the Empire and the colonial project. Therefore, it is no surprise that *Cloud Atlas* engages with the will to power of the British Empire in its portrayal of world history.

Ewing's journal registers the repressed story of the Moriori tribe that underwent genocide at the hands of the Maori and the British Empire backing them. It is also an account of the workings of colonialism and its effects on the other colonized societies he visits on his way back to America. David Mitchell says that when writing the first narrative, he has drawn upon a historical work, *A Land Apart* (1990) by the historian Michael King, which "provides a factual account of Chatham Islands history" (*CA*, "Acknowledgments"). This statement makes clear that the novel strives to uncover some truths about the colonial past. Kohlke and Gutleben state that "few individuals outside New Zealand, apart from anthropologists and historians specialising in the southern Pacific, would likely have heard of the genocide of the

Moriori before David Mitchell's […] *Cloud Atlas*" ("Introduction" 19-20). This suggestion indicates that the novel *does manage* to convey some historical knowledge about the tragic history of these colonized peoples even as it questions the traditional assumptions about history and history writing, as explained in the previous sections. Then, it can be claimed that *Cloud Atlas*, like many other neo-Victorian works concerned with overlooked events and silenced peoples, responds to Paul Ricoeur's call to write "a kind of parallel history of […] victimisation, which would counter the history of success and victory" (10) by providing a glimpse into the histories of Moriori people, the other colonized communities Ewing visits, and the will to power of the British Empire. Writing a parallel history (not necessarily a history of victimization) and uncovering some truths are indicative of an attempt to reconstruct the past in meaningful ways, which is evident in neo-Victorian works closer to the neo-realist end of the spectrum. Hence the in-betweenness of this novel in this spectrum.

Mitchell's target is made clear in the very first sentence of Ewing's journal when he mentions seeing "a trail of recent footprints" on the shore (*CA* 3). The journal points to the extent of imperial expansion through this allusion to a canonical text, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is "commonly regarded as the first novel of colonialism" (Wallhead and Kohlke 218). While the footprints Crusoe sees are supposed to belong to the "savages" in that novel, those Ewing sees on the shore belong to a white man whose "nationality was no surprise. If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote, that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw" (*CA* 3). This man is Henry Goose, a doctor from London, who searches for cannibals' teeth. At the very beginning of the novel, then, Mitchell reveals the themes that will recur in the cyclical history depicted in the whole novel: predation, exploitation, savagery versus civilization, progress and regression, and the capitalist system.

The journal of Ewing makes clear that the Moriori tribe was a pacifist community that lived on the Chatham Islands and underwent a massacre at the hands of the Maori, another native tribe. What lies behind this massacre is the British Empire's expansion, the displacement of the Maori by the colonizers, and the white man's

passivity in the face of the mass-slaughter of one tribe by another. The Victorian narrative also registers the cultural and environmental disasters that the colonial conquest caused. With the advent of the white man, the Moriori lands were destroyed. The sealers killed the seals and "clear[ed] the land by bushfires" (*CA* 13). The whalers brought cats and rats, which ate birds' eggs, the food of the native tribe (*CA* 13). Spies despoiled "holy sites" (*CA* 13). The will to power of the colonizers led to the destruction of cultural traditions, natural environment, and food resources of the natives. Instead of "civilization", it brought disease, enslavement, and genocide to the natives. Although Ewing hears several different accounts concerning the Moriori tribe, these accounts all point to the fact that these peoples were massacred due to the imperial expansion of Britain. The fact that in this novel the eternal recurrence of predation starts with a focus on the Empire underscores Britain's culpability, its role in shaping the history of the Moriori and, indirectly, the future history of humanity depicted in the whole novel.

While the novel remembers the history of the colonized peoples, it debunks the ideologies justifying the imperialist cause. One of the most important assumptions that legitimized the colonial project in the eye of the British was the mission of civilizing the savages. This mission stems from and reinforces the assumed superiority of those who civilize and the inferiority of those who need to be civilized. The novel dismantles this assumption in several ways.

Firstly, by portraying the way of life of these supposedly primitive people, the novel subverts the stereotypical images of dark-skinned others, such as "irrational", "savage", "primitive", "barbaric", which were prevalent in Victorian writings. Such homogenizing images were dominant both in the sphere of Victorian literature, i.e. the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*, and in the spheres of Victorian science, anthropology, history, and politics among others, as brilliantly explored by Patrick Brantlinger in *Dark Vanishings* (2003). Mitchell presents the Moriori's "unique pacific creed" (*CA* 12), which renders them more civilized than the Europeans. Before the advent of the colonizers and the missionaries, they lived according to the principle "Thou Shalt Not Kill" (*CA* 12). This is a principle embraced by Christianity. D'Arnoq says that these "noble savages" framed an "oral 'Magna Carta' to create a harmony unknown

elsewhere for the sixty centuries since Adam tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge" (*CA* 12). Unlike the British, they did not dream of other lands. As they were foragers, their lifestyle was in perfect harmony with the natural environment. Tellingly, "'Moriori' means, simply, 'People'", which implies their respect for human life (*CA* 11). They embraced such values as hospitality and generosity. Moreover, these supposedly primitive people had a parliament where important issues concerning the whole tribe were debated. When the Maori tribe moved to their island in large numbers, Moriori men came together in this parliament to negotiate what to do. It is due to their decision to abide by their "creed of Peace" that they were slaughtered by the Maori (*CA* 14). By debunking the stereotypical images of dark-skinned peoples dominant in the period, the novel contests racist Victorian accounts concerning racial others and presents insights into this rather underrepresented and hitherto forgotten community. The other narratives reconfigure this engagement in different ways and contexts, which, in turn, enables the novel to envision alternative forms of togetherness between characters from various backgrounds.

As the above-mentioned disciplines, i.e. Victorian science, religion, literature, often reinforced and supported one another when the issue was the Empire, it is no surprise that postcolonial neo-Victorian novels employ representatives of these disciplines in their critique of the colonial past of Britain. Likewise, Mitchell's novel lends a voice to the Westerners, the strong forms of the will to power, so as to reveal their mindset. The employment of an English doctor, Henry Goose, and an English missionary, Preacher Horrox, is the second strategy Mitchell uses to lay bare and dismantle the ideologies that advocated the colonial project.[29] Goose, an English doctor, stands for Victorian racist science and the will to power of the Empire. According to Goose, "[f]riendship between races […] can never surpass the affection between a loyal gundog & its master" (*CA* 37). His mantra is: "Eat or be eaten" (*CA* 490). His perception of the world is shaped by a racial hierarchy which derives from social

[29] The figures of the Victorian scientist and clergyman are used to diverse ends in neo-Victorian fiction. While texts with a deconstructive agenda can employ these figures to reveal the limits of historical knowledge, as demonstrated in the analysis of *Ever After*, postcolonial neo-Victorian works, such as Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000) and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), employ them to unveil the ways in which science and religion (Christianity) worked to legitimize the atrocities that took place in the colonies of the Empire.

Darwinism and justifies the will to power of the Empire. Mitchell's critique of the Empire is evident in the portrayal of Goose as the villain in this story. Ewing initially sees Goose as "the only other gentleman on this latitude", "an exemplary healer", his "loyal doctor", a friend and a "gentle Christian" (*CA* 5, 18, 500, 490). Towards the end of the voyage, however, he realizes that Goose is a "trickster", a "fiend" (*CA* 503, 504). Goose befriends the notary in order to possess his money and a lease of an estate which, he assumes, Ewing keeps in his trunk. Just like the Empire that preys on indigenous peoples, Goose preys on the notary. When the naïve Ewing realizes the intentions of Goose, Goose defends himself as follows:

> Where is the mystery? 'But, Henry, this is wicked!' But, Adam, the world *is* wicked. Maoris prey on Moriori, Whites prey on darker-hued cousins, fleas prey on mice, cats prey on rats, Christians on infidels, first mates on cabin boys, Death on the Living. 'The weak are the meat, the strong do eat.' (*CA* 503; emphasis in original)

Anticipating Nietzsche's idea of the will to power and the Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest, Goose believes that the world is a stage where a drama of the will power is played out. One has to subjugate the other in order not to be subjugated himself. The idea of a recurrent history of predation would seem only natural to the likes of the fittingly named Goose. This belief is a justification for his attempt to kill another man and for colonialism. As such, it reflects a dominant Darwinian assumption in the Victorian period that Brantlinger mentions: the extinction of certain races, just as that of certain species, was a natural phenomenon (167-170).

Goose frequently speaks about and is associated with parasites. He claims that Ewing has a parasitical worm inside his brain, which will kill him. "Contrasting the endemic nature of the worm in the exotic Pacific Islands with the Western sureties of science, Goose easily seduces Ewing into thinking he has a cure for the tropics" (Mezey 81). His cure, which is poison, can be thought as standing for the cure of British colonizers, that is, "enlightening" and "saving" the natives, such as the Moriori and the Maori. Postmodernist theorists, such as Lyotard, point out the effects of this assumed cure, such as genocides, the two world wars, the Holocaust and historical traumas visited on the other. Aware of these consequences, neo-Victorian novels like *Cloud Atlas* criticize the "imperial ontology and epistemology" through the figure of

the Victorian scientist because, in his hands, cure means curse (Eve 59). Meanwhile, they deconstruct the grand narrative of science, Victorian science in particular, which promised a better future and civilizational advancement, albeit at the cost of the lives of dark-skinned others.

Importantly, despite being the arch-villain in this story, Goose articulates some facts about the colonial project. It seems that Mitchell partly speaks through him when Goose reflects on the reason why it is the British Empire whose will to power shapes the world:

> Our weaponry was not dropped onto our laps one morning. […] 'But why us Aryans? Why not the Unipeds of Ur or the Mandrakes of Mauritius?' Because […] of all the world's races, our love -or rather our *rapacity*- for treasure, gold, spices & dominion, oh, most of all, sweet dominion, is the keenest, the hungriest, the most unscrupulous! This rapacity, yes, powers our Progress […] I feel only gratitude that my Maker cast me on the winning side. (*CA* 489; emphasis in original)

Of course, the last comment by Goose in this quotation runs contrary to Mitchell's and the novel's general approach. Nevertheless, this crucial passage undermines the notions of progress and the civilizing mission and exposes the sinister agenda of the Empire. The Enlightenment narrative of progress legitimizes imperial expansion at the expense of the lives of the indigenous people. Through Goose, who stands for the Empire, the novel shows how the grand narrative of progress and the civilizing mission turned out to be a means of exploiting the non-Western other. In other words, it provides an insight into the reasons why the West was interested in foreign lands in the first place, thereby communicating some historical knowledge. Therefore, Goose and the other colonizers in this narrative are, in a sense, the "Old Uns" who cause the Fall in between the fifth and the sixth narratives (*CA* 272), which is suggestive of the effects of British colonialism in the long run.

As science and religion were inseparable fields of knowledge that "often reinforced each other" in justifying the colonial project (Brantlinger 70), neo-Victorian novels concerned with the Empire often juxtapose the figure of the scientist and a man of religion. In *Cloud Atlas,* Preacher Horrox, an English missionary and a merchant, is employed to unveil the underbelly of the Empire and delegitimize the grand narrative

of Christianity. Horrox's theory of "Civilization's Ladder" provides the reader with some racist assumptions popular in the Victorian age, while revealing the function of the missionaries and men of religion in the colonial history of Britain. The fittingly named Horrox explains his theory as follows:

> [G]od, in our Civilizing World, manifests himself not in the Miracles of the Biblical Age, but in Progress. It is Progress that leads Humanity up the ladder towards Godhead. No Jacob's Ladder this, no, but rather 'Civilization's Ladder', if you will. Highest of all the races on this ladder stands the Anglo-Saxon. The Latins are a rung or two below. Lowers still are Asiatics -a hardworking race, none can deny, yet lacking our Aryan bravery. […] Lower down, we have the Negro. Good-tempered ones may be trained to work profitably, though a rumbunctious one is the Devil incarnate! The American Indian, too, is capable of useful chores on the Californian *barrios* […] the Pacific Islander may, with careful instruction, acquire the 'A-B-C' of literacy, numeracy & piety, thereby surpassing the Negroes to rival Asiatics in industriousness. […] Last, lowest & least come those 'Irreclaimable Races,' the Australian Aboriginals, Patagonians, various African peoples &c., just one rung up from the great apes & so obdurate to Progress that, like mastodons & mammoths, I am afraid a speedy 'knocking off the ladder' - after their cousins, the Guanches, Canary Islanders & Tasmanians- is the kindest prospect. […] Nature's Law & Progress move as one. Our own century shall witness humanity's tribes fulfil those prophecies writ in their racial traits. The superior shall relegate the overpopulous savages to their natural numbers. Unpleasant scenes may ensue, but men of intellectual courage must not flinch. A glorious order shall follow, when all races shall know & aye, embrace, their place in God's ladder of civilization. (*CA* 487-488; emphasis in original)

The color of their skin and what Europeans see as their lack of industriousness render the natives non-human for the likes of Preacher Horrox. The conquest of their lands and their enslavement by European colonizers are only a natural outcome, a divinely ordained process, according to the Preacher. The advocation of genocide by a man of religion is shocking to Ewing but arguably, not to the reader who have some knowledge about the colonial past. As Horrox says, some indigenous communities have already been exterminated since they were deemed as "mammoths", unable to make any progress. In these respects, his theory is a reflection of the Victorian Robert Knox's racist theories which, Brantlinger notes, legitimized the extinction of these "lowest" races, their cultures, and traditions, and which influenced the "theories of race in the 1850s and 1860s" (40). Horrox's theory articulates the nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific understanding of races, an understanding that divided humankind into white and black. By employing a character who articulates

Knox's theories and reveals the mindset of many colonizers at the time, the novel displays its commitment to the Victorian context.

The novel's commitment to the Victorian context is also made clear when Horrox mentions "the kindest prospect" because, like Goose, he articulates the "extinction discourse", which propagated, even as it seemed to lament, "the inevitable disappearance of some or all primitive races" in the Victorian period (Brantlinger 1). Brantlinger says that this discourse was "performative" since it announced "the myth" of natives' "total extinction", which, in turn, justified the British rule in foreign lands (4, 3). A similar announcement is discernible in Horrox's theory that *predicts* what will happen in the future in a way that authoritatively attempts to determine what will count as history. This is a history which will not include dark-skinned others because they are doomed to extinction. Brantlinger thinks that extinction discourse assigned "primitive races to futureless past", a "prehistory", which eradicated the possibility of a future history for them (2, 26). He exemplifies this through the association of dark-skinned people with "Stone Age", which creates "the illusion" that these "peoples, races, or cultures are unable to speak in the present and the future tenses of history" (2). In his book, Brantlinger makes clear the mutual influence between history and the racist theories postulated in the other spheres of knowledge such as science and anthropology. Mitchell subverts the attempt of the likes of Horrox, who placed the natives outside the sphere of history, by depicting a bond of friendship between Autua and Ewing and by providing Autua, by implication, the Moriori with a future, albeit in America. The postcolonial perspective adopted in the Victorian narrative enables the author to write a more inclusive history of the colonial period and to provide these people with a future history, albeit in the sphere of fiction. This again points to the novel's reconstructive stance on history and the Victorian age.

In addition, the novel reflects how capitalism and the colonial project went hand in hand in the Victorian past. The missionaries were assumed to turn "heathen races" to God's way, the true path, in the Victorian era. That is why Preacher Horrox associates the progress of humanity with Christianity. Ironically, however, the Preacher makes a deal with the captain of the *Prophetess* right after the postulation

of his theory. The Captain pays a visit to the island to chart a new trade route. The Captain advises Preacher Horrox to sell commodities in California rather than England. He says that California is "a reliable market closer to the Societies" than London, and that the "commodities" grown in their "plantations may fetch a fair price" in California (*CA* 480). The Preacher accepts this offer and changes the trade route after making some calculations. By juxtaposing the Preacher's theory with the deal about a new trade route he makes with the Captain, the novel lays bare how capitalism and imperialism supported one another in the Victorian age, which is factual.

Brantlinger says that in the nineteenth century, "one supposedly peaceful antithesis of savagery", which was "also synonymous with civilization", was commerce; and he adds, "the use of money" divided "civilization from savagery" (31, 32). In *Cloud Atlas*, the episode about the smoking school in Raiatea reveals how the colonizers "rescued" the natives from "savagery" and how they "tamed" these peoples. When Ewing visits a church on the island, he witnesses a show of "informal religiosity": fifty natives in the church puff on a pipe while a white man in the pulpit sermonizes about how to smoke (*CA* 481). Ironically, "hundreds of Holy Bibles printed in Polynesian" are kept in a cabinet untouched by these natives. Wagstaff, one of the missionaries, explains the purpose of the "Nazareth Smoking School" to the puzzled Ewing: a typical native "spurns industry because he's got no reason to value money. […] But by instilling in the slothful so-an'-sos a gentle craving for this harmless leaf, we give him an incentive to earn money, so he can buy his baccy […] from the Mission trading post" (*CA* 482). Although the American notary and the English missionary think that this plan is "ingenious" (*CA* 482), this episode sheds light on the motive of some missionaries and provides another perspective on the "progress of civilization". By making the natives addicted to tobacco, the church ensures that they work on plantations and earn enough to pay for tobacco. The church makes profit in each way. By introducing another (Western) way of life, capitalism, to the natives, the church contributes to the maintenance of both colonial domination and the capitalist system, in other words, Britain's will to power.

In these episodes, the novel raises the question of what "progress" means, which recurs in the following narratives. The progress of civilization was what the imperial

expansion was supposedly for: enlightening dark-skinned others and bringing "civilization" to them so that they would be rescued from their "barbaric" way of life and make some progress. Civilizational progress meant, in other words, adopting the qualities and capacities that Westerners had, such as being Christian, "[m]odernization into or through the capitalist mode of production", valuing work, owning property, and "composing written histories" (Brantlinger 35, 126, 172). *Cloud Atlas* shows this Victorian understanding of progress as a *myth* that served either the imperial project or the personal ends of those who used it.

In the Victorian narrative, it seems that it is Preacher Horrox who determines what progress is according to his own standards, just as it was the Western world that determined its meaning in the nineteenth century (in fact, in many ways in today's world, too). For Horrox, it means the British Empire's legitimate domination of the Eastern world. Progress is related to the industriousness of the native. Progress is achieved when the natives work and produce commodities on plantations and when the missionaries like Horrox make profit by selling these commodities. Progress is capitalism, the economic growth of the Empire. Progress is the expansion of the Empire, possessing more lands, exploiting the natural resources of the colonial lands and the labour force of the slaves. This understanding of progress is what the novel calls "hunger for more", that is, greed (*CA* 272). And hunger for more leads to predation. As the Preacher guesses, unpleasant scenes follow from this hunger. The novel presents these unpleasant scenes through Luisa's fear two books later that the flawed nuclear reactor can "turn Southern California into Hiroshima" (*CA* 118) and more clearly in the hyper-capitalism and environmental disasters in the dystopian world of Sonmi. The collapse of civilization and the ensuing regression to barbarism in the sixth book are, then, only the logical results of the progress as understood by those like Preacher Horrox. In one sense, the regression of civilization in the distant future takes root in the Victorian narrative, specifically in the imperial myth of progress. Therefore, it can be claimed that this imperial myth has a major role in the whole novel's bleak vision of the cyclical history of predation because it and, through it, the Victorian narrative become points of origin. As also noted by Wallhead and Kohlke (217) and Ho (198), the colonial past emerges as the origin of

the disasters and calamities depicted in the following narratives. Hence the centrality of the Victorian narrative to the novel.

The novel undermines the Victorian understanding of progress by subverting the tropes of cannibalism and savagery (Knepper, "Toward a Theory" 103; Ng 107, 108). Although Goose and Ewing think that the natives are or can be cannibals, the above-mentioned theories of Goose and Horrox demonstrate that the Western discourses on cannibalism, savagery, and primitiveness are means for Europeans to justify their ends. Figuratively speaking, Europeans engage in cannibalism by preying on other human beings, which is made clear through the advocation of genocide by Preacher Horrox and the attempt of Goose to murder Ewing. The subversion of the savage versus the civilized dichotomy is evident in the depiction of savage Europeans and peace-loving natives. In stark contrast to Goose's preying on Ewing is the rescue of Ewing by the stowaway Autua. Although Ewing initially thinks that this "savage" man can eat him, Autua turns out to be his saviour. Thus, the novel makes room for the will to power of the colonized character, along with the will to power of the Western characters discussed above. Autua's resistance to the tyranny (due to the British rule) in his land, in other words, his will to power is also discernible in his escape from his own land. He manages to survive and begin a new life in America. That he changes the course of his life reflects his agency as a colonial subject or as a weak form of the will to power.

It can be claimed that the subjugation of racial others and the capitalist system Ewing witnesses on the Chatham Islands form one chapter of the cyclical history of predation depicted in the novel. It bears repetition that the events that take place in the Victorian age reappear in various forms and/or give birth to calamities in the other historical periods the novel depicts. This means that the Victorian narrative *anticipates* and *encompasses* the thematic concerns of the other narratives that follow it, which marks the novel's neo-Victorianism.[30] Though he himself is not always an innocent character, Frobisher in the second story, too, is exploited by his master, who

[30] The Victorian narrative not only anticipates the bleak vision of humanity but also provides the reader with some alternative routes, some resolutions to the problems it depicts, which can help create a better world and future. This point also signals the neo-Victorianism of the novel, and it will be examined in detail in the last section of the analysis.

plagiarizes from the young musician. Frobisher thinks that hanging himself is "preferable to letting the parasite master plunder my talents" (*CA* 457). He does not hang but shoots himself a few days later because he has read Nietzsche and internalized the philosopher's idea of eternal recurrence, which does not give him any hope for a better future. The will to power that causes massacres, wars, and bloodshed in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century reappears through predatory multinational corporations in the third story set in the second half of the twentieth century. Alberto Grimaldi, the corrupt CEO of Seaboard Corporation, enjoys his "mastery over others", just like the missionaries and the Preacher in the Victorian narrative, even though he knows his will to power can lead to an explosion and "deaths by radiation poisoning" (*CA* 129, 128). In the near future portrayed in the fifth story, the clones' enslavement and execution are a direct echo of the genocide of the Moriori, as is the massacre and enslavement of the Valleysmen at the hands of the Kona tribe in the post-apocalyptic world of the sixth story. All this shows that Mitchell's novel portrays the recurrence of historical wrongs in its six stories, each of which is a different but related version of a particular historical wrong: British imperialism.

In her essay entitled "Practice Reading for the Apocalypse: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* as Warning Text" (2015), Jennifer Rickel claims that each narrative that appears in the following one functions as a "textual warning", which fails to affect a change for the diegetic reader or audience due to his or her "exceptionalist logic" (159, 160). By this term, she means that each protagonist, who reads, watches, or listens to the preceding narrative, sees the violence and oppression depicted in it as something that belongs to the sphere of fiction without perceiving the exploitation that goes on around him or herself (Rickel 161). She contends that Mitchell warns the reader against this exceptionalism and notes that "enact[ing] the possibilities that literature such as *Cloud Atlas* offers" is very difficult "under neoliberal capitalism" (174, 159). Although her focus in the essay is not on the novel's concern with history, Rickel's suggestion that the novel functions as a "warning text" (161) has critical implications concerning the treatment of history as past events in the novel.

Firstly, the fact that the Victorian narrative, the first warning text in the novel, indirectly reappears in the post-apocalyptic world of Zachry implicitly draws

attention to the impact of British colonialism on the regression of humanity and the ramification of the lack of historical consciousness. In this way, the novel underscores that if contemporary societies do not draw some lessons from the past, they can face various calamities in the future. Then, historical accounts, such as Ewing's journal, can convey historical knowledge, albeit partially. In this respect, it can be argued that the postcolonial neo-Victorian agenda adopted in the Victorian narrative, which turns Ewing's journal into a warning text, at least partly, enables the novel to go beyond certain postmodernist implications such as the (over-)emphasis on the textuality of history and the problematization of the notion of historical knowledge, which are embraced by many neo-Victorian novels close to the metafictional end of the spectrum.

Mitchell places emphasis on the act of remembering and its role in structuring a better future primarily through the Victorian narrative, which will be examined in detail in the analysis that follows. At this point, it is worth mentioning that, as Wallhead and Kohlke rightly contend, in making room for the non-European others, the novel highlights and undermines the Eurocentric bias in Western trauma studies, which take the Holocaust as the paradigmatic limit event (231). According to these critics, the fact that Jewish suffering is inscribed as "*central* to the West's cultural memory of historical violence and suffering" leads to the privileging of "our own cultural denominators as indicators against which to measure what counts as 'real' human trauma worthy of remembrance" (231; emphasis in original). This means that when the Holocaust is considered as the central limit event, the non-white other's suffering is marginalized, deemed less significant, and even forgotten. What is at stake here is remembering one's own traumatic past and forgetting the trauma inflicted by this same group of people, the Western world, on others. *Cloud Atlas* challenges this bias and Eurocentrism by writing a parallel history of and for the Moriori rather than focusing directly on the Holocaust. It suggests that just like the Holocaust, "the arrival of the Europeans in the Pacific was an apocalyptic moment for all indigenous cultures" (Ng 116). As such, the novel intervenes in the debates about what is worth remembering and makes some contributions to cultural memory. In this respect, a comparison can be made between *Ever After* and *Cloud Atlas*. While *Ever After* focuses on the present primarily in terms of the traumatic effect of

the loss of epistemological certainties on Bill Unwin, and while it is not much concerned with the future, *Cloud Atlas* uses the image of the Victorian age it evokes to show the continuation of the same problems on both personal and collective scales across the Victorian era, the twentieth century, a near future, and a distant future. Mitchell suggests that when certain facts are (sometimes deliberately) forgotten, those societies or countries in power can repeat historical wrongs, and it becomes impossible to break the eternal recurrence of a history of predation.

Secondly, and drawing from these suggestions, if Ewing's journal and the whole novel function as warning texts, then it can be claimed that the novel points to the value of narratives in this respect. As Adam Ewing is a witness to the exploitation in his own social milieu, his journal appears in the following narrative as a historical document which sheds some light on what happened in the peripheries of the British Empire in the Victorian past. In one sense, the account of each protagonist turns into a historical account, which reveals or touches upon the socio-political context they find themselves in, when it reemerges in the following narrative. Treasa De Loughry sees the "utopian seeds that reinforce the importance of individual acts of narration and resistance" in the "transmission of resistance actions through storytelling" in *Cloud Atlas* (146). In fact, when a previous narrative reappears in the following one, it does not always enable the transmission of resistance actions. However, regarding the novel's concern with history as past events, it can be claimed that Mitchell seems to value narrative and storytelling because characters, especially the Victorian Adam Ewing, create subversive narratives that have the capacity to challenge the mainstream assumptions of the groups they belong to. These narratives function as warning texts, if not for each one of the protagonists in the narratives that follow, at least, for Mitchell's reader. In addition, the novel invites the reader to political and ethical action *through its six narratives*. Right after Zachry's son invites his addressee to "hold" the orison and "look" at it (*CA* 309), by implication, at a narrative, the novel directs the reader to look back to the past through narratives. This indicates the value of inclusive narratives that provide some insights into human experiences in the past and shed some light on the dark spots of history even as the novel displays the postmodern distrust of narratives. As a warning text, therefore,

Mitchell's novel demonstrates that history and narratives can be of use for us in the present for the future.

Cloud Atlas mines the past and shows British imperialism as a major historical wrong that directly or indirectly leads to the calamities depicted in the other five narratives. It reveals where humanity went wrong in the first narrative and uses this image to reflect on where it may go wrong in the future. While Ewing's journal and the whole novel provide a glimpse into the past, they simultaneously turn into warning texts that invite the reader to draw some lessons from the past. As such, the novel speaks to the external world in a serious manner. The history of predation and its recurrence present a bleak picture regarding the future of humankind and the planet (future history). However, the novel's complex engagement with the three-dimensional history presents some hope for the reader, too, as will be explored in the following analysis.

4.4. Shaping Future History through a New Humanism

In an essay on *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House* by David Mitchell, Wendy Knepper states that the writer "strives to imagine the world as other by awakening *alternatives latent within history* and culture" ("David Mitchell" 166; emphasis added). Awakening alternatives latent within history, more precisely, within the nineteenth century is an important part of the neo-Victorian project, and it is discernible in *Cloud Atlas*, too. While exploring these alternatives, the novel offers some solutions to the problems it presents. This move is a far cry from postmodernism's denouncement of a resolution, which is traceable in many examples of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. This section will explore these alternatives latent within history (as past deeds) and their function as related to the ethical and political aspirations of David Mitchell. It argues that even as it uses experimental narrative techniques and adopts a deconstructive approach to history, *Cloud Atlas* imagines a new sort of humanism, which is significantly reliant on historical consciousness, an awareness of the lived experience of humankind, along with several other factors. It suggests further that the novel envisions progressive history from within cyclical history, which runs contrary to the denouncement of teleology,

causality, and the grand narrative of history in representative examples of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. The novel is a neo-Victorian text due to this departure as well because the neo-Victorian project of moving forward is itself an invitation and a political contribution to historical progress in a renewed sense. The reconfiguration of progress/progressive history and a new kind of humanism constitutes the novel's optimistic vision which sits along the bleak vision of a cyclical history of predation discussed above. This section will focus on the *uses* of the Victorian past and history, the relationship between alternatives latent in the Victorian past and the humanist ends these alternatives serve in the novel, all of which highlight the novel's reconstructive approach to the Victorian past and history. It will also reflect on the relationship between the postcolonial neo-Victorianism of the first narrative and the larger project of the novel. In so doing, it will present another insight into the writer's engagement with the eternal recurrence of history and complement the analysis of the reconstructive attitude of the novel towards history in the sense of past deeds provided in the preceding section.

Mitchell's concern with ethical actions, political agency, and humanism has been observed by many critics writing on *Cloud Atlas* and his other works. Knepper and Hopf argue that Mitchell's novels are "fraught with political and ethical self-consciousness" ("An Introduction" 12). Caroline Edwards notes that Mitchell's is an "optimistic, humanist aesthetics […] expressing a new direction in contemporary British fiction" (179). She contends that contemporary novelists like Mitchell move beyond "the crippling passivity of domestic individualism towards a reformulated vision of community, solidarity and political alternatives", which is indicative of a "shift towards a revised version of humanism" (180). Likewise, Nicholas Dunlop claims that in *Cloud Atlas*, the writer adopts a "humanist, empathic and engaged perspective" as he "embeds postcolonial critiques in his fiction" (205).[31] D'haen states that *Cloud Atlas* advocates a "cosmodern postmodern humanism" (275). Harris-Birtill discusses "the secular humanist attitudes" of Mitchell's works discernible in the emphasis they place on "the shared fate of humanity as a co-

[31] This suggestion is in line with the claim of this study about the relevance of the postcolonial neo-Victorianism of the Victorian narrative to Mitchell's larger ethical project, and its role in the novel's going beyond a completely deconstructive approach. However, in this essay, Dunlop does not discuss the Victorian narrative and history but focuses on Sonmi's narrative and dystopia.

dependent and globally interconnected species", "the role of personal agency", and "compassionate action" throughout her book (15, 26, 153). Each critic interprets this move away from postmodernism's ironic and deconstructive stance by employing different terms, such as a "cosmopolitan" (Schoene 34; McCullogh 16), "metamodern" (Harris-Birtill 151, 155), "transmodern" (Onega and Ganteau 23), "post-postmodern" (Bentley 724) sensibility. What is important for the scope of this study is the common idea implied or acknowledged by most of these critics: Mitchell uses postmodernist narrative techniques to humanitarian and ethical ends as well as to deconstructive ends. These deconstructive ends have been examined in sections 4.1. and 4.2. This part of the study focuses on the humanitarian ends of the novel, aiming to explore the relation between the humanism configured in this novel and the novel's concern with the Victorian past and history, which has often been neglected in the critical works on the humanist twist in *Cloud Atlas*.

While the novel's structure places emphasis on the cyclicality of history from progress to regression, from civilizational and technological advancement to tribalism and ecological catastrophe, *Cloud Atlas* is not completely pessimistic regarding humanity's future. In Nietzschean ideas of eternal recurrence and the will to power, there is room for the resistance of weak forces to appropriation and domination. As Parker notes, "it is not only the will to power that recurs" in the novel; "in counterbalance to the eternal recurrence of predatory behavior, is the eternal recurrence of Ewing's 'good man'" (209). This claim suggests the importance of the Victorian narrative, which critically engages with the imperial past, to the larger project of David Mitchell. The alternatives hidden in this narrative and the reconfiguration of them in different but related ways in the other narratives enable the novel to envision a better future and a new kind of humanism. This study extends Parker's claim and suggests that the recurrence of resistance is connected to not only Ewing's "good man", his transformation due to witnessing colonial atrocities, but also Autua's "good man". Just as Autua represents an alterity to Ewing, the American Ewing is a racial other for Autua. Just as Ewing transgresses the boundaries that define him as a racially superior character, Autua turns to Ewing, a racial other, and helps him in time of need, which means that he, too, transgresses the boundary of race. Therefore, the recurrence of the resistance of the weak forms of the

will to power in the novel can be better understood, if the focus shifts from the American character's approach to the racial other to the formation of a *bond* between these two characters, each of whom represents alterity to the other.

Equally important to the novel's optimism about the future of humanity is the reconceptualization of the notion of progress and progressive history. The boomeranging structure allows the reader to understand each story, even the fifth one set in the future and the sixth one set in a more distant future, as a narrative about the past. The reader is aware of what happens in future history in each move to a former historical period in the second part of the novel. The concept of progress imagined as an alternative to the eternal recurrence of predation is not Preacher Horrox's civilizing mission, which brought about the genocide of indigenous tribes and the erasure of their culture. The reader has already seen the ramifications of this Victorian understanding of progress in the high-tech society of Sonmi's world, which is in many ways similar to the world of the enslaved tribes in Ewing's story.

At this point it is important to note that Mitchell's engagement with temporality is very complex, which has led to various and, at times, contradictory interpretations. For example, Jonathan Boulter, in *Melancholy and the Archive* (2011), contends that through its structure, *Cloud Atlas* presents "a (curious) teleology […], a repeating trajectory from one point of origin (1841) to the end of history and back again" (131). Similarly, in *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century* (2016), Heather J. Hicks states that the treatment of time in this novel is ambivalent in that it "is preoccupied with both cyclical and linear forms of temporality" (67). He remarks that the novel presents "the problems and potential posed by each ontological position" (67). What seems to be a "curious" teleology to Boulter and ambivalence to Hicks is the complex juxtaposition of progressive history and cyclical history in this novel. In *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction* (2012), as different from these two scholars, Fiona McCulloch notes that "the linearity of human civilization collapses into a cyclical route towards entropic exhaustion" in the novel (146-147). The recurrence of capitalism is the reason for the "cyclical return to a regressive primitive state" in the sixth story, according to the critic (McCulloch 157). This study argues that rather than the collapse of linearity into a cyclical route, the novel

paradoxically configures linearity (progress and progressive history) *from within* circularity (the eternal recurrence of the past). Rather than presenting the problems and potential posed by the two understandings of temporality, the novel points to the possibility of progressive history even as it presents the eternal recurrence of a history of predation.

In this respect, this study draws upon Parker's suggestion that this novel imagines progress as "future-thinking" (214). However, while mentioning "the clash between those who desire immediate gratification and those who are future-thinking" in the novel, Parker places emphasis on the future, the "Long Now", defined as: "'thinking, understanding, and acting responsibly over long periods of time'" (210). In other words, she overlooks the equal emphasis the novel places on rethinking the past (history as past deeds), what can be called past-thinking. This study suggests that what Parker calls future-thinking is functional only when it is informed by a simultaneous past-thinking, that is, historical consciousness, as mentioned in the previous section. The novel reveals that "future-thinking" and historical consciousness are equally important for shaping a progressive history.

Mitchell employs powerful symbols and images in order to draw attention to the importance of this double-awareness of both the past and virtual futures. Zachry sees a turtle in a moment of rage. He wants to kill it but decides not to because the turtle's eyes are "so ancient" that "they seen the future" (CA 256). Zachry cannot kill the animal because its *ancient eyes that have seen the future* stand for wisdom. In the sixth narrative, when Meronym talks about the difference between a savage and a civilized individual, she says that while the former "sat'fies his needs now" the latter "sees further" (*CA* 303). As a Prescient, who owns Sonmi's orison, Meronym knows what happened in the past, though she does not share it with Zachry. Her historical consciousness and future-facing awareness render her one of the mouthpieces of the writer. Through her, Mitchell indicates that only such a perception can pave the way for progress as it can avert catastrophes awaiting humanity and the planet. If people insist on their selfishness, like Goose and Preacher Horrox, and focus on only the present state of affairs, they will meet "the unspeakable forms waiting around

history's corner", to use Frobisher's words (*CA* 460). Awareness of these unspeakable forms is the historical consciousness demanded from the reader as well.

The reworked perception of progress entails a change of mindset, political agency, and, as Harris-Birtill emphasizes throughout her work, "future-facing ethical action" and "individual compassionate action", which can become interventions in the future history of the world (90, 157). In *Cloud Atlas*, most of the protagonists and some minor characters display political agency in fighting against the subjugation of the weak and/or in resisting predation in their worlds, which stems from and leads to the transformation of their worldview. For example, at the beginning of the first story, Ewing has a sense of white supremacy as an American. He sees the natives as racial others. He thinks that the black-skinned woman working in the tavern "has a tinge of black blood & I fancy her mother is not far removed from the jungle breed" (*CA* 6). As the whites represent culture and civilization to him, the black woman is associated with nature and savagery. When he sees a public flogging, he is confused about the "bizarre, beelike 'hum'" of the slaves watching this scene, and he denigrates the slaves: "Such inbred, bovine torpor!" (*CA* 6). Recalling the passivity of British settlers in the face of the mass-killing of the Moriori, his reaction to this scene is swooning, not intervention. While his reaction shows his difference from the rest of the whites, this is in one sense a passive reaction. In this episode, "[t]he beaten savage", Autua, casts him a "look of uncanny, amicable knowing" as if he were a performer on a stage who sees a "long-lost friend" (*CA* 7). Although Ewing cannot understand the implication of this amicable look, this moment and that look are arguably the starting point of his awakening. A few days later, when he hears the theory postulated by Horrox, his stance on this theory is ambivalent. On the one hand, he asks, "[s]hould not *we* applaud Mr. Horrox's & his brethren's efforts to assist the Indian's climb up 'Civilization's Ladder'? Is not ascent their sole salvation" (*CA* 492; emphasis added). On the other hand, he does not know the answer because "the surety of my younger years [flew]" (*CA* 492). At this point, it is important to raise the question of who is the "we" that Ewing mentions. Although his newborn scepticism about the colonial project is evident when he says, "[m]aybe the Indians of the Societies & the Chathams would be happiest 'undiscovered'" (*CA* 492), his understanding of "we" does not include the natives yet.

Ewing's understanding of "we" changes when he saves the stowaway Autua from being thrown into the sea and Autua rescues him in return. Autua's help, which is self-sacrifice in one sense because he is the only black man on the ship, completes Ewing's transformation. The native man takes the notary to a Catholic mission in Honolulu, where a nun turns them away due to his skin color. Nevertheless, Autua manages to persuade them by stating that he is "on a *mission* […] *of mercy*" (*CA* 506; emphasis added). Ewing's physical recovery is at the same time a philosophical awakening which he explains as:

> My recent adventures have made me quite the philosopher, especially at night, when I hear naught but the stream grinding boulders into pebbles through an unhurried eternity. My thoughts flow thus. Scholars discern motions in history & formulate these motions into rules that govern the rises & the falls of civilizations. My belief runs contrary, however. To wit: history admits no rules; only outcomes.
>
> What precipitates outcomes? Vicious acts & virtuous acts.
>
> What precipitates acts? Belief. (*CA* 507)

In one sense, he has not been much concerned with the plight of the natives who endure various atrocities up to this moment. This quotation shows that his perception of the world and humanity has shifted from one based on racial differences to another based on the common humanity of all races. Ewing decides to pledge himself to the Abolitionist cause (*CA* 508). This is an alternative cause to the imperialist one, the ramifications of which he has witnessed on the Chathams.

The neo-Victorian novel advocates and practises an ethical turn to the other, evident in the centralization of Victorian others and their silenced stories in these works. Mitchell broadens the scope of the relationship between the self and the other in such a way that addresses all people, various life forms, and the planet itself in the six narratives. In the Victorian story, this other is a Moriori man. It bears repetition that Ewing's understanding of "we" changes mainly due to his encounter with a racial other and the emergence of a bond of friendship between them. Autua's uncanny look in the episode of public flogging "communicated his recognition" of their shared humanity (*CA* 6). Lynda Ng claims that this uncanny look "forces Ewing to acknowledge the slave as an individual" (114). This study contends that this

acknowledgement is a gradual process. Ewing could not comprehend what the slave recognized at that moment, but later, Autua explains it from his perspective: "you seen I, aye - you pity I" (*CA* 26). When the notary swoons, Autua recognizes the white man's turn to him and his care for a black slave. Ewing's "deliverance" by Autua is the logical outcome of this openness to the other, which makes Ewing's rescue a "duty" for Autua (*CA* 506, 502). Ewing says, "Autua insists that had I not prevented him from being tossed overboard as a stowaway he could not have saved me & so, in a sense, it is not Autua who has preserved my life but myself" (*CA* 506). In this crucial passage, the boundary between the self and the other gets blurred. Ewing becomes Autua, and Autua becomes Ewing. The "we" mentioned above now includes the (racial) other. The self and the other get interwoven, forming a whole, a new understanding of "we".

Such an ethical turn to the other is arguably the belief Ewing mentions in the quotation above, the belief in the connectedness of all people regardless of their skin-color and the belief in their shared humanity. This belief, which signals the new kind of humanism envisioned by the writer, precipitates virtuous acts. To Ewing, virtuous individual acts, such as joining the abolitionists, can pave the way for a better future. Importantly, Ewing decides to "begin somewhere" (*CA* 508) and his worldview changes after he learns the history of the Moriori and witnesses atrocities in the colonial space. Beginning somewhere is also an act of future-thinking. It points to his willingness or his attempt to intervene in future history. Ewing has already begun somewhere by looking at the face of the native man in the episode of public flogging. The ensuing ethical actions of both Ewing and Autua, and Ewing's eventual decision to join a collective political action can be traced back to that moment when the self turns to the other and empathizes with the vulnerable and suffering other.

His acquaintances, such as his father-in-law, can look down on Ewing since they see him as a marginal figure, but his marginality is an assertion of political agency, which is necessary to resist the eternal recurrence of predation. A cycle of resistance is built through the actions of the characters in the following narratives. Frobisher, for example, leaves Ayrs upon realizing that his master is preying on him. However, unlike Ewing, who believes in belief, Frobisher is a pessimist and a nihilist. When

reading *Also Sprach Zarahustra*, he feels as if "Nietzsche was reading me, not I him" (*CA* 63). He sees history as the eternal recurrence of bloodshed rather than having faith in the potential of virtuous acts in breaking this vicious cycle. He thinks that there is no escape from the nightmare of history. This is the primary reason for his suicide. In the last letter written just before his suicide, he says, "Rome'll decline and fall again, […] Ewing will sail again, Adrian will be blown into pieces again, you and I'll sleep under Corsican stars again […] Nietzsche's gramophone record. When it ends, the Old One plays it again, for an eternity of eternities" (*CA* 471). He fails to see the warning and the promise Ewing's story presents: a change for better is possible, at least, it is worth fighting for.

Other protagonists assert their agency and resist predation for various reasons, some of which are related to protecting other people. Like Ewing, Luisa in the third narrative differs from the rest of the columnists working for *Spyglass Magazine* as she sets out to expose the design flaw of the nuclear reactor. Her care for other people and the environment transforms her. She is initially a "gossip columnist", but she becomes an investigative journalist like her father (*CA* 91). She is fired from *Spyglass* when Seaboard buys it and tries to silence her. However, she manages to raise public outrage and avert a possible disaster. Timothy Cavendish in the fourth narrative resists the "illegal confinement" in Aurora House (*CA* 177). His escape plan works because he cooperates with some friends entrapped like himself in the nursing home. Sonmi in the fifth narrative is a deviant clone for the Archivist and the Juche. Her ascension, "knowing information no one else […] knew", is the effect of an experiment made on her (*CA* 190). What can be regarded as her class-consciousness, her transformation, takes root when she witnesses the exploitation of other clones, such as Wing□27 and Zizzi, by the purebloods (*CA* 210, 335). Upon seeing the slaughterhouse, where the clones are butchered, she decides to fight against corpocracy by writing a "declaration of rights" (*CA* 346). She says the "logic and ethics" of her work are fed by her experiences, that is, the past (*CA* 347). Her *Declarations* is also a product of future-thinking. Like Autua, who is associated with martyrdom by Ewing (Wallhead and Kohlke 236), she sacrifices herself for the liberty of other clones by cooperating with corpocracy. She makes an ethical choice

when she accepts to cooperate. She lets the regime use herself like a puppet because she sees "a game beyond the endgame":

> Media has flooded Nea So Copros with my Catechisms. Every schoolchild in corpocracy knows my twelve 'blasphemies' now. My guards tell me there is even a talk of a statewide 'Vigilance Day' against fabricants who show signs of the Declarations. My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold. (*CA* 349)

She manages to disseminate her declarations and raise awareness about the ongoing enslavement in Nea So Copros. It is important to underline that she has children, the future, in her mind when she makes this ethical choice. In the sixth story depicting a post-apocalyptic world, Zachry does not trust Meronym, one of the Prescients who visit his tribe twice a year. He thinks that they may be planning to colonize his tribe. When Meronym cures his sister disobeying the rules of her own tribe, a bond of trust and friendship is built between these figures. Zachry and Meronym save one another from death several times in the story. The change of his attitude towards this other, Meronym, saves him from death at the hands of the Kona tribe. As each of these protagonists asserts his or her agency, the cycle of resistance, functioning as a counterbalance to the cycle of predation, gestures towards the possibility of progress towards a better future.

These characters, except for Zachry, have a comet-shaped birthmark, indicating that they are reincarnations of one another, as also implied through the references to rebirth and reincarnation throughout the novel. Although Mitchell is an agnostic and although he says that he does not fully believe in reincarnation, he acknowledges the influence of Buddhism on his writing (Harris-Birtill 176-177). Reincarnation or the transmigration of souls points out one of the main themes of the novel: the interconnectedness of humankind and of other life forms, as mentioned by several scholars (Dillon 13; Childs and Green 26; Edwards 188; McCulloch 162; Harris-Birtill 92). What deserves more scholarly attention is what reincarnation means with regard to the novel's concern with progressive history. The trope of reincarnation points to a cyclical history because it shows that while the strong forms of the will to power shape world history through colonialism, exploitation, and capitalism, the recurrence of resistance to these forces can pave the way for an alternative future. In

other words, the recurrence of resistance, which suggests another kind of cyclical history, can paradoxically turn into or bring about a progressive history. Reincarnation also points to causality in the sense that one character's "past actions are unavoidably connected to -and visible in- the future lives of others" (Harris-Birtill 92). The mistakes of one character have certain results in the life of another character, and the virtuous acts of one character can give birth to a change for the better in another's life. The relation of causality between the protagonists' experiences and between the six narratives reflects the haunting presence of the Victorian age in terms of both different forms of predation (the cyclical history of predation) and versions of Ewing's humanist vision (progressive history) in the narratives that follow.

The theme of reincarnation is underscored through some characters' experiences of *déjà vu*. When Sixsmith and Luisa are entrapped in the elevator, he says, "I feel I've known you for *years*, not ninety minutes" (*CA* 96; emphasis in original). When Luisa hears *Cloud Atlas Sextet* composed by Frobisher in the previous narrative, she thinks that the sound is "spectral, hypnotic … *intimately familiar*" and says, "I *know* this music" (*CA* 408; emphasis in original). Upon reading Frobisher's letters, Luisa thinks of "the images of places and people" in these letters as "memories" (*CA* 120). Drawing upon Kate Mitchell's claims that neo-Victorian novels are "haunted by a desire for the act of historical recollection, the process of remembering" (8), it can be argued that history turns into memory through such experiences of *déjà vu* in the novel perhaps because the history depicted in the novel is the history of humanity, which has several implications. Firstly, the perception of history as memory signals a blurring of the boundary between the private and the public as well as between the self and the other. Secondly, seeing history as memory underlines the importance of remembering, by implication, the significance of historical knowledge and consciousness. Thirdly, this approach ensures that "meanings will continue to be made", albeit "provisional and incomplete", as put by Kate Mitchell (9). This last aspect points out the value of narratives (the Victorian narrative in *Cloud Atlas*, *Cloud Atlas* as a narrative, and the neo-Victorian novel as a subgenre) regarding their capacity to contribute to the historical understanding and consciousness of the reader, as mentioned in the previous section. It bears repetition that this aspect can be

regarded as a return of the narrative and a kind of faith in narratives as an antidote to or in counterbalance to the postmodernist distrust of historical narratives.

From a postcolonial neo-Victorian perspective, the connections between the protagonists in the novel point to the interconnection of the cultures, histories, and futures of different communities. Ewing pledges himself to abolitionism because of his experiences in the colonial space. Thus, the history of the Moriori and those of the British Empire and America are interlinked. Disasters depicted in Sonmi's story, set in what is Korea today, are interlinked to the experimentation with nuclear reactors in San Francisco, where Luisa lives. These experiments cause the ecological disaster depicted in Sonmi's world. Likewise, the Fall, which leads to a regression to tribalism and barbarism in Zachry's story, set in Hawaii, is the result of hyper-consumerism and capitalism in Sonmi's world, and it is an indirect result of the hunger for more prevalent in Ewing's world. Through this cause-and-effect relationship between events taking place in different historical periods and places, the novel points to the connection between the past and the future, too. A change for better or worse in a certain part of the world will inevitably affect the rest of the world and the fate of humanity in the long run. Considering the relevance of the Victorian past to the three-dimensional history (that includes the past, the present, and the future) evoked by the writer and the emphasis placed on the connectedness of all people in the world in each period depicted in the novel, it can be said that the postcolonial attitude adopted in this narrative has some bearing on the larger project of the whole novel.

The connections between characters, the impact of the past on the present and the future, and the connectedness of all people are highlighted through some recurring phrases, images, and symbols in the novel. For instance, describing the Maori master, who flogs Autua, Ewing says, "Lizards mighty & small were tattooed over every inch of the savage's musculature" (*CA* 6). The Kona in Zachry's story similarly carry "whips'n'blades" and have "lizard tattoos" (*CA* 240, 300). The Kona can be regarded as a reincarnation of the Maori because each tribe is war-hungry. Each enslaves and kills the members of a peace-loving tribe. Likewise, both Autua and Sonmi are described through religious terminology, which may suggest that Autua is re-born as

Sonmi. Autua is described as a Christ-like figure in the episode of flogging: "his insensible face bespoke the serenity of a martyr already in the care of the Lord" (*CA* 6). His readiness for martyrdom for the sake of another individual is also traceable in the episode where he tries to rescue Ewing. Sonmi sees herself as a "martyr" since she cooperates with the regime, aware that she will be executed in the end (*CA* 349). These characters resemble the "Crow" in Meronym's yarn in the sixth narrative. The crow dips a stick "in the lake o' flames", the volcano, and brings the burning stick in his mouth "toward home" while "eyes smokin', feathers crispin', beak burnin' . . . *It hurts!* Crow crawed" (*CA* 284-285; emphasis in original). Despite being hurt, it does not drop the burning stick because it is on a mission: to help humans who have forgotten how to make fire and who suffer as a result. While underlining the connectedness of humans and nature, this episode reflects on the cost of forgetting the past. Crow might have dropped the stick, but it does not. Autua might have chosen to ignore the plight of a white man, but he does not. Meronym could have left the wounded Zachry on his own, but she chooses to take him to the ship. The recurrence of such characters, who are attentive to the other's suffering and who act responsibly, suggests that "no tyranny reigns forever" (*CA* 500). It is possible to intervene in the recurrent history of predation by individual "acts of belief", to use D'haen's words (280).[32] Through these recurrent images and symbols, Mitchell depicts various forms of the will to power and different ways of fighting against hegemonic forces in closely connected ways.

Although David Mitchell does not prescribe a certain way to struggle against oppression and predation, there are certain occasions when the reader almost hears the voice of the writer. These occasions are the episodes where a character, major and minor, engages in a philosophical musing. These musings involve the novel's message to the reader. "The possibility of sympathetic reciprocity, which acknowledges co-dependency, is glimpsed *throughout the second-half of Cloud Atlas* as an alternative social principle that could deflect a predatory world from consuming itself" (Childs and Green 34; emphasis added). For the scope of this study, this means philosophical enlightenment entails historical knowledge and

[32] Importantly, D'haen claims that such individual "acts of belief" are "hardly imaginable in classic postmodernist fictions" (280).

awareness about the possible futures that await the reader and the characters. This double awareness can enable one to develop intersubjective bonds like the one between Ewing and Autua and to leave behind antagonisms, greed, and selfishness.

On some occasions, these philosophical musings are about a wise character who knows what happened in the past (albeit partially) and thinks about what might happen in the future. On other occasions, they are experienced by wise characters, who reflect on the fate of humanity. Importantly, the last voice in the novel is Adam Ewing's, which was the first voice as well. He undergoes a transformation in the course of the story, leaving behind his sense of superiority to the natives. The writer seems to call for a similar change of mind in his reader, too. Adam Ewing can be considered as the mouthpiece of Mitchell when he says:

> If we *believe* humanity is a ladder of tribes, a colosseum of confrontation, exploitation & bestiality, such a humanity is surely brought into being, & history's Horroxes, Boerhaaves & Gooses shall prevail. […] Why undermine the dominance of our race, our gunships, our heritage & our legacy? […]
>
> […] Because of this: -one fine day, a purely predatory world *shall* consume itself. […]
>
> If we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* divers races & creeds can share this world […] peaceably […], if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. I am not deceived. It is the hardest of the worlds to make real. […]
>
> A life spent shaping a world I *want* Jackson to inherit, not one I *fear* Jackson shall inherit, this strikes me as a life worth the living. (*CA* 508; emphasis in original)

As implied through his name, *Adam* Ewing stands for wisdom in this episode, which makes his voice an alternative latent in the Victorian past. Significantly, even as the novel calls into question realist representations of the past and the possibility of fully knowing the past, Mitchell in one sense prioritizes a realistic Victorian text, Ewing's journal, at this moment due to the messages it gives and the values, such as equality, peace, and fraternity, it advocates. Through other narratives that reconfigure and develop Ewing's humanist assumptions, such as Zachry's comment on the connectedness of the clouds in the sixth narrative (*CA* 308), the novel establishes a meaningful connection between the Victorian age (Ewing's voice), the present, and

the future. Since Ewing is a (fictional) Victorian writer in one sense, this quotation can also be regarded as an implicit engagement with Victorian writers because some resolutions to today's problems may be hidden in some of their texts, in what they said; or some alternative routes can be found if one figures out why Victorian writers did not say what they repressed.

Ewing's journal makes clear the new humanism envisioned by the writer, and it invites the reader to start somewhere. Harris-Birtill contends that the novel does not offer these small-scale beginnings as a guarantee of change (157). Ethical actions and political agency can turn out to be abortive attempts in the face of the eternal recurrence of exploitation. Ewing acknowledges the difficulty of creating an alternative future. Nevertheless, by simultaneously looking back at the past (the exploitation of the colonized) and to the future (the world his son will inherit), Ewing concludes that fighting for the possibility of an alternative future built on such values as equality, freedom, respect for life and nature, justice, and peace is worth the effort. He knows that his effort may amount to "no more than one drop in a limitless ocean", yet "what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (*CA* 509). The new sort of humanism made manifest through the image of a multitude of drops highlights the interconnectedness of all people regardless of their differences and the interconnectedness of the past, the present, and the future in the ocean of a three-dimensional history.

Moreover, through this quotation, the novel points to certain narratives and values that people may choose to believe in. And this can be considered a major element in this new configuration of humanism. Another major element in this understanding is that it celebrates "individual human life" yet does so "by denying it its traditional centre-stage exposure", according to Berthold Schoene (122). In *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009), Schoene remarks that the community imagined by the novel "respects yet does not single out or fetishise the individual; it accommodates the self and to a certain degree assimilates it within a larger whole" (123). Elaborating further on this claim, this study suggests that while the new kind of humanism configured by the novel puts the individual in the center only *as* a part of a big whole which includes other forms of being, this is a humanism because the human being is *still* at the

center of the wholeness envisioned by the novel.[33] The human being is the central element in this newly configured humanism because he or she is the bearer of responsibility and the agent that can intervene in future history through individual acts. This centrality stems also from the individual's ability to tell new sorts of narratives, which can inspire the coming generations and affect changes on a personal or larger scale. This individual is not the white man, the European, but rather each one of "us". In Schoene's terms, this means conceiving "ourselves first and foremost as members of humanity in all its vulnerable, precariously exposed planetarity" (181). Resembling Ewing's changed perception of "we" discussed above, this is a new configuration of the meaning of "we": each part is dependent on the whole, and the whole is dependent on its separate parts for survival and a sustainable future. This "we" involves human beings, all life forms on the earth, and the earth itself.

Some neo-Victorian works envision alternative kinds of togetherness in accord with their call for creating a better society and future (social change and historical progress) in the real world. Similarly, Mitchell's novel illustrates the new conception of humanism through some alternative communities it evokes (Schoene 123; Hicks 71). These alternative communities stand for the new understanding of "we". The Moriori, as explained above, is offered as an alternative mode of living. In portraying this pacifist tribe, Mitchell excavates the Victorian site/past to point out the potential hidden in history. The Moriori face genocide due to their respect for human life, but their pacifist system of belief partly survives in the friendship between Autua and Ewing. Just like the predatory figures depicted in the novel, such alternative communities are eternally recurrent in the fictional world of the novel.

[33] One might ask whether or in which ways this argument about a new *human*ism is compatible with the presence of a clone in the centre of one of the six narratives. The answer this study offers is that, firstly, Sonmi is an ascended clone, which means that Sonmi's rebellious nature is due to some experiments done by humans on her. Other clones do not have such capacities as storytelling and class-consciousness that Sonmi has. Sonmi's status in the novel, in other words, is close to human beings; she has been turned to a human-like clone and gained intellectual faculty that distinguish Sonmi from other clones. Secondly, as noted above, the target of Sonmi's *Declarations* is primarily children. Moreover, it is the rulers of the country, the "purebloods", who turn her into a human-like (ascended) clone; *they* use her like a pawn in their scheme to serve their own ends, and *they* kill her in the end. Therefore, human agency and the responsibility or irresponsibility of the human being are *still* at the center of this narrative.

Another alternative community, which is another version of the Moriori tribe, appears in Sonmi's dystopic world. This community, like the former one, presents another alternative horizon within history when considered from the vantage point of the sixth story. In the face of the oppressive corpocracy, "a colony of recidivists" leaves Nea So Copros and moves to the outskirts of the city (*CA* 329). This colony is comprised of "Uyghur dissidents", "dust-blowed farmers", "unemployable deviants" and "those undollared by mental illness" (*CA* 330). Despite their differences, they create a whole, unlike the strictly divided society of Nea So Copros. They do not exploit the weaker ones, unlike the communities portrayed in Ewing's story. They are not alienated from one another, unlike the consumers in Sonmi's world. Their life is not dominated by compulsory consumption, unlike that of the purebloods. There is no hierarchy in this community, unlike the situation in the peripheries of the Empire. Their sense of solidarity is discernible in times of sorrow and happiness. "Their entertainment was themselves": "gossip, music, complaints, and laughter" (*CA* 330, 331). On one occasion, Sonmi says, "[t]hey bicker, blame, and grieve as people will, but at least they do it in a community, and companionship is a fine medicine in itself. Nea So Copros has no communities now, only mutually suspicious substrata" (*CA* 331). They have many problems. Aeros launch shells and kill some people; "winters are severe"; "crops fall prey to disease; and "their medicine is sorely limited" (*CA* 330-331). What is important for Sonmi and, by extension, for Mitchell, however, is their sense of togetherness in the face of all difficulties. These recidivists see their colony as the "we" that Ewing comes to recognize and advocate.

The eldest of this colony, the Abbess, is a figure through which the novel underlines the importance of historical consciousness, future-thinking, and openness to otherness, in other words, the relationship between history (as past deeds) and the new humanism it envisions. The Abbess is sixty-eight, but Sonmi says, "if she had claimed to be three hundred years of age I would still have believed her, such gravitas she had" (*CA* 330). She is an equivalent of the above-mentioned turtle whose eyes are so ancient that they have seen the future. She stands for wisdom due to her historical knowledge and foresight. Unlike the Archivist, who sees the dissident clones as terrorists and other clones as non-human, she acknowledges that the clones are like humans: "nothing is more heinous than the enslavement of your

tribe" (*CA* 333). She sees the clones as another tribe like her colony and puts Sonmi on the same plane as herself. The Abbess is a historical figure from the vantage point of the sixth story. Her wisdom and her colony reveal the potentialities hidden in history, which arguably contributes to the historical understanding of Meronym and her openness to otherness. Moreover, recalling the generosity and hospitality of the Moriori in the first story, "hospitality" is an important value for the Abbess (*CA* 333). Hospitality means openness to otherness, which is necessary for the humanism envisioned by the writer. It is through such figures as the Abbess, Sonmi, Meronym, Ewing, and Autua that the novel tells a "counter-narrative […] to challenge violence" (Knepper, "David Mitchell" 166). The novel offers some hope for a better future through such figures, who can shape future history through their individual acts of belief, their political agency, the stories they tell, and the stories told about them.

Mitchell seems to underscore the need for a new kind of humanism in today's world and to call the reader to participate in this project. The readers of *Cloud Atlas* cannot be passive consumers. The complex narrative structure does not allow this. Rather, they must be active participants in two senses. Firstly, like Swift's readers, they are expected to be actively engaged in the meaning-making process, charting the connections between the six stories. Secondly, they are expected to be "participants and co-creators in world-making struggles over social transformation" (Knepper and Hopf, "An Introduction" 14), which is in keeping with the neo-Victorian project. To put it another way, they should take ethical actions, like Ewing, Autua, Luisa, and Sonmi, and effect some changes in the real world.

The first step to being a co-creator of a new humanity is empathizing with the other because selfishness will lead to disasters on a global scale. Just like Ewing, Sonmi, and Meronym, who display or aspire to political agency, the reader is invited by this novel to take action for themselves, for the other, for all people, and for the planet and to restructure their understanding of "we", just like Ewing. This call is articulated, for instance, by Zachry's son in the sixth narrative when he holds the orison of Sonmi and addresses his audience as: "Hold out your hands. Look" (*CA* 309). In this episode, it may be argued that although in that diegetic level Zachry is addressing an unknown audience, "you", this "you" can also be taken as Mitchell's

reader. Mitchell invites the reader to hold the text that involves a fictional kind of world history. This is a call for reading this history through the turtle's eyes, through the eyes of the wise Abbess, which underlines the significance of narratives, historical knowledge, and historical consciousness. Such a reading will lead the reader to a change of mind and perhaps pave the way for a better world. Thus, the "flea o' hope for us" (*CA* 303) is located in the readers themselves. Moreover, if this "you" is Mitchell's readers, then, implicitly, they are called to create a seventh narrative that is yet to be written. That seventh narrative, which awaits a writer and a reader, suggests that the common future history of humanity is entrusted to more inclusive narratives, storytellers, and audiences who get the gist of the story.

This is what the serious neo-Victorian novel ultimately aims to do with the (Victorian) past in the present for the future. Kohlke and Gutleben underscore this point when they say that while neo-Victorian works are "'doing history'", they are, in fact, "determining the shape of the past for the future" ("Introduction" 8). *Cloud Atlas* rewrites the Victorian past while recording an alternative world history in order to affect changes in the reader and in the real world. Adopting a reconstructive attitude towards history, it looks back to the Victorian past and other virtual pasts with a future-oriented vision, which, in a sense, recalls the practical realist approach to history writing.

To conclude, *Cloud Atlas* employs experimental narrative techniques to deconstructivist ends, just like *Ever After*. This deconstructive agenda is discernible in its engagement with history as narrative (official/written history) and history writing, too. The novel engages in a dialogue with postmodern history writing through one character's theory of time and history writing and exhibits its scepticism about such notions as historical truth, realist representations, and the authenticity of documents in each narrative. It questions the authority of the historian and the archive, contests the traditional assumption that what happened in the past can be fully known and reflected objectively in a narrative. It also deals with the postmodernist conception of the unrepresentable event and the historical sublime through the Fall, an event which evades cognition and expression. Alongside this approach to history, however, there is a reconstructive attitude towards history in this

novel. This reconstructive attitude serves ethical, political, and humanist ends, which differentiates this novel from neo-Victorian novels closer to the metafictional end of the spectrum. These ethical and humanist ends are in keeping with the progressive agenda of many neo-Victorian novels. Mitchell depicts the Victorian past from a postcolonial vantage point and draws close connections between the Victorian era and a larger, three-dimensional, history. The novel lays bare and subverts the myths that justified British imperialism and uses this image of the Victorian past as a warning and also as a tool to underline the importance of narratives and historical knowledge. While depicting a cyclical history of predation, the novel manages to configure a new conception of progress and progressive history. At the same time, it envisions a new kind of humanism which prioritizes the individual, an ethical turn to the vulnerable other, narratives, and a simultaneous past-thinking and future-thinking. The image of the Victorian past evoked by Mitchell is used as a means to these reconstructive and humanist ends while at the same time indicating the importance of historical consciousness in today's world and a complex continuity between the past, the present, and the future of humanity. Therefore, *Cloud Atlas* is a neo-Victorian novel which deviates from the ironical, anti-humanist, and anti-foundationalist approach to history that often pervades the metafictional neo-Victorian novel and which remains in between overt self-consciousness and neo-realism in the neo-Victorian spectrum.

CHAPTER 5

LADY'S MAID AS A NEO-REALIST NEO-VICTORIAN NOVEL

This chapter aims to explore Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990) as a representative example of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction and to examine its attitude towards the Victorian past and history. *Lady's Maid* deals with the Victorian past by revisiting two historical figures, Elizabeth Wilson, who was the devoted maid of the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself. It rewrites the past in rather traditional ways and yet to important critical ends. This chapter argues that, as a neo-realist example of the neo-Victorian novel, *Lady's Maid* presents a plausible, coherent, and meaningful story; and, in this way, it both redefines history and presents a meaningful addition to the historical record. In other words, it argues that fiction turns into a kind of history *in* and *through* this novel. The novel provides the reader with a sense of *what might have happened* in the entangled personal histories of Elizabeth Wilson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning while at the same time providing some insights into who Elizabeth Wilson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were. Drawing upon Kate Mitchell's suggestion that neo-Victorian novels can function as memory texts and Michael Lackey's argument about fictional truths, as discussed and extended in the first and second chapters[34], it can be claimed that this novel emerges as a memory text that provides the reader with fictional truths and shapes cultural memory through such truths.

Margaret Forster's fictional works generally focus on the ordinary lives of ordinary people, especially women, women's roles and experiences in both domestic and public spheres, family life, social matters and problems, working-class experiences, and human relationships. Her biography entitled *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1988)

[34] Please see pages 6-7, 42-43.

and her novel, *Lady's Maid* are not Forster's only forays into the Victorian past. Forster's *Memoirs of a Victorian Gentleman: William Makepeace Thackeray*, originally published in 1978, presents a fictional biography or autobiography[35] of the Victorian novelist Thackeray. In *Significant Sisters* (1985), she presents the history of early feminism and charts the early developments in the feminist movement by exploring some nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women, such as Caroline Norton, Florence Nightingale, Emily Davies, and Elizabeth C. Stanton, who in one way or another contributed to the feminist cause and paved the way for contemporary feminisms. These works reveal the writer's interest in the Victorian age and the Victorians, history, life story, the author figure, woman's position in society, and feminism, which are crucial to understanding the sense of history in *Lady's Maid.* Moreover, her obsessive returns to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in a biography, in a selection of the poet's works published in 1988, and in *Lady's Maid*, which deals also with the poet, demonstrate Forster's preoccupation with women's writing and the figure of the woman author.

Lady's Maid tells the story of Elizabeth Wilson, the loyal maid of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It returns to the period between 1844 when Elizabeth Wilson started serving Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a maid and 1861 when the poet died. The story is narrated by a third-person narrator, and most of the time it is told from the viewpoint of the protagonist, Elizabeth Wilson. The reader hears Elizabeth Wilson's own voice, too, through the fictional letters inserted in the main body of the text. The story is set in England and Italy. While the novel primarily focuses on what happens in the domestic sphere, be it the Barrett, the Browning, or the Romagnoli [36] households, and on the inner world of the protagonist, it also touches on some historical events that took place in Italy and England at the time. Nevertheless, the history portrayed in this novel is mainly a personal history.

To date, *Lady's Maid* has received very little scholarly attention. Despite looking at many examples of neo-Victorian fiction in his *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, Gutleben

[35] Kathleen Jones says that this book was seen as "almost impossible to categorise" by reviewers (56-57). She refers to this work as "literary biography" and a "fictional autobiography" (54). Nick Rennison calls it "a fictionalised memoir of Thackeray, told […] in his own voice" (59).

[36] Elizabeth Wilson marries Ferdinando Romagnoli, an Italian patriot, who serves the Brownings in Italy in the novel, which is factual.

discusses this novel without delving into details. While accusing Forster of "parasitical" passages of pastiche in the novel, he overlooks some important preoccupations of the novel and the meaning of its return to the life of a maid (29). In the other books on neo-Victorian criticism, such as the collection entitled *Neo-Victorian Biofiction*, it is referred to only in passing. There are only a few essays on this novel, and most of them, like Gutleben's work, deal with the representation of the poet rather than that of the maid without presenting a thorough analysis of the treatment of the poet in this novel. For example, Julia Novak's "The Notable Woman in Fiction: The Afterlives of Elizabeth Barrett Browning" (2016) looks at the plays, novels, and other cultural products about Barrett Browning, but it does not delve deep into Forster's approach to the woman poet in this novel. Therefore, what this novel does *with* and *through* the Victorian age and the two historical figures is a gap in neo-Victorian scholarship, which this study aims to address.

In addition, there are some disagreements among the scholars who have written on this novel. One of these is related to the question of who is given the central stage by Forster. Gutleben believes that Elizabeth Wilson's personal life seems "subservient" as her "personal doings" take place after the elopement of the poets and are told late in the novel (29). Due to this reason, the role of Elizabeth Wilson is "reduced to that of a witness of another story", that is, the story of the poets (Gutleben 29). In fact, the novel does not seem to be much interested in Robert Browning. Like Gutleben, Ruth Robbins, in "Hidden Lives and Ladies' Maids: Margaret Forster's Elizabeth Barrett Brownings" (2004), finds the novel wanting because "even Wilson's own story, told from her perspective, demonstrates her supplementary status. We want to read it only because it largely comprises her observations of others who have already been designated interesting by literary history" (228). Robbins concedes that Elizabeth Wilson's "emotions are muted" because, unlike her friends and husband, she is a literate servant, and this situation hinders a true correspondence with her social equals (226). Like Gutleben, she thinks that Forster failed to put this character in the center even though she has given a voice to her (Robbins 228). Similarly, in her essay "The Notable Woman in Fiction: The Afterlives of Elizabeth Barrett Browning" (2016), Julia Novak asserts that it is not clear whether Forster gives the central stage to the maid or the poet in the novel (98). In *Neo-Victorian Biofiction*

(2020), Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben refer to this novel while elaborating on recent neo-Victorian biofiction in which the focus shifts from the great heroes to the lives of ordinary people ("Taking" 43). This means that they see Elizabeth Wilson as the protagonist of the novel.

The reader, especially one who knows the place of the Brownings in literary history, is drawn to this novel due to readerly curiosity, perhaps hoping to read a novel about the dark secrets of the Brownings or of Elizabeth Barrett Browning rather than the life of their servant. And the novel satisfies this curiosity to a certain extent by depicting the life of Barrett Browning, along with that of her maid. Nevertheless, the protagonist of the novel is Elizabeth Wilson and she is at the central stage rather than in a supplementary position even in her own story. The claim that her emotions are muted does not ring true because the narrator places much emphasis on the protagonist's experiences and feelings, and her fictional letters enable the reader to hear her story and emotions in her own voice. And yet, Forster does not put Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the periphery of the story because, firstly, the lives of these two historical women are entangled; and, secondly, one of Forster's aims in returning to this woman poet is paying homage to her, as will be argued in the last section of this analysis.

Another problem according to these scholars is related to the employment of realist narrative techniques. Gutleben considers this novel a retro-Victorian novel when elucidating "the derivative nature of pastiche", that is, neo-Victorian works that imitate Victorian novels and deal with what he sees as conventional themes to conservative ends (25). To him, *Lady's Maid* imitates the Victorian novel in both form and content, so it does not have a political or progressive agenda. He connects the novel's resort to realistic techniques to the representation of the poet, finding fault with Forster's "choice of perspective and tonality" (29). Since the invented documents (fictional letters) incorporated in the text and the narrative voice attribute "to the Victorian poetess words which she has never spoken or written", the fictional poet "harms herself through her own speech", which means that the novel is a "condemnation" of the poet (27, 28). Gutleben does not pay attention to the highly complex engagement with Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the relationship between

the poet and her maid. Ruth Robbins, likewise, connects what she sees as the problematic peripheral position of the maid to the employment of the conventions of biography, by extension, of realist fiction, which, she thinks, precludes a complete portrayal of the inner world of the servant figure (224). This study, however, proposes that the employment of realist narrative techniques does not automatically mean that the novel is devoid of a socio-political agenda or a critical engagement with the Victorian past, as will be shown in the following sections.

Along with these problems and disagreements among scholars about what *Lady's Maid* does by returning to the Victorian past, there are certain gaps in the existing scholarship on this novel. For instance, the novel's gesture towards the humanist understanding of the subject and its celebration of the author figure, both of which run contrary to the stance of the metafictional neo-Victorian novel, have not received any critical attention. In "Disparate Images: Literary Heroism and the 'Work vs. Life' Topos in Contemporary Biofictions about Victorian Authors" (2014), Julia Novak and Sandra Mayer discuss the representation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in this novel and claim that it criticizes her and, in so doing, dethrones the author figure (35, 31). Other scholars who have written on this issue also think or suggest that the author is dethroned by the novel. This study departs from this argument, as will be demonstrated in the last section of the analysis. Furthermore, the novel's *obsession* with the possibility of a kind of bond between the two women portrayed in it has not been observed by the scholars who have written about this novel. This study aims to present a detailed exploration of the neo-realist neo-Victorianism of this novel. The sections that follow will explore the implications of the traditional narrative techniques employed by Forster, the portrayal of the personal history of the servant figure, and the novel's complex engagement with Elizabeth Barrett Browning in order to show what the novel does *to, with,* and *through* these female figures and the Victorian past.

5.1. The Narrative Techniques Used in *Lady's Maid*

As many scholars have observed, while some contemporary writers cherish the postmodernist scepticism about all kinds of certainties, some others find this

scepticism problematic (Waugh, *Practising* 125-126; Kaplan 41; Kohlke, "Into History" 156). It is especially in neo-Victorian novels produced by feminist and postcolonial writers this hesitation about postmodernist scepticism is most apparent. As they are often concerned with forgotten events, human experiences in the past, and identity politics, they do not resort to experimental narrative techniques which almost automatically call into question the notions of narrative, truth, subjectivity, agency, and history. Such notions are often central to the agendas of the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction. This section of the study argues that the employment of traditional narrative techniques in *Lady's Maid* enables it to configure a plausible version of the Victorian past. It aims to explore *how* this novel manages to tell a convincing story and communicate some "fictional truths".

There are several factors that contribute to the plausibility of the story told in *Lady's Maid* and the aura of the authenticity of the Victorian world evoked in it. If the metafictional mode is essential to overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian fiction, then the mode of verisimilitude can be claimed to be central to the neo-realist examples of the subgenre. *Sarah Thornhill* (2011) by Kate Grenville and *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009) by Kate Pullinger, among other examples, present a verisimilar account of the past. Unlike the metafictional neo-Victorian novel, neo-realist works are often linear. They do not have complex structures. They often have a neat beginning, a middle, and an ending. Like many Victorian novels, these novels tell the story observing such principles as coherence, causality, and resolution rather than narrative fragmentation and textual undecidability.

Accordingly, the plot of *Lady's Maid* is chronological, and it is divided into three parts. The first part is entitled "1844-1846". It is set in Wimpole Street in London. It starts with "the first letter" Elizabeth Wilson writes to her family (*LM* 3). This part portrays the daily routines of the protagonist and her mistress, the development of a kind of connection between them, the oppressive atmosphere of the Barrett household, the protagonist's aborted attempts to find a suitable match for herself, the correspondence between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, and their passionate love. It ends with the famous secret marriage of the two poets and the preparations for their secret flight to Italy. The second part is entitled "1846-1857". It

is mainly set in Italy. It deals with the daily life of Elizabeth Wilson in a foreign country, her love affairs and marriage to Ferdinando Romagnoli, who is another servant in the Browning household, and the tragic unfolding of events for the protagonist upon her pregnancy. When her employers turn down her request to raise her child in the same house, resorting to such excuses as economic problems and the inconvenience of this situation, Elizabeth has to give birth to her son, Oreste, in England. She lives in England for several months and then chooses to leave her son with her sister and return to her job because she does not want to live away from her husband. Yet her separation from her first-born as well as the increasingly tense relationship between her and her selfish mistress make her life very difficult and give birth to some other problems. This part ends with the second pregnancy of Elizabeth, which causes the end of her service with the Brownings after thirteen years. This event leads to a growing distance between Ferdinando, who is still in service, and Elizabeth, who starts running a boarding house. The last part, "1857-1861", depicts the problems in Elizabeth's family life, her desire and attempts to reunite with Oreste, who lives in England with her aunt, her endeavors to recover the lost connection between herself and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and her determination to become the mistress of her own life despite all the difficulties she faces. This part also reflects on some political events taking place in Italy at the time. Nevertheless, the focus is on Elizabeth, her struggles, her inner world, and her relationship with her old mistress, who dies in 1861. The novel ends with a hopeful note on the future of the protagonist. That the whole story is set in the Victorian period adds to the authenticity of the narrative, unlike some neo-Victorian novels with dual time periods, such as *Ever After*. Forster's novel provides the reader with a teleological and coherent story without disrupting the reality effect the narrative organization creates. This kind of narrative structure renders the novel and the story it tells accessible to the reader.

Neo-realist neo-Victorian works generally present a detailed account of the past, which reinforces the reality effect they create. The details about time, place, and characters render the stories told in such novels life-like. Gutleben thinks that the establishment of "a clearly identifiable spatio-temporal setting" is "a conservative aesthetic choice" since the "'historical realism'" of such novels "betrays a

documentary conception of the novel not at all foreign to the Victorian taste for didactic fiction" (60). To Gutleben, "original" neo-Victorian works establish a detailed setting only to subvert the illusion of realism by parodying some conventions or making room for "linguistic hybridity" (112, 113). However, in the neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction, "historical details […] authenticate the Victorian world created" (Hadley 156). And this does not mean that they are not original works, or that they do not have progressive agendas. Forster gives particular emphasis to historical details, such as the dress Elizabeth Barrett Browning wears for her wedding ceremony and the hotel rooms where the Brownings stay till they arrive in Italy (*LM* 187-188, 201). She gives the exact dates of the events depicted, such as the first miscarriage Elizabeth Barrett Browning had on "March 21st" and the birth of the protagonist's son on "the thirteenth of October in the year […] eighteen-hundred-and-fifty-five" (*LM* 228, 370). In addition, the continual references to the correspondences between the poet and her friends, such as John Kenyon, Mary Russell Mitford, Anna Jameson, and Isa Blagden, enable Forster to configure a convincing account of the social context and the literary circle of the Brownings. Such details enable the novel to paint a vivid picture of that age and the historical subjects it deals with. They transport the reader to the world depicted by the novel. Since most of these details are historically accurate, they make the novel more referential. Rather than foregrounding the impossibility of a realist representation of the past, as is the case with metafictional neo-Victorian fiction, this novel silently imitates Victorian realism, that is, it does not draw attention to its own invented nature. Through this imitation, it enables the reader's suspension of disbelief.[37]

The most salient feature of neo-Victorian fiction, arguably across the spectrum, is giving voice and/or the central stage to a peripheral character. In Kate Pullinger's *The Mistress Of Nothing* (2009), another example of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction, the marginal figure is the historical Sally Naldrett, who served Lady Duff-Gordon and accompanied her for some time in Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century. The reader hears her life story in her own voice. In *Lady's Maid*, it is the historical

[37] While the term "suspension of disbelief" is often associated with such genres as fantasy and science fiction and while it refers to the reader's engagement with, for example, the supernatural elements in a fictional work, it is used here in the sense of the reader's belief in the truthfulness of an invented story.

Elizabeth Wilson. As also noted by several scholars, with this novel, Forster responds to Virginia Woolf's call in *Flush*, which was published in 1933. In the notes to *Flush*, Woolf writes, "[t]he life of Lily Wilson is extremely obscure and thus cries aloud for the services of a biographer" (105-106). She adds that we cannot "pretend that we can guess" what "Lily Wilson" thought after the death of her mistress, "for *she was typical* of the great army *of her kind -the inscrutable*, the all-but-silent, the all-but-invisible servant maids of history" (*Flush* 109; emphasis added). While underlining the need to imagine this particular woman's life story, Woolf's way of putting this need signals how undifferentiated "Lily Wilson" is: she is typical of her kind, one of the many inscrutables of history. As she was an ordinary woman, a servant, Elizabeth Wilson's life story is not written in the historical record. Regarding her proximity to a celebrity figure, the most important thing about her might seem to be her involvement in the elopement of the poets. However, the novel puts her in the center and manages to inscribe her life story in history.

The novel names the characters after actual historical subjects and presents a fictionally truthful portrayal of these figures while blending fact and fiction in this process[38], which also adds to the reality effect it evokes and its referentiality. Forster mixes well-known facts about the Brownings, such as the famous elopement of the couple after their secret marriage and their interest in the current political events in Italy, with the fictional story of Elizabeth Wilson, on whom very little is known. In her biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Forster touches upon the life of the historical Elizabeth Wilson, commenting on how well she looked after her mistress, her role in the elopement, her under-payment by the poets despite performing many tasks, her pregnancy and marriage to Ferdinando Romagnoli, the poet's selfishness towards her, the separation of Elizabeth from her son, Oreste, and her visits to the Browning household even after losing her job (*EBB* 126, 179, 185, 272-273, 299, 302-303, 315, 363). Forster claims in the introduction of the biography that her account relies on the new-found letters of the poet (*EBB* xiii-xiv). Nevertheless,

[38] While these two features make this novel an example of biofiction, as conceptualized by Michael Lackey (*Biofiction* 1), it bears repeating at this point that all neo-realist examples of neo-Victorian fiction are not biofictional works. Some of these neo-realist novels, such as *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006) by Belinda Starling, tell the story of fictional Victorians. Some others deal with actual Victorians, but they do not name the protagonist after the historical subject they recreate.

some of the above-mentioned details concerning Elizabeth Wilson in this biography seem to be speculations. For instance, Forster's claim about the selfishness of the poet in the biography, which she reworks in the novel, too, is due to the fact that the poet did not write anything about the plight of her maid in the documents she left (*EBB* 315). This study does not focus on the biography, but it is important to note that *Lady's Maid* is a fictional work because, despite the story's reliance upon the above-mentioned historical details, there are no documents left by the protagonist. Thus, her story, as told in the novel, is imagined. The dialogues between the characters, the daily experiences and inner world of the protagonist, her feelings and thoughts, and her letters are all invented.

Unlike metafictional neo-Victorian novels, there are no deliberate errors concerning the historical details or the events in the Brownings' lives in *Lady's Maid*. There are no language games, plot twists, or tricks played on the reader in this novel. Forster has resorted to imagination in configuring what kind of a life the maid might have led, but the novel does not point to the difficulty of recording her personal history, draw attention to the scarcity of the documents about her life or the impossibility of knowing what she experienced as a maid, a working-class woman, a mother, and an English woman in Italy. As Rosario Arias states concerning some neo-Victorian writers, such as Sarah Waters, A. S. Byatt, and Belinda Starling, "postmodern historicity (as defined by Fredric Jameson) is replaced with 'a sense of a referent'" in their works (113). This claim applies to neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction. In *Lady's Maid*, the referent is the lives of the historical figures depicted in it. The novel sticks to the biographical data about the poet to a great extent, and it does not flaunt the fictiveness of the story. Thus, the referent is still functional as the basis of the narrative. In some other neo-realist novels, the referent can be well-known or forgotten events. What is at stake in neo-realist neo-Victorian novels regarding the notion of the referent is that they do not overtly call into question this notion because they are concerned with human experiences in the past. Moreover, rather than *the* referent (the past as it was), these novels pursue *a sense of* the referent.

Even though the writers of neo-realist neo-Victorian novels, like the practical realist historians, are aware that an accurate representation of the Victorian age is

impossible and even though they may invent some characters or events, their works often lay claim to the possibility of knowing the past in some respects and capturing some aspects of it in a narrative. Their aim is to present a story that can make the reader *feel* what life was like for the peripheral or oppressed figures who lived in that era. Thus, although the writer of neo-realist works resorts to creative licence while rewriting the past, he or she "implicitly establishes a certain kind of truth contract with readers", as Lackey says of some writers of biofiction (*Biofiction* 2). Forster's truth contract with the reader is evident in the promises of the narrative to tell some fictional truths. Elizabeth Wilson insists that she "knows" her mistress (*LM* 85, 521), that she has "the certain knowledge" about the Brownings (*LM* 522), that she "know[s] them" (*LM* 522), meaning that although she was not privy to all events taking place in the Browning household or between the two poets, after years of service she knows their personality, what kind of people they are. As she conveys this knowledge through her letters, the novel lays claim to historical knowledge through these letters, too.

Closely connected to the notion of truth contract is the narrative voice employed in neo-realist neo-Victorian works. These novels use reliable narrators. For example, the story of Sally Naldrett is narrated by herself in Pullinger's *The Mistress of Nothing (*2009), and the reliability of this narrator is not called into question by another device. Even when she talks about an event she has not witnessed, she explains how she has learned or heard about it. The reader, therefore, does not question the veracity of her account. In *Lady's Maid*, the story is narrated by the third-person narrator whose sympathies lie with the maid; most of the time it is narrated from the perspective of the maid. The narrator in this novel does not resort to tricks, linguistic games or point out the limits of knowledge. Drawing upon Hadley, then, it can be claimed that by employing a third-person narrator in traditional ways, too, the novel reveals "a confident belief in the possibility of accessing the past" and "encourage[s] the reader to accept the narrator's perspective as the truth" (Hadley 153, 151). Since the reader accepts this perspective as the truth, the story told in the novel (Elizabeth Wilson's life) complements the factual account given in the biography (Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life) in a sense.

The reader hears the voice of Elizabeth Wilson through the fictional letters she writes to her family, friends, and the poet, which are embedded in the main body of the work. These letters are imagined documents because, as Forster says in the "Afterword", there are "no surviving letters from, or to, Wilson" (*LM* 535). In her *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2013), Kym Brindle concedes that "[t]o some extent all epistolary forms are metafictional devices" (5). While this suggestion applies to overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian works, such as Swift's *Ever After*, where the letter of Matthew Pearce works to reveal the fictiveness of history, the letters of Elizabeth Wilson do not work to such deconstructive ends. Brindle acknowledges this point stating that Forster "put[s] diary form to quite conventional servitude to reveal maids' secrets of their 'betters' to readers" (30). The conventional usage of these letters is discernible in their reflections on not only the secrets of the Brownings but also the secrets, experiences, thoughts, feelings, dreams, disillusionment, and hopes of the protagonist herself. They are written for her family and trusted friends, such as Minnie Robinson, who is the housekeeper of the Barretts (*LM* 41-429, 449-451), and Elizabeth Treherne, who is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's former maid (*LM* 346-347, 514-518). Some of them are written in times of crisis seeking the advice of the addressee. For example, in her letter to Elizabeth Treherne, the protagonist asks what she should do concerning her relationship with Ferdinando and its consequences. It ends as: "Write to me Lizzie for God's sake and give me some direction" (*LM* 334). Similarly, when the protagonist is on the brink of a mental breakdown due to living away from her elder son and her husband and losing her job, she "need[s] to write a letter, to commit her thoughts and feelings to paper and *communicate* through the medium of paper and pen" with "the person to whom she had once been most close, to Mrs Browning" (*LM* 441-442; emphasis added). These letters are private, confessional, and illuminating, albeit invented, documents. They provide the reader with a glimpse into the inner world of Elizabeth Wilson and make the reader feel, at least partly, what she might have felt. It is important to note that in this episode, the reader might be hearing the voice of the implied author, who is arguably the biographer Margaret Forster and who promises to convey some knowledge, some fictional truths about the maid through the medium of this novel.

As Brindle says of several other neo-Victorian novels that employ letters or diaries, these letters work to "mimetic authenticity" (27). An important reason for this is that there are not any epistemological contradictions between the accounts of the narrator and the maid, as given in these letters. Rather, the narrator points to the reliability of the protagonist's account of events. For example, on the very first page, the narrator states that it is important for Elizabeth Wilson "so early in *her chronicle, to be exact*" (*LM* 3; emphasis added). This desire to be exact is also repeated on other occasions, for instance, when the maid writes to her mother "every scrap of home life" (*LM* 23). When she withholds some information from her family, the narrator explains what has happened and why she does not mention that episode in her letters. For example, when Elizabeth Wilson says that she "could not and did not write" the "coarse things" a fellow servant has told about her employers, the narrator explains that the coarse thing is "an intimate service" Dr Mitford begs his servant to do (*LM* 37). Her reluctance to write about sexual intercourse between a servant and her employer is in line with the principles of "discretion", "decency", and "decorum" observed in that period, as Hadley notes regarding nineteenth-century biography (36). In making Elizabeth observe this convention, Forster displays her "commitment to the historical specificity of the Victorian era" (Hadley 21). In addition, this episode points to Elizabeth's honesty, loyalty, and devotion to her mistress by comparing the attitudes of the two maids towards their employers. Such personal features also make her a reliable narrator and enable the reader to believe in her account. As such, these letters enable the reader's identification with the protagonist. Another important point concerning these letters is that in writing these documents, the protagonist emerges as a chronicler, a historian of some sort, who pens her own history and transmits historical knowledge to the reader. In other words, the traditional usage of letters is a strategy that endows the protagonist with a kind of narrative power and the authority of a historian in a sense.

The employment of a third-person narrative voice throughout the novel and the first-person narrative voice in these letters brings forth the issue of ventriloquism, a topic of interest in neo-Victorian studies. In *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2012), Helen Davies states that ventriloquism, in the sense of both "neo-Victorianism 'speaking for' the silenced subjects of the Victorian era" and

"Victorian authors and texts 'speaking through' neo-Victorian literature", is a central issue regarding "the politics of neo-Victorian literature" (4, 6). Conceding that ventriloquism can be "either a 'subversive' or 'conservative' enterprise", Davies underscores that "ventriloquism is intimately related to the politics of voice, gender and agency" (6, 15). The central questions to be asked of neo-Victorian works that re-voice the silenced Victorians or "talk back" to the Victorians are as follows: "what is re-voiced by neo-Victorian fiction [, …] what might be silenced, the ways in which neo-Victorian fiction does 'talk to itself' -to 'our' contemporary preoccupations- as opposed to 'talking back' to the nineteenth century" (Davies 12). Gutleben finds fault in the ventriloquism of the poet in this novel. He claims that the imitation of the poet's voice in passages of direct speech and in the invented letter that she writes creates "the illusion […] of revealing a hitherto unknown aspect of Mrs Browning's life"; as a result, the novel reinforces Forster's own "controversial version of Mrs Browning's biography", which is an "intellectually questionable" enterprise (27-28). While he may be right to a certain degree in accusing Forster of speculating in the biography, as mentioned above, the unflattering depiction of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the novel is also suggestive of Forster's pursuit of objectivity as a novelist, who is also a biographer and a historian. In *Significant Sisters*, which traces the history of feminism, Forster writes that "[a] history ought to be objective and not prejudiced by the historian intruding" (9). Therefore, on the one hand, her claims about the selfishness of the poet in the biography seem to be speculative because, when arguing this, Forster relies on the fact that there are no letters or documents left by the poet that touch on her concern for the plight of her maid. On the other hand, however, the lack of evidence can indicate that Barrett Browning was not bothered about it at all. This means that by reflecting on this not-so-ideal aspect of the poet, Forster, in both biography and the novel, aims to present an objective account. It is perhaps due to her pursuit of a degree of objectivity that she criticizes the biographical subject in the biography and the fictional Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the novel. Her attempt in this respect recalls practical realist historians' insistence on objectivity and the pursuit of truth.

Furthermore, this study suggests that Forster manages to ventriloquize both a well-known figure and a silenced one to subversive ends. Concerning the first case, she

draws the reader's attention to a poet whose works have been forgotten to a great extent after her death. In so doing, she enables Elizabeth Barrett Browning and some of her works to "'speak through'" this novel, as will be explored in the last section of this analysis. Moreover, as Louisa Hadley says of A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, by ventriloquizing Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Forster challenges "the narrow perception that the literary accomplishments of the Victorian era are confined to the novel genre" and places emphasis on "the importance of Victorian poets and poetry in their own day" (161). Concerning the latter act of ventriloquism, Forster endows the forgotten maid with agency by making her pen her own history, a kind of history that depicts her struggles for personal independence and self-fulfilment as a woman. The novel, then, intervenes in the sphere of history by both *contributing to* the afterlife of a celebrity figure, as Novak also says (85), and, more importantly, *shaping* an afterlife for the forgotten Victorian maid. In addition, by revoicing and criticizing certain socio-political issues debated in the Victorian age, such as class hierarchy and "the Woman Question", Forster talks back to Victorian society, too. Since some of these issues still reverberate in today's world and are still debated in feminist circles, it can be argued that the novel also talks to the present. The neo-realist devices used in the novel, then, do not prevent it from engaging in a critical dialogue with both the past and the present. And departing from the arguments of Gutleben, Heilmann and Llewellyn about some novels that imitate Victorian realism, as explained in Chapters 1 and 2, this study contends that such a dialogue with the Victorian past cannot be a conservative move. Rather, it showcases that a neo-Victorian novel can be metacritical without being self-reflexive.

Lady's Maid resembles Victorian novels in terms of its length, too. It is over five hundred pages. As the pace of the novel is usually slow, the process of reading can be vexing for the reader. Arguably this is another device deliberately chosen by Forster to make the reader feel the uneventfulness of the lives of those living below the stairs. In this respect, it can be argued that the slow pace also adds to the authenticity of the story.

The use of afterwords, postscripts, epilogues, and author's notes helps differentiate neo-realist neo-Victorian works from overtly self-conscious ones. In the

"Afterword", Forster says that she has blended fact and fiction and explains which elements are based on truth and which ones are invented (*LM* 535). In fact, all neo-Victorian works blend fact and fiction to varying degrees, and many metafictional examples employ epilogues or afterwords. Yet what differentiates neo-realist novels is that they do not undermine the plausibility and truthfulness of the story in an afterword, epilogue, or author's notes. Accordingly, rather than underlining the invented nature of the story, Forster emphasizes the elements or scenes that are "based on truth": "Elizabeth Wilson was a real person"; she "indeed" became the maid of the poet; "[i]t is true that" she gave birth to her first son in her sister's house in England and returned to Italy after one year; the details about the new boarding house she runs are "true" (*LM* 535). Forster makes truth claims when she says "[a]ll the information" regarding these events "comes from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's letters" (*LM* 535). A metafictional neo-Victorian work would use this grounding in the textual traces of the past as a means to show the textuality of history. Yet this novel uses it to point out the referentiality of the story it tells.

Neo-Victorian novels are inevitably intertextual works, yet, concerning their attitudes towards history, intertextuality works to different ends in neo-realist works when compared to its functions in metafictional neo-Victorian novels. The direct and indirect references to *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys in D. M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000) work to reveal the constructed and discursive nature of subjectivity, to overtly criticize the act of writing as distorting the material, to criticize Victorian realist fiction for repressing some issues, and to implicitly reflect its own inauthenticity as a rewrite (Thomas 90-91, 137, 174, 127). However, as mentioned above, in *Lady's Maid*, one of the main functions[39] of intertextuality is to silently complement and complicate official history and the existing scholarship on the poet by presenting a fictional biography of Elizabeth Wilson whose life story has been forgotten or deemed insignificant. The novel does not contradict what Forster tells in the biography but rather recycles and complements it through the story of the maid. For instance, in the biography, Forster writes that on the day of their secret marriage, Elizabeth Barrett planned to go out as

[39] The references to the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

if she would visit Mr Boyd, a scholar and close friend, and told her sisters to take her home from his house. While her sisters would think that she was with Mr Boyd, she and Elizabeth Wilson would be at the church for the wedding ceremony (*EBB* 178). In the novel, this episode is narrated in keeping with the biography yet with more emphasis on how the two women *feel* about transgressing societal conventions and the rules of Mr Barrett (*LM* 186-187). By means of fiction, Forster adds emotions, personal thoughts, historically insignificant-looking happenings and details to the historical record and biographical data about the poet.

To sum up, the resort to traditional narrative techniques in *Lady's Maid* does not mean that this neo-realist novel is devoid of a critical agenda or sophistication, contrary to what the scholars, who associate formal experimentation with a progressive agenda and critical engagement, imply or say in their works. The employment of a third-person narrator in conventional ways, the traditional usage of letters, and adherence to traditional narrative principles, such as coherence, linearity, causality, and referentiality, make the story plausible. This plausibility makes it easier for the reader to get immersed in the novel. As these formal qualities reinforce the truthfulness of the narrative, fiction takes on a significant task in such neo-realist works: filling in the gaps of history so that history becomes a more inclusive and democratic sphere of knowledge. This again recalls the practical realist approach to history writing. In her essay on neo-Victorian biofiction, Wondrich notes that an "anti-theoretical stance […] partly characterises the renewal of realism in contemporary British fiction" (123). This anti-theoretical stance is apparent in the implications of the narrative techniques employed in this novel and in many other neo-realist neo-Victorian works, as discussed above. It is also discernible in the thematic concerns of the novel, which are negotiated through the two historical figures it portrays. The following sections will focus on the treatment of Elizabeth Wilson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in order to elaborate on this anti-theoretical stance and the anti-deconstructive approach to history evident in the novel.

5.2. Configuring a Female-Oriented History through Fiction

This section focuses on the life story of Elizabeth Wilson, as told in *Lady's Maid*, aiming to explore what kind of a history emerges when fiction comes close to history

and which fictional truths this novel communicates through the story of this hitherto inscrutable woman. It argues that *Lady's Maid* returns to the Victorian period in order to configure a female-oriented history, which can be defined as an alternative kind of history largely composed of the *imagined* feelings, inner world, struggles, and experiences of an ordinary Victorian woman. This means that the female-oriented history configured in the novel is closely connected to its engagement with female subjectivity, which will be discussed in both this and the following sections. This study also proposes that while presenting a kind of micro-history, which, importantly, provides the reader with a glimpse into macro-history (the Victorian age) in several ways, the novel manages to simultaneously look back to the past, at the present, and to the future. Drawing upon the scholarship on women's historical fiction and neo-Victorian biofiction, and Margaret Forster's own works, this part of the study will explore the female-oriented history formulated in the novel and the implications of this configuration concerning the relationship between history and fiction.

In the preface to her *The Woman's Historical Novel* (2005), Diana Wallace concedes that "defining what constitutes 'historical' in relation to fiction" is one of the most important questions to be tackled in an analysis of women's historical novels (x). Similarly, Marie-Luise Kohlke avers that women's historical fiction is often concerned with "redefining what counts as history worth telling in the first place" ("Into History" 154). In fact, many neo-Victorian novels are preoccupied with the question of what counts or what will count as history. Yet while the metafictional ones generally point out that we cannot certainly know past reality, the neo-realist ones strive to illuminate some aspects of the experienced past. These neo-realist novels demonstrate that "fiction can lay claim to the past, provisionally and partially", in Kate Mitchell's words (3). In other words, the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel reconstructs history in meaningful ways; and recalling practical realist historiography, it shows that we can know the past to a certain degree. These novels *silently* intervene in the sphere of history and *expand* the meaning of history and the historical. The concept of intervention in history, traditionally understood as an account of the great deeds of great (white) men, is central to the project of revision, recovery, reconfiguration, and reconstruction in *Lady's Maid* because, as Forster

says, "sometimes *beneath the stories lurks the history* of more than an ordinary person. Sometimes their story is the story of thousands" (*Hidden* 13; emphasis added). While underscoring the importance of micro-histories for the reader's historical consciousness, Forster's statement also suggests fiction's capacity to function like history. This capacity, indicative of some faith in the possibilities and potential of narrative and recalling practical realist historiography, is one of the most important features of neo-realist neo-Victorian novels that differentiates them from metafictional ones.

This faith in the capacity of fiction to work like history is discernible especially in the novels of postcolonial and/or feminist writers. Therefore, understanding the sort of feminism that Margaret Forster advocates is crucial to an assessment of her reconstruction of the Victorian past and history in the novel. Forster is a self-acclaimed feminist (*Good* 205). She advocates a mainstream sort of feminism, advocating equal rights and the "self-fulfillment" of women in both domestic and public spheres (*Significant* 2). She is aware that woman is not a homogenous category because the meaning of the "'self'" in the term "self-fulfillment for women", the main aim of feminists according to Forster, changes depending on the context such as one's social and economic status (*Significant* 2). This awareness is evident in the juxtaposition of a lady and a maid and in the depiction of the stark contrasts between the lives of working-class and upper-class characters in the novel. Forster thinks that, despite such differences, women share a common ground, which is female oppression; and this common ground makes "solidarity among women" an ideal to be insistently pursued by feminists and all women (*Significant* 4). In *Significant Sisters*, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, and *Good Wives*, one of the main issues that Forster deals with is the dilemma that women faced in the past and continue to face in the present: work/career versus marriage/motherhood. Forster advocates achieving "total fulfilment", which means that both are equally important to the personal fulfilment of women (*Significant* 10). She deals with these issues in Elizabeth Wilson's story, too. Forster calls herself a "feeble feminist" because she has not supported the feminist cause in more active ways, such as marching on the streets, and because she has always enjoyed the traditional roles ascribed to women (*Significant* 10). Despite this claim, this analysis suggests that, with *Lady's Maid*,

Forster contributes to the feminist cause by reconfiguring what constitutes "historical" from a woman-centred perspective.

While reconstructing the personal history of Elizabeth Wilson, *Lady's Maid* firstly draws attention to the invisibility of low-class women and servants to their superiors and, by implication, to historians whose accounts of the Victorian age often exclude their lives and experiences and overlook the singularity of each individual. In this respect, it is highly telling that the novel is entitled *Lady's Maid*, not *Elizabeth Wilson*. While the title points to the class barrier between the two women in question, thereby signalling the conjoined foci on women and class issues, it simultaneously implies that the personal history of a maid can only be told in a fictive work because it would be deemed too insignificant to be included in a history book. That Forster has written a *biography* on Barrett Browning, an upper-class Victorian, because there are many documents about her and *a fictive work* on Elizabeth Wilson, a servant, due to the scarcity of evidence about her life has several important implications. Firstly, this reveals that one's social status determines whether her or his life and voice will be included in official history. In other words, it shows that it is more likely for a female servant to be written out of the historical record than an upper-class woman. Secondly, since the novel inscribes the life of the servant in history, it can be claimed that fictional works can reshape history by writing a parallel history which presents a critical revision of official history and its prejudices as regards gender and class matters.

The novel repeatedly refers to the insignificance of Elizabeth Wilson as an individual. At the very beginning of the novel, some ladies and Elizabeth stop at an inn to rest on their way to the Barrett house, where Elizabeth Wilson will start serving as the maid of Elizabeth Barrett. While the ladies are shown into a room, "*no one troubled about her*. Mrs Barrett's maid *ignored* her timid request as to where she should go, but then perhaps she had spoken so softly *she had not been heard*" (*LM* 3-4; emphasis added). This scene is ironic in that the whole novel troubles about this silenced figure and makes her voice heard. It is not only Elizabeth Wilson but also the whole servant class who have been written out of the historical record. The novel uses the images of light and darkness to point out this exclusion. When the Barrett

family and the servants gather in a room to celebrate Christmas, "there were no lamps and they [the servants] were *almost invisible* in their black and white clothes" (*LM* 88; emphasis added). It is their uniforms, the mark of their social status, which makes these people invisible in that room and in official history. Arguably, while foregrounding the invisibility of such figures, the novel engages in a critical dialogue with not only official history but also many Victorian realist novels, which reproduce the "conventional obscurity" of the servant figure, according to Bruce Robbins (3). In *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (1986), Robbins concedes that "servants fill the margins of texts [nineteenth-century realist novels] devoted to their superiors", adding that it is often "in this oblique way" that "Western literature has acknowledged and incorporated the divisions of class" (x). The realist novels of such writers as Dickens and Gaskell do not "take up the life of the domestic as a subject in its own right" or "see them as they were", which means that their subjectivity, plans, experiences, and sufferings all go unmentioned by many Victorian writers (Robbins xi, 3, 6).

The novel attempts to reverse this situation in both official history and in the bulk of nineteenth-century realist fiction. It renders visible the almost invisible Elizabeth Wilson by depicting her personal and moral integrity, which is valued by both the characters in the novel and Forster. The novel repeatedly underlines her personal qualities, such as her commitment to and respect for her mistress, her sense of duty and responsibility, and her intellect, courage, and dignity. Miss Henrietta, the poet's sister, praises her: "such devotion to duty, Wilson! Why Ba, you have a treasure of a maid" (*LM* 51). The servants in the Barrett household think highly of her. Compared to other servants, she is "cut above the general run" (*LM* 119) because she is not interested in gossip, she performs the duties in the way she should, and she does not steal from the house, unlike her sister, Ellen. Likewise, Timothy Wright, the footman, is attracted to her because of "the intelligence that radiated from her -she was not silly, as so many maids were, nor was she proud. There was, he was sure, *a great deal more to her than anyone supposed*" (*LM* 87; emphasis added). Timothy is most probably a supporter of the Chartist movement, so he is fascinated with her awareness of the stark contrast between the luxurious life of the Barretts and the

poverty, starvation, and misery haunting thousands of people in the slums of England.

More importantly, in the quotation above, Timothy is the mouthpiece of Forster who promises the reader to tell a great deal more about this assumedly "inscrutable" woman and imagines what this "more to her" can be in the course of the novel. This suggests that the novel portrays Elizabeth Wilson as a coherent, unified, and autonomous subject whose history can be captured in a narrative. It bears repeating that Elizabeth Wilson repeatedly claims that she "knows" her mistress (*LM* 85, 521), that she has "the certain knowledge" about the Brownings (*LM* 522), she knows what kind of people they are, which also lays bare the writer's attempt to capture the subject in a narrative. Therefore, it can be claimed that just as the history Forster rewrites displays some faith in such notions as referentiality, objectivity, teleology, and causality, the female subject she depicts recalls the humanist understanding of the subject. While rendering the protagonist visible in the history it rewrites, the novel simultaneously reclaims her individuality, or, what can be considered as her unique identity.[40]

Moreover, the novel privileges the protagonist as a maid, a woman, and a mother, pointing out that her life is no less important than that of her mistress, who was a great Victorian poet. Ruth Robbins draws attention to "the material conditions" that enabled the historical Elizabeth Barrett Browning to lead an "excessively private life", adding that it was other women's labour and her own "class privilege" which enabled this privacy (223, 222). The novel points to these material conditions by depicting the dependence of the fictional poet on her maid in both England and Italy, and the sacrifices Elizabeth makes for the sake of her mistress. When the poet asks her to flee to Italy after her secret marriage, she is aware that her maid will be "risk[ing] all with us", that this would be a "sacrifice" (*LM* 192). Going abroad is "a jump into the unknown. All safety, all security, would vanish." (*LM* 194). In underlining the risks she would be taking by helping her mistress, the novel portrays the role of the protagonist in the elopement of the poets as a heroic act worthy of

[40] The perception of subjectivity is quite similar in the representation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as will be discussed in the following section.

remembrance. The implication is that by taking these risks, Elizabeth contributes to the career of the poet. Furthermore, by taking on many tasks along with those expected from a maid, such as the duties of a seamstress and a nursemaid, in Italy, she provides her mistress with the time, solitude, and freedom she needs to write and to fully concentrate on writing. This point reveals how cultural capital is, at least partly, built on the labour of the working classes.

Through Elizabeth Wilson's story, *Lady's Maid* provides the reader with a sense of what kind of a life a servant might have led in the Victorian period and what kinds of circumstances might have shaped the lives of the servant class and limited their choices. Although the novel deals with the period between 1844 and 1861, the narrator reflects on the earlier experiences and the familial background of the protagonist and portrays what might have happened in other houses in Victorian England. Elizabeth comes from a poor family. Her father has died. Her mother "had never done anything but wash and scrub and clean" throughout her life (*LM* 5). The family lives in a cottage in Newcastle, and they can be evicted at any time. The sense of economic insecurity makes the mother urge her daughters to become a servant, under maid, parlour maid, or scullery maid (*LM* 5). The narrator repeatedly likens these jobs to "slaving" (*LM* 5), thereby criticizing class hierarchy in the Victorian period that doomed thousands of women, like Elizabeth's mother and sisters, to this kind of slavery. The vile living conditions of Elizabeth's family are portrayed through forceful images and stark contrasts, which reminds one of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), a condition-of-England novel that depicts nineteenth-century England through stark contrasts between the lives of the rich and the poor. When Flush, the poet's beloved dog, has been stolen and finally brought home, "His Lordship" is fed "extra cakes and the cream from the milk" and "breast of chicken" (*LM* 71, 70). While feeding the dog, Elizabeth remembers the time when her family could not find enough money to buy chicken for her sick sister. On such occasions, the micro-history of this Victorian maid stands for macro-history: the Victorian past and the condition of England in the nineteenth century. The episodes about Elizabeth's family are invented by Forster, yet they add a sense of truthfulness to the narrative because they present detailed depictions of the sufferings of the servant class, which Bruce Robbins finds missing in nineteenth-century realist novels, as

mentioned above. Drawing upon Heilmann and Llewellyn, therefore, it can be claimed that by "incorporating the experiences of the servant class", the novel "turns into a socially representative narrative" ("Hystorical" 148).

As a neo-realist novel, therefore, while *Lady's Maid* particularizes history by focusing on the life story of the protagonist, it simultaneously uses this story to provide some insights into the condition of England and the condition of women. To put this in another way, the micro-history of the protagonist is a means for the novel to engage critically with the Victorian age. In this engagement, one of the significant preoccupations of the novel is "the Woman Question". While resembling Victorian novels in terms of such subject matter, the novel deals with these issues with a modern sensibility. In *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction (*2005), Jeannette King rightly argues that contemporary women writers' interest in the Victorian period stems from their preoccupation with gender issues and the "need to know how our beliefs came about, and how much has been excluded or forgotten in what we know" about the construction of gender identity and womanliness (6). Importantly, King claims that "[r]evisiting Victorian women's lives provides an opportunity to challenge the answers which nineteenth-century society produced in response to 'the Woman Question'" (6). King thinks that this preoccupation is a postmodernist challenge to history (3-4). Departing from the last suggestion of King, this study proposes that by revisiting a Victorian discourse, this novel displays its commitment to the historical context and the specificity of the Victorian era, as Hadley reiterates throughout her book (6, 18). Furthermore, the study suggests that the treatment of female characters and the issue of gender in *Lady's Maid* signals a departure from postmodernism's deconstructive stance on the subject, history, and history writing. As mentioned above, the novel challenges masculine history but does this silently without turning history into a playground or a fictive, chaotic, and meaningless entity, and without showing the historical figures it portrays as textual, dissolving, and elusive constructs.

The novel critically engages with "the Woman Question" by demonstrating that Victorian women, no matter which social class they belong to, are similarly subjugated. When some relatives visit the Barretts, Elizabeth Wilson cannot go out

and meet her lover because she is needed at home. On the same day, Mr Barrett forbids Henrietta, the poet's sister, to leave the house. The reason for this is that Henrietta has visited a friend "unchaperoned", and her lover Surtees Cook was there, too, which is "outrageous" according to Mr Barrett (*LM* 133). The narrator draws attention to the shared experience of these two women from different social classes: "it was not only being a servant which hampered her freedom of conduct but being a woman. […] It was, Wilson decided, very little better to be a lady than a servant." (*LM* 133). Although in neither her biography of the poet nor this novel does Foster portray Mr Barrett as a completely tyrannical figure, he is undeniably the embodiment of Victorian patriarchy in the novel with his anger, the pressure he exerts on his children, and the rules he makes them observe. Henrietta is likened to a property, an object, expected to obey the rules set by her father and keep silent in the face of his tyranny. The feminine experience of oppression in different forms shared by these two women renders them equals in a sense.

Forster's critique of Victorian patriarchy is most evident in the stark contrast between the atmospheres of Victorian London and Italy, especially Florence. While No. 50 Wimpole Street is a gloomy and claustrophobic place, managed according to "the master's orders" (*LM* 22, 27), Italy is warm, glorious, and life-promoting. It is a place for possibilities, alternatives, new life, and new hopes. While the episodes set in England are dominated by images of prison, confinement, sadness, misery, poverty, hard work, and darkness, the parts set in Italy abound in images of change, the joy of life, freedom, happiness, color, and light (*LM* 290, 295, 321). This stark contrast seems to be in line with what the historical poet herself thought as to the cultural climates of England and Italy (Forster, *EBB* 204, 206). By drawing upon a Victorian woman's opinions on the socio-cultural climate in that period, the novel tries to capture what it was like to be a Victorian woman.

Furthermore, the novel revisits several images of women dominant in the Victorian age and through such images, criticizes the patriarchal society that ascribes women to the domestic sphere and constrains their freedom and personal development. The Victorian discourse on gender was based on dichotomies that associate women with emotion, fragility, and domesticity; and men with intellect, reason, and physical

strength. Victorian society valued a certain ideal of femininity and expected women to fit into this image. Noting how "the intersection of scientific, religious and literary discourses" reinforced Victorian gender discourse, King concedes that the Victorian dichotomy between "'madonnas'" and "'magdelenes'", which were derived from the Bible, dictated the idea that "[o]nly by being obedient, denying their bodies and seeking fulfilment in maternity can women be sure of a place within the first category" (10). As "the angel in the house", an image derived from Coventry Patmore, was the valued leg of this dichotomy, the proper sphere ascribed to women was home and the proper roles for them were assumed as being in line with this proper sphere, such as domestic management, motherhood, bearing children, being the guardian of morality at home and a supporter of her husband. The Victorian ideal of femininity also dictated that female sexuality, if it did not serve a woman's "primary reproductive purpose", was a great "danger to a woman's mental health" and "her moral worth" (King 18, 21). From this perspective, it can be argued that in *Lady's Maid*, Ellen, Elizabeth's sister, embodies the image of "the whore" or the fallen woman, a popular figure in neo-Victorian fiction. She becomes pregnant out of wedlock and turns into a disgrace for her family when her lover deserts her. Elizabeth's approach to her reflects mainstream society's attitude towards the fallen woman. When Ellen talks to her about her sexual experiences with Albert, Elizabeth despises Ellen due to her "clear enjoyment of her carnal relationship with Albert"; the idea of her sister "coupling made her nauseous" (*LM* 167). Elizabeth has always thought of "it" as a "thing of horror", "something to be endured for the sake of love and marital duty or the procreation of children" (*LM* 167-168). Ellen is the embodiment of moral corruption and pollution since she has transgressed this norm. That is why Elizabeth thinks that "dignity and sense of responsibility" are "entirely lacking in Ellen" (*LM* 298). Ellen gains a degree of dignity and respectability only when she pledges "herself to honour and obey William Henry Wilson until death did them part" despite not knowing or loving this man (*LM* 315). To her family, William is almost a saviour who redeems her sins. Their marriage is not built on love. Ellen is helpless, and William needs a woman to look after his children. The novel uses the image of the fallen woman to criticize Victorian society which sees women's sexual pleasure as deviance and punishes women who pursue their desires and have sex before marriage.

The novel revisits the images of "the angel in the house" and "the whore" through the protagonist. As her approach to her sister makes clear, Elizabeth has internalized dominant discourses on womanhood and ideal femininity, and she cherishes them. She yearns for a conventional marriage and a cosy home, where she will take on the role of "the angel in the house". Elizabeth Treherne's life depicted as "such a happy home with a husband as handsome and pleasant as Billy Treherne and a baby" is what she longs for (*LM* 86). Her fear of spinsterhood is as strong as that of poverty. Moreover, to her, an ideal husband is a physically strong and masculine man, who leads his wife (*LM* 264, 265). She is willing to adopt the feminine role of passivity. Until late in the novel, Elizabeth pursues her dream of conventional marriage and family, and she desperately struggles to be an "angel" in her own house. However, due to several reasons, such as her long-time proximity to an intellectual woman, her transformation in Italy, and the family problems she faces, her worldview concerning womanhood and her gender identity changes. Rather than longing for being led by her husband, she wants economic independence and personal freedom. Towards the end, she is sexually and emotionally alienated from her husband. When she rejects having sex with him, aware that he can abandon her for another woman for this reason, she feels "only a welcome *sense of freedom*. She was free of Ferdinando" (*LM* 479; emphasis added). In fact, what she has longed for throughout her life is genuine affection in human relationships. Perhaps this is what lies behind her desire for a conventional family life until a certain moment in the narrative. This welcome sense of freedom is indicative of both a rejection of the Victorian ideal of womanhood and the pursuit of her own desires and purposes.

As mentioned above, a crucial quality of "the angel in the house", the Victorian ideal of femininity, was that the woman did not have any sexual feelings except for the purpose of bearing children. Initially, Elizabeth, who yearns to be an "angel", displays a lack of sexual feeling. She keeps distant from male characters. She does not transgress the boundaries of what she sees as respectability in her romantic encounters. Yet, in time, she experiences a sexual awakening, just like her sister whom she has despised for this. Importantly, it is in Italy, not England, that she follows her sexual desires. Sexually attracted to Ferdinando Romagnoli, another servant in the Browning household, she wants him "to touch her", thinking that "if he

did she would die of *pleasure*" (*LM* 328; emphasis added). It is Elizabeth, not him, who initiates the sexual intercourse. The narrator comments that with their sexual union, "months of yearning" is "now given its satisfaction" (*LM* 337). Like many neo-Victorian novels, *Lady's Maid* talks about female desire and sexuality overtly. And it "celebrate[s] female sexuality", like some other novels which return to "the Woman Question" (King 4). Tellingly, this sexual union takes place around the same time the son of a friend of the Brownings dies. Thus, female sexuality, "her own pleasure", is associated with a celebration of life in the face of the inescapability of death, an affirmation of life: "Life was short and she wanted to enjoy it to the full, to waste none of it. And she felt more alive, more full of hope than she had ever done" (*LM* 337, 338). By addressing female sexuality overtly, the novel signals its difference from Victorian novels, most of which keeps silent about this taboo subject even though some of them, such as *Jane Eyre*, criticize Victorian patriarchy.

Elizabeth, like her sister, faces the cost of her sexual transgression. Upon being dismissed by her employers, she moves into a boarding house that she will run by herself. Here she suffers due to living away from her first-born and also because she has her second baby to look after and the house to manage by herself. Her husband is still in service. He lives with the Brownings and joins them in their travels. These pressures lead her to the brink of mental breakdown, and she begins thinking that she has acted like a "whore". What she has initially seen as her "womanly impulses" turn into "lust" (*LM* 346, 440). In this episode, Forster makes clear how the intersection of Victorian ideologies on religion, class, and gender oppresses women and precludes their self-fulfilment. To understand where she has done wrong and deserved what she sees as punishment, Elizabeth obsessively reads the Bible. She believes:

> She had been wicked. She had given herself, a *virgin*, to Ferdinando without benefit of holy matrimony and her first-born was being withheld from her as payment for her crime. '*Servants, be obedient* to them that are your *masters*' she read in Ephesians 6 -and she had not been obedient. (*LM* 440; emphasis added)

She blames herself for transgressing societal conventions and religious teachings which, in turn, makes it impossible for her to be "the angel in the house". Engaging

critically with the Victorian association of female sexuality with deviancy, immorality, and mental problems, the novel underlines that it is the pressure of the patriarchal system, reinforced by several disciplines, not womanly impulses, that leads her to self-alienation and almost to madness.

Additionally, the juxtaposition of the servant figure and virginity in the quotation above suggests that working-class women can be doubly oppressed when compared to upper-class women though both experience different forms of pressure. In this respect, it is telling that the novel revisits the images of "the whore" and the fallen woman through Elizabeth and her sister, both of whom are working-class women, while revisiting the cherished image, "the Madonna", through Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Mr Barrett believes that her daughter is "the purest woman that ever lived", "an example […] of Christian fortitude" (*LM* 32, 91). The novel makes clear that his idea stems from the facts that she writes religious poetry, and it seems almost impossible to both her and those around her that a woman with such poor health could get married (*LM* 45, 81). Of course, the fictional poet, just like the historical poet, debunks this image by eloping with the man she loves. Nevertheless, the revisitation of the image of "the whore" through working-class characters and "the Madonna" through the upper-class character is indicative of the association of moral corruption with the lower-classes in that period.

The above-mentioned self-alienation and crisis Elizabeth undergoes is to a great extent due to a conflict frequently seen in the Victorian novel: the aspiration for social mobility gets in "conflict with domestic ideology" (Gagnier 61). For Elizabeth, who starts working as a scullery maid at the age of thirteen, becoming a lady's maid promises a "rise in the world" (*LM* 5), in other words, social ascent. However, her rise in the world turns into a trap. Her role as a lady's maid does not allow her to fit into the Victorian ideal of femininity due to various reasons, such as her reluctance to leave her employment for fear of poverty, the selfishness of her mistress, and the complex bond between her and her mistress. These reasons make it difficult for her to break the master-servant relationship between her and her mistress even after she loses her job. Early in the novel, in the Shoreditch episode, where she witnesses the poverty of people living there, she decides that marriage is the only way to be

"respectable and safe and far removed from Shoreditch" (*LM* 180). Nevertheless, marriage does not provide her with happiness, safety, and a sense of fulfilment because her life is to a certain extent "circumscribed by the code laid down for servants", and it is very difficult for a servant to be "a free agent" (*LM* 133). As a result of the clash between the demands of her mistress and her desire to be a good wife and a good mother, Elizabeth finds herself in a dilemma. She cannot be the mother she longs to be, and she cannot bring Oreste to Italy because her employers do not let her. If she reunites with Oreste, this means she must leave her employment and live away from her husband, who still serves the Brownings. Even when she loses her job, she cannot bring together her family. Her husband lives under the roof of the Brownings, and he is not much concerned with family problems. Ellen does not allow her to bring Oreste to Italy, seeing him as her own child. Although this impasse leads her to the brink of the above-mentioned identity crisis, she overcomes this conflict caused by her social status and gender identity because, arguably, this conflict also empowers her. More concretely, this conflict makes it necessary for her to reject passivity in both marriage and her job and to control her own life. Towards the end of the novel, she is determined to make a better future for herself and her children, but the family she dreams of now does not involve a husband figure. While this can be interpreted as her failure to realize her initial ideals, it simultaneously indicates her adoption of the idea of an alternative kind of family in which she will not submit to the will of a husband. Thus, the ending shows her free from the bonds of servitude in more senses than one.

Forster engages with "the Woman Question" also by revisiting the institution of marriage, a key concept regarding the Victorian understanding and ideal of womanhood. She focuses on what an ideal marriage is in the novel. Forster deals with the issue of marriage in some other works, too. She thinks that marriage as an institution can denote a woman's "subjection to the will of a man" or slavery for some people today, yet she privileges marriage so long as it is built on "true sympathy", "mutual love, mutual respect, mutual caring for each other", and so long as women retain their own "individuality" (*Good* 313, 193, 319, 320). While the initial anti-marriage stance of the fictional Elizabeth Barrett Browning is based on factual documents, the protagonist's approach to marriage to a certain extent reflects

Forster's own ideas. Whereas her mistress sees marriage as "servitude", a "lifelong subjection to a man", Elizabeth muses: "if marriage was servitude, spinsterhood was only another kind of slavery" (*LM* 40). To Elizabeth Wilson, marriage "cannot rightly be called servitude unless there is no love only calculation" (*LM* 41-42). While her mistress sees only calculation in the marriages around her, Elizabeth focuses on the bond of love. For her, "[i]t must be a great blessing to be loved […], and to love back" (*LM* 42). When she witnesses the happiness of Elizabeth Treherne, her precursor, the unconventional ideas of her mistress about the question of marriage seem "absolute nonsense" because the "fine talk of freedom from marital servitude" is, to Elizabeth Wilson, "no freedom at all" (*LM* 87). Only when the correspondence between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning begins and leads to their passionate love, do the two women agree on the idea that having "a home of one's own is a fine thing" (*LM* 93). While this statement can be a reference to Virginia Woolf's famous phrase about women writers' need for time and freedom to write, the implication here is that marriage based on mutual understanding and true love can, at least in part, provide the self-fulfillment a woman needs. It is important to note that the novel does not seem to criticize either Elizabeth Barrett Browning's anti-marriage approach or Elizabeth Wilson's desire for a traditional marriage. While the latter character can be harshly criticized by some of today's feminists, who would see marriage as a trap, Forster uses the approaches of both characters to underline the importance of love for marriage and for the self-fulfilment of some women. Reciprocal love functions as a remedy for the poet, who recovers both physically and psychologically (*LM* 208). The novel underlines that love, in various senses of the term (maternal, sexual, etc.), can render one's life meaningful. Therefore, it can be argued that the female-oriented history formulated by Forster is also a kind of history oriented towards love.

In keeping with the project of reconstructing history by centralizing women, the novel changes the meanings of certain terms which are related to history. In so doing, too, the novel expands the meaning of history. One of the terms renegotiated in the novel is "progress". This term is traditionally associated with the Enlightenment ideal of historical progress or developments in a society in time. The novel associates progress with the changes in women's bodies and their experiences concerning love

and sexuality. For example, progress is associated with Elizabeth Barrett's "a few faltering steps", "the weight she was gaining", "the beginnings of some colour creeping into her cheeks and the increase in her appetite", and the return of her "womanly health", that is, menstruation (*LM* 133-134). The experience of pregnancy is also seen as progress in the novel (*LM* 282). By associating progress with the body, the novel makes women's bodies and bodily changes visible in the history it formulates. The term is related to love when the narrator states that Elizabeth and Ferdinando "progressed from hand-holding to kissing and then to embracing" (*LM* 333), and that the "love affair" between the two poets is "in progress" (*LM* 158). Hence the centrality of love to the history rewritten by Forster. Progress is most evident in Elizabeth's change from the timid, naïve maid at the beginning of the novel to an independent woman towards the ending. Her sense of selfhood changes, and she feels transformed due to her proximity to Barrett Browning, her experiences of marriage, motherhood, and the Italian lifestyle, the problems she has faced in the meantime, and her struggles against these problems. Therefore, progress is suggestive of women's journey towards autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency, too. By reinterpreting "progress" and relating it to women's bodies, female sexuality, love, and the personal development of women, the novel undermines the Enlightenment ideal of progress, which is associated with nations, great events, and great men, in other words, masculine history and patriarchy.

The novel similarly redefines the meaning of the term "ordeal" by relating it to the experiences of women. The ordeals Elizabeth Wilson goes through are going to new places and meeting new people, travelling alone, giving birth, and staying in Ellen's house for several months far away from her husband (*LM* 11, 99, 370). Those her mistress undergoes are related to her health problems, being disowned by her father, living away from her siblings, and several miscarriages she has. In connecting this term to the difficulties a woman may experience in daily life, Forster implies that overcoming these seemingly trivial difficulties makes them the heroines of their own histories. Accordingly, the novel is preoccupied with feminine "great deeds" which are in stark contrast with the traditional understanding of this phrase, connoting wars, violent conflicts between nations, and bloodshed. Forster's women-centred history

foregrounds the creativity of women in various senses of the term[41]. In the case of the protagonist, female creativity is associated with bearing children and her resourcefulness in the face of many difficulties. Upon facing an economic crisis at her sister's home in England, Elizabeth starts making new clothes out of the old ones, which is a talent "she had inherited [from her mother] and developed" (*LM* 375). By cutting some pieces from an old dress, altering some other parts, she produces "a most attractive creation" (*LM* 376). As a seamstress, she gains more money than that she has gained as a maid because customers are "thrilled with the originality of the dress[es]" (*LM* 376). By drawing attention to the female potential, the novel reveals that the accomplishments of women, their resourcefulness, and creativity in the face of various crises are as valuable as the "great deeds" of great men in (masculine) official history.

While focusing on the personal history of a maid, the novel touches upon the historical events taking place in both England and Italy in that period. While the references to these events function to place the narrative in a historical context and, thus, render the story referential and truthful, these reflections are of secondary importance since the focus is on the protagonist's personal struggles. For instance, when the narrator touches upon the struggle for national independence in Italy, the narrative directs the reader's attention to Elizabeth's desperate attempts to reunite with Oreste and bring together her family. In the face of her own problems, she does not "care a jot for Garibaldi or Cavour or any other Italian hero. Her concerns were here, in front of her, concerns that were domestic and intimate and not to be spoken of in the same breath as supposedly greater events. She did not think them greater" (*LM* 464). Forster wants her readers to see what is going on in the inner world of the protagonist, which is no less dramatic than the historical events taking place in Italy or England. By foregrounding her own story rather than great events, the novel demonstrates that although she is not a maker of history in the traditional sense, she is struggling to be the maker of her own history. These suggestions again indicate that the female-oriented history configured by Forster presents a critical revision of and a significant intervention in masculine history, which does not involve the domestic and intimate concerns of an ordinary woman.

[41] Poetic creativity will be discussed in the following section.

Concerning the issue of being subject to or a subject in history, the novel underlines that, in some ways and to a certain extent, the protagonist's life is shaped by her mistress. For instance, the fictional Barrett Browning sees her maid's pregnancy as a "deceit" when she learns that the baby has been conceived before marriage (*LM* 356). She tells her that they cannot accommodate their servants with a baby (*LM* 360). Due to her mistress's lack of understanding and the consequent problems, Elizabeth's life turns into tragedy, as explained above. Nevertheless, the protagonist is not a totally passive and victimized subject, which is crucial to understanding the woman-centred history formulated by Forster.

With reference to some novels by women writers, King accurately remarks that "[b]y making female experience central to their narratives, such novels gave women back their place in history, not just as victims but as agents" (King 3). Women's independence, their struggle for individual autonomy, and female agency are very important concepts for Forster, who negotiates these issues in several works, such as *Significant Sisters* and *Good Wives*. While Elizabeth can be seen as a victim regarding her relationship with her mistress, she is an agent in her personal history, evident in her above-mentioned "great deeds", her progression from a timid maid to an economically independent landlady, from a submissive and passive woman to a self-assertive one. In *choosing* to flee to Italy with her mistress, Elizabeth changes the course of her life. In Italy, she tries "so hard to make a new and better life" (*LM* 220). Although she cannot ask for an increase in her salary after many years of service, she manages to speak up for herself rather than bowing her head "meekly before what is wished upon [her]" (*LM* 301). She demands what is rightfully hers: "'I must have twenty guineas, as others do, or I am a fool and a poor one.'"; "'I must earn what I am worth while I am able'" (*LM* 307, 309). When her employers turn down her request, she threatens them with quitting her job (*LM* 307). She does not leave employment since they make a compromise. Nevertheless, in this episode, she dares to assert her will against that of her mistress for the first time.

The maid's struggles for being an agent in her personal history continue even though she frequently finds herself in between taking matters "into her own hands" and "waiting so feebly for fate to help her" (*LM* 460). Although this situation continues

until late in the novel, and although she does not seem to be much aware of what she has done with herself and her life, Elizabeth emerges as a woman with an independent economic agency, a woman aware of her potential and power in the third part of the novel. The above-mentioned family problems have not been solved yet at this point in the narrative, but the novel ends with a note of hope:

> For too long, Wilson reflected […] I have *looked backwards, fearing to look forwards*, but it *can and must be done*. Her life was far from over. She would have Oreste brought out and would endeavour to *make for herself a new world* in which *the centre* was not Mrs Browning. Never again would she tie her life to another person in quite that way but would seek to *stand on her own* more truly than had ever been possible. […] Her days as a lady's maid […] had died with her lady. Now, she *could be herself* and not poison what was left of her life with regrets and resentments. The yoke was lifted, and what she had been required to do and be, under it, should have no relevance to her future. She was a lady's maid no longer. (*LM* 533-534; emphasis added)

This is a very significant moment in Elizabeth's life and in the novel since it signals a turning point. She chooses to take all responsibilities and to be *a subject in history*. She is determined to lead a free life without dependency on an employer or a husband. More importantly, she places herself at *the center* of her world, and she is determined to *be herself*, an idea that runs contrary to the concept of the dissolved and decentred subject embraced by the metafictional neo-Victorian novel. As the emphasis placed on her personal integrity, her unique identity, her struggles and personal development also demonstrate, the novel portrays Elizabeth Wilson as a unified, continuous, and autonomous subject. Her new awareness of her power and accomplishments suggests that she will be the mistress of her life from then on, and that *she* will exercise control over her fate. Therefore, the female-oriented history configured by Forster is not a utopian fantasy placed in the Victorian past but a plausible version of the Victorian past that participates in a feminist imperative: "the humanist project to restore personal agency to women", in Cora Kaplan's words (41). While inscribing her history into the reader's historical understanding, the novel reclaims female agency. As such, it can be claimed that the women-centred history formulated by Forster gestures towards the return of the humanist (female) subject.

By portraying the endeavors of the protagonist to realize her dreams, her ambition to create a better future for herself and her family, and her awareness that she is the

center of her life and the maker of her own history, the novel also uses this female subject as a means to strike a chord in the reader and to illuminate "the human condition more generally", as Lackey says of some other biofictional works (*Biofiction* 118). More concretely, her struggles, desires, and ambitions are in some ways close to the struggles, desires, and ambitions of many people, especially women, today. This means that the reader can find something of their own lives in the story of this Victorian woman.

Closely connected to this point, which establishes a continuity between the Victorian past and the present, between them and us, the novel points to and implicitly calls for "more humane ways of thinking and being" (Lackey, *Biofiction* 116). This call is discernible in the portrayal of the complex and at times paradoxical relationship between the protagonist and her mistress. Forster believes that "solidarity among women", a "sense of identification with each other for all women", is the ideal horizon for feminisms (*Significant* 4, 201). Accordingly, the novel negotiates the possibility of this ideal by focusing on the possibility of a kind of sisterly bond between these characters. Initially, Elizabeth remains at a certain distance to her mistress due to her social standing. Upon her mistress's repeated claims, such as "we are friends"; "I hope I am your friend […] I never could abide those who say they could not be friends with a servant and boast of the distance they keep. I *wish* to be thought of as a friend"[42] (*LM* 41, 63; emphasis in original), the protagonist and, through her, the narrative become preoccupied with the question of whether a friendship across the class boundary, a kind of sisterly feeling can be possible. Living in close proximity for a long time, these characters take on different roles, which initially leads to a genuine bond between them. Elizabeth becomes a maternal figure for the poet, looking after her and soothing her whenever she feels depressed (*LM* 125). Being privy to her mistress's secrets, Elizabeth is also a friend and confidante for the poet. Only Elizabeth accompanies the poet in the wedding ceremony since no one from her family knows it. Likewise, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's attitude towards her maid initially gives the impression that a true understanding and

[42] These statements are based on verifiable facts. In her biography, Forster mentions the poet's frustration with people who look down on their servants and quotes from the documents left by Barrett Browning, where the poet states that she had "a fine madness for turning servants into friends" (*EBB* 124-125)

compassion across the class barrier is possible. She takes on the role of the mother figure when Elizabeth falls ill in Italy. Elizabeth writes in a letter to Minnie that her mistress "has been as kind as a person ever could be, and *if I had been her sister* I could not have been more tenderly treated" (*LM* 224; emphasis added).

Although this connection and sisterly feeling shatter when her mistress learns that Elizabeth's baby has been conceived out of wedlock and her loyal maid has kept it as a secret for some time, the narrative obsessively returns to this possibility, to these characters' paradoxical behaviors towards each other, and to the impact of all this on the inner world of the protagonist. The ebbs and flows of the relationship between these characters embody narrative tension. Elizabeth becomes more and more obsessed with it especially after losing her job. She sees this bond as one based on "understanding and sympathy" and support; her mistress views it as the "perfect trust" between them due to the "honesty" of her maid (*LM* 356). While this explains why Elizabeth Barrett Browning turns from a friend to a selfish mistress, it cannot be an adequate explanation for her cruelty towards her maid. Moreover, although Barrett Browning says, "I am tired of her, Robert [….] It is nothing but trouble, nothing but *her* problems when we have enough of our own. […] I do not even like to see her, it makes me uncomfortable and I wish her gone" (*LM* 461; emphasis in original), the novel indicates that she needs her old confidante and that the new maids cannot truly replace Elizabeth. Elizabeth hears her mistress's comments given above. In fact, she is aware that her old mistress has always underpaid her. She resents being separated from her husband largely due to the Brownings. She cannot take in why her mistress treats her in this way. And at times she despises her mistress for these reasons. But still, she cannot completely cut the bond between them.

The nature of the relationship between these two women is so complex and their behaviors towards each other so paradoxical that it can vex the reader, or they may interpret both characters as inconsistent in this regard. Towards the end of the novel, the tragic news about Henrietta's illness and the consequent decline in the health of Barrett Browning bring these women "closer together" in their "love and concern for Miss Henrietta" (*LM* 463). The poet even empathizes with Elizabeth and attempts to bring Oreste to Italy with the help of another servant. Likewise, despite living away

from her elder son for years due to her mistress's lack of empathy, when her mistress falls sick again, "[t]remors of feeling flickered through Wilson [….] Her love for her mistress refused to die completely however hard she rejected it" (*LM* 477). Elizabeth wishes "to recover" her mistress, meaning both her health and, more importantly, "the feeling […] which I believe to have been between us, the understanding" (*LM* 507). The death of her mistress makes it impossible to recover "the past happiness", "what we mean to each other" (*LM* 508). Nevertheless, even the possibility of this recovery act functions as a remedy to Elizabeth, who has several important problems in her life. Even after the death of the poet, Elizabeth is haunted by her memory and the lost chance of recovery. Although she blames either herself or her mistress for this loss, in a letter to Elizabeth Treherne, she writes:

> Those who serve can never hope to breach the gap between themselves and those who are served and I ought to have remembered it. And yet there was something between us which was over and above the maid-and-mistress position and that is what I must cling to. […] A sympathy, it was, a feeling, which at times crossed the barrier. (*LM* 515)

The complex relationship between these women has important implications. Firstly, rather than showing the inconsistency of these characters, their obsessive attempts at times to recover and other times to cut this bond reveal something of the human being, linking them to us. The novel underlines the individual's need for others, the human need to be loved and to love, to be cared for and to care for others while at the same time revealing the extent of human selfishness. Secondly, if this relationship tells something about the human being, both the Victorians and us, then it can be claimed that the novel gestures towards the humanist understanding of subjectivity through this bond, too. In other words, the emotional complexity of these characters likens them to us and their experiences to our experiences. This, in turn, shows that the novel's understanding of the (female) subject departs from the elusive, textually constructed, and dissolving subject as in *Ever After*. Thirdly, as is the case with the Victorian narrative in *Cloud Atlas*, by placing the possibility of this alternative[43] way

[43] Sisterhood/sisterly feeling between a Victorian maid and a lady is an alternative way of being because Victorian society was governed by class hierarchy. Since the feminist ideal of sisterhood does not seem to have been achieved in today's world, and since there are many (social, political, economic, sexual, etc.) divisions in modern societies that separate people, a bond of compassion and genuine sympathy across boundaries can be regarded as an alternative route in today's world, too.

of being, feeling, and thinking in the Victorian past, the novel points out that history can be something valuable and some lessons can be hidden in it. This, in turn, indicates the value of narrative, fiction, and, by implication, literature in that they can both provide insights into human experiences in the past and, through such insights, enable us to develop more humane ways of living. Therefore, it can be claimed that through such thematic concerns as empathy with and sympathy towards the other, solidarity, and love across boundaries, which are the significant messages the novel gives to the reader, the novel addresses the present and also the future. In this way, too, the novel establishes a relationship of continuity between the Victorian past and the present, the past and the future.

Nick Rennison explains the paradoxical nature of the relationship between these two women as follows: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Elizabeth Wilson "are mutually dependent and intimate", and yet they are "also forever separated by the enormous gulf of class distinction" (59). This suggestion seems too simplistic because rather than being forever separated, these characters seem forever connected. This connection is both a problem in the sense that it has devastating effects on Elizabeth's life and a possibility, a feminist alternative way of living and being buried in history and addressing the present and the future. Forster invites her readers to imagine what could have changed for the better in both women's lives if they could have recovered their past happiness, if they could have realized the possibility of sisterhood. In addition, even though these characters cannot fully recover the lost happiness, the novel reflects on how other women help Elizabeth in her time of need, pointing to the possibility of female solidarity in this way, too. For instance, Isa Blagden sends lady-boarders to the protagonist; Blagden also "laid to rest all her anxieties" about her elder son (*LM* 412). The narrator states that the protagonist understood "Miss Blagden's kindness" as a "sign and evidence of human concern" that "had most probably saved her […] from real madness" (*LM* 441). The larger and ethical message given to the reader on such occasions is turning to and caring for the suffering other, in short, recognizing the common humanity of all people.

Referring to Forster's novel, Kohlke and Gutleben state that through neo-Victorian biofiction, "neglected subalterns" are introduced "into cultural consciousness for the

first time as subjects worthy of remembrance in their own right" ("Taking" 43). They concede that, in this way, biofiction "becomes an *alternative or compensatory virtual archive*" ("Taking" 44; emphasis added). This suggestion is reminiscent of Kate Mitchell's claim that neo-Victorian novels are memory texts, which continuously shape and reshape cultural memory (32). Drawing upon these suggestions, it can be claimed that in Forster's hands, the invented life story of a maid turns into a woman-centred archive, which reclaims female agency, complements the historical record through fictional truths, and presents significant historical, political, ethical, and cultural interventions.

5.3. The Return of the (Victorian) Author

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) was one of the most prominent poets in the Victorian period. In her "Introduction" to *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Selected Poems* (1988), Margaret Forster states that Browning thought "she had a special function as a poet", which was "'to speak out'" (xvii). Although Barrett Browning managed to speak out about women's position in society, English society, established systems that oppress certain groups, and the political situation in Italy, amongst many other current issues in that period, her works have been rather neglected in the twentieth century.[44] Forster revisits the poet in *Lady's Maid*, portraying her as a Victorian lady, a mother, and, more importantly for this section of the study, a significant woman writer. This section argues that although *Lady's Maid* criticizes Elizabeth Barrett Browning for her selfishness and cruelty towards Elizabeth Wilson, it celebrates her as a woman writer and as an intellectual Victorian woman, and it pays tribute to her to a great extent. It suggests further that while contributing to the poet's re-presence in cultural memory, this novel gestures towards *the return of the (Victorian) author*. This section of the study will first examine the idea of the death of the author, as discussed by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, and critical debates revolving around the author figure and authorship in neo-Victorian studies.

[44] In her "Introduction" to *Selected Poems*, Forster remarks that although Barrett Browning "has never been entirely 'lost' [… ,] she was rapidly demoted from the position she held in her life" after her death, adding that this situation began to change in the 1970s, when some feminist critics "rediscovered" her works (xviii-xix).

In light of this theoretical context, it will explore the treatment of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a woman writer in *Lady's Maid*.

In the second half of the twentieth century, prominent theorists of poststructuralism and postmodernism called into question many concepts associated with liberal humanism. The humanist notion of the sovereign, autonomous self and the author as the origin of the meaning of a work are two significant and closely connected concepts debunked by these theorists. In "The Death of The Author" (1968), Roland Barthes claims that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (Barthes, "Death" 185). When a writer starts writing, he or she "enters into his own death" because "writing begins" (Barthes, "Death" 185). As the subject/the author is a by-product of language, and not the reverse, "it is language which speaks, not the author" in a text (Barthes, "Death" 186). If it is language that speaks, if a "text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, "Death" 188), the meaning of a work cannot be single, final, or stable. This suggestion is an attack on the idea that the meaning of a work originates in the intentions, emotions, opinions, consciousness, identity, or life of a writer. According to this approach, meaning is constantly deferred. There can be "nothing beneath" a text (Barthes, "Death" 188). As Andrew Bennett states in *The Author* (2005), with his "declaration of radical textuality",

> [Barthes] subverts long-held beliefs concerning the priority of the human, of individuality, of subjectivity and subjective experience; and he challenges conventional notions of biography and autobiography as well as traditional conceptions of the institution of literature and the nature and status of the literary work. (11)

The death of the author is celebratory for Barthes since it leads to "the birth of the reader" ("Death" 189). In other words, it paves the way for a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of a single work. In so doing, it ultimately defies any kind of authority including the authority of the writer who is traditionally assumed to be the originator of the ultimate meaning of a text.

Michel Foucault deals with the question of the author in "What is an Author?" (1969) in a similar manner. Here Foucault, like Barthes, associates writing with "a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules" (116). He sees the act of writing as "creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears", "a voluntary obliteration of the self", "the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer" ("Author" 116, 117). In this essay, Foucault sees "'the author' as a function of discourse", which means that the author is a construct, a discursive entity, not "an originating subject" (124, 137). If the author is a discursive construct, a function of discourse, then the question to be raised is "What matter who's speaking?" rather than who the author of a particular work is, or what she or he expresses in a work (Foucault, "Author" 138). The idea that a work expresses the intentions, personality, and feelings of a writer is discarded by these prominent figures. However, the question of who is speaking and the concepts revolving around this question, such as authority, authorship, and authorial identity, are highly important for certain groups who have not obtained the position of authority in the first place.

The issue of the death and/or the rebirth of the author has been discussed by several neo-Victorian scholars whose ideas do not seem to be in agreement on this topic. Some of these scholars see the return to and the return of the author in neo-Victorian fiction as a postmodernist move that aims to reveal the fictionality and instability of subjectivity (Kaplan 38, 71, 78, 79)[45], some others consider this tendency as indicative of a new phase of postmodernism (Kirchknopf 49; Kohlke and Gutleben, "Taking" 39, 40). Roberta G. Wondrich thinks that the obsession with the author figure, that is, with Victorian authors is connected to "realism in biofiction", yet she says that these novels "foreground the fictionality of their own historical recollection and representation" through the author figure (113, 118). This claim raises the

[45] Kaplan discusses the explosion of biographical narratives in recent years in her *Victoriana-Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007). She remarks that while this interest in the subject and the author "might seem […] like the crude revenge of nineteenth-century realism on the cool ironies, unfixed identities and skewed temporalities of the postmodern", it can also be "a symptom and effect of an argument *within* rather than simply *with* contemporary theory or postmodernity -more broadly, an argument about both the nature and position of the subject" (37, 38; emphasis in original). However, the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel's interest in the subject and the author seems to be an argument *against* contemporary theory and the postmodernist understanding of the subject.

question: in which ways does a neo-realist work differ from the overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel in terms of the portrayal of the author figure?

The few critics who have written on the representation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a writer in *Lady's Maid* all see this engagement as the dethroning of the author figure. Gutleben criticizes Forster for making clear "the self-centredness of well-off Mrs Browning in relation to her maid, whose needs, affections and ambitions she is shown to disregard", which means that "the self-deconstructing discourse of selfishness […] is forced on the poetess" (28). To him, the novel presents a critique of "a comfortable writer whose declarations are in contradiction with her life" (28). While this claim is true to a certain extent, he overlooks the complexity of the treatment of the poet in the novel and does not delve deep into what else Forster does to and through this historical figure. Similarly, in "Disparate Images: Literary Heroism and the 'Work vs. Life' Topos in Contemporary Biofictions about Victorian Authors" (2014), Julia Novak and Sandra Mayer accurately claim that *Lady's Maid* reveals the discrepancies between the poet's public image and private self through the depiction of her approach to her maid (32). "The critique implied in *Lady's Maid*" is "the poet's inability to live up to her own standards", her "disregard for class hierarchies" despite her "awareness of gender inequalities", both of which dethrone the Victorian author, according to Novak and Mayer (35, 31). Yet seeing this critique as the novel's entire stance on the poet would be a reductive interpretation of the novel.

The novel admittedly represents the poet in an unflattering light regarding her attitude towards her maid. However, as discussed in the previous sections, the critique of her lack of empathy towards her maid, firstly and to a certain extent, signals Forster's pursuit of a degree of objectivity. As Kohlke and Gutleben state, "revisionary" neo-Victorian novels, which picture the dark lives of the eminent Victorians, "lay claim to be 'truer', because more honest and inclusive, than many official histories" ("Taking" 11). Secondly, it denotes the complexity of the poet's personality and of the relationship between the two characters, as discussed in the previous section, rather than dethroning or condemning Barrett Browning *as* a woman writer. Kohlke and Gutleben concede that in this novel, the focus is on the

protagonist, not on the Brownings ("Taking" 43). Although the novel tells the story of Elizabeth Wilson, Forster's interest in Elizabeth Barrett Browning is evident throughout the work. Therefore, an analysis of the novel must also address the treatment of the woman writer and consider what it means concerning the sense of history in the novel. The above-mentioned scholars, who have written about Forster and *Lady's Maid*, have overlooked certain important gestures of this novel, that is, its defiance of the postmodernist conceptions of the decentred subject and the death of the author. This study maintains that the novel's concern with the rebirth of the female author is inseparable from its political agenda of reclaiming female agency as well as the authority of the woman writer. This section, therefore, aims to find answers to such questions as the following: Why is Forster interested in this poet? Which issues does Forster emphasize concerning Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life and personality? Which of her works are mentioned in the novel, and to which ends do these references serve?

The death of the author thesis advocated by Barthes and Foucault has not been supported by some feminists and other marginalized groups. Discussing the reception of the idea of the death of the author in feminist circles, Mary Eagleton says:

> [O]ne group of academics was declaring the 'death' of the author as a figure of origin, meaning and power at precisely the same moment as another group, from varying feminist positions, was looking for the 'birth' of the author in terms of a reclamation of women's literary history and an exhortation to women to claim a voice. (3)

The feminist critic Nancy K. Miller, who belongs to the latter group, remarks:

> The postmodernist decision that the Author is Dead and the subject along with him does not […] necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not […] (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* self, ego, cogito, etc. (106; emphasis in original)

Underscoring the voice of women writers, reclaiming their authorial identities, foregrounding how they tackle patriarchy, and configuring a female literary tradition that makes room for the works of these figures have been part of the project of

feminism in the late twentieth century, especially after the 1970s. Margaret Forster participates in this project, as her obsessive returns to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in three different works obviously show.

There are several important points that must be clarified at this point. Firstly, in the debates revolving around the author figure in neo-Victorian studies, the author who returns, who is dethroned, whose authority is challenged or celebrated is the fictional Victorian author such as the fictional Charles Dickens in *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) by Gaynor Arnold, the fictional Henry James in *Author, Author* (2004) by David Lodge, and the fictional Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Lady's Maid*. In other words, the author in question is inevitably the fictional Victorian author such novels revisit or place at the central stage or at the margins to diverse ends, which, of course, does not mean that this engagement does not have implications about the position or the authorship of the neo-Victorian writer. Cora Kaplan concedes that this preoccupation with Victorian writers is closely related to contemporary writers' and readers' interest in "life writing in all its forms" (37). Secondly, as the title of this section suggests, the return of the Victorian author is *a thematic concern* of *Lady's Maid.* The novel cherishes this return, which is discernible, for instance, in the emphasis it places on the connections between Barrett Browning's *life* and works. This means that while Barthes and Foucault deal with the author as the authority over the meaning of a text, Forster places emphasis on the life and personality of Barrett Browning in order to connect them to her works. Therefore, Barrett Browning's strong presence in the novel, which also underlines her authorial identity, must also be explored to illuminate how the novel deals with the author as a figure of authority, the target of Barthes's and Foucault's above-mentioned essays. Thirdly, *Lady's Maid* is a *readerly* work, with a certain agenda concerning Barrett Browning, that is, criticizing her in some respects and celebrating her authorial identity. Arguably, this suggests a kind of closure concerning meaning. In addition, Forster asserts an authorial voice in and through the novel, by criticizing and paying homage to her, in other words, by shaping how the Victorian author is remembered today. All this demonstrates the novel's and Forster's renouncement of the death of the author thesis.

After her death in 1861, the work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning has not received the critical attention it deserves. Virginia Woolf draws attention to this point:

> fate has not been kind to Mrs. Browning as a writer. Nobody reads her, nobody discusses her, nobody troubles to put her in her place. […] the only place in the mansion of literature that is assigned to her is downstairs in the servants' quarters, where, in company with Mrs. Hemans, Eliza Cook, Jean Ingelow, Alexander Smith, Edwin Arnold, and Robert Montgomery she bangs the crockery about and eats vast handfuls of peas on the point of her knife. ("*Aurora*" 182-183)

Furthermore, upon eloping with Robert Browning, she was "mythologized as an ailing Victorian lady who, Rapunzel-like, was rescued from the claws of an evil sorcerer-father by a poet-knight, with whom she fled to Italy at the age of 40, had a child, and lived 'happily ever after'" (Novak 86). This image has been reinforced by many cultural productions about the poet. In the first half of the twentieth century, she "became little more than a footnote to her husband's success" (Avery 11). The image of the poet that emerges in such myths and legends is a "fading maiden, defined solely in terms of her relations with men […] and lacking any kind of independence or agency" (Avery 13).

These two factors, her relegation to the servants' quarters in cultural memory and her mythologization as a weak woman, are indicative of the metaphorical death of the author. It is against this critical neglect and misrepresentation that Forster returns to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in this novel and puts her in her deserved place in literature. Thus, concerning the representation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Forster's common aim in the three works about the life and works of the poet is "to stimulate more interest in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry" and to reveal "her development as a poet" (*EBB* xvi).

In line with these aims, Elizabeth Barrett Browning has a strong presence in the novel even though she is not the protagonist. Forster takes her from the servants' quarters and places her in a privileged position firstly by challenging the myth of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a fading maiden rescued by Robert Browning. The very first image of Elizabeth Barrett Browning evoked early in the novel is "a sad, wasted figure […], an invalid, almost a recluse, so sweet and delicate and gentle, moreover *a poet* of some acclaim" (*LM* 6; emphasis in original). The italics used here

make it clear that Miss Barrett is already a well-known poet in the London literary circle by the time Elizabeth Wilson starts serving her. Although the novel does not delve deep into the life of the poet until that moment, on the first day of service, the housekeeper informs Elizabeth Wilson that Miss Elizabeth has had a "sad life", "a lot of illness and disappointment" (*LM* 10). This sad life is due to the loss of her mother and her beloved brother. As the maid has not witnessed these events, her first impressions about her mistress are in keeping with the above-mentioned mythic image: a mysterious woman, a poor invalid, a sick creature who needs to be looked after like a child. Yet Elizabeth Wilson believes that there is "*more* […] *to know*" about her new mistress (*LM* 27; emphasis added). Here the reader hears the voice of the implied author, who is the *biographer* Margaret Forster. As is the case with the silenced maid, the implied author promises to communicate to the reader some information about the poet. Accordingly, the protagonist realizes that her mistress does not "want to be an invalid but had such a state pushed upon her" (*LM* 35). As the relationship between the maid and her mistress develops, both the maid and, through her, the reader *know more* about the poet, such as her perception of "socialising" as a "waste of creative energy" (*LM* 94), which is based on known facts about the historical poet (Forster, *EBB* 47, 278, 287), the economic problems the Brownings face in Italy, another factual detail which partly explains their reluctance to raise the salary of their maid and to allow her to raise her children under their roof (Forster, *EBB* 208, 221, 242), and the poet's concern with the downtrodden, child labour, injustice to women, and social inequity, which will be explored later in this section. Moreover, the novel does not end with the elopement or the marriage of the poets, unlike some cultural products about Barrett Browning. It reflects on the difficulties she faces during pregnancy and due to living away from her family. Forster reconstructs the fictional Elizabeth Barrett Browning as closely as possible to the fact-based portrayal of the poet in her biography, in other words, close to the way she lived, thought, and wrote. Through this portrayal, the novel both challenges the myth of the fading maiden defined in terms of her relations with men and manages to communicate some historical knowledge about her life.

Furthermore, the novel reflects Elizabeth Barrett Browning's stance on some issues revolving around "the Woman Question", which contributes to her portrait as an

intellectual woman. As is the case with the representation of the maid regarding this issue, on such occasions, the novel calls into question several "answers which nineteenth-century society produced in response to 'the Woman Question'" (King 6). In the Victorian period, equality between the sexes was impossible because women were assumed to be inferior to men, who were associated with the intellect and the mind. It "was dangerous for any woman to expend energy on anything other than her primary reproductive purpose", such as "'brain-forcing'" (King 18, 19). A woman's "relative lack of […] 'masculine' qualities", such as reason and mental and physical strength, "debarred her from public life" in that period (King 28). The novel subverts such Victorian assumptions about women and women's writing through the representation of Barrett Browning. It focuses on her "brain-forcing" rather than that of Robert Browning. The fictional Elizabeth Barrett does not heed her sisters or doctors, who warn her "not to work so hard" since they believe "she will injure her health further and never be well" (*LM* 18-19). The association of reading and writing with illness is a typical Victorian approach to the woman writer. Since Victorian gender ideology asserted that women lacked in intellect and reason, it defined women as abnormal if they rejected to fit into this image. However, in the novel, the act of writing gives the poet a sense of power. She clings to life by writing and reading in times of crisis (*LM* 27, 31, 69). This is in keeping with what Forster writes in her biography: "reading and writing were what made life worth living" to the historical poet (*EBB* 27). Her life becomes closely connected to her art, in other words, her art defines who she is.

In addition, the novel touches upon how the fictional poet manages to fashion herself as a great woman writer by, for example, describing her daily routines. The general assumption about women who wrote poetry in the Victorian past was that "it was an 'accomplishment' rather than a vocation" (Stott 65), or that it was a leisure activity. The novel, however, underscores the fact that Elizabeth Barrett Browning sees writing as her work. After having her morning coffee, she writes and reads until two o'clock in the afternoon (*LM* 18). Meanwhile, she prefers being alone. The protagonist wonders what "this writing and reading meant, whether it was letters Miss Elizabeth wrote and newspapers she read"; she gradually comes to realize that "this was a more *serious occupation*", that her mistress "*worked* at her poetry and

wrote articles for magazines" (*LM* 18; emphasis added). Forster's choice of vocabulary indicates the novel's fidelity to the historical record because this was how the historical figure considered writing (Forster, *EBB* 34). Furthermore, the novel emphasizes her ambition as a writer and how seriously she takes poetry and writing. Elizabeth writes to her mother:

> [S]he *writes and writes*, mother, on such small pieces of paper, ever so fine and neat until she has a great collection and then she scores through her writing and *writes it out again until it is Right.* It is *Clever stuff*, mother, such as you or I cannot rightly understand [….] All morning up to dinner Miss Elizabeth *applies herself* and none must interrupt. Then there are the books, mother, so many of them and all so Thick and Heavy she scarce has strength to lift them. There are books in tongues I have never seen but she makes light work of them, never pausing, *the pages turning and turning*. It is so strange to see *a Lady working* thus, I cannot believe it. (*LM* 18; emphasis added)

The repetitions in this quotation highlight the female creative imagination at work while suggesting the originality of the poet's works since she produces "clever stuff". As this comment is placed early in the novel, it also points to Elizabeth Barrett's effort to establish herself as a powerful author and voice.

One might claim that the quotation above, the novel's emphases on the daily routines of Barrett Browning and on her brain-forcing have nothing to do with the authority of the author or the "author" as understood and challenged by Barthes and Foucault. This study, however, contends that by drawing attention to how Barrett Browning challenges the patriarchal assumptions about women's writing dominant in that age, the novel underlines her radical stance, her power and authority as an author. On many occasions when she appears in the narrative or when the narrator refers to her, she is either reading or writing, as mentioned above. While one might say that this physical presence is not what Barthes and Foucault mean by the term "author" in their essays, this study maintains that the reader's awareness of Barrett Browning, who is constantly reading or writing letters, articles, or poems even in the episodes where she is not present, reveals that the novel uses this physical presence, too, to emphasize the authority of the woman writer. The novel suggests that Barrett Browning's will to write in the face of her sad life and her will to establish herself as a prolific author, despite her health problems and despite patriarchal ideology, lead to

her personal development and enable her to assert her dissenting voice in literary circles dominated by male figures, as will be discussed further below.

Concerning the novel's engagement with "the Woman Question", it must also be noted that the novel underscores how the fictional Barrett Browning fights against social conventions and patriarchal norms that limit women's freedom. Although the servants in the household think that their mistress is against marriage, the poet does not so much attack marriage built on love as the institution of marriage that makes women life-long servants. She articulates "her verdict" with "authority" on love and marriage: "If people are in love then it is an absurdity to be bound by […] conventions" (*LM* 137). Her attack on conventions and norms that place women in a lesser position is repeatedly underscored in the novel. She asks her maid why women are "reluctant to make changes", why they "cling to the old ways and routines" even though they do not like them (*LM* 140). She rejects clinging to the old ways and follows her heart instead of yielding to her father's will. Her "open rejection of the conventional" (*LM* 353) is evident in her attitude towards female sexuality and her own sexuality, too. She believes that women should not "be ashamed of feeling that physical attraction men exhibit so carelessly and are rather praised for" (*LM* 253). When they are on their way to Italy, she says to her maid, "I want to be with my husband heart and soul and body", with her voice strengthening on the word "body" (*LM* 200). She does not fit into the dominant images of womanhood in that period, such as "the Madonna" cherished by her father; she is rather the embodiment of their explosion. She is not the submissive wife idealized in that period and by the protagonist because her marriage is not built on her husband's authority and power. As a mother, she tries to raise her son, Penini, in a more flexible way than what her maid and husband wish. She explains her way of motherhood as: "'I think it good that he [Penini] is considerate and sensitive -he has been brought up to see no merit in violence, and when he is a man he will be as his father, entirely lacking in those so-called manly virtues of domination and arrogance towards women'" (*LM* 421). Although she initially supports or seems to support some patriarchal assumptions, for example by siding with her father regarding Henrietta's romantic relationships, she subverts traditional assumptions about womanhood, female sexuality, family, and gender roles in her own life. Through such examples, the novel reveals that she is in

many ways ahead of her time. Since most of these details are also historically valid, they add to the authenticity of the image of the Victorian period and the image of Barrett Browning evoked in the novel. While satisfying the reader's curiosity for knowing more about her, these historically grounded examples reveal that the novel privileges this woman poet and presents a contribution to cultural memory by highlighting such details about her.

Moreover, the novel challenges the Victorian ideology of the separate spheres by depicting the room of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Wimpole Street as a highly political place. While it is a place of confinement, the room is also a place of artistic and feminine production, a place where women engage in intellectual activities and conversations. In this room, the poet discusses current topics concerning English society, marriage, poetry, love, and political issues, such as the Corn Laws and the Irish question, with her maid. The reader does not hear some of these dialogues, but the narrator and the maid mention that the poet involves her maid "in all the topics of the day" (*LM* 110). On these occasions, while contributing to her maid's intellectual development, she directly or indirectly invites her to question and judge received opinions, especially about marriage, gender roles, and female sexuality. These conversations, in a sense, place the lady and maid, an intellectual woman and an ordinary woman, on the same footing because, as the poet repeatedly claims, they talk as "friends" in this room (*LM* 41). Therefore, the room is also an alternative space where the class divide is crossed to a great extent and where one woman raises the consciousness of another woman on certain issues. This reinforces the depiction of Barrett Browning as an intellectual woman.

More importantly and as also evident in the novel's preoccupation with such issues as Barrett Browning's brain-forcing and her efforts to become a powerful writer explained above, in *Lady's Maid*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning emerges as "the writing subject", whom theorists like Foucault have attempted to deconstruct ("Author" 116). The novel depicts her as the female writing subject, reclaiming her authorial identity. Whereas the above-mentioned claims of Barthes "move authority away from the author, the author as source of the work, the fount of all knowledge and meaning, towards the system of language, the textual codes that produce effects

of meaning" (Bennett 13), Forster moves authority to the female writing subject. Forster's emphasis on the authorship of Barrett Browning explained so far demonstrates some ways in which she moves authority towards the author. The movement of authority away from the system of language towards the female writing subject is also discernible in the novel's engagements with the concept of the woman writer's "anxiety of authorship" and with the works of Barrett Browning.

When the writing subject is a woman, an important issue worthy of exploring is her "anxiety of authorship". In *The Madwoman in The Attic* (1979), a significant work of feminist literary theory, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar elucidate this notion while dealing with many other important issues about women and writing. They challenge Harold Bloom's "male-oriented theory of the 'anxiety of influence'", which suggests that in literary history "a 'strong poet' must engage in heroic warfare with his 'precursor'", and "a man can only become a poet by somehow invalidating his poetic father" (Gilbert and Gubar 48, 47). Gilbert and Gubar claim that what is at stake for a woman writer is rather a "more primary 'anxiety of authorship' -a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (48-49). The woman writer's anxiety of authorship connects with the limits placed on women's agency and independence, and certain definitions of woman/womanhood by male writers which add to this fear.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's anxiety of authorship is negotiated through spatial means in the novel. The depictions of No. 50 Wimpole Street abound in images of claustrophobia, darkness, illness, immobility, and the low spirits of the fictional Elizabeth Barrett. She sees her room as a place of confinement, a prison (*LM* 19). She is encaged in this room in several different senses. Firstly, she cannot move easily due to her health problems. Secondly, she thinks she must obey her father's rules about woman's roles and acceptable behavior even if she has rebellious ideas. On one occasion, when the poet mentions her father, the busts in her room "loomed enormously above her head" (*LM* 185). These are the busts of male poets, such as Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth, whom she adores. Therefore, thirdly, and more importantly, she is metaphorically encaged in a male-dominated literary tradition. Although the novel does not highlight her opinions about these Romantic poets or

some other male figures in philosophy and art, or her search for female precursors[46], the description of the poet's room is highly telling in these respects. Elizabeth Wilson likens the room of the poet to a "tomb" where the "busts of the poets Miss Elizabeth revered" glow "eerily in the half light", and "this *tiny creature*" is "*smothered and trapped* by all the belongings and the furniture" (*LM* 26; emphasis added). "Weariness lay heavy in the air, *lethargy* seemed to seep from the walls, and there was *a hint of despair* over every surface" (*LM* 26; emphasis added). She is smothered and trapped because, her anxiety of authorship is handed down to her by these literary fathers, as Gilbert and Gubar note of women writers in general (51). These forefathers arguably haunt her as reverent ghosts, both long dead and yet present through their busts and books. Most of the time, she feels "walled up in a tomb and wishes she could fly England […] and go to some warm country" (*LM* 76). Although the poet has already gained public acknowledgement and has begun to challenge received ideas at that point in her career, her desire to fly away suggests her need for a more forceful assertion of her voice as a woman writer, among other things. Drawing from Gilbert and Gubar, it can be said that this anxiety turns into a kind of motivation for her when she uses "the pen", "essentially a male 'tool'", as a female weapon in her "journey […] toward literary autonomy" (8, 16). The protagonist says that her mistress is "better humoured, less listless" if she has worked that day (*LM* 27). The 1840s was the period when the historical poet began to free herself from the male literary tradition, formed "her new poetics" and "a new vantage point" by focusing on contemporary issues (Stott 81) and speaking out more forcefully about women, art, society, and her own age, an act which culminates in *Aurora Leigh* (1856). That the novel refers to this masterpiece several times can signal that despite experiencing anxiety of authorship, the fictional poet manages to fashion herself as a "grandmother" for future generations of women writers, as many scholars have noted about the historical Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The references to this work also indicate her authority as a woman writer in the female literary tradition.

[46] In her "Introduction" to *Selected Poems*, Forster states that the historical Barrett Browning "looked everywhere for poetic 'grandmothers' and could find none" (xvii).

While providing the reader with some information about the life and the mindset of the historical Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the novel simultaneously engages with her works, connecting her life to her works. Forster refers to some works of the poet directly and some others indirectly. Importantly, these references indicate that the novel renounces postmodernist anti-intentionalism and the death of the author thesis because, in each case, the novel underscores that Barrett Browning's gender identity, personal experiences, and socio-political views are *behind* her work. In other words, contrary to what Barthes says about the author, Forster underlines that Elizabeth Barrett Browning "exists before it [her work], thinks, suffers, lives for it" ("Death" 187). While this does not mean that Barrett Browning's (or Forster's) readers cannot make their own meanings, the novel does not seem to support the postmodernist idea of the multiplicity of interpretations or meanings of a work. These points have critical implications concerning this neo-realist neo-Victorian novel's approach to the subject and the author.

One of the poems directly referred to in the novel is "The Lady's Yes" from *Poems* (1844; 1850), a collection where the poet explores "the ills of capitalism, slavery and sexual oppression" (Avery 6). This poem is about the female speaker's expectations and desires concerning courtship and her advice to the man who flirts with her the previous night. The poet reads this poem to her maid to learn her opinions on it. Although Elizabeth Wilson initially thinks that she would find the poem "incomprehensible", "*she did understand*" it (*LM* 45; emphasis added).

> Wilson had no difficulty appreciating the sentiments -they were precisely stated and her own entirely. She was surprised Miss Elizabeth should write so, with such simplicity and feeling, and as the poem went on the force of the verses did not escape her. *It was true, all true*. She herself had never flirted in her life and yet all around she saw how coquetry on both sides ruled the day. In the fourth verse she found herself nodding at the line, 'wooing light makes fickle truth'; and the fifth verse was so exactly right she clapped her hands. (*LM* 46; emphasis added)

This scene is important because rather than foregrounding textuality, textual indeterminacy, or the plurality of meanings, it reveals that the reader's [47]

[47] One might claim that there is only one reader in such episodes, and that this does not provide a conclusive suggestion about the interpretation and meaning of the poems in question or about such notions as intentionalism. Nevertheless, as the story is told from the point of view of the maid, as the

interpretation of the poem is close to what the poet aims to express in it. This scene is indicative of the notion of intentionality, or in Andrew Bennett's words, the possibility that "authorial intention is accessible" (66), an idea debunked by the postmodernist and poststructuralist theories of authorship. In this scene, the poet affirms her reader's interpretation when she says Elizabeth is "quite the critic" (*LM* 53-54). She means that her maid, who is the reader in this episode, has properly understood what she expresses in that poem. The novel's approach to the woman poet is, then, suggestive of "the 'Romantic' or 'modern' sense of authorship": a subject who was "present to herself as she wrote or composed it and was fully conscious of and knowledgeable about her words, meanings and intentions" (Bennett 7, 8). In addition, the maid's remark on the truthfulness of what the poem expresses reveals that it reflects the outer reality, at least, according to her. The novel, in a sense, celebrates Barrett Browning's works as they reflect social reality, in other words, due to her astute observations; and it uses this aspect of her poems as a means to underscore her authority as a writer. Furthermore, as the resistance of the female speaker in this poem to the advances of the gentleman and her expectation to be respected by him are in accord with the ideas of the fictional Barrett Browning, the poem emerges as a place where the reader feels the presence, rather than the absence, of the author. Therefore, in line with the reclamation of female agency in the case of the protagonist, the representation of the poet in the novel is suggestive of the rebirth of the humanist subject, more specifically, the celebrated return of the female writing subject.

Another work the novel refers to is "The Cry of the Children", one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's political poems from 1844 *Poems*. This poem presents a powerful critique of child labour, the problem of industrialization, and factory work. The children, who work like slaves at factories, curse England which progresses at the cost of their lives. The poet reads the review of her *Poems* (1844) by a "gentleman" in a magazine, who has written that "'this poet had done better to confine herself to those romantic ballads and sonnets which are so becoming to the

narrative focuses on the maid's interpretations of these poems, and as Forster's readers are not provided with some scenes which reflect on how these poems are interpreted by other characters, it can be claimed that in this novel, the maid stands for the readers of Barrett Browning.

female pen instead of straying in a subject very near to politics about which she can know nothing" (*LM* 53). He criticizes her because she is transgressing the boundary between the male and female terrains and "dealing *overtly* with the wider political sphere" (Avery 6; emphasis in original). The implication in this review is that, as a woman, she is expected to remain in the proper sphere allocated to her and deal with feminine subjects, associated here with emotions, love, and romance rather than politics, a male sphere of knowledge. The poet laughs out loud upon reading this review, deriding the critic for his belief that a woman writer "ought not to write about suffering and injustice" (*LM* 53). This laughter is a political response because it suggests her power and self-confidence about what she does, and the pleasure she gets in transgressing the boundaries set for her. Unlike this critic, Elizabeth Wilson, the female critic here, has "cried at it [the poem] and thought it *very true* and wondered how you could *know* […] being so removed from such dreadful things" (*LM* 53; emphasis added). Although the poet leads a secluded life, she is an ardent reader of newspapers, magazines, reports, and novels. She says that novels "are wrongly despised, I learn a great deal from novels" (*LM* 53). While this scene shows the poet as a social commentator, an intellectual, who speaks up for the downtrodden so as to draw attention to the social ills of her time and perhaps to cause social and political reforms through her poems, it also privileges the realist novels of the period for holding up a mirror to the outer world.[48] Furthermore, as the tears on her maid's face in this scene make clear, the poem manages to strike a chord in the reader, becoming a means to extend the reader's sympathy to the suffering others in society.

In terms of its thematic concerns, "The Cry of the Children" connects to the 1840s Chartist movement and the condition of England in the mid-nineteenth century. The novel points out how the poet's feelings and ideas on these issues are *behind* this poem. Talking to Timothy Wright, the footman and a supporter of Chartism, excites her (*LM* 58). She thinks that "he has a Mind" and finds him "pleasing" because he reads newspapers and pamphlets about "the Condition of the World" (*LM* 58). Timothy believes that things will change for better for the low-classes (*LM* 72). The

[48] The fictional poet reads *Jane Eyre* and *Mary Barton* and finds the latter better than the former (*LM* 265, 276). This suggests her interest in politics (in the traditional sense of the term), the outer world, and working-class people.

reference to the Chartist sentiments of Timothy, the poet's appreciation of his ideas, her attack on child labour and factory work in this poem, and the maid's comments on the truthfulness of the dreadful things the poet expresses all underline that Barrett Browning's "passions, humours, feelings, impressions" (Barthes, "Death" 188) do inform her works, which, in turn, impacts on the reader's interpretations of these works to a certain degree, as is the case with the first poem discussed above.

The third work mentioned in the novel is the magnum opus of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1856). This poem is multidimensional in its scope and concerns. It tells the journey of an artist, Aurora Leigh, towards independence, her development as a poet and a woman. Along with these, it addresses many other issues, such as gender roles, the plight of fallen women, female solidarity, love, marriage, the poor, the role of the poet and poetry. This masterpiece is put to complex uses in the novel. The novel first reflects on the source of inspiration for this work. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wishes to read Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) because it is "thought a very brave book for speaking out" (*LM* 276). She says, "I have had a mind for years to speak out myself, though not in the manner of Mrs Gaskell. There *is* injustice for women in the world and we, who are so fortunate, must not forget it" (*LM* 276; emphasis in original). Here she articulates her aims and intentions in producing this work and her perception of the role of a poet, that is, to speak out, to draw attention to social injustices and gender inequalities.

While the poet, preoccupied with "all the poor and exploited women in the world", is trying to complete *Aurora Leigh*, however, she announces what the protagonist sees as "the message of doom", "a death-knell", that is, the maid has to leave her baby in England if she wants to regain her position in the Browning household in Italy (*LM* 276, 385). On the one hand, Barrett Browning's lack of sympathy towards her maid, who has served her for a long time, throws a shadow on this poem, the messages it gives to the reader, and the sincerity of the poet's sympathy for exploited people. The juxtaposition of the poem, which focuses on injustice for women, and the protagonist's subjugation by its writer certainly renders more forceful the novel's critique of Barrett Browning's selfishness in this respect. In her biography, Forster

refers to this issue, noting the lack of any expression of sympathy and understanding in the documents the poet left:

> The mother who adored her own child and had been overwhelmed by the violence of maternal feeling, and the poet who was about to publish a poem full of the tenderness of women for children and a defence of the exploited working-class girl, both seemed untouched by her own maid's anguish. (*EBB* 315)

As explained in the previous section, the reliance of the portrayal of the poet in the novel on the account given in the biography contributes to the truthfulness of the story. The poet is portrayed as a woman of her own class concerning her attitude towards her maid, and she is criticized for this. The critique levelled at the poet demonstrates that the novel does not turn a blind eye to the faults of this historical figure in an attempt to idolize her.

On the other hand, however, references to this poem work to portray the fictional Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a great woman writer. Her health declines when she is working on the poem, but every day she continues correcting *Aurora Leigh*, "scanning the proofs for errors" (*LM* 392). While helping the poet with the packaging of the sheets, the protagonist reads some parts of the poem.

> Some shocked her, with descriptions she could not credit her mistress had written. Reading of Marian Earle's pitiful room, so like many a servant girl's attic she had known, Wilson could not think where her mistress had gleaned *such knowledge*. From her novels, she supposed. And […] reading of Marian Earle's brutal rape, she could not believe this too had come from novels. Wilson's heart beat faster as she tied those sheets and parcelled them up and she could not help saying […], 'It is a story of a poor girl then, ma'am?' Mrs Browning smiled. 'Among other things, Wilson. It tells *a sorry tale of life for some women and will be villified for it*.' (*LM* 392-393; emphasis added).

In this episode, the poet says that Elizabeth "must" read the poem, adding that she "will find it *authentic*" (*LM* 393; emphasis added). The protagonist's comments about the truthfulness of her depictions and the poet's claim to the authenticity of her work make clear that her words correspond to the world. As the novel does not challenge the authenticity of this poem even as it criticizes the poet, it can be claimed that it is not the language that speaks in this poem but the female writing subject, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She emerges as the authority over the meaning of her

work. Moreover, since she expects negative criticism due to writing about what critics and readers will find outrageous, she lays claim to having produced an original work. The novel does not challenge the notion of originality. Rather, it silently acknowledges that this work is an authentic piece. It does not debunk the notion of origin, either. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is the originating subject; and her identity, subjective experiences, and worldview are the source of her work and its meaning. Originality is also related to her transgressing the boundaries set for a woman writer. Such implications run contrary to postmodernist premises that a text can only be an intertextual construct, derived from many other texts written before it, never an original piece of work, and that the author disappears when writing begins.

Although the juxtaposition of this masterpiece with the exploitation of the maid shows the discrepancy between the poet's public and private personas, as Novak and Mayer accurately claim (32), and although the novel criticizes the poet in several ways, these do not mean that the novel dethrones the writer. The fact that the poem tells the sorry tale of some women signals that even as the poet lacks genuine compassion for her own loyal maid, she uses her poetry to point out women's lot. This study suggests that the novel pays tribute to Barrett Browning to a certain extent rather than dethroning the author figure. Firstly, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is not portrayed as a cruel woman throughout the novel. Until she learns about her maid's pregnancy, she contributes a lot to the personal and intellectual development of her maid. Often Elizabeth "would become so confused as question after question and hypothesis after hypothesis were presented to her that she was hardly aware of what she was saying and yet Miss Elizabeth drove her on relentlessly to say something" (*LM* 141). After spending a few years with the poet, Elizabeth Wilson feels transformed: "Now, thanks […] partly to Miss Elizabeth, she thought of things that had never crossed her mind before" (*LM* 155). She is "more aware" about her wishes and desires (*LM* 155). Rather than seeing marriage as a guarantee of economic security, as she initially does, Elizabeth looks for love because her mistress has repeatedly claimed that love is of crucial importance to marriage (*LM* 178). Despite her old mistress's cruelty and lack of understanding, Elizabeth visits the poet, who is in her sickbed, after being dismissed from her job. She tells her mistress that she has taught her "to hope and expect miracles with confidence and believe in [herself]"

(*LM* 496). On another occasion, she acknowledges that it is "her mistress's teaching" that has triggered her "to stand on her own", to "be herself", and to look for "a little hope, a little joy" in life (*LM* 534, 533). These examples and confessions, after all the poet has done to her, demonstrate the poet's shaping influence on the personal development of the protagonist and on her determination to become a self-sufficient and independent woman. Moreover, it is Barrett Browning who initiates the act of recovering the lost connection between them. She acknowledges her own mistakes: "These things happen. I wish they had not. You were very dear to me, Wilson" (*LM* 507). This scene can signal that, to a certain degree, she is redeemed by the novel because in this scene she turns to the suffering other, recognizes her as a woman, a mother, an old friend, and also recognizes their shared humanity.

Although the novel focuses on the relationship between the poet and the protagonist, the descriptions of Barrett Browning's negotiations with other characters can reveal the sincerity of her sympathy for poor people, women, and children. In the Shoreditch episode, she tries to give some money to a poor woman "to buy bread for her children"; and when her maid stops her, she advises her "to sympathise with their poverty which was not their fault" (*LM* 179, 180). The sincerity of her concern for oppressed groups, her advocation of the rights and independence of all people are more forcefully portrayed in the parts set in Italy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning fiercely supports the Italian cause[49], that is, the unification of Italy and the freedom of the Italians. In the late 1850s, when hopes arise about a war that can enable Italy "to rid herself of the foreign oppressor and unite to form a great power", she is as excited as the Italian patriot, Ferdinando, because she believes "that liberty and freedom are abroad once more and this time *we* shall not fail" (*LM* 446; emphasis added). She includes herself and her family in this "we" because Italy has become a home for the self-exiled poet. When she hears "the devastating news" that an armistice between the French and Austrians has shattered all hope for independence, she is shocked (*LM* 447). Elizabeth cannot understand why her mistress is affected

[49] After 1815, much of Italy was ruled by the Austrian emperor. Against this rule, what was called Italian *Risorgimento*, a call for the unification of Italian states, emerged. Although there were some uprisings and revolutionary activities in the early 1800s by Italians, who fought for national independence, the unification of Italy was achieved by the end of the 1860s. Elizabeth Barrett Browning could not see it because she died in 1861.

equally by her sister's death and by the political situation in Italy. Ferdinando likens the poet to "an Italian man" and blames Elizabeth for her narrow-mindedness, selfishness, and indifference to what goes on around her and who determines the future of her children (*LM* 464, 465). While underscoring that the poet truly cares for other people, this scene suggests that it can be the protagonist who is selfish because she is not interested in great socio-political events that affect the lives of thousands of people too absorbed as she is in her own world and her own problems. The political situation in Italy influences the health and psychology of the poet. The victories restore her to her former self, and bad news devastates her, which again signals that she empathizes with disempowered people. These historically valid and yet also imagined reflections provide a glimpse into her political views that were behind her Italian poems, which are not overtly referred to in the novel. For a reader who is ignorant about her life yet knowledgeable about these poems, these reflections on her interest in Italian politics can function as biographical data[50]. By delving deep into her support for the Italian cause, the novel also draws attention to the poet's preoccupation with such important notions as liberty, (gender) equality, individual's rights, social justice, and socio-political reforms, as the above-mentioned poems also show.

The homage paid to Elizabeth Barrett Browning is evident, especially towards the end of the novel. Forster hints at the immortality of the author and overtly celebrates Barrett Browning's poetic creativity and authorial identity. For instance, some lady-boarders choose to stay at the protagonist's boarding house to learn more about "the venerable poetess" they adore (*LM* 419). When the protagonist is hosting Mr Landor, an old poet, she compares this figure, who is "unlike any poet", with the two poets she has served for years: "He has no love of beauty [….] I cannot think what his poetry would be like" (*LM* 456). The protagonist considers Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her works as the criterion to assess the authorship of another writer in this scene. She and, through her, the novel point out the superiority of the authorship

[50] These reflections are generally based on verifiable data, as given in Forster's biography of the poet and in many scholarly works on Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

of Barrett Browning[51] to that of Mr Landor. Similarly, when the poet dies, Elizabeth, here the mouthpiece of Forster, says that "she will never really leave us" (*LM* 512). The narrator underlines the powerful presence of the poet after her death, stating that "her mistress was still there in the very air of the room, in the belongings within it, *in the books and papers* everywhere *in evidence*" (*LM* 513; emphasis added). If her books guarantee her presence, then she will continue to address readers and speak through her books. This suggestion seems to be a far cry from the claim that it is language, not the author, who speaks in a text. When Robert Browning asks Elizabeth to choose a keepsake for herself, she chooses the poet's "little inkstand", which the poet has "kept with her all her life" (*LM* 518). Recalling the busts and books in her room in No. 50 Wimpole Street, these references to her books, papers, and inkstand lay bare that she is a reverent ghost now, dead but still present in and through her works. Through the keepsake and books, which are closely connected to the identity or the name of a writer, the novel underscores that it matters who the writer is while at the same time forcefully reclaiming Elizabeth Barrett Browning's authority and power as the female writing/originating subject.

The last few pages of the novel overtly articulate what the episodes about her poems implicitly suggest. When Elizabeth tells Penini that her mother was "very special, some say *a genius*"; likewise, when she answers Mr Landor's question whether Barrett Browning was "*a genius*" as: "people who knew about poetry praised her highly", she is the mouthpiece of Forster (*LM* 520, 525; emphasis added). In other words, the implied author, who is Margaret Forster the biographer and who has promised to tell us more about this Victorian poet at the beginning of the novel, concludes the novel by celebrating Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a woman of genius, a great Victorian poet, and perhaps one of her own "grandmothers".

At this point, what this novel suggests concerning Margaret Forster as a woman writer is worth mentioning. It can be argued that she asserts an authorial voice in and through this novel since she shapes the discourse on Barrett Browning. Forster

[51] The protagonist is privileging Elizabeth Barrett Browning, not Robert Browning, here because she knows some poems written by her mistress; and neither she nor the narrator mentions that she has read any poems by Robert Browning.

manages to do so by portraying Barrett Browning's indifference to the plight of her own loyal maid and criticizing her for this, by contesting certain myths that have given birth to the image of Barrett Browning as a weak woman, a footnote to Robert Browning's success, and by reclaiming and celebrating Barrett Browning's authorial identity and authority. Furthermore, as discussed in the section on the maid, Forster reshapes history by telling the story of a hitherto silenced woman. In each way, Forster contributes to cultural memory and intervenes in the sphere that assumedly belongs to the historian, which reveals her power and authority as a woman writer.

To conclude, if "the struggles of feminism have been primarily a struggle for authorship", as Seán Burke concedes (146), then it can be claimed that by foregrounding Elizabeth Barrett Browning's authorial identity, portraying her as a great woman poet, a woman of genius, an intellectual ahead of her time, the novel reclaims her authorship, authority, and female agency. The novel reflects on the opinions of the poet on various subjects and places emphasis on how these opinions, along with her personal experiences, inform her works. By referring to some of her poetry, the novel demonstrates Elizabeth Barret Browning's progression as a female writing subject and sheds light on the variety of her concerns, which enables her to go beyond the limited sphere ascribed to women writers at the time. Therefore, even as it criticizes the poet in some respects, *Lady's Maid* pays homage to her. As such, it manages to place Barrett Browning in her deserved place in the reader's historical understanding and in cultural memory.

This chapter has explored Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* as a representative example of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction. What makes this novel neo-realist is its resort to traditional narrative techniques on the one hand, and its attempt to complement and complicate official (masculine) history through a plausible story on the other. Importantly, this plausible story provides the reader with a woman-centred history. While reconfiguring the personal history of a silenced woman and re-presenting a Victorian woman writer, this novel critically engages with the Victorian age, the dominant Victorian ideologies about women, the condition of England in that period juxtaposed with the condition of women, and women's writing. In keeping with its feminist and reconstructive agenda, this neo-realist neo-Victorian

work gives voice to the hitherto silenced Elizabeth Wilson, thereby configuring an afterlife for her in the reader's understanding of the Victorian age and, simultaneously, reshapes and presents an addition to the afterlife of a cultural icon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The return to the Victorian past in this novel works to provide some insights into the lives of these women. The novel silently intervenes in history. It writes them in history as powerful women whose struggles for self-development within the context of the restrictions placed on them are as valuable as the pursuits of kings, great men, and heroes in masculine official history. Similar to the function of Adam Ewing's story in *Cloud Atlas*, the strong bond between the two women emerges as an alternative hidden in history, which connects them to us in a meaningful way. *Lady's Maid* invites the reader to rethink their approaches to others and to reshape society according to such values and concepts as love, equality, personal freedom and rights, caring for the other, and a kind of solidarity while placing these values in a privileged position in the history it rewrites. In this way, the novel manages to both talk back to the past and to address the present and the future.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The fascination of contemporary writers, such as A. S. Byatt, Sarah Waters, Colm Tóibín, Tracy Chevalier, Emma Donoghue, and Matthew Kneale, among many others, with the Victorian past especially from the last decades of the twentieth century onwards has led to an explosion of novels that revisit the Victorian period in many ways and to diverse ends. This dissertation has focused on this trend and the meaning of these novels' obsessive returns to the Victorian age. Neo-Victorian studies, which emerged in the early 2000s as a result of this growing interest, discuss these novels under the umbrella term "neo-Victorian fiction". This dissertation has adopted this term and defined "neo-Victorian fiction" as a subgenre of the contemporary historical novel, which returns and reimagines the Victorian age, culture, literature, and society in one way or another. It has aimed to shed light on the various senses of history in neo-Victorian fiction by exploring the formal qualities and thematic concerns of the selected novels and their attitudes towards both the Victorian past and broader history.

The dominant tendency in neo-Victorian criticism is situating the neo-Victorian novel in the context of postmodernism and/or latter-phase postmodernism. Since this tendency leads to hierarchizing these novels, excluding some works from the umbrella term "neo-Victorian fiction", or underestimating the political and critical agendas of a certain group of novels, this dissertation has aimed to go beyond this approach. It has aimed to propose a more inclusive and flexible framework that can address various uses the Victorian past is put to and various understandings and senses of history in neo-Victorian fiction. It has analyzed the neo-Victorian novel in the contexts of postmodern and practical realist historiography and traced the echoes of these approaches in the field of history in neo-Victorian fiction. This study has

argued that, concerning their formal qualities, thematic concerns, and, more importantly, their attitudes towards the Victorian period and history, the neo-Victorian novel oscillates between the two ends of a spectrum: "metafictionality" and "neo-realism". At one end of this spectrum is what this study has called "the metafictional neo-Victorian novel" or "the overtly self-conscious neo-Victorian novel", which has many affinities with historiographic metafiction. Metafictional neo-Victorian novels use experimental narrative techniques, and they have a deconstructive attitude towards history. Their ultimate aim in returning to the Victorian period is to call into question traditional assumptions about history and history writing and to underscore the fictive and constructed nature of history. In other words, these novels show history as fiction. At the other end of the spectrum is what this study has called "the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel", which imitates the Victorian realist novel in terms of its formal qualities and adopts a reconstructive attitude towards the Victorian past and history. In keeping with its project of reconstructing history, the neo-realist neo-Victorian novel ultimately aims to illuminate what might have happened in the Victorian era through plausible and coherent stories. As such, in and through these novels, fiction comes close to or turns into history. This study has also suggested that some neo-Victorian novels remain in between these two ends. These novels can display formal experimentation, upholding certain postmodernist premises, and yet they do not stop at deconstruction. Often a deconstructive and a reconstructive approach to the Victorian past and history coexist in these novels.

Rather than selecting novels according to a chronological order, this study has chosen novels which can be considered more or less representative examples concerning their position in the neo-Victorian spectrum. This dissertation has analyzed Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992) as a metafictional neo-Victorian novel, David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) as a neo-Victorian novel that remains in between the two ends of the spectrum, and Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990) as a neo-realist neo-Victorian novel. Departing from some neo-Victorian scholars' association of self-consciousness and sophistication mainly with the employment of experimental narrative techniques and a postmodernist agenda, this study has argued that each one of the selected novels is self-conscious and sophisticated in different

ways and to varying degrees. Although, unlike the other novels analyzed, *Lady's Maid* does not flaunt its self-consciousness, this is still evident in the negotiation of important issues, such as "the Woman Question", from a modern vantage point.

Concerning the relation between fiction and history displayed in these novels, which is one of the most important concerns of this dissertation, it can be said that *Ever After* blurs the boundary between fact and fiction, history and literature, data and invention by overtly drawing attention to its own fictionality, the fictiveness of the Victorian past it rewrites, hence the fictive, textual, indeterminate, and constructed nature of history. Both the narrative techniques employed in it and its thematic concerns reveal that this novel deconstructs the grand narrative of history and revisits the Victorian past to this end. This highly metafictional neo-Victorian novel, therefore, shows that *history is fiction*. Swift privileges storytelling, and the novel implies that narratives can provide a kind of remedy to the baffled postmodern subject (Bill Unwin), but it is not clear whether the narrator's attempt to rewrite his ancestor's history and his own past helps him to find any meaning in life. Thus, it can be claimed that narrative is to a great extent suspect in this novel.

A similar scepticism about history as a narrative is evident in *Cloud Atlas*, which reveals it through, for instance, the theory of actual and virtual pasts proposed by a character in one of the six narratives it involves. This theory draws attention to how certain events are forgotten and suppressed when they turn into facts. The multiple interpretations of the same events, such as the tragic history of the Moriori tribe, also show that what we assume to be *history is*, in fact, *fiction*. Yet along with this scepticism about history, history writing, and narrative, there is a kind of faith in narrative in this work. The novel shows that a narrative can provide a glimpse into the past, just as the Victorian story it involves conveys some information about the historical traumas inflicted on native peoples. This novel suggests that narratives are valuable in this respect. More concretely, it suggests that if a (historical) narrative manages to be inclusive, and if the individual or society learns from the lessons of the past conveyed in such narratives, then they can create a better future and not repeat historical wrongs.

Like these novels, *Lady's Maid*, in a sense, blurs the boundary between fiction and history but to a very different end: to show that *fiction can function like history*. This novel fills in the gaps in official history through fictional truths. It lays claim to the possibility of historical knowledge and the capacity of narratives to capture the past to a great extent. Of course, this does not mean that its version of the Victorian past is offered as the Truth, but still, Forster's novel, like Mitchell's novel, demonstrates that neo-Victorian fiction can present interventions into the sphere of history. It can be claimed that both *Cloud Atlas*, through the Victorian story it involves, and *Lady's Maid* work as "compensatory virtual archive[s]" (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Taking" 44) or "memory texts", in Kate Mitchell's words (28, 29). They provide the reader with information about different aspects of the Victorian age. The versions of the Victorian past these novels evoke are more forcefully inscribed in the reader's understanding of the Victorian age in comparison to the case with the dry data in the historical record. This means that in and through such novels, certain notions associated with liberal humanism and, therefore, debunked in the metafictional neo-Victorian novel, such as historical knowledge, historical truth, the subject, and personal agency, re-emerge. This reemergence and these novels' reconstructive attitudes towards these notions can signal that fiction, narratives, and, by implication, literature are important means for reclaiming history for certain groups written out of the historical record. As also noted by Kate Mitchell, as an act of memory in the present, these neo-Victorian novels have a "creative role […] in historical recollection" (4, 11). Therefore, neo-Victorian fiction comes close to history in cases like these.

If history and fiction feed one another in and through neo-Victorian novels, then what is the relationship between the neo-Victorian writer and the historian? Drawing upon the suggestions above, it can be argued that by foregrounding the peripheral and hitherto silenced characters, many neo-Victorian writers resemble historians. The marginalized figures "to whom a name has been refused" or those "who have had names, generally common nouns, imposed on them" in both official history and Victorian novels are given a "countenance" and, thereby, "re-sign[ed]" in the neo-Victorian novel, which is the moral task of a historian according to the American philosopher Edith Wyschogorod (13, 39). As also noted by Kate Mitchell several

times, the neo-Victorian writer becomes a sort of historian by reshaping the past and, thus, the historical consciousness of the reader (24). The writer resembles the historian also by articulating what she or he considers suppressed and (deliberately) forgotten in Victorian novels and official history, such as the extinction of native peoples in Australia, as portrayed in Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers*, and the industry of pornography and the lesbian Victorians, as depicted in Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*. With each new version of the Victorian age, the image of the Victorian period in the popular imagination becomes more complex, as also noted by some neo-Victorian scholars. From this perspective, it can be argued that many neo-Victorian novels are in a complementary relationship with Victorian fiction.

As the neo-Victorian novel reimagines the Victorian age, one important question this reimagination raises is whether these novels demonstrate a continuity or discontinuity between then and now, which is a topic of debate in neo-Victorian studies. In *Ever After*, despite the desperate attempts of the narrator to find a kind of stronghold in the Victorian age, the relation between the past and the present is one of discontinuity. Even though there are some similarities between the two periods depicted in the novel, these similarities do not make much sense to the narrator, who fails in his attempts to chart a historical continuum and place himself in a meaningful historical context. The experimental narrative devices employed in this novel underscore the differences between the past and the narrative present, the Victorian story and the contemporary story, Matthew Pearce and Bill Unwin. The metafictionality of Swift's novel precludes the reader's immersion in the text, which also reinforces the alterity of the past.

Cloud Atlas draws close and causal connections between the Victorian past, the present, and the future, evident in its portrayal of a history of predation starting from the Victorian age and continuing in different forms in the stories that follow it. While the reemergence of similar events in different periods portrayed in the novel suggests a cyclical temporality and a cyclical history, the novel uses this cyclicality as a warning and manages to envision a kind of continuous and progressive history. Although the seemingly irrelevant stories in the first half of the novel baffle the reader, like *Ever After* thwarting the reader's desire for coherence and

epistemological certainty, the second half of *Cloud Atlas* completes the stories in reverse order, thereby presenting a meaningful story and a complete picture of a three-dimensional history. The highly complex narrative structure and the employment of distancing devices in *Cloud Atlas* preclude the reader's immersion in the first half of this novel, but this structure also enables their immersion in the fictional world especially in the second half. While Swift's readers can hardly identify with the two protagonists due to the self-reflexivity of the novel and the unreliability of the narrator, Mitchell's readers can identify with such protagonists as Ewing, Luisa, and Zachry and, to a certain extent, believe in the stories they tell. As Luisa and Zachry are incarnations of the Victorian Ewing, the reader's immersion in the story and identification with the Victorian character suggest that the novel manages to connect the modern reader to the Victorians, the now to the then.

Lady's Maid might seem to be less concerned with the question of whether the past connects to the present in meaningful and/or causal ways because it is completely set in the Victorian age. Nevertheless, the emphasis it places on the relationship between a lady and a maid, dealing with such thematic concerns as sympathy and understanding across the boundaries of class, and a kind of sisterly feeling suggests that, to a certain extent, this novel establishes a continuity between the Victorian past and the present. As the novel makes room for the voice of the protagonist without challenging the truthfulness of her account, and as it employs a reliable third-person narrator, readers identify with the protagonist, immerse themselves in the story, and believe in the account of the Victorian past given in the novel. This, too, reinforces the sense of continuity between the past and the present because readers find something of themselves in the hopes, disillusionments, and struggles of the protagonist, who is an ordinary Victorian woman. Furthermore, this novel aims to re-present a prominent Victorian poet and a hitherto silenced figure, which means that this novel makes these Victorians and, by implication, the Victorian age present in cultural memory.

Each one of these novels deals with the relation between the subject and history, pondering such questions as whether the subject can change the course of her or his own history and/or larger history, whether she or he is subject to or is a subject in

history. *Ever After* is preoccupied with the connection between subjectivity and history. In line with its deconstructive agenda, it challenges the traditional understanding of both the subject and history in closely connected ways. Just as the subject (the narrator, his Victorian ancestor, and some other characters) is shown as a dissolving, textual, and elusive construct, the history the narrator rewrites is fragmented, ambiguous, fictive, and meaningless. In the face of the nightmare of history, the narrator cannot be a subject in history. Rather, he is subject to its destructive force and unknowability. The impenetrability of history, both personal and larger history, makes it impossible for the narrator to understand who he is.

Like this novel, *Lady's Maid* is preoccupied with the place of the subject in history. While Swift's novel has an anti-foundationalist and anti-humanist approach, Forster's novel has a reconstructive agenda. In line with this agenda, it centralizes the female subject in the history it reimagines, reclaiming female agency, the female writing subject, and history for women. This novel demonstrates how the female subject (both Elizabeth Wilson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning) shapes her personal history and becomes a subject in history. By putting the female subject (Elizabeth Wilson as a unified, autonomous individual and Elizabeth Barrett Browning as the female writing subject) in the center of the female-oriented history it configures, this novel gestures towards, in fact, celebrates the return of the humanist and yet female subject.

Cloud Atlas shares *Ever After*'s stance on the discursivity and constructedness of both subjectivity and history (history as a narrative). Nevertheless, it also privileges the human being, recalling the privileging of the female subject in *Lady's Maid*, because only an individual, who has historical awareness and future-awareness, can create a better future history. Some of Mitchell's characters (some of the protagonists and some minor characters) manage to become subjects in history by making ethical decisions and risking their lives for others and the larger society. Mitchell, furthermore, invites the reader to be active agents and to intervene in the course of history. Thus, it can be argued that the anti-foundationalist and anti-humanist approach prevalent at the metafictional end of the spectrum is defied to varying

degrees in the novels that renounce a totally deconstructive attitude towards the Victorian age and history.

One important question discussed in neo-Victorian studies is why these contemporary novels growing in number are obsessed with the Victorian past. This connects to other questions: Does this obsession indicate escapism or nostalgia for the novels, writers, values, and certainties of that age? Is the larger project of neo-Victorian fiction entertainment or education? What do these writers look for in the Victorian age? What do they find in it? The answers to these questions may change from one writer to another. Still, the analyses of the selected novels in this study reveal that the return to the past cannot be regarded as escapism or nostalgia. Even though Swift's narrator wants to escape from the postmodern condition, where the real thing is absent, and nostalgically looks back to the past, the complexity of the Victorian age and the crises undergone by the Victorians themselves reveal that the lives of the Victorians were not simpler than that of the narrator. This novel does not look for certainties in the Victorian past, unlike the narrator, who wants to believe that his Victorian ancestor can work as a center for him and enable him to overcome his identity crisis and the crisis of truth. The novel, through playfulness and irony, criticizes him for associating that age with certainty. Nevertheless, since the novel shares the narrator's pessimism about the loss of a sense of reality and meaning due to the collapse of all kinds of grand narratives, the return to the past in this novel can also be indicating a desire to find meaning or a desire for meaningful narratives. Yet the reader cannot certainly know whether the narrator and, by implication, the novel find meaning anywhere. The novel's critique of nostalgia for the Victorian past coexists with pessimism about the modern age and the loss of grand narratives, which leaves almost nothing that can function as a center for the narrator, by implication, for the novel and the reader. This aspect of the novel is not necessarily shared by other metafictional neo-Victorian novels, which frequently cherish the collapse of grand narratives.

Cloud Atlas and *Lady's Maid* return to the Victorian past with a moral commitment. The look back to Adam Ewing's world works to point to the alternatives latent in that story, by implication, in the Victorian past and history. *Cloud Atlas* is not nostalgic

for the past. It is not escapist, either. Mitchell uses the Victorian past to draw attention to the consequences of the historical wrongs in the Victorian story that reemerge in different forms and lead to catastrophic results in the other stories set in later times.

Similarly, it cannot be claimed that *Lady's Maid* looks back nostalgically because it criticizes Victorian class hierarchy, gender inequity, and also Elizabeth Barrett Browning in some respects. The return to the personal history of an ordinary woman in this novel is an attempt to inscribe her story in the reader's understanding of the Victorian period and to invite them to think how different or similar women's lot is in the present. As Forster suggests in her other works, although today's world is much better than the (Victorian) past concerning the issue of gender equality and women's experiences, the ideal horizon for women, which is female solidarity, has not been reached yet. In this respect, Margaret Forster's messages in this novel can be likened to that of David Mitchell, but it must be noted that Mitchell's agenda is larger and his messages are more direct and more forceful.

This study has proposed that an important reason for these novels' obsession with the Victorian past can be searching for alternatives, possibilities, and different routes hidden in history. Unlike *Ever After*, *Cloud Atlas* and *Lady's Maid* display a new sensibility, which is discernible in some other neo-Victorian novels that renounce or reject postmodernist scepticism about *all* kinds of certainty, too. These two novels, just like Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), among others, imagine alternative communities, relationships built on togetherness, love, mutual understanding, and empathy towards the disempowered. Through such formulations, these novels directly or indirectly invite the reader to realize these imagined alternative ways of living in real life. While this invitation is more forceful in *Cloud Atlas,* it is implicit in *Lady's Maid*. Many neo-Victorian novels practise an ethical turn to the other, evident in their giving voice to peripheral and forgotten fictional or historical figures, as also observed by many scholars. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that it is especially in the novels that do not stop at deconstructing the grand narrative of history and go on to put the Victorian past and the Victorians to certain ethical uses

that this call is evident. These novels invite the reader to build meaningful relationships with others, to re-shape themselves, their worldviews, and society in line with such values as openness to otherness/others, equality, freedom, social justice, and togetherness. Importantly, these values are closely connected to historical consciousness in *Cloud Atlas* and to historical knowledge, albeit derived from fictional truths, in *Lady's Maid*. The socio-political problems these two novels locate in the Victorian era, such as violence, colonialism, the exploitation of the other, and the lack of understanding between various groups, are both Victorian and contemporary in that they reverberate in today's world in different forms and lead to antagonism, conflicts, and alienation. These two novels suggest solutions to problems they locate in the Victorian past. These solutions are learning to live together, caring for the disempowered, and empathy in the face of racial, social, economic, and cultural boundaries. This is a future-oriented move because it addresses today's world for the future. That is why, in such cases and to a great extent, the neo-Victorian novel looks back to the Victorian past in order to pave the way for a better world and a better future.

The novels analyzed in this dissertation were published in 1992, 2004, and 1990, respectively. Neo-Victorian novels' oscillation between metafictionality and neo-realism is evident in more recent examples, too. For instance, Michael Cox's *The Meaning of the Night* (2006) looks at the Victorian past and history in a way that recalls *Ever After* (1992). Cox's novel blurs the line between fact and fiction, history and story. The notes, the poem, and some other extracts from invented documents, which are inserted in the main body, fragment the narrative. The self-reflexivity of the unreliable narrator, who is a murderer, his problematization of such notions as truth or the pursuit of truth (Cox 53, 106, 111, 424), the unified self (Cox 110, 309), and his footnotes all draw attention to the novel's postmodernist agenda. The novel is close to the metafictional end of the neo-Victorian spectrum. Among novels on the neo-realist side of the spectrum, there are some examples that resemble *Lady's Maid* (1990), a traditional example of neo-realist neo-Victorianism. *The Rose of Sebastopol* (2007) by Katharine McMahon, for example, tells a story about the Crimean War and a love triangle between the narrator (Mariella), her cousin (Rosa), and the surgeon she loves (Henry). It is set in the 1850s and the 1840s. It goes back

and forth between these two periods, but each strand of the plot is chronological. The extracts from newspapers provide some knowledge as to the war (McMahon 130, 131, 163), and the letters inserted in the novel provide a glimpse into the characters' feelings and experiences (McMahon 166-168, 173-174) rather than serving narrative fragmentation. The narrative has a neat beginning, middle, and ending. This novel adopts a feminist and reconstructive agenda. It portrays women's (Florence Nightingale's, her nurses', and the two female characters') roles in the Crimean War and provides some insights into this rather underrepresented historical event. As to the more recent examples of neo-realist neo-Victorian fiction, it can be argued that while these novels can make use of several narrative techniques often used in postmodernist fiction, such as telling the story from several viewpoints, these techniques do not work to deconstructive ends any more in such novels. Rather, they contribute to the plausibility of the story.

It is hoped that this dissertation will open up new avenues of inquiry, especially concerning the new sensibility in some neo-Victorian works, as explained above. Further studies can examine whether this new sensibility is present in other contemporary novels and ponder what it means when analyzed from a larger perspective. Another research question can be the relation between postmodernist pessimism, the collapse of metanarratives, and the human being. This thesis has discussed this topic in *Ever After*, but a study that examines several different novels in this regard can reach some interesting results. Other studies can compare the images of the Victorian writers evoked in neo-Victorian works by different writers. For instance, Laura Fish's *Strange Music* (2008) focuses on Elizabeth Barrett Browning. However, the image of the poet in this novel is very different from that evoked in Forster's novel as the former has a postcolonial agenda. Additionally, exploring neo-Victorian fiction from an ecocritical perspective can prove very fruitful to understand what these novels do with and through the Victorian past. To date, little attention has been paid to this topic, but such novels as Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie*, which was shortlisted for the 2011 Man Booker Prize, present important insights into the nineteenth century. Such studies can offer new answers to the question of what counts as history and, in this way, provide new insights into the diversity of the sense of history in neo-Victorian fiction.

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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Küçük, Hale

EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	METU, English Literature	2008
BA	Gazi University, Foreign Languages Education	2004

WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2004- Present	Ministry of National Education	English Teacher

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English (Advanced), German (Intermediate)

PUBLICATIONS

1. Küçük, Hale. "The Political Unconscious in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Great Expectations*." *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1242-1254.

2. Küçük, Hale. "Oppression in the 'Happy' Multicultural Land in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*." *Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2021, pp. 248-258.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Contemporary Fiction, Neo-Victorian Fiction, World Literature, Women and Writing, Drama, Critical Theories, Postcolonial Studies, Cultural Studies

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Çağdaş İngiliz romanının en belirgin özelliklerinden biri, tarihi ele alması, yani belirli dönemlere geri dönmesi, o dönmelerde yaşamış insanlara ve yaşanmış olaylara odaklanmasıdır. Bu romanlarda ele alınan dönemlere bakıldığında, on dokuzuncu yüzyıla olan ilgi dikkat çekmektedir. Viktoryen dönemi ele alan romanların yirminci yüzyılın son dönemlerinden bu yana giderek çoğalması, 1990'larda "neo-Viktoryen roman" kavramının ve 2000'lerde bu romanları çeşitli bağlamlarda inceleyen ve "neo-Viktoryen çalışmaları" olarak adlandırılan yeni bir çalışma alanının ortaya çıkmasına sebep olmuştur. Aslında, neo-Viktoryen romanın ortaya çıkışı 1960'ların sonuna ve bu akımın öncüleri sayılan Jean Rhys'ın *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) ve John Fowles'un *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) adlı eserlerine dayanır. 1970'lerde ve 1980'lerde az sayıda neo-Viktoryen roman yazılmış olup A. S. Byatt'ın *Possession* (1990) adlı eserinin Man Booker ödülünü kazanmasından sonra bu tür romanlar gittikçe çoğalmış, çok sayıda ödüller almış ve büyük bir okur kitlesine ulaşmıştır. Bu tez; neo-Viktoryen romanı, çağdaş tarihsel romanın Viktoryen dönemi, o dönemin eserlerini, ideolojilerini, kültür ve toplumunu ele alan bir alt türü olarak değerlendirmektedir. Tez, çağdaş İngiliz romanındaki bu yeni yönelime odaklanmakta ve Graham Swift'in *Ever After* (1992), David Mitchell'in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) ve Margaret Forster'ın *Lady's Maid* (1990) adlı romanlarını inceleyerek neo-Viktoryen romandaki tarih anlayışına ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Neo-Viktoryen çalışma alanının gelişmesine katkıda bulunan bazı eleştirmenler, bu eserleri postmodernizm çerçevesinde incelemiş ve özellikle Linda Hutcheon'ın "tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca" modeliyle benzerliği üstünde durmuştur. Ancak bu yaklaşım; bazı eserlerin neo-Viktoryen olarak görülmemesi, gerçekçi romanların postmodern öğeler taşıyan neo-Viktoryen romanlara göre daha az değerli, daha az yenilikçi veya tutucu metinler olarak değerlendirilmesi gibi sorunlar doğurmaktadır. Ayrıca Louisa Hadley ve Kate Mitchell'in de belirttiği gibi, neo-Viktoryen roman postmodern romanla ve tarihyazımcı üstkurmacayla birebir uyuşmamaktadır (Hadley

19; Mitchell 3). Kullandıkları anlatım teknikleri, genel olarak ele aldıkları konular ve tarihe karşı genel tutumları göz önüne alındığında bu alt türün bazı örneklerinin postmodern tarihsel romanın tarihe karşı genel tutumunun ve amaçlarının ötesine geçtiği veya bunları tümden reddettiği açıkça görülebilir. Bu noktadan yola çıkan bu tez, neo-Viktoryen romanların bir ucu "üstkurmaca" diğer ucu "yeni-gerçekçilik" olan bir spektrumda konumlandırılabileceklerini, bazı romanların bu uçlardan birine çok yaklaşırken bazılarının ise arada bir noktada kaldıklarını ileri sürmektedir. Tez, üstkurmacasal uca yakın olan romanları "üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen roman", diğer uca yakın romanları da "yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman" olarak adlandırmaktadır. Bu alt türle postmodern tarih yazımı arasındaki ilişkiye Dana Shiller ve Kate Mitchell gibi isimler değinmiş olsa da bu konunun detaylı bir incelemesi henüz yapılmamıştır. Ayrıca akademide hâlâ geçerliliğini koruyan gerçekçi tarih yazımının neo-Viktoryen romandaki yansımaları, bu alanda çalışılmamış bir konudur. Alandaki bu boşlukları doldurmak amacıyla bu tez; üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanı postmodern tarih yazımı, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanı ise pratik gerçekçi tarih yazımı bağlamlarında ele almakta ve bu tür tarih yazımlarının neo-Viktoryen romana ne şekillerde tesir ettiğini göstermektedir. Oluşturulan bu kuramsal çerçevenin amacı şimdiye kadar yapılmış çalışmalardan daha esnek ve kapsayıcı bir yaklaşım sunmak, on dokuzuncu yüzyıla bir şekilde değinen eserlerin "neo-Viktoryen roman" başlığı altında değerlendirilebilmesini sağlamak ve böylece bu çalışma alanındaki bazı önemli boşlukları doldurmaktır.

Neo-Viktoryen romanlar, on dokuzuncu yüzyıla geri dönen ve bu dönemi farklı amaçlarla ve çok değişik şekillerde yeniden yorumlayan ve yeniden yazan eserlerdir. Bazı romanlar, Viktoryen dönem romanlarında anlatılan hikâyelerin öncesini veya devamını yazarlar. Bazıları, bu romanları tekrar ve farklı bir bakış açısıyla yazarlar. Örneğin, Jean Rhys'ın *Wide Sargasso Sea* adlı romanı, Charlotte Brontë'nin 1847'de yazdığı *Jane Eyre*'daki "deli" kadın karakteri merkeze alarak tekrar yazar ve önceki romana yeni bir boyut kazandırır. A. S. Byatt'ın *Possession*'ı gibi bazı neo-Viktoryen eserlerde olaylar ikili bir zaman düzleminde geçerken, Sarah Waters'ın yazdığı *Fingersmith* (2002) gibi romanlarda sadece on dokuzuncu yüzyılda geçer. Genellikle feminist veya postkolonyal bir hedefi olan neo-Viktoryen romanlar, o

dönemde yaşanmış, çok bilinmeyen veya kasıtlı olarak unutulan olayları, ötekileştirilmiş kişilerin hikâyelerini merkeze alır. Bu tez, tarihin üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlarda yapısöküme uğrarken, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlarda farklı açılardan yeniden inşa edildiğini ileri sürmektedir.

Alandaki başat eleştirmenler, bu alt türe yaklaşımları bakımından kabaca iki gruba ayrılmıştır. Bir grup, bu romanları postmodernizm bağlamında ele almakta ve sadece biçimsel açıdan deneysel olan metinlerin orijinal, revizyonist ve yenilikçi olabildiğini iddia etmektedir. *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001) adlı kitabıyla Christian Gutleben ve *Neo-Victorianism* (2010) ile Ann Heilmann ve Mark Llewellyn bu gruba dahildir. Gutleben, neo-Viktoryen romanı postmodernizmin İngiliz romanındaki son evresi olarak değerlendirir. Bu romanları parodi ve pastişin kullanımına göre ikiye ayırır. Romanın biçimsel özelliklerinin onun ideolojisini gösterdiğini ileri sürer. İlerici bir ideolojinin sadece Viktoryen dönemi postmodern bir perspektiften ele alan parodik romanlarda görülebileceğini düşünür (Gutleben 10, 11). Pastişe başvuran eserlerde ise Viktoryen dönem romanlarını biçim ve tema açısından taklit ettikleri için ilerici bir amaç olamayacağını, hatta bunların "parazit" eserler olduğunu savunur (Gutleben 7, 9, 19, 25). Yani Gutleben'a göre, bu tezin "yeni-gerçekçi" olarak gördüğü eserler neo-Viktoryen olarak değerlendirilebilseler bile parodik romanlarla kıyaslandıklarında "nostaljik" ve "tutucudurlar" (45, 46, 47). Heilmann ve Llewellyn, Gutleben'in parodi/pastiş ayrımını onaylar ve bunu bir adım ileriye taşırlar. Onlara göre, bir romanın neo-Viktoryen sayılabilmesi için kendi kurgusallığını ön plana çıkarması, yani kendini de analiz etmesi, üstkurmacasal tarzda yazılmış olması ve dil oyunları yapması şarttır (5, 14). Heilmann ve Llewellyn'a göre on dokuzuncu yüzyılı konu alan bir roman eğer bunu sofistike bir şekilde yapmıyorsa, yani kendi kurgusallığını öne çıkarmıyorsa, bazı meta-tarihsel ve meta-kültürel çıkarımları barındırmıyorsa, neo-Viktoryen değil de tarihsel roman olarak görülmelidir (5, 6). Bu gruptaki eleştirmenlerin fikirleri ve teorileri, bu çalışmada üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen roman olarak adlandırılan eserleri incelemek için faydalıdır, ancak yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman olarak adlandırılan eserlerin incelemesi için uygun değildir.

Diğer gruptaki neo-Viktoryen eleştirmenler neo-Viktoryen romanı tarihsel romanın bir alt türü olarak görürler, daha geniş bir tanım ve kuramsal çerçeve sunarlar. Kate Mitchell ve Louisa Hadley, bu romanlar için biçimsel bir niteleme yapmamayı tercih etmiştir. Onlara göre, on dokuzuncu yüzyılı yeniden yazan bir roman ister gerçekçi ister deneysel anlatım teknikleri kullansın neo-Viktoryen sayılabilir. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010) adlı kitabında Hadley, neo-Viktoryen romanların Viktoryen dönemdeki tarihsel anlatı türlerini ne şekillerde yeniden ele aldığına odaklanırken, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010) adlı kitabında Kate Mitchell, bu romanları "bellek metinler" ("memory texts") olarak niteler ve onların kültürel belleği tekrar tekrar şekillendirdiğini savunur (4). Bu eleştirmenlere göre, neo-Viktoryen romanları tarihyazımcı üstkurmacayla bir tutmak yanıltıcıdır çünkü bu romanlar, tarih bilgisi gibi kavramları reddeden tarihyazımcı üstkurmacanın aksine, geçmişin kısmen de olsa bilinebileceğine işaret ederler (Hadley 19; Mitchell 3). Bu fikirler, bu tezin çıkış noktalarından bazılarını oluşturmaktadır. Kate Mitchell'in teorisinden bu çalışmada oldukça faydalanılsa da bu tez, Mitchell'in neo-Viktoryen romanların kültürel belleğe duyulan *isteği* göstermesi iddiasına çok katılmamaktadır. Tez, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanların ve spektrumda ortalarda kalan bazı romanların geçmişe ışık tutabildiğini, okuyucunun tarih bilgisine ve bilincine katkıda bulunduğunu öne sürmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, bu romanlarda kurmacanın tarihi tamamlayarak tarih gibi bir işlev görebildiğini savunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın yeniden yapılandırmacı olarak gördüğü bu tutum, Mitchell'in iddiasının aksine, neo-Viktoryen romanlarda zaman içinde gerçekleşen bir değişimi veya bir dönüşümü göstermez. Yapısökümcü yaklaşımlarla aynı anda varlık gösterir ve neo-Viktoryen romandaki tarih anlayışının çeşitliliğine işaret eder.

Her ne kadar bu ikinci gruptaki çalışmalar ve yeni çıkan bazı çalışmalar bu alt türün bazı örneklerinde on dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiliz romanının en belirgin özelliği olan gerçekçiliğin yeniden ortaya çıktığına değinmiş olsalar da bu gerçekçiliğin ne olduğu, bu yeni tür gerçekçiliğin postmodernizmle bağlantısının ne olduğu veya ondan ne şekillerde ayrıştığı, bu eğilimi sergileyen romanların tarih bağlamında ne yapmak istediği gibi sorular alandaki güncel ve tam anlaşmaya varılamamış tartışma konularıdır. 2004'te yazdığı bir makalede, Marie-Luise Kohlke,

"yeni(meta)gerçekçilik" ("new(meta)realism") kavramını ortaya atar ve bu kavramı şu şekilde açıklar: yeni(meta)gerçekçi bir roman, tarihe postmodern açıdan bakar ancak kendi kurgusallığı hakkında sessiz kalır ("Into History" 156). Kohlke, bu eserlerin on dokuzuncu yüzyılda tabu sayılan konulara da değindikleri için ilk bakışta o dönemin gerçekçi romanlarından da gerçekçiymiş gibi durduklarını söyler ("Into History" 156). Kohlke'nin bu önerileri bu tezin yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman olarak gördüğü eserlere uymaktadır. Ancak Kohlke'nin yeni(meta)gerçekçi romanların da tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca tarzında yazıldıkları, tarihle ilgili bazı soruları cevapsız bıraktıkları ve tarihin anlaşılmazlığını göz önüne serdikleri ("Into History" 155, 160, 161) gibi fikirleri bu tezde yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman olarak görülen eserlerin onun yeni(meta)gerçekçilik tanımından ayrıştığını göstermektedir. Kohlke'nin yeni(meta)gerçekçilik kavramından esinlen Kate Mitchell, bu tür romanlar için "sahte-Viktoryen roman" ("faux-Victorian") kavramını kullanır; bunların Viktoryen dönemde yazılmış eserleri biçimsel açıdan taklit ettiklerini ve tarih bilgisine ulaşmak için verilen uğraşın önemine işaret ettiklerini düşünür (118, 3). Mitchell, bu romanların amaçlarının tarihe sadakatten ziyade kültürel bellekte Viktoryen dönem edebiyatının kapladığı yere oturmak ve bu eserlerin günümüzde nasıl hatırlandığını, ne hatırlattığını değiştirip dönüştürmek olduğunu savunur (121). Ona göre, bu romanlarda geçmiş, tarihten ziyade hafızanın süzgecinden geçirilir (10). Bu yüzden geçmişle duygusal ("affective") bir ilişki ortaya çıkmaktadır ki sahte-Viktoryen romanlarda on dokuzuncu yüzyılda çekilmiş fotoğrafların ve o dönem fotoğrafçılığının önemli öğeler olması da bu ilişkiyi daha belirgin kılar (116, 144). Kohlke ve Mitchell'in bazı neo-Viktoryen romanların kurgusallıkları hakkındaki sessizlikleri, tarih bilgisine katkıda bulundukları, kültürel belleği tekrar ve tekrar şekillendirdikleri gibi düşünceleri, bu tezin öne sürdüğü yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen roman kavramı için önemli çıkış noktaları olsa da bazı konularda bu çalışma bu iki tutumdan ayrılmaktadır. Bu tez; yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanların büyük tarih anlatısını, tarihsel doğru ve tarih bilgisi kavramlarını, geleneksel tarih yazımını direkt bir şekilde sorgulamak ve açıkça reddetmektense kendi kurgusallıklarıyla ilgili sessizliklerinden ötürü tarihe yaklaştıklarını, yani tarihin boşluklarını doldurduklarını ileri sürmektedir. Yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlar, geçmişe yeni açılardan baktıkları için o dönemde yazılan eserleri tamamlasalar da asıl amaçları resmî tarihi yeniden gözden geçirmek

ve tamamlamak, okuyucunun tarih bilincine katkıda bulunmaktır. Alandaki bazı yeni çalışmalar gerçekçiliğe dönüşü post-postmodernizme veya postmodernizmin yeni bir evresine bağlamıştır. Bu çalışma ise yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanın tam da postmodern kuşkuculuğa karşı kuşku duyduğunu ve resmî tarihin boşluklarını tespit edip bu boşlukları, Michael Lackey'in biyokurgusal eserler için söylediği gibi, "kurgusal doğrular" ("fictional truth") (*American* 65) sayesinde tamamladığını iddia etmektedir.

Kısacası bu çalışma; üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanların tarihi bir kurmaca olarak gösterdiklerini, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanların ise tarihi farklı şekillerde yeniden inşa ettiklerini savunmaktadır. Neo-Viktoryen romanları katı bir şekilde gruplandırmak yanıltıcı olacağından, çalışma bu iki tutum arasında da bazı örnekler olabileceğini öne sürmektedir. Spektrumun iki ucu arasında kalan neo-Viktoryen romanlar, tıpkı üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlar gibi, deneysel teknikler kullansalar ve büyük tarih anlatısını çürütseler de bu romanlarda genellikle bu duruşun yanında, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlarınkine benzer bir şekilde, tarihi yeniden yapılandırma hedefi de gözlemlenmektedir. Bu romanlar, okuyucunun tarih bilgisine katkıda bulunma gibi amaçlar için de Viktoryen döneme dönebilirler.

Bu tez, neo-Viktoryen romandaki tarih anlayışını incelerken bu alt türle tarih disiplini arasındaki ilişkiye ve bu romanların kurmacayla tarih ilişkisini ne şekilde gördüklerine odaklamaktadır. Üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlar hem genel amaçları hem de kullandıkları teknikler düşünüldüğünde Hutcheon'un tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca modeliyle çok benzeşir, ancak odak noktalarının diğer dönemlerden ziyade on dokuzuncu yüzyıl olması sebebiyle ondan ayrışırlar. Bu romanlar, tıpkı tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca gibi, postmodern tarih kuramından beslenir ve Viktoryen dönemi postmodern bir bakışla yeniden yazar. On dokuzuncu yüzyılda tarihi bilimsel bir disiplin olarak değerlendiren pozitivist tarih ve tarih yazımı yaygınken, bu bakış açısı yirminci yüzyılın ortalarında ortaya çıkan postmodernizm ve postyapısalcılık tarafından sert bir şekilde eleştirilmiştir. Postmodern tarih kuramı, pozitivist tarih yazımını ve onun gerçekçilik ve objektiflik iddialarını çürütür. Tarihle kurgusal bir anlatının çok benzediğini, tarihin asla tam olarak bilinemeyeceğini, geçmişte olan olayların anlamlarının seçilen anlatı türüne göre değişebileceğini öne sürer.

Tarihçinin inanç, ideoloji ve ön yargılarının yazdığı tarihin anlamını belirlediğini vurgular. Ayrıca bu bakış açısına göre, tarih büyük bir kaos, bir kâbus gibidir. Bazı olaylar, örneğin dünya savaşları, anlaşılamaz, konuşulamaz, izah edilemez. Bu durumda, anlatılar şüphelidir. Tarih alanındaki bu tutum, tarihyazımcı üstkurmacada tarihin temsilini belirler niteliktedir. Bu romanlar, Hutcheon'a göre, paradoksal bir biçimde hem tarihseldir hem de kendi kurgusallıklarına dikkat çekerler (*Poetics* 5). Bu özellik, üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlarda da görülür. Tıpkı tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca gibi, üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlar da şimdiye kadar görmezden gelinmiş kişilere bir ses vererek onların anlatıları üzerinden resmî tarihi, pozitivist tarih yazımını, liberal hümanizmi ve bunlarla ilintili kimlik, merkez, tarih bilgisi, mutlak doğru, gerçeklik, nedensellik gibi kavramları sorgularlar. Gerçek yaşamda bize gerçek olarak dayatılan şeylerin ve tarihin aslında söylemsel yapılar olduğuna dikkat çekerler.

Postmodern tarih kuramı geçtiğimiz yüzyılda tarih yazımına ve edebiyata oldukça etki etmiş olsa da gerçekçilik akademideki tarih yazımında geçerliliğini korumuştur. Örneğin, kendilerini "pratik gerçekçiler" olarak adlandıran Amerikalı tarihçiler Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt ve Margaret Jacob *Telling the Truth about History* (1994) adlı kitaplarında postmodern tarih kuramının bazı savlarını kısmen kabul etseler de gerçekçi tarih yazımını savunurlar. Bu tarihçilere göre, tarih bir anlatıya benzeyebilir; ama bu, uydurulmuş hikâyelerin de tarih olarak görülebileceği anlamına gelmez. Geçmişi tam anlamıyla bilmek mümkün olmayabilir; ama bu durum, bilginin tamamen göreceli olduğu anlamına gelmez. Bir olay farklı şekillerde yorumlanabilir; ancak bu, her iddianın doğru kabul edileceğini göstermez. Tarihçinin amacı, bu tarihçilere göre, yeni bulunan belgeler ve kanıtlar ışığında geçmiş olayları mümkün olduğunca doğruya yakın bir şekilde yazmak ve tarihsel gerçekleri gün ışığına çıkarmaya çalışmak olmalıdır (Appleby ve ark. 250, 251). Tarihçi, kapsayıcı bir tarih yazmaya özen göstermeli ve bir milletin hoşuna gitmeyebilecek doğrulara da anlatısında yer vermelidir. Ancak bu şekilde yazılan tarih, demokratik bir tarih olur ve toplumun daha da demokratikleşmesine katkıda bulunabilir. Bu tarihçilere göre, anlatı değerlidir çünkü, eğer yeterince kapsamlıysa, geçmişteki insan deneyimlerine ışık tutar (Appleby ve ark. 229). Gerçekçi bir tarihsel anlatı, mutlak doğruyu veya gerçeği olduğu gibi açıklayamasa da mümkün olabildiğince gerçeğe yaklaşır; bu da

dilin dış dünyayı/geçmişi kısmen de olsa aktarabildiğini gösterir (Appleby ve ark. 250, 251). Bu tür tarih yazımının önemli bir diğer özelliği de Aydınlanma ve modernite ile özdeşleştirilen ve postmodern tarih kuramcıları tarafından bazı sebeplerle eleştirilen toplumsal ve tarihsel ilerleme gibi bazı kavramları ve değerleri ön planda tutmasıdır. Tarih alanındaki bu yaklaşımın yansımaları, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlarda gözlemlenebilir. Bu romanlar, tarihsel gerçeği olduğu gibi yansıttıklarını iddia etmezler. Ancak oldukça inandırıcı anlatıları sayesinde geçmişe kısmen de olsa ışık tutarlar. Şimdiye kadar duyulmamış veya unutulmuş kişi ve olayları merkeze alarak resmî tarihteki boşlukları kurgusal doğrularla doldururlar. Üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanların aksine, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlar, tarih bilgisinin mümkün olabileceğine işaret eder. Tarih bilgisi, yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlarda kurmaca ve kurgusal doğrular sayesinde iletilse de burada amaç kesin bilgiye ulaşmanın zorluğu, tarihsel gerçeklerin bir anlatıyla yansıtılmasının imkânsızlığı ve temsil meselesiyle ilgili problemleri ön plana çıkarmak değil, tarihi yeniden ve yeni şekillerde yazmaktır. Bu romanların en önemli özelliklerinden biri, anlatının gerçekçiliği ve inandırıcılığıdır. Yaratılan Viktoryen dönem imajı, hâliyle o dönem üstüne yazılmış kaynaklara, o dönemde yazılmış olan romanlara ve büyük oranda da yazarın hayal gücüne dayanır. Ama bu metinler, temsil krizine değil de hikâye ve karakter gelişimine odaklanır. Gerçekçi tarih yazımı kuramına benzer şekilde, bu romanlarda dilin dış dünyayı, anlatının da tarihi kısmen de olsa temsil edebileceğine dair bir inanç vardır. Kate Mitchell'in genel olarak neo-Viktoryen roman hakkında öne sürdüğü kurmacanın "tarihsel bilgi için bir araç haline gelmesi" (7) durumu, üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlardan ziyade yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlar için söylenebilir. Bu durum, Mitchell'in de belirttiği gibi (181-182), on dokuzuncu yüzyılda farklı disiplinler olduğu iddia edilen tarih ve edebiyatın, tarih ve kurmacanın birbirinden beslenmesi ve birbirine yaklaşmasının bir göstergesi olarak düşünülebilir. Pratik gerçekçi tarihçilerin gelecek odaklı vizyonuna benzer bir şekilde, bazı yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanlar ve spektrumda arada bir noktada kalan bazı romanlar, geçmişe ışık tutmanın yanında günümüze ve geleceğe de hitap ederler. Bu romanların "öteki" ile daha insancıl ilişkiler kurmanın önemine, bireysel hak ve özgürlüklere, birliktelik, kardeşlik, eşitlik, empati gibi ilkeler doğrultusunda yeni düşünme ve var olma biçimlerine yaptıkları vurgularda yeni bir duyarlılık kendini göstermektedir. Bu romanların

Viktoryen döneme yansıttıkları problemlere bu değerleri öne çıkaran çözümler sunmaları, onların hem günümüz hem de gelecekle en az geçmiş kadar ilgili olduklarını gösterir.

Bu kuramsal çerçevece ışığında, bu tezde Graham Swift'in *Ever After* (1992), David Mitchell'in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) ve Margaret Forster'ın *Lady's Maid* (1990) adlı romanları incelenmektedir. *Ever After* birçok bakımdan bir üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen roman, *Lady's Maid* yeni-gerçekçi bir neo-Viktoryen roman, *Cloud Atlas* ise üstkurmacayla yeni-gerçekçilik arasında kalan bir neo-Viktoryen roman olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Tezin üçüncü bölümü, Graham Swift'in *Ever After* adlı romanını inceler. Bu romanda anlatı iki koldan ilerler. Modern çağda (1980'lerin sonunda) yaşayan anlatıcı, Bill Unwin, bir üniversitede edebiyat dersleri vermektedir. Bill, neredeyse tüm sevdiklerini kaybetmiş, travmatik bir hayat sürmüş, orta yaşlarda bir karakterdir. Yakın zamanda intihara teşebbüs etmiş ama başaramamıştır. İyileşme sürecindeyken de büyük dedesi Matthew Pearce'in hayat hikâyesini yazma işine girişmiştir. Hikâyenin diğer ayağı on dokuzuncu yüzyıldadır ve Matthew Pearce'in trajik yaşamına değinir. Matthew; bir dinozor fosili görmesi, küçük oğlunun ölmesi, Charles Darwin ve Charles Lyell'ın bilimsel teorileriyle Hristiyanlık inancını yerle bir etmeleri üzerine dinî inancını kaybeder ve ikili bir hayat yaşar. Matthew'un hikâyesini Bill için cezbedici kılan şey, muhtemelen onun da tıpkı kendisi gibi bir "öteki" olmasıdır.

Swift'in romanı, büyük tarih anlatısına şüpheyle bakar ve onu sorgular. Viktoryen dönemin anlatıcı tarafından tekrar yazılması (aslında yazılamaması) da bu amaca hizmet eder. Anlatıcının güvenilmezliği, hikâyeyi uydurduğunu çünkü olayları böyle görmek istediğini, hikâyenin yarı gerçek yarı uydurma olduğunu açıkça ve defalarca dile getirmesi, romanın gerçekçi tarih yazımını ve gerçekçi romanları eleştirdiğini gösterir. Ne Bill Unwin'in kendi hayat hikâyesi ne de onun anlattığı şekilde Matthew'unki doğrusal olarak ilerler. Nedensellik, tutarlılık ve anlaşılabilirlik gibi prensipler, bu romanda çiğnenir. Anlatının parçalanmışlığı ve belirsizliği dikkat çeker. Anlatıcının kendi tarih bilgisinin sınırlarına ve kütüphanedeki kitapların

geçmişi yaşandığı haliyle anlatamayacağına dikkat çekmesi, okuyucuyu tarih olarak kabul edilen şeyi tekrar gözden geçirmeye ve doğru olarak kabul edilen şeylerin ne derece doğru veya gerçek olabileceğini düşünmeye sevk eder.

Ever After'da öznellik ve tarih birbirinden ayrılamaz konular olarak ele alınır. Roman, öznelliğin sürekli değişen ve söyleme dayalı bir yapı olduğunun altını çizer. Benzer şekilde, Bill'in anlattığı tarih (hem kendi geçmişi hem de Viktoryen dönem) de net olmayan, tam anlaşılmaz ve sabitlenemez, söyleme ve yoruma dayalı bir kurmacadır. Bill'in on dokuzuncu yüzyılla ilgilenme sebebi, yaşadığı kimlik bunalımı ve bunun çaresinin geçmişi anlamak olduğunu düşünmesidir. Geçmişi anlarsa, kendi benliğinin özünü bulacağına ve kendini tarihte bir noktaya anlamlı bir şekilde konumlandırabileceğine inanmaktadır. Eğer kendine kimlik inşası için bir merkez bulabilirse, bunun yaşadığı bunalıma bir çözüm olabileceğini düşünmektedir. Bu merkez, bir baba figürü olabilir; ancak Bill'in birden çok babası veya baba yerine koyduğu insan vardır. Bu babaların hepsi ölmüş olduğundan sağlam bir temel işlevi göremezler.

Anlatıcı; bazı rollere bürünerek, bir modeli taklit ederek kendi varlığına bir açıklama getirmek, hayatını anlamlandıracak bir amaç bulmak için durmadan çabalar. Kendini roman boyunca William Shakespeare'in *Hamlet* adlı oyunun kahramanı olan Hamlet'le özdeşleştirir. Ara sıra kendini bir şövalye, bir peri masalı kahramanı olarak da görmeye ve göstermeye çalışır. Ancak bu şablonlar veya modeller, her seferinde roman tarafından parodi ve ironi yardımıyla çürütülür ve anlatıcının istediği şekilde çalışmazlar. Yani, sabit, değişmeyen bir öznellik veya benlik algısı yaratamazlar.

Bu durumda, Bill Unwin de kendine dayanak olarak kullanabileceği bir model bulmak için geçmişe döner. Viktoryen dönemi anlarsa, Matthew Pearce'ın hikâyesini anlayıp yeniden yazabilirse, geçmişiyle ve tarihle anlamlı bir bağ kurabileceğini, bu şekilde de benliğinin özünü anlayabileceğini düşünür. Ancak roman; tarihin boşluklarla, belirsizliklerle dolu, büyük oranda duyuma, kurmacaya dayalı bir metin, bir anlatı olduğunu, geçmişi anlama, bilme ve bir metinde geçmişi yaşandığı şekilde aktarma çabasının boş bir uğraş olduğunu vurgular. Birçok üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanda olduğu gibi, Swift'in romanında pozitivist tarih yazımı ve resmî

tarih eleştirisi tarihçi figürler kullanılarak da getirilir. Bu romanda iki tarihçi vardır. Bunlardan biri Bill, diğeri ise Bill'in üniversiteden arkadaşı olan tarihçi Michael Potter'dır. Michael ün peşinde koşan, kişisel çıkarları için her şeyi yapabilen bir tarihçidir. Bill ise kişisel tarihin peşindedir. Michael'ın romanda kuru bilgi peşinde koşan itici biri olarak resmedilmesi, romanın akademideki tarih yazımına yönelttiği eleştirinin bir göstergesidir.

Bill, daha farklı bir tarihçi olarak resmedilse de onun geçmişi kendi istediği şekilde yazma çabası, bunu açık açık söylemesi, bilmediği olayları uydurması, hatta bazı olaylar için birden fazla senaryo yazması, elindeki dokümanlardaki eksikliklere işaret etmesi, tarih bilgisi denilen şeyin aslında kulaktan kulağa aktarılan yorumlara dayandığını gösterir. Bu noktalar, aynı zamanda romanın geleneksel tarihe ve tarih yazımına getirdiği eleştirilerdir. Romanda tarih ve kurmaca arsındaki sınır belirsizdir. Tarihçi figürü, arşivler, kanıtlar, tarihsel anlatılar, geleneksel tarih yazımı ile ilişkilendirilen tüm kavramlar eleştiri konusudur. Romanda Viktoryen dönemde gerçekleşen bazı olaylara ve gerçek kişilere değinilse de bu detaylar okuyucuya o dönem hakkında bilgi vermekten ziyade onun kafasını karıştırmaya, tarihsel anlatıların objektiflik, doğruluk gibi iddialarını çürütmeye yarar.

Bütün bu faktörler, okuyucunun anlatılan hikâyenin içine girememesine, kendini anlatıya kaptıramamasına sebep olur. Yukarda değinilen bilişsel problemler ve temsil meselesiyle ilgili sorunlardan dolayı, tıpkı anlatıcıyla kendi anlatısı arasındaki kopukluk gibi, okuyucuyla Bill Unwin arasında, modern çağla Viktoryen dönem arasında da benzer kopukluklar vardır. Okuyucu, roman boyunca uydurulmuş bir hikâyeyi tam da uydurulurken okuduğunun farkındadır.

Postmodern tarih kuramını anımsatır şekilde, *Ever After* bazı büyük olayların tarihsel yüce duygusu uyandırdığı için asla tam anlamıyla anlaşılamayacağına, konuşulamayacağına ve aktarılamayacağına işaret eder. Postmodern kuramcıların dikkat çektikleri tarihsel yüce ve temsil edilemez olay kavramlarına modern anlatıda İkinci Dünya Savaşı, bu savaşta ölen karakterler ve atom bombasına yapılan imalarla Viktoryen anlatıda da inanç krizi ve Matthew'un dinozor kalıntılarıyla karşılaşması

üzerinden değinilir. Ancak roman, bu temsil edilemez konulara derinlemesine giremez, o olayları aktaramaz. Tarih, bu romanda bilinmezliğini korur.

Anlatıcının on dokuzuncu yüzyılı yani büyük dedesinin hikâyesini tekrar yazma sebeplerinden biri de yaşadığı çağda Jean-François Lyotard'ın bahsettiği manada büyük anlatıların geçerliliğini yitirmiş olması ve bundan kaynaklı olarak gerçeğin ne olduğunun artık bilinemez olması, yani bireyin gerçeklik algısını kaybetmiş olmasıdır. Kohlke ve Gutleben'e göre, postmodern çağın bir getirisi olan bilginin göreceliğinin veya bilinmezliğinin bilinmesi, bir travma sebebidir ("Introduction" 4). Jean Baudrillard'ın karamsar bir açıdan "gerçeğin artık gerçek olmadığı" ve hakikatin yitimi olarak tanımladığı postmodernite (2), romanda benzer şekilde ele alınır ve özne üstündeki olumsuz etkilerine değinilir. Anlatıcı, kendi varlığını ve yaşamını anlamlı kılacak bir dayanak noktası veya büyük anlatı bulamaz. Yaşadığı çağ, Baudrillard'ın postmodernite için dediği gibi kopyanın asıl olanın yerine geçtiği (1), neyin gerçek neyin kopya olduğunun anlaşılamadığı bir dönemdir. Bill, travma kaynağı olan bu çıkmazdan kaçmak için Viktoryen dönemi epistemolojik manada netlik ve kesinlikle özdeşleştirmek ister. Bill'in bu dönemi idealize etmeye çalışması, geçmişe duyduğu özlemin de bir göstergesidir. Roman, bu nostaljik bakışı eleştirse de postmodern bir özne olan anlatıcının doğrunun bilenememesinden kaynaklı karamsarlığını ve kendine herhangi bir anlatı, tutunabileceği bir dayanak bulamamasının yarattığı çaresizliğini paylaşır. Bu noktanın tüm üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlar için geçerli olduğu söylenemez çünkü genellikle bu romanlar mutlak doğrunun olmamasını, gerçeğin göreceliğini, büyük anlatıların çöküşünü kutlarlar ve bunlarda bir potansiyel görürler. Bu bakımdan diğer üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlardan ayrışsa da Swift'in romanı, tıpkı diğer üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlarda olduğu gibi, tarihi bir kurmaca olarak gösterir. Bu ve yukarıda açıklanan pek çok özelliğinden dolayı bu roman, üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryenizmin iyi bir örneği olarak görülebilir.

Bazı neo-Viktoryen romanlar, tarihe postmodern açıdan yaklaşsalar ve deneysel anlatım teknikleri kullansalar da sadece büyük tarih anlatısını yapısökümeye uğratmakla yetinmezler. Bu romanlarda tarihin yapısökümünün yanı sıra tarihi yeniden inşa etme amacı da bulunmaktadır. Bu tez, dördüncü bölümde David

Mitchell'in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) adlı romanının böyle ikili bir tutum sergileyen, bundan dolayı da spektrumda ortalarda bir yerde görülebilecek bir neo-Viktoryen roman olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. *Cloud Atlas*, ilk okumada birbiriyle alakasız gibi görünen altı hikâyeden oluşur. İlk hikâye, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda İngiliz İmparatorluğu'na bağlı kolonilerde geçer. Amerikalı Adam Ewing'in buradan evine dönerken yaşadığı maceraları anlatır. Sonraki hikâye, 1931'de Belçika'da geçer. Üretken bir müzisyen olan Robert Frobisher'in sekreterliğini yaptığı Vyvyan Ayrs ile arasında geçenleri erkek arkadaşı Rufus Sixsmith'e anlattığı mektuplarından oluşur. Bu mektupların bazılarında Robert Frobisher, Vyvyan'ın evinde şans eseri iki ayrı parça halinde bulduğu bir günlükten bahseder. Bu, Adam'ın yolculuk sırasında tuttuğu günlüktür. Üçüncü kısım, 1970'lerin Kaliforniyasına döner. Gazeteci Luisa Rey'in Seaboard adlı bir şirketin toplum hayatını tehdit eden bir skandalını ortaya çıkarma çabasını anlatır. Bu hikâyede Rufus Sixsmith de önemli bir karakterdir çünkü Seaboard'un ne yaptığını bilmektedir ve skandalı ortaya çıkarabilecek önemli bir raporu elinde tutmaktadır. Luisa'nın hikâyesi, bunu takip eden hikâyenin kahramanı olan Timothy Cavendish'e basılmak üzere gönderilen bir metin olarak sonraki hikâyede yeniden ortaya çıkar. Bu hikâye, 2000'lerin Londrasında geçer. Timothy'nin kardeşi tarafından kandırılıp bir bakımevine yatırılmasını, orada başından geçenleri ve bazı arkadaşlarıyla bakımevinden kaçışını anlatır. Timothy'nin anlatısı, sonraki hikâyede kahramanın kısmen izlediği bir film olarak ortaya çıkar. Bu hikâye, Nea So Copros adlı bir yerde ve distopik bir yakın gelecekte geçmektedir. Bilinç düzeyi artırılmış bir klon olan Sonmi'nin rejim tarafından yok edilmeden önce suçlarını anlatması için tasarlanan bir röportajından oluşmaktadır. Bu röportajın kaydedildiği cihaz, son hikâyedeki kahramanların eline geçer; ama insanlık "Düşüş" ("the Fall") olarak adlandırılan büyük bir felaket sonrasında medeniyet öncesine gerilediği ve dil de büyük oranda unutulduğu için Sonmi'nin ne dediği çok anlaşılmaz. Bu son hikâye, post-apokaliptik bir dönemde Hawaii'de geçmektedir. Anlatıcı, başta bir keçi çobanı olan Zachry gibi görünse de hikâyenin sonunda anlatının aslında onun oğlu tarafından bir şekilde kaydedilmiş sözel hikâyesi olduğu anlaşılır. Roman genel olarak baskı, şiddet, kölelik ve en önemlisi de tarihle ilgilidir.

Geniş kapsamı, biçimsel ve tematik karmaşıklığı ve altı hikâyeden sadece birinin on dokuzuncu yüzyılda geçmesi sebebiyle eleştirmenler, bu romanı neo-Viktoryen

olarak değerlendirmek konusunda biraz karasızdırlar. Ancak bu tez; Viktoryen dönemi ele alan kısımda işlenen konular takip eden diğer kısımlarda yeniden işlendiği ve her bir hikâyede meydana gelen olaylar sebep-sonuç ilişkisi içinde gösterildiği için Viktoryen dönemde geçen anlatının romana, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda yaşananların da romandaki tarih algısına esas olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu sebeplerle *Cloud Atlas*'ın da bir neo-Viktoryen roman olarak görülebileceğini savunmaktadır.

Kullanılan anlatım teknikleri bakımından *Cloud Atlas*, *Ever After* ile çok benzerlik gösterir. Üstkurmacasal tarz, hem Timothy gibi karakterlerin yorumlarında hem de romanın işlenen konulara, kendi yapısına ve organizasyonuna göndermeler yapılan kısımlarında açıkça görülmektedir. Her anlatının tam ortada kesilip yeni bir hikâyeye geçilmesi ve altıncı anlatıdan sonra sırayla diğer anlatılara dönülüp bunların sonlandırılması ilk başta anlatının doğrusal olarak ilerlemiyor gibi görünmesine sebep olur. Bu durum, okuyucuda bir şaşkınlık yaratır. Biçimsel deneysellik, tıpkı *Ever After*'da olduğu gibi, romanın ilk yarısında okuyucunun anlatıya kendini kaptırmasını engeller. Onu gerçeğin ve tarihsel doğrunun ne olduğuna dair bir sorgulamaya iter. Romanın büyük tarih anlatısına, gerçekçiliğe ve geleneksel tarih yazımına getirdiği eleştiri, Isaac Sachs adlı bir karakterin tarih yazımı ve zaman konularına değinen kuramında da açıkça görülmektedir. Postmodern tarih yazımına ve Hutcheon'un tarihyazımcı üstkurmaca teorisine açıkça gönderme yapan Sachs'ın kuramına göre, yaşanmış olaylar ve gerçeklik tarihsel doğrulara dönüşürken, yani tarih yazılırken kaybolur (*CA* 392-393). Doğru sanılan şeyler bellek, masal ve duyumlara dayanır. Tarih yazılırken gerçek geçmiş kaybolur, sanal geçmiş ise çoğu zaman belirli gruplara hizmet etmek için parlatılır. Yani tarih, büyük ölçüde tarihçinin kendi inanışlarına göre oluşturduğu bir kurmacadır. Hem bu teori hem de bu teorinin diğer hikâyelerde özellikle de Sonmi'ninkinde örneklendirilmesi, romanın bir anlatı olarak tarihe, resmî tarihe ve gerçekçi tarih yazımına duyduğu şüpheyi göz önüne sermektedir

Ancak romanda bu şüphenin yanında tarihe karşı farklı tutumlar ve farklı tarih anlayışları bulunmaktadır. Romanın bazı eleştirmenlerce Matruşka bebek olarak adlandırılan yapısı, onun tarihe yaklaşımı düşünüldüğünde hem bir döngüsellik (kendini tekrarlayan tarih) hem de bir nedensellik ve doğrusallık (ilerlemeci tarih)

anlayışına yer verdiğini gösterir. *Cloud Atlas*'ın oldukça karmaşık olan tarih anlayışı şu şekildedir: 1) geçmiş, şimdi ve geleceği kapsayan üç-boyutlu bir tarih, 2) paradoksal bir biçimde birlikte varlık gösteren bir ilerlemeci tarih ve kendini durmadan tekrarlayan bir döngüsel tarih, 3) ve bu tezin iddia ettiği gibi, bunlara sebep olan ikili tarih algısı: bir anlatı olarak tarih ve yaşanmış insan deneyimleri olarak tarih.

Romanın bir anlatı olarak resmî tarihe yaklaşımı yapısökümcüyken yaşanmış tarihi ele alış şekli yeniden yapılandırmacıdır. Viktoryen döneme post-kolonyal bir perspektiften bakan ilk anlatıda, Adam ve onun sayesinde okuyucu, şimdiye kadar çok bilinmeyen Moriori kabilesinin yaşadığı travma hakkında bilgi sahibi olur. Kabilenin neredeyse yok edilmesi, birkaç karakter tarafından farklı şekillerde anlatılmış olsa da roman bu olayın İngiliz sömürgeciliği ve açgözlülüğü yüzünden gerçekleştiğini vurgular. Resmî tarihte çok zor yer bulacak bir olaya ışık tutan roman, bu hikâyeyle İngiliz İmparatorluğu'nu ve sömürgeciliği Friedrich Nietzsche'den esinlenerek betimlediği sonsuza kadar kendini tekrarlayan yağma tarihinde bir başlangıç noktası olarak gösterir. On dokuzuncu yüzyılda dünyanın birçok yerinde hüküm süren İngiliz İmparatorluğu, günümüzde ve gelecekte insanlığın başına gelen felaketlerin bir anlamda sorumlusu ve büyük bir tarihsel hata olarak gösterilir. Moriori kabilesinin yaşadığı felaket ve yağmanın, diğer sömürge adalarındaki yerli halklara Avrupai yaşam tarzının dayatılmasının, kapitalist düzenin buralarda Batılı karakterlerce kurulmasının sonuçları Luisa'nin dünyasında gözünü para hırsı bürümüş şirket sahiplerinin toplum sağlığını ve güvenliğini hiçe saymaları, Sonmi'nin dünyasında insanlığı, çevreyi ve klonları tehdit eden baskıcı rejim olarak yeniden ortaya çıkar. Zachry'nin hikâyesine gelindiğinde, Sonmi'nin içinde yaşadığı distopik dünya ve baskıcı sistem neredeyse bütün insanları yok etmiş, çok büyük felaketlere sebep olmuştur. Bu gibi bağlantılar sayesinde roman; geçmiş, günümüz ve geleceğin birbirini nasıl şekillendirdiğini gösterir. On dokuzuncu yüzyıla post-kolonyal açıdan bakarak, anlatılar sayesinde tarih bilgisi sunmaya çalışarak, anlatıların bu bağlamda önemine vurgu yaparak, roman hem postmodern şüphecilikten ve gerçeğin/doğrunun göreceliği fikrinden uzaklaşmakta hem de Adam Ewing'in günlüğüne yerleştirilen ve diğer anlatılarda geliştirilen mesajlar sayesinde kendini tekrarlayan yağma tarihi imajı üzerinden bir ilerlemeci tarih anlayışına işaret

etmektedir. Kendini tekrarlayan yağma tarihi, dünya ve insanlığın geleceğine dair karamsar bir tabloya işaret etse de bu tarih algısının yanı sıra sunulan ilerlemeci tarih anlayışı, daha pozitif ve iyimser bir tablo çizer.

Birçok çalışmada belirtildiği gibi, bu romanda yeniden tarif edilen bir hümanizm çağrısı vardır. Bu tezde bu çalışmalarda dikkatten kaçan nokta, yani yeniden tasavvur edilen hümanizmin tarih ve tarih bilinciyle ilintisi ele alınmaktadır. Yazar, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda geçen hikâyeye bazı umut tohumları yerleştirmiştir. Amerikalı Adam'la Moriori kabilesinin son üyelerinden Autua'nın birbirini tanıma, dayanışma ve kardeşlik gibi değerlere dayalı arkadaşlığı, yaşanmış tarihte saklı ve keşfedilmeyi bekleyen bir alternatif yaşama ve düşünme biçimi olarak görülebilir. Adam, sömürülen halkların başından geçenlere şahit olmasından ve kendi çocuğunun daha iyi bir dünyada yaşamasını istemesinden dolayı kişisel bir dönüşüm yaşar ve köleliğin kaldırılması için çalışmaya karar verir. Bu yeni düşünce tarzının ve yeniden düşünülmüş bir birliktelik anlayışının diğer hikâyelerde de ortaya çıkması, romanın en önemli mesajlardan birinin yeni bir hümanizm anlayışı yaratmak olduğunun göstergesidir. Tıpkı Adam ve Autua gibi, diğer hikâyelerdeki karakterler de hem diğer insanları, canlıları veya yaşam formlarını düşündüklerinden hem de daha iyi bir gelecek yaratma amacıyla harekete geçerler. Bazıları, kendilerini başkaları için tehlikeye atar. Roman, bu yeni hümanizm anlayışını kurarken bu anlayış için gelecekle ilgili farkındalık kadar tarih bilincinin de önemli olduğunun altını çizer. Bu yeni hümanizm anlayışında önemli bir diğer etmen de insanın/öznenin merkezde olmasıdır. Ancak liberal hümanizm anlayışındaki insanmerkezcilikten farklı olarak bu yeni hümanizm anlayışının merkezindeki özne; herhangi bir yerde yaşayan, herhangi bir kimliğe sahip, herhangi bir inanç sistemine mensup, herhangi bir bireydir. Sadece bir bütünün parçası olarak merkezdedir ve merkezde olmasının sebepleri, dünyanın ve insanlığın geleceği için hem olumlu hem olumsuz anlamda sorumluluğun onun üstünde olması ve hikâye anlatabilme yeteneğidir. Roman; eğer yeterince kapsayıcı hikâyelerle tarih bilincini ve gelecekle ilgili farkındalığı artırabilirlerse, etik kararlar verip bunları hayata geçirebilirlerse, insanların daha iyi bir gelecek yaratabileceklerine vurgu yapar. Reenkarnasyon ve *déjà vu* imgeleriyle de tüm insanların birbirleriyle ve doğayla bağlantılı olduklarının, farklı kültürlerin ve toplumların tarihlerinin birbiriyle ilintili olduğunun, geçmişle bugünün ve geleceğin

ayrılamaz olduğunun altını çizer. Bu yeni hümanizm anlayışı, romanda bazı alternatif topluluklarla örneklendirilir. Viktoryen dönemde yaşayan barışçıl, çevre konusunda duyarlı, insan yaşamına değer veren Moriori kabilesi, alternatif bir yaşam şeklini temsil eder. Sonmi'nin anlatısında değinilen, şehirden uzakta yaşayan, farklı gruplardan gelen ama sevinçte ve kederde birlikte olabilen bir grup insan da alternatif bir yaşam ve dayanışma örneğidir. Bu örneklerle roman, okuyucuyu da birliktelik ve kardeşliğe dayalı ilişkiler kurmaya ve böylece toplumu ve dünyayı yeniden şekillendirmeye davet eder. Bunun için gerekli olan bencillikten ve açgözlülükten vazgeçmek, geçmişi anlamak ve geleceği görebilmek, "öteki" olanla, doğa ve farklı yaşam formlarıyla bir arada, barış içinde yaşayabilmeyi ögrenmektir. Yaşanılmış geçmişi yeniden yapılandırmacı bir tutumla ele alması ve yeni bir hümanizm tahayyül etmesi bakımından bu roman, anti-hümanist duruşun benimsendiği üstkurmacasal neo-Viktoryen romanlardan ayrışır ve spektrumda arada bir noktada bulunur.

Tezin beşinci bölümünde, Margaret Forster'in *Lady's Maid* (1990) adlı eseri yeni-gerçekçi bir neo-Viktoryen roman olarak incelenmektedir. Bu roman, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın en önemli kadın şairlerinden olan Elizabeth Barrett Browning'e uzun süre hizmet eden Elizabeth Wilson'ın hayat hikâyesini anlatır. Olaylar, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ortalarında İngiltere ve İtalya'da geçer. Diğer iki romanın aksine, bu romanda gerçekçi anlatım teknikleri kullanılır. Anlatıcı, Elizabeth Wilson'un işe başladığı günden itibaren yaşadıklarını aktarırken kahramanın kendi sesi de ailesine ve arkadaşlarına yazdığı mektuplar sayesinde duyulur. Doğrusal bir şekilde ilerleyen, nedensellik, tutarlılık gibi prensipleri de gözeten anlatı oldukça inandırıcıdır. Romanın uyandırdığı bu gerçeğe yakınlık imajı metin boyunca devam eder, çürütülmez. Romanda bahsedilen olaylar, tarihsel ve mekânsal ayrıntılar, Forster'ın 1988'de yazdığı Elizabeth Barrett Browning'in biyografisiyle uyumludur. Bu sebeple romanın biyografiyi, kurmacanın tarihi tamamladığı söylenebilir. Diğer iki romanın aksine, bu romanda dil oyunlarına, okuyucuyu yanıltarak veya şaşırtarak sorgulamaya yönlendiren stratejilere başvurulmaz. Kullanılan anlatım teknikleri, okuyucunun kendini anlatıya kaptırmasını sağlar. Bu roman, diğer iki romandan farklı olarak, kurgusal doğrular yaratır ve bu doğrular sayesinde tarihi yeniden

şekillendirir. Geçmişin ve tarihin kurmaca/anlatı sayesinde kısmen de olsa açıklanabileceğini ve bilinebileceğini ortaya koyar.

Forster, büyük tarih anlatısını açık bir şekilde çürütmek veya temsil krizine dikkat çekmek yerine kadın ve sınıf meselelerine odaklanarak tarihi sessizce sorgular ve yeniden yazar. Yeniden inşa edilen bu tarih; kadın merkezli bir tarihtir ve sıradan bir kadının duygu ve düşüncelerini, evlilik, annelik ve iş hayatındaki kişisel deneyimlerini ön plana çıkarır. Elizabeth Wilson'ın hikâyesi, bir mikro-tarih olsa da Viktoryen dönemde yaşamış kadınların, işçi sınıfının, özellikle hizmetçilerin yaşantılarına ve o dönemin İngiltere'sine birçok açıdan ışık tutar. Okuyucuca o dönemde bir kadın, bir hizmetçi olmanın ne demek olduğunu hissettirir.

Romanda geleneksel anlatım teknikleri kullanılması, onun sofistike olmadığını veya geçmişe eleştirel bir açıdan bakmadığını göstermez. Diğer iki roman gibi, *Lady's Maid* de revizyonist bir tutum sergiler denilebilir çünkü şimdiye kadar görmezden gelinmiş bir kadını merkeze alır, o dönemde yaşanan sosyal adaletsizlikleri eleştirir ve o çağın en önemli meselelerinden biri olan "kadın meselesini"ne değinir. O çağda yaygın olan "evinin meleği", "fahişe", "kutsal ana" gibi imajları yeniden irdelerken ataerkil Viktoryen toplumunun iki yüzlülüğüne, kadınların bu imajlar sayesinde eve hapsedildiğine ve özgürlüklerinin kısıtlandığına vurgu yapar. Bu tarihsel konuya değinmesiyle ve Elizabeth Barrett Browning hakkında şimdiye kadar bilinen gerçekleri bazı noktalarda sorgulasa da bunlara genel itibariyle uyan bir anlatı sunmasıyla roman, tarihselliğine işaret eder.

Roman; bir yandan bu iki kadının kişiliklerine, hayatlarına ve Viktoryen döneme ışık tutarken bir yandan da alternatif bir tarih yazar. "İlerleme" ve "büyük olaylar" gibi tarihle ilgili bazı terimleri yeniden tanımlayarak bunları kadınların deneyimlerine, kadın bedenine ve duygulara bağlar. Böylece, bir tarihçiye önemsiz görünebilecek bir kadın hizmetçiyi, onun tarih kitaplarında yer bulamayacak duygu, düşünce, günlük yaşantısını ve kadın bedenini yeniden yazdığı tarihin merkezine koyar. Forster hem Elizabeth Wilson'ı hem de Elizabeth Barrett Browning'i anlatırken kadını bir özne, kendi bireysel tarihinin yaratıcısı ve kahramanı olarak resmeder. Kadının bir özne olarak tarihin merkezinde olması, Elizabeth Wilson'ın kişisel

gelişimi ve gittikçe daha özgür bir kadına dönüşmesinde ve Elizabeth Barrett Browning'in kadın yazar kimliğinin öne çıkarılmasında gözlemlenebilir.

Cloud Atlas'a benzer bir şekilde, bu romanda da "öteki" ile daha insancıl ilişkiler kurulmasına vurgu yapılır. *Lady's Maid*, farklı sosyal sınıflara mensup iki kadın arasında bir kız kardeşlik, birliktelik ve arkadaşlık kurulabilmesi ihtimalini kahramanın bu konudaki saplantı sayılabilecek durumu üzerinden ele alır. Anlatının başlarında, bu iki karakter birbirleri için neredeyse yakın bir arkadaş olur. Ancak bu birliktelik duygusu; kahramanın evlenmeden önce hamile kalması, bunu Elizabeth Barrett Browning'den saklaması, durum açığa çıkınca da Browning'in ona duyduğu güvenin kaybolması ve gittikçe bencil ve zalim bir kadına dönüşmesiyle neredeyse yok olur. İşten atılmasına ve bundan dolayı ailevî sorunlar yaşamasına rağmen Elizabeth Wilson, hanımına bağlı kalır. Ona duyduğu sevgi, saygı ve bağlılık tamamen yok olmaz. Bu ilişkiyle ve bu konuyu işlerken öne çıkardığı empati, özgürlük, sevgi gibi kavramlarla roman, bir anlamda alternatif bir düşünme ve yaşam biçimi tasavvur eder ve okuyucuya hem bugün hem de gelecekle ilgili bir çağrı yapar denilebilir. İnsanların bencillikleri ve başkalarının yaşadığı acılar konusunda vurdumduymazlıkları, günümüzde de ayrışmalara ve bireyin gittikçe daha çok yalnızlaşmasına sebep olmaktadır. Roman, günümüzde de yaşanabilen sorunları geçmişe yansıtıp bu sorunların ne şekilde çözülebileceğini göstererek, geçmişle olduğu kadar günümüzle de ilgili olduğunu belli eder. Buna ek olarak, bu iki kadının arasındaki bağın kahramanın hayatındaki etkileri; okuyucunun onunla bir bağ kurmasına, onun insanî ihtiyaç ve isteklerinde, hayal kırıklıklarında ve umutlarında kendinden bir parça bulmasına yol açar. Bu özdeşleşme de bir anlamda romanın insan doğasına da değindiğini ve geleneksel hümanizm anlayışındakiyle bazı noktalarda benzeşen ve bazı noktalarda da ondan ayrışan bir özne ve öznellik kavramını benimsediğini gösterir. Yani bu romana göre özne, *Ever After*'daki gibi sürekli değişen, söyleme dayalı ve anlaşılmaz bir yapı değil de gelişen, hayatını şekillendirebilen, böylece de kişisel tarihinin yaratıcısı olan aktif bir öznedir.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, romanın kahramanı olmasa da geri plana atılmamıştır. Roman, Browning'i hizmetçisine karsı bencilliğinden dolayı eleştirir. Ancak bu eleştiri, bazı eleştirmenlerin iddialarının aksine, Forster'ın feminist edebiyat için çok

önemli olan Barrett Browning'in yazar kimliğini yapısöküme uğrattığı anlamına gelmez. Bu tez; bazı noktalarda Browning'i eleştirse de romanın bu kadın yazarı yücelttiğini, onu çağının ötesinde entelektüel bir kadın olarak tasvir ettiğini savunmaktadır. Roman, Roland Barthes ve Michel Foucault'nun öne sürdüğü "yazarın ölümü" ("the death of the author") tezinden uzaklaşarak yazarı mecazi anlamda yeniden diriltir ve bu yeniden dirilişi kutlar. Forster Elizabeth Barrett Browning'i ölümünden sonra ortaya çıkan, Robert Browning'le kaçarak babasının baskısından kurtulmuş, hayatının gerisinde mutlu yaşamış zayıf bir kadın imajından kurtarır. Onu idealize etmese bile bir yazar olarak kendini nasıl geliştirdiğine işaret eder. Onun politik duruşuna ve eserlerine yaptığı vurgularla da Barrett Browning'i yazar kimliğiyle öne çıkarır, onun yazar olarak otoritesine dikkat çeker. Bu şekilde de bu şairin kültürel bellekteki yerini sağlamlaştırır.

Tezin altıncı bölümü, incelenen üç romana çalışmanın genelinde odaklanılan araştırma soruları bağlamında karşılaştırmalı olarak bakmaktadır. Bu soruların en önemlilerinden biri; edebiyat ile tarih disiplini, kurmaca ile tarih arasındaki ilişkinin ne olduğudur. *Ever After,* kurmaca ve tarih arasındaki sınırı belirsizleştirir. Bunu yaparken amacı, tarihin bir kurmaca olduğunu göstermektir. *Cloud Atlas*'ta hem bu postmodernist anlayış hem de yeniden yapılandırmacı bir tutum vardır. *Lady's Maid*'de de tarihle kurmacayı ayıran çizgi belirsizleşir denilebilir, ama bu sefer amaç çok farklıdır. Bu roman; edebiyatın/kurmacanın tarihi yeniden yazmada, geçmişi anlamada ve anlatmakta önemli bir rol oynayabileceğini gösterir. *Cloud Atlas* gibi sadece yapısökümcü bir hedefi olmayan, yani tarihe yeniden yapılandırmacı bir yaklaşımları da olan neo-Viktoryen romanların ve *Lady's Maid* gibi yeni-gerçekçi neo-Viktoryen romanların bir anlamda tarih kitabına benzediği, hatta Viktoryen dönemi onlardan daha etkili bir şekilde anlattıkları söylenebilir. Kate Mitchell'in de belirttiği gibi, çoğu neo-Viktoryen roman yazarı bir tarihçiye benzer (24) çünkü bir anlamda geçmişle ilgili bilinmeyenleri kurmaca sayesinde ortaya çıkarırlar, görmezden gelinmiş ya da "öteki" olarak görülmüş kişilerin anlatılarına yer vererek geçmişi bazı yönleriyle aydınlatırlar. Bu konuyla ilgili olarak bu çalışmanın ilgilendiği bir diğer soru da neo-Viktoryen romanların o dönem ve günümüz arasında bir devamlılık veya bağlantı kurup kurmadığıdır. Bu durum, Swift'in romanı için söz konusu değilken, diğer iki roman geçmişle günümüz arasındaki bağlantıyı anlatılan

olayların sebep ve sonuçlarına dikkat çekerek veya insan ilişkilerini konu alarak kurar.

İncelenen üç roman da özne ve tarih ilişkisine doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak değinmektedir. *Ever After*'da özne de tarih de söyleme dayalı, değişken, asla sabit kalmayan yapılardır. *Cloud Atlas*'ta da bu durum görülmektedir, ama bunun yanında öznenin tarih yazabilmesinin önemine dikkat çekilmektedir. Okuyucuya da geleceği şekillendiren aktif bir özne olmaları çağrısı yapılır. *Lady's Maid*, bu soruyla oldukça ilgilidir. Kadını kendi hayatını kontrol edebilen, kendini geliştirebilen, kendi tarihinin kahramanı olan aktif bir özne olarak görür ve tahayyül ettiği tarihin de tam merkezine koyar.

Peki bu romanlar neden Viktoryen döneme dönmektedir? *Ever After* için bu dönüşün asıl amacı; büyük tarih anlatısını, gerçekçi romanların ve geleneksel tarih yazımının dış dünyayı olduğu gibi aktarmak gibi iddialarını sorgulamak, okuyucuyu neyin doğru neyin gerçek olduğunu tekrar düşünmeye davet etmektir. *Cloud Atlas*'ta da resmî tarih ve geleneksel tarih yazımı konusunda bu hedef vardır; ama bunun yanında geçmişte yaşanmış bazı olayları aydınlatma amacı da vardır. Bu roman, on dokuzuncu yüzyıla tekrar bakarak günümüze dair bazı uyarılar yapmayı ve geleceği yeni bir hümanizm anlayışı doğrultusunda şekillendirmeyi de amaçlar. *Lady's Maid*'in o döneme dönmedeki amacı, tarihi kadın merkezli olarak tekrar yazmak ve okuyucuya gerçekten yaşamış iki kadın hakkında bilgi aktarmaktır. *Cloud Atlas*'a benzer şekilde, bu romanda farklı sosyal sınıflardan gelen iki kadının dostluğu ihtimaline odaklanılması, geçmişten dersler çıkarılabileceğine, bu derslerin günümüzde yaşanılan bazı sorunları çözmede ve iyi bir gelecek oluşturmada önemli olduklarına işaret eder. Sonuç olarak, birçok neo-Viktoryen roman için Viktoryen döneme dönmelerindeki genel amacın bireysel ve toplumsal ilerlemeye katkı sunmak, okuyucuyu geçmişten dersler çıkararak daha iyi bir gelecek ve dünya yaratmaya teşvik etmek olduğu söylenebilir.

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