

## Abstracts:

## Fashioning the Neo-Victorian. Iterations of the Nineteenth Century in Contemporary Literature and Culture

(International Conference, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, 8-10 April 2010)

### Rosario Arias (University of Málaga): **The Concept of the Trace and Neo-Victorianism: A New Paradigm?**

This paper focuses on the increasing relevance of the notion of the trace for the study of contemporary revisions of the Victorian age. Since the “uncanny 1990s” there has been an upsurge of interest in considering the pervasive presence of the Victorian past through the trope of haunting and spectrality in which the two main trends are constituted by Jacques Derrida’s hauntology and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s work on the phantom and the crypt. This theoretical framework has proved to be extremely fruitful for neo-Victorianism in which the ‘trace’ (be that either spectral or encrypted) is often mentioned in passing. Taking haunting and spectrality as a starting point, I would like to suggest that the concept of the trace is an apt critical tool to analyse contemporary interventions into the nineteenth century. Recent critics have turned to this notion of the trace (or visible mark) in order to emphasise *presence*. My aim is to explore the ways in which the inscription (and presentness) of the Victorian past in the twentieth- and twenty-first century can be examined against the backdrop of this notion that (I argue) demands more critical attention. In addition, it will be argued that the concept of the trace is in keeping with the challenges posed to postmodernism in contemporary culture. The theoretical underpinnings will be provided by critics like Paul Ricoeur who in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) theorises the notion of the trace and develops its pivotal role in memory and history to arrest loss and forgetting.

### Dietmar Böhnke (University of Leipzig): **(Re)Fashioning the Neo-Victorian Canon: An Interim Assessment**

Neo-Victorian Studies are clearly here to stay. During the past decade or so, at least a dozen academic books, several international conferences and a peer-reviewed e-journal have testified to the growing popularity not only of the neo-Victorian phenomenon itself but also of its study in academic circles. It is much less clear what exactly is being studied, however. There have been various attempts at definition of the ‘neo-Victorian’, but the field is both amorphous and rapidly changing. How, then, can we pretend to talk of a neo-Victorian ‘canon’? I believe that already at this point, we can see certain key works and themes emerging in the discussion that seem to constitute something like a makeshift canon. In this paper, I will try to evaluate this development by looking at several of the academic guides to the field (including Clayton, Gutleben, Joyce, Kaplan, Kucich/Sadoff and Krueger) as well as the e-journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, and ask the following questions: Which are the most popular novels/authors, films, cultural phenomena etc. discussed? Are there any significant central topics or key concepts? Is there a preferred approach or methodology discernible? Are there conspicuous absences? Finally, this will lead me to my ‘interim assessment’ of the neo-Victorian ‘canon’ as it presents itself at this moment in time, and perhaps even a few suggestions as to what changes the next round of refashioning might bring.



Kym Brindle (University of Lancaster): **Through a Critical Looking Glass: Diary Disorder in Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me***

Lewis Carroll is posthumously tried for crimes 'evidenced' by mysteriously censored documents and his penchant for photographing children in 'their favourite state of nothing to wear'. Now appropriated, revised and mythologised, Carroll is an increasingly amorphous and imagined figure, sought and pseudo-located in his remaining documents. Katie Roiphe's neo-Victorian novel, *Still She Haunts Me* (2001), re-fashions the Carroll myth and his relationship with Alice Liddell to imagine what Carroll's missing diary entries might have recorded. Negotiating the contradictions that inform our understanding of an iconic Victorian, Roiphe combines the temporal order of diary form with internal disorder of content to imagine chaos and conflict in Carroll's private consciousness in direct response to similarly disorderly suspicions that hang over Carroll's reputation. Emphasising the palimpsestic nature of her work, Roiphe illustrates inconsistencies in two contrary propositions, which both appropriate Carroll's diary and its elisions to shape and evidence an essentially inaccessible past.

Commentators read the frustrating gaps in Carroll's actual diary in conjunction with his child photographs – a strategy fully exploited by Roiphe. A revised diary therefore conspires with the historically skewed gaze of the camera lens to debate how contemporary commentators correlate the 'black art' of photography with the mysteries surrounding Carroll's mutilated or lost diaries. This paper examines how Roiphe's novel interrogates a debate generated by Victorian secrets and contemporary suspicions and questions who, in fact, is the voyeur? Carroll? Or those who peer into a Victorian looking-glass to see spectral images that reflect only modern imaginations?

Jessica Cox (Brunel University, Uxbridge): **"The bad dreams always come back again": Narratives of Sexual Trauma in Contemporary Adaptations of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White***

Recent years have witnessed a plethora of literary, screen and stage adaptations of Wilkie Collins's seminal sensation novel, *The Woman in White* (1860). A survey of these reveals a particular trend towards portrayals of sexual trauma. This paper examines the significance of the inclusion of these narratives of trauma in works such as David Pirie's film adaptation of *The Woman in White* (1997), James Wilson's novel, *The Dark Clue* (2001), and Linda Newbery's novel, *Set in Stone* (2006). Mel Kohlke suggests that trauma is a key feature of neo-Victorian fiction, arguing that 'the period is configured as a temporal convergence of multiple historical traumas [...] These include both the pervasive traumas of social ills, such as disease, crime, and sexual exploitation, and the more spectacular traumas of violent civil unrest, international conflicts, and trade wars that punctuated the nineteenth century'<sup>1</sup> – traumas, Kohlke suggests, which have clear parallels with contemporary culture. The adaptations of *The Woman in White* with which I am concerned focus not on trauma in its broader historical sense – in relation to empire, trade wars etc. – but on personal narratives of trauma, which can also be seen to reflect contemporary concerns and anxieties. This paper explores the significance of these narratives in relation to the refashioning of Victorian sensation fiction for a contemporary audience.

<sup>1</sup> Mel Kohlke, 'Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter' in *Neo-Victorian Studies* (Vol. 1, No. 1), Autumn 2008, p.7



Anne Enderwitz, Doris Feldmann (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg): **Material Culture and Nostalgia: Present-ing the Past in *Cranford***

The mini series *Cranford* (BBC 2007) can be placed within the tradition of English heritage films, offering images of pre-industrial England and a class-bound vision of a small community. Its unique take on the past consists in the fact that it not only attempts to render the past present but also introduces a meta-narrative about the nostalgic desire to re-present the past. The series thus testifies to the current fascination with the Victorians and their own preoccupation with the past.

*Cranford* portrays everyday life in a small Victorian town, dominated by unmarried women whose anachronistic lifestyle is founded on bereavement and loss and is itself a sign of an irrecoverable (pre-Victorian) past. The series enacts a longing for the past, which is rendered in a partly comic, partly elegiac style. The past is re-presented by material objects and the everyday cultural practices bound up with them. They function like the Derridean trace by giving presence to the past while *also* drawing attention to its absence. The material culture re-presented in *Cranford* is evocative of a material turn in Neo-/Victorian studies and of a significant moment in Britain's imperial and cultural history: the objects and lifestyles presented address a commodity culture which developed in the nineteenth century and constructed consumer desire as female desire. The film, however, is not only concerned with consumption and commodities, but also with an economy based on gifts and relics. The mediated objects of Victorian culture testify to a fantasy of origin arising out of the insatiable demands of nostalgia – a nostalgia which seeks to both distance and appropriate the past.

Christine Ferguson (University of Glasgow): **The 2009 U.K. Steampunk Convivial: Retrofitting Nostalgia**

My paper presents a case study and analysis of the innovative performance of nostalgia at the first ever British steampunk convivial, held in Lincoln, September 11-13, 2009. Drawing over 400 participants from around the world and featuring a host of steampunk musical, literary, and comedy performances, the event also provided an opportunity for attendees to act, in the words of organizer John Naylor, as “living installations” by parading through the conference grounds and the city streets in spectacular and largely home-made or found object-based steampunk costumes that combined Victorian styles with techno-anachronistic accessories. My paper considers how the politically, aesthetically, and emotionally invested practices of remembrance on display at the convivial, and in the wider steampunk community, shed light on the subculture’s attempt to retrofit and radicalize nostalgia, to reject the charges of reactionism and political bankruptcy associated with nostalgia since Jameson’s devastating critique in *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). It also suggests how this concept of retrofitted nostalgia might help us to situate steampunk’s dialogue with, distance from, and in some cases, marked opposition to, the more popular and middle-brow forms of Neo-Victorian literature and performance represented by the likes of A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) and Susan Hill’s *The Woman in Black* (2002). Illustrated by a selection of images from the gathering, my presentation urges us as Neo-Victorian scholars to recognize and theorize the political stakes of a steampunk aesthetic that neither reifies the Victorian era as a lost object, nor deploys it as a vehicle for reactionary escapism.



Ann Heilmann (University of Hull): **The Ancestral Home Revisited, or Neo-Victorian Spectral Returns in the Neo-Forties: Alejandro Amenabar's *The Others* (2001) and Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger* (2009)**

One of the key metaphors for neo-Victorianism's self-constitution through its Victorian referents is the ancestral home: a house haunted by tragedy which for those exiled from it represents a place of unbounded desire, yet for its inhabitants constitutes itself as dangerous and disputed territory: a site of alienation, betrayal, shame, extreme disillusionment, imprisonment, harrowing family collapse, even mortal combat. As the material testimonial to the family's past and its secrets, the Victorian manor house holds vital clues to characters' heritage and identity. The recovery of personal histories is often metafictionally linked to textual reconstructions of Victorian voices and plots. Thus Charles Palliser's *Quincunx* (1989), A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2003), John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2005), and Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) connect the quest for the protagonists' origins hidden in the disused or wrecked family home with an invitation to the reader to investigate the literary ancestry of the text by tracing clues from Dickens, Robert Browning, Christina Rossetti, Wilkie Collins, Charlotte Brontë, and a host of other Victorian writers.

The house haunted by the voices of the past is represented literally through the theme of spectrality in Alejandro Amenabar's film *The Others* (2001) and Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger* (2009). Here the neo-Victorian project of the nostalgic/traumatic return is played out in a multifaceted mirror game with our contemporary period's rememorisations of the dual legacies of the 'golden age' of the Victorians and the 'broken age' of the post-war 1940s. Neo-Victorianism's engagement with the 1940s as well as the Victorians is a distinctly twenty-first century phenomenon. This paper aims to explore the complexities of this historical 'double take' in examining the way in which the Victorian house and its spectral inhabitants force the 1940s characters to recognize their relationship with the past, thus encouraging a similar process of reflection in the contemporary reader or spectator. In *The Others* this course of traumatic enlightenment eventually leads to the acceptance of the post-war condition, metaphorically coded as ghostliness. In *The Little Stranger*, on the other hand, the ghost-story surface plot serves to disrupt rather than illuminate the existential condition of the 1940s characters. Waters here engages with the twenty-first century as well as the 1940s novel's nostalgia for the Victorians by intermingling echoes of Victorian fiction (*Great Expectations*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, 'Turn of the Screw', 'The Yellow Wallpaper') and psychology (Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers and Frank Podmore's *Phantasms of the Living*, 1886) with 1940s literature and its own Victorian returns (*Rebecca*, *Blithe Spirit*). In a third 'turn of the screw' Waters plays with reader expectations raised from her own previous neo-Victorian novels and the twists around which they revolve. Thus interpretations of the open ending of her novel depend on the nature of readers' negotiation of Victorian fiction and psychology, 1940s literature, and Waters' prior work. The ancestral home in Waters, as in Amenabar, acts as both an emblem of the literature and culture of our dual Victorian and post-war past and a site of intertextual experimentation.

Elizabeth Ho (Ursinus College, Collegeville, PA): **Neo-Victorianism at Sea: Towards a Global Memory of the Victorian**

Recently, a sub-genre within neo-Victorianism has formed based around the sea voyage rather than the more "settled" locales of conventional neo-Victorian texts. Novels like Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), for example, are concerned with the *journeys* of colonial missions rather than the founding acts of settler colonialism themselves. Neo-Victorianism at sea, I argue, draws



our attention to the dispersal of Englishness around the world in the nineteenth century, creating alternate histories of empire and establishing the memory of “the Victorian” as the precursor to our current moment of globalization. The shift from destination to voyage, I suggest, also widens the scope of neo-Victorianism beyond its primarily British archive to include new locations – and thus new histories – previously overlooked. Ghosh and Kneale, for example, admit India during the Opium Wars and Tasmania respectively into the realm of neo-Victorianism, while novels such as Andrea Barrett’s *Voyage of the Narwhal* (1999) and Harry Thompson’s *This Thing of Darkness* (2006) offer American authorship and pan-American locations (from Philadelphia to the Galapagos and other South American climes) both heretofore neglected by the neo-Victorian canon. In this paper, I read the neo-Victorian at sea as an attempt to move beyond conventional neo-Victorianism’s bounded territorial spaces and status as national literatures and argue instead for a shared heritage or global memory of “the Victorian” that simultaneously destabilizes our understanding of the cartography of the British Empire and traces the contours of globalization.

Theresa Jamieson (University of Hull): **Bound to Please: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian Heroine**

A recent episode of Radio 4’s *Women’s Hour* sought to investigate the complex relationship women have with their clothes. The show’s host, Jenni Murray acknowledged that for some women dressing is ‘a delight’, while for others it’s ‘a daily agony,’ but ‘at least today we don’t have to think about corsets that make us faint and skirts so wide we can’t get through the door,’ the twentieth century having ‘liberated’ women from ‘the strictures of fashion where discomfort was a requirement.’<sup>1</sup>

Such phrasing implies that historically punishment rather than aesthetics has been the motivating force of female clothing design, while the conjunction of corsets and crinolines identifies the Victorian woman as the archetypal ‘victim’ of fashion. Indeed, though the corset has a long and lavish history, it now functions as ‘the most illuminating icon of the Victorian era... steeped in and expressive of Victorian female sexuality and its subordination.’ As such it is a popular choice of image with which to illustrate neo-Victorian novels, being an immediately recognisable advertisement for the (illicit) pleasures concealed between their sumptuously decorated covers.

However, this playful appropriation of a familiar image of sexuality and oppression can obscure neo-Victorianism’s more sophisticated engagement with nineteenth century female fashions. This paper will explore the ways in which neo-Victorian novelists foreground women’s clothing, not merely for use as symbols of subjection and subversion, but as complex cultural documents in which women, as artists, and readers play a central part in producing.

Rosa Karl (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg): **Participatory Desires: On Metalepsis, Immersion and the Re-Plotting of the Victorian**

Taking its cues from Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair* (2001), this paper will examine the motive of traveling into or between books and historical others. The enquiry will focus on the different desires and anxieties that underlie these immensely popular, transgressive engagements with ‘heritage’. It will argue in how far concepts from the recent theory on media convergence (esp. on interactive games and hypertexts) can help to analyze our

<sup>1</sup> *Women’s Hour*, Radio 4, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2009.



fascination with the (Neo)Victorian.<sup>1</sup> The "pleasures of immersion and interaction" can be seen as intricately linked to affective pleasures of reading,<sup>2</sup> which, however, seem to pose certain problems for literary critics writing in a tradition where 'affective fallacy' still carries disconcerting echoes of naïveté and the disorienting effects of metaleptic games appear to be self-evident.<sup>3</sup> If we believe cognitive psychologists, re-plotting and the violation of ontological boundaries, as it is practiced 'for real' by Fforde's heroine, is an unwitting habit and a typical psychological response of any reader – even while they seem to be "provocative 'to our normal literary intuitions'" (Rubik 175).<sup>4</sup> This fundamental ambiguity towards our participatory desires has a striking parallel in the attitudes towards another widespread cultural praxis involving 'heritage': that of tourism. Susan Stewart's enquiries into these desires might therefore prove interesting in this context – just as the recent research into the cultural construction of tourist attractions and the concomitant forms of gazes might help to analyse our ludic and nostalgic constructions of the (Neo)Victorian.<sup>5</sup>

Tatiana Kontou (University of Sussex): **Re-covering the Victorian authoress in Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel***

In this paper I will explore Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel* published in 1957 (and adapted for cinema by François Ozon fifty years later) as a neo-Victorian text. Although we consider the neo-Victorian novel's development and popularity as a product of the last thirty years, I want to suggest here that Taylor's subject matter is an illuminating example of the kinds of issues and preoccupations not only recent neo-Victorian novels are raising but also scholarship on Victorian women authors. *Angel* documents the rise and demise of the popular fin de siècle author Angelica Deverell. *Angel*'s story can be representative of so many Victorian novelists, Marie Corelli, Florence Marryat, Rhoda Broughton, Ouida, to mention but a few, whose stories were consumed by adoring reading publics and scathed by literary critics. Novelists who enjoyed great fame and fortune but failed to capture the Edwardians in the same way they had done a generation ago. Today authors like *Angel* are recuperated by feminist scholars, mimicked and subverted by neo-Victorian authors. What is of interest to me in this paper is Taylor's preoccupation and fictive exploration of the Victorian past in a time of change not unlike the unsettled time that recent neo-Victorian novels are produced in. By reading selected episodes from the novel I will argue that Taylor is trying to create a lineage of women authors that do not reject the Victorians (in the way that many modernists did) but rather try to make up for that loss in transition between the high Victorian and the modern.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. Janet H. Murray. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. MIT Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, J. Yellowlees and Hargadon, Andrew; Schechner, Richard (reply) and Jenkins, Henry (reply). "The Pleasures of Immersion and Interaction: Schemas, Scripts, and the Fifth Business." Noah Wardrip-Fruin und Pat Harrigan (eds). *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2004. 192-206.

<sup>3</sup> See Rubik's discussion of Fforde's devices, which realizes the unfitness of the traditional conclusions – even while her sometimes apologetic formulations show her own uneasiness with readerly "wish-fulfilment". Rubik, Margarete "Invasions into Literary Texts, Re-Plotting and Transfictional Migration in Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair*". Rubik, Margarete and Mettinger-Schartmann, Elke (eds). *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 167-79, passim but esp. 174f.

<sup>4</sup> Fforde's text plays with and foregrounds these feelings of sacrilege further by (ostensibly) re-plotting central cultural capital in a parallel world that is an intensified parody of our own ideologies, a world that has taken some telling alternative historical turns and where our own literary myths carry far more weight.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. For the research into the latter see e.g. Culler, Jonathan. "The Semiotics of Tourism". *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988. 153-167; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. London, Sage 2002; Rojek, Chris und John Urry (Hg.). *Touring Cultures: Transformation of Travel and Theory*. London: Routledge, 1997.



Nadine Muller (University of Hull): **Dead Husbands and Dirty Secrets: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian Widow**

To date there have been numerous popular neo-Victorian crime fiction series on the market, but since the turn of the new millennium two authors in particular have created not only interesting and literary but also fundamentally similar examples of the genre. Both Tasha Alexander and Deanna Raybourn have opted for the figure of the upper-class widow in their choice of protagonists, creating Lady Emily Ashton and Lady Julia Grey respectively. The first novel in each of these series is concerned with the ladies' uncovering of their late husbands' mysterious pasts, in the process of which they receive ample assistance from the novels' 'proper' – and, not surprisingly, incredibly attractive – detectives. Where Raybourn opts for a hero modelled on the intriguing class- and culture-transcending Sherlock Holmes, Alexander treats us to a more Austenesque Darcy figure, an aristocrat whose character appears at first dubiously arrogant, but is eventually revealed to be completely impeccable. As both heroines delve into their marital pasts in order to pursue their late husbands' secrets, the figure of the widow becomes a somewhat metafictional device for the novels' treatments of personal and historical pasts. Through a comparison of Raybourn's and Alexander's representations and utilisations of the widow detective – her intellect, autonomy and development throughout the series – this paper will establish the significance and appeal of the figure of the widow for neo-Victorian crime fiction and for neo-Victorianism's relationship to the past more generally.

Ming-tsuey Ni (National Taipei University of Education, Taiwan): **Reinventing the Victorians – the Art Works of Yinka Shonibare**

Our conceptions of “The Victorians” has been reconsidered and reinvented in various ways in different historical periods. Each period has shaped this complex concept in the image of its own concerns and values. Though there is no stable and unified concept of the “Victorians,” the Victorian sensibilities are alive and well into the twentieth-first century. Victorian legacy has also inspired the younger generation of artists. This paper will examine the reinvention of the Victorians in the work of contemporary postcolonial artist Yinka Shonibare.

Like many younger artists of the 1990s, Shonibare in his works reflects new conditions of cultural hybridization and global cross-fertilization. In a playful, humorous and visually stunning way, Yinka Shonibare uses various artistic media and materials which include painting, photography, sculpture, installation as well as reproduced picture and sign carriers from art history to raises important issues concerning today's multicultural society and questions about national identity in an epoch of globalization.

For instance, in *How Does a Girl Like You Get to Be a Girl like You?* of 1997, the headless mannequins wear finely detailed high Victorian fashions evoking British decorum in the Age of Empire. However the cloth is made not from historically accurate fabrics, but patterned fabrics which connoted “Africa”. The sculptural installation produces contradictory cultural associations, reflecting Shonibare's concern with the enduring and pervasive effects of European colonialism. The 1998 photo series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, inspired by the 19th bourgeoisie society, subverts the designated roles of whites and blacks by creating a fantasy social setting that explores power relationships between race and class.

Shonibare's work builds on discourses that blur distinctions between the decorative and fine arts, past and present, and the familiar and strange. By a flashy visual seduction and an occasionally deceptive element of familiarity, Shonibare interweaves cultures that are at odds with one another, but at the same time, reveals a weighty historical baggage that



manifests a strong continuity between the past and the present. By addressing how the notions of fashion, ethnic status, cultural identity, museum display and artistic value are brought into collision in Shonibare's works, this paper suggests that his work offers a dynamic vision of cultural diffusion and renewal.

Caterina Novák (University of Vienna): **Modernism and the Neo-Victorian Novel**

One of the most characteristic features of neo-Victorian fiction is, perhaps, its tendency to look for new angles from which to explore the Victorian era, affording glimpses of the 'unofficial' life of official personages and giving a voice to those who, in Victorian times, would have been denied the right to speak. Extensive theoretical work has been done on this aspect of the neo-Victorian genre; likewise, there is a wealth of literature on Modernist departures from and renegotiations of Victorian values, discourses and modes of literary expression. However, little attention appears to have been accorded to the impact of these works on neo-Victorian fiction either in terms of intertextuality, themes and motifs, or formal considerations. In my paper, I should like to focus on this aspect of the neo-Victorian genre, foregrounding the fact that contemporary neo-Victorian novels not only engage in creative dialogue with the Victorians themselves, but also with early modernist examples of literary re-engagements with the Victorian era (as exemplified, for instance, by Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990) and its relationship to *Flush* by Virginia Woolf). On a more general level, I should like to explore how the Modernists' debunking of Victorian 'heroes' to some extent anticipates our contemporary predilection for uncovering the hidden lives of the Victorians and sets the tone for the depiction 'eminent Victorians' in works of neo-Victorian fiction.

Claire O'Callaghan (University of Leicester): **"The Queerest, Lewdest Thing": Lesbians and Pornography in the novels of Sarah Waters**

Sarah Waters' novels have received significant critical acclaim for 'recovering' historical narratives of lesbian communities. Indeed, Waters provides a voice to a previously silenced sexual past whilst emphasising a distinctly erotic vision of what a Victorian Sapphic history may have been. Whilst literary critics have recognised the influence of traditional Victorian narratives in shaping Waters' novels, such as the influence of sensation fiction on her award-winning *Fingersmith* (2002) for example, there has not yet been an examination of Waters' fiction in relation to, or as influenced by, Victorian pornographic and erotic discourse. This paper will focus on Waters' representation of the lesbian and lesbian sex in relation to a range of Victorian sexual discourses including *Walter's My Secret Life: The Sex Diary of a Victorian Gentleman* (1888) and the erotic journal *The Pearl, A Journal of Facetiae Voluptuous Reading* (1879-1881) amongst others. I argue that Waters' 're-imagining' of a sexual female history offers both an appropriation of, and counterpart to, Victorian pornographic discourse. Further, I propose that Waters' Neo-Victorian representation of lesbian sex reflects contemporary (lesbian) feminist debates regarding sex and pornography; simultaneously negotiating both pro and anti pornography perspectives. Drawing on Adrienne Rich's concept of 'Re-Vision', a literary strategy of 'entering a text from a new critical direction', I will outline some of the ways in which Waters' debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1996) and her third novel *Fingersmith* both draw on, revise, and add to, Victorian pornographic discourse as well as Victorian lesbian erotica.



Monika Pietrzak-Franger (University of Siegen): **Reimagining Syphilis**

Apart from watercolour and pencil illustrations, Victorian surgeons often made use of photographs of diseases in their publications. Whereas early clinical photography still framed patients as subjects with certain ailments, the evolution of photographic illustration eliminated their subjectivity only to present them as the indexical sign, a symptom of certain diseases. Even if attempts were made at describing particular cases in much detail, what often stayed for the posterity was simply a testimony to the conditions rather than to the people who suffered from them. Even if, e.g. Jonathan Hutchinson, the major late nineteenth century British syphilologist, attempted to render the cases of thus “preserved” patients as truthfully as possible by appending the patient’s history to his photograph/illustration whenever possible, case histories told little or nothing of the patient’s life beyond his/her way of infection and concurrent treatment. In *Endurance and Suffering* (2009) John Wood reappropriates such medical photographs to rediscover through poetry the lives of people who exist for posterity only through the symptoms of the disease they had acquired. This paper enquires into the status of this poetic rereading of syphilitic subjects: in how far (if at all) does it rediscover and rewrite the syphilitic subjects? Does it allow for the expression of their marginalized voices or only takes up and maintains hegemonic medical discourse in which they had been encased? In how far is the medium responsible for the (changed?) representation of the medicalized subject?

Patricia Pulham (University of Portsmouth): **Uncanny Afterlives: Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* and Neo-Victorian Biofiction**

In *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticisms* (2007), Cora Kaplan notes that ‘Biofiction’, a genre which merges fact and fiction, has achieved increasing popularity in recent years. Kaplan argues that ‘biography has become the new novel’ and that biofiction, can be interpreted in various ways, as highlighting the tension between biography and fiction, as well as marking the overlap between them’. Recent examples include David Lodge’s *Author, Author* (2004), Colm Tóibín’s, *The Master* (2004), both of which focus on the life of Henry James, Julian Barnes’s, *Arthur and George* (2005) that features a case investigated by Arthur Conan Doyle, and Gaynor Arnold’s *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) which centres on the life of a fictionalised Catherine Dickens, Charles Dickens’s estranged wife. These texts constitute examples of neo-Victorian biofiction that choose to revive Victorian authors for contemporary consumption. Elsewhere, I have argued that neo-Victorian fiction displays features of the Freudian uncanny: the double, animation of the seemingly dead, ghosts, and the familiar made strange.<sup>1</sup> It often represents a ‘double’ of the Victorian text; it reanimates Victorian genres and authors and functions as a form of revenant that infiltrates our present. In resurrecting dead authors, neo-Victorian biofiction animates the seemingly dead, and makes the familiar strange. This paper will focus on Colm Tóibín’s, *The Master* (2004) in order to show how Tóibín deploys the uncanny to produce a ‘spectral’ James who becomes a literary revenant, who is himself haunted by other texts, authors, and styles.

<sup>1</sup> See introduction to *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, eds. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham, forthcoming, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.



Anca-Raluca Radu (University of Goettingen): **Voices of the Disempowered: Investigations of the Mind in *Alias Grace* and *The Secret Scripture***

As the investigation of the human psyche emerges as a science in the Victorian age, the study of madness and the difficulty of diagnosis form the object of interrogation in numerous Victorian fictions. This paper wishes to analyse two contemporary novels that focus on the doctor-patient relationship and the psychological game played by the two parties in their negotiation of power and identity: Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture* (2008).

Condemned to life imprisonment for murder, Grace Marks serves her sentence in Victorian Canada. She is interviewed by Dr. Simon Jordan who employs his medical acumen attempting to establish the truth about Grace's crime. *The Secret Scripture* is set against the background of Irish history at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and follows retrospectively the life story of Roseanne Clear, now a 100-year old patient in a mental institution. Dr. Grene conducts several interviews with her, hoping to identify the grounds for her confinement to the asylum.

While rehearsing several tropes of Victorian fiction, both novels dwell extensively on the preoccupation with the human psyche, offering a particularly pertinent tool for postmodernist inquiries into constructions of identity. In a Neo-Victorian fashion, the novels reassess the power balance between genders, on the one hand, and doctor and patient, on the other, as the doctors' investigations reveal as much about themselves as about their patients. By letting the reader hear the voices of both patient and doctor, the novels suggest that the patient is by no means powerless against the doctor, using subtle psychological strategies to re-invent herself, and confuse and subvert his authority.

Christy Rieger (Mercyhurst College, Erie, PA): **The Legacy of Medical Sensationalism in *The Crimson Petal and the White* and *The Dress Lodger***

This paper analyzes a recent and overlooked trend in contemporary Victorian fiction. I describe this tendency as *medical sensationalism* because the narratives in the genre depict the bodily and mental abnormalities of defenseless patients, scrutinize the role of medical men as they seek to manage these "cases," and portray the heroic efforts of female protagonists who thwart the control of the medical establishment. In Sheri Holman's *The Dress Lodger* (2001) and Michael Faber's *The Crimson Petal and The White* (2002), these events occur within a melodramatic framework of illicit sexuality, concealed identities, and dramatic revelations. Clearly indebted to Foucauldian and feminist critiques of Victorian medical authority, both novels conclude by celebrating a feminine space of privacy and self-sufficiency that thwarts the efforts of corrupt males— husbands, male lovers, and doctors working in league with one another— who preserve their professional identity through manipulation of the ill. What may be most interesting in these rewritings of the Victorian doctor, however, is their suggestion that twenty-first century readers also view nineteenth-century disease and deformity from a fractured position, one that is scientifically advanced yet ethically questionable. Like the curious Victorian medical man, we want to observe and assess the minutiae of the infant's exposed heart in Holman's novel or the hysterical symptoms of Agnes Rackham in Faber's work. Yet in doing so, we subject these vulnerable characters to a scopic regime that violates their personhood. I conclude the essay by situating this neo-Victorian critique of medical authority within contemporary medical ethics.



Lena Steveker (University of Saarbruecken): **“Eminent Victorians” and Neo-Victorian Fictional Biography**

In 2007, Cora Kaplan identified the return of “a humanism that gives priority to individual lives” as the main reason for biography’s immense success on the book market in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Having grown weary of postmodern obsessions with fragmented identities and ontological uncertainties, both writers and readers have, since the 1900s, shown increasing interest in the lives of ‘eminent Victorians’, as becomes evident in the large number of biographies of, for example, Charlotte Brontë, Robert Browning, Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy and Queen Victoria, all of which were published in the last two decades. Focusing on individuals who lived in an epoch that lay claim to a “passionate interest in the individual”, as Robert Goodbrand put it in 1879, contemporary biography can be seen as turning towards what is perceived as an age of humanism pre-dating the (post)modern splintering of the subject.

In my paper, I will focus on the genre of Neo-Victorian fictional biography, which is part of the current success of Victorian life-writing. Discussing Adam Foulds’s *The Quickening Maze* (2009) and Richard Flanagan’s *Wanting* (2009), I will elaborate on the defining characteristics of this kind of life-writing. Unlike literary biographies such as Peter Ackroyd’s *Dickens* (1990) which represents the Victorian author as both human and literary icon, the novels I will analyse refrain from any kind of nostalgic hero-worship. Although they skilfully explore the lives and selves of Victorian ‘celebrities’, these texts do not merely express longing for alleged 19<sup>th</sup>-century humanist certainties. Written during a time when public fame and shame are often two sides of the same coin, Neo-Victorian fictional biographies exhibit a very contemporary tendency to cut their famous subjects down to size when they focus on moments of crisis in their biographees’ lives. On a more theoretical note, I will argue that the novels mentioned above form part of the more general anti-theoretical backlash of recent years, since they are engaged in resurrecting the (Victorian) author. I will furthermore analyse how Foulds’s and Flanagan’s texts explore the ethical dimensions of the self/other dichotomy. Typical of Neo-Victorian fictional biography, neither novel simply focuses on a single historical person, but creates fictional accounts of an individual’s life in relation to both other people and a specific historical moment. Thus, the marginalised Others of Victorian culture and society feature as strongly in Neo-Victorian fictional biographies as the ‘eminent Victorians’ whose lives are (re)told. From the perspective of literary and cultural studies, it is remarkable that Foulds’s and Flanagan’s depictions of both marginalised Others and Victorian society are often determined by clichés of sexual repression and emotional inhibitions, since such images of the Victorian Age are indicative of the position this epoch claims in the contemporary cultural imaginary.

Eckart Voigts-Virchow (University of Siegen): **Bio-Fiction: Neo-Victorian Revisions of Genetics and Evolution – The Cases of Darwin and Mendel**

“At least the old eugenics was governed by some kind of theory, however dreadful it may have been. The new eugenics, our eugenics, is governed only by the laws of the marketplace. . [...] Are we really such intellectual dwarfs [...] as to imagine that the laws of supply and demand can be elevated to the level of a philosophy?” (Simon Mawer, *Mendel’s Dwarf*, 273)

Taking the abbreviation ‘bio’ to refer both to biographies and biological science, the paper looks at the way in which Neo-Victorian bio-fiction reviews Victorian science. In short, the paper discusses a bio-fictional version of the Great Evolutionary Synthesis (Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics), considering the novels *Mendel’s Dwarf* (Simon Mawer, Penguin, 1998) and *The Darwin Conspiracy* (John Darnton, Knopf, 2005).



Mawer's erudite and stereoscopic view on the vagaries of scientific discovery and present-day "gene-centrism" (John Dupré) contextualizes the achondroplasiaic (i.e., short) geneticist Benedict Lambert and his love interest Jean (sic!) with Lambert's great-great-great uncle Gregor Mendel in order to intervene satirically in current neo-eugenics and discussions of the role of heredity in constructing human nature.

Darnton's novel casts Darwin as a murderer manqué, which becomes obvious in forgotten manuscripts. This intertwining of present-day positivism and fabricated Victorianism is one the one hand a stale re-hash of A.S. Byatt, complete with eager young academics turned manuscript fetishists and liaising romantically in an unnecessary subplot. On the other hand it casts a fascinating look at how post-colonial positions may review evolutionary science. Texts such as Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plot*, Janet Browne's magisterial two-volume biography (*Voyaging* 1995, *The Power of Place* 2002), Peter Nichols's non-fictional *Evolution's Captain* (2003), *Mr Darwin's Shooter* by Roger McDonald will provide points of biographical comparison.

The important Neo-Victorian sub-genre of scientific bio-fiction, i.e. fictionalizations of biological science and scientific biographies, will be used to link popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century notions of Charles Darwin and the unlikely posthumous success story of Mendelian genetics to contemporary issues such as evolutionary aesthetics, bioethics, biotechnology and genetic engineering.

