

PART II

On Gender and (Re)writing Patterns

**From Postmodernism, with Love:
Neo-Victorian Sexual/Textual Politics
in *The French Lieutenant's Woman***

Michaela PRAISLER
Oana-Celia GHEORGHIU*

Abstract

*Against the backdrop of the sexual revolution that the world was undergoing and of the textual experimentation that literature was undertaking in the late 1960s, the silence of the female characters populating Victorian fiction became nothing less than audible – the source of the debate around the 'sexual/textual politics' to have dominated the end of the twentieth century. With *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles gives a voice to his central character, Sarah Woodruff, and, in so doing, constructs a woman who deconstructs the (predominantly male) canon. Moreover, the novelist weaves her tale into his story and thus builds successive layers of fictionality for the interrogation of outmoded patterns of thought and the associated narrative strategies – symptomatic for the late Victorian era, yet lingering in the mindset of readers a century later. To illustrate the general postmodern 'dis-ease' with tradition and the particular subversive manner in which Fowles challenges expectations, the present study lays focus on the cultural production of early Neo-Victorian novels, highlights parody and metafiction as recurrent modes of writing, with frequent incursions into text, context, and intertext.*

Keywords: Fowles, Neo-Victorianism, Postmodernism, parody, metafiction

Neo-Victorianism – a symptom of the “postmodern condition”?

Neo-Victorianism, as a cultural phenomenon, encompasses cultural works that somehow engage with the Victorian era and its art, literature, science and history. A relatively new, yet dynamic academic subfield of literary studies, New Victorianism is still to establish itself as a definitive branch of critical literary studies, but the telling signs of its significance have been increasingly made obvious by the publication of more and more scholarship interested in how Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism relate to, take inspiration from

* “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, Romania.
michaela.praisler@ugal.ro; oana.gheorghiu@ugal.ro

and, above everything else, play (parodically, Hutcheon would say) with the Victorian text to create new moulds. It is noticeable at a glance that all scholars who share an interest in Neo-Victorianism approach it in a manner that denies the limitations based on artistic form, transcending the boundaries of genre and focusing on literature, film, culture, history and heritage as closely intertwined. Shall we call Neo-Victorianism postmodernist? We can, of course, but would it suffice without interrogating postmodernism first? We may come (too) early in the process to the famous conclusion drawn by Jameson, that “one of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is pastiche” (Jameson 1998: 4), which may, in turn, narrow our critical judgment of these so-called Neo-Victorian works to just that: derivative ‘copies’ of a recipe which has proven the most successful one in the history of the novel. In a nutshell, this inference would, consequently, lead to erroneously regarding these novels as illustrating the world outside rather than the inner dimension, in a bird’s eye view over a chronologically built plot populated with objectively portrayed metonymical characters, who are either moved through their world by a godlike puppeteer who also assumes the role of the omniscient storyteller, or narrated from the perspective of a distanced, objective, more mature *I* (Praisler 2005: 14-15). But Neo-Victorian novels are not anything like this very brief characterization of the late nineteenth century ones; there follows that they are not pastiches, at least not in the sense that Jameson gives the term:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter (Jameson 1991: 17).

Fredric Jameson regards postmodern cultural productions – to which the Neo-Victorian novels are (at least) chronologically ascribed – as “the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and [...] the increasing primacy of the ‘neo’” (Jameson 1991: 18). Mind the prefix ‘neo’ and the negative connotation it implies with the same force as the noun ‘cannibalization’, with which it is paired – repetitiveness, lack of originality, even theft/plagiarism, if not the downright *assassination* of the original. A lot more useful it would be if one looked into Hutcheon’s understanding of such texts as parody or parodic self-reflexivity instead of pastiche, in her words, as “imitation with a critical difference” and “a form of inter-art discourse” (Hutcheon 2000: 2) instead of just mere potentially reverential imitation. When the prefix ‘neo’ comes into play, one can speak, much more directly than in other cases, of textual appropriation and influence. The intertextual nature of anything that contains a ‘neo’ in its name is assumed and embraced. Even the title of this chapter should be indicative of the creative force of the parodic cultural intertext, as inspired by a song titled ‘From Sarah, with love’ – and the

research subject below will make it obvious why the elided/replaced 'Sarah' matters – to which the title of an influential feminist study by Toril Moi was appended with a view to orienting the reader towards the authors' obvious feminist intentions. "[H]owever, we see influence as a burden – Bate 1970 – or as a cause of anxiety – Bloom 1973. Parody is one way of coming to terms with the texts of that rich and intimidating legacy of the past," (Hutcheon 2000: 4), a means to *re-functioning* the artistic forms of overwhelming heritage so that they suit novel needs. Neo-Victorian novels seen as postmodern parodies of the grand Victorian narratives may, therefore, seem a fortunate and appropriate way of looking at them from a critical perspective, of sending them back in time with the mission of helping us "experience history in some active way," (Jameson 1991: 21), as they can be easily proven to be "self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilemann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). All these *re-s* are obviously in line with the politics of postmodernism that requires that its texts return to the past, rewrite it, and reassess its historicity from the vantage point of a hundred years' distance and progress. Whether this is a "postmodern condition", in Lyotard's terms, viewed either as *disease*, as the subtitle of this section implies, pointing, albeit misleadingly, to a form of artistic degradation, or as merely a circumstance or state, is less important for the present discussion. What matters, on the other hand, is that they display that "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv), where the latter embody totalizing truths legitimised by the authority of tradition, myths, political power, even culture, being, instead, telling examples of *petits récits* (Lyotard 1984: 60) – fragmented, disjointed texts that disregard omniscience and the singularity of the point of view. Without necessarily expressing it in these terms, the views of Neo-Victorianism scholars like Heilemann and Llewellyn (2010, see *supra*), Hadley (2010) and Kaplan (2007) converge on the idea that this literary/cultural phenomenon, which we insist to consider postmodernist, is "a scene of dissolution, a vertiginous melting-pot where the old canons of literature are invaded by textual stuff from psychology, philosophy, law, medicine, geography, and the old generic boundaries are down, and the distinction between 'literary' and 'non-literary' goes, and old minor or marginal texts (authors' jottings, essays, fragments, versions...) cease to lurk in the supplementary shadows and come busily in from the margin and the cold to receive equal treatment with what were once thought of as the main objects of concern, the poems and novels and plays, the published stuff, the final versions, and so on" (Cunningham 1994: 6).

Just a Victorian setting is not enough, however, for such writings to be considered Neo-Victorian, as critics also speak of nostalgia and fetishization/commodification: "rewritings of Victorian culture have flourished because the postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence

and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence" (Kucich and Sadoff 2000: xv).

This proves the validity of the points made by New Historicists and Cultural Materialists, who claim that literature, pertaining both to the wider cultural system and to the individuals that create it, functions in three ways: "as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author, as itself an expression of the codes by which this behaviour is shaped, and as a reflection upon these codes" (Greenblatt 2005: 4). History, just like literature, is a discursive formation that constructs rather than reflects the past. In connection to this view on history, Louis Montrose coins the chiasmus "textuality of history – historicity of text" in his essay 'Professing the Renaissance: Poetics and Politics of Culture'. By historicity of texts, Montrose understands "the cultural specificity, the social embeddedness of all modes of writing", whereas textuality of history suggests the very idea of a subsequently constructed and mediated discourse which is assumed to be "merely contingent and partially consequent" with/to an authentic past which contemporaneity has access to through texts only (Montrose 1989: 20). In turn, this interplay of history and literature at work in Neo-Victorian works gives way to analyses that go beyond the mere necessity of accessing history through all kinds of texts (literary ones included), and that which applies concerns of the present to fictionalized events of the past. Apart from accounts of the *then* ideology filtered through an ideology of *now* and historical contexts (political, social, economic and cultural), such critical readings can and do find fertile grounds in postcolonial studies or gender studies, for the simple reason that "the dwellers of phenomenal history, of the fact in its development, attempting to control the real and subject it to their own needs, use representational codes to synthesize and appropriate it" (Cuțitaru 1997: 13, our translation). Accordingly, as is the case here, Neo-Victorian fiction is tackled as a temporally and ideologically mediated cultural representation of the Victorian age, with emphasis on the intricate texture of postmodernist untruths it conveys.

Sexual/textual politics and the early Neo-Victorian novel

In a theoretical article on what is and what is not Neo-Victorian fiction, published in the flagship journal of this branch of literary scholarship, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Samantha J. Carroll stresses that, in the Neo-Victorian novel,

the representation of the Victorian past is also the lens through which a variety of present concerns are examined: the interaction of advances in cultural theory and developments in postmodern criticism; the deliberate complication of the supposedly separate jurisdictions of history and fiction; metafictional commentary on the mechanisms of fiction and the effect of narrative techniques on the construction of historical discourse; and, the imaginative restoration of

voices lost or constrained in the past, with repercussions for the present (Carroll 2010: 180).

The point the Australian scholar makes, and to which the present study adheres, at least for the case under the lens here, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, if not for the plethora of writings catalogued as Neo-Victorian after the immense and rather unexpected success of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), is that, instead of being sorry clones of the Victorian modes of writing, therefore anachronical through their publication in the latter half of the 20th and in the 21st century, such novels "triangulate history, fiction and postmodern critical thought" (Carroll 2010: 182). They are indeed examples of what Linda Hutcheon terms "historiographic metafiction" (1988: 5) and Brian McHale calls "postmodernist revisionist historical fiction" (1991: 90), and it is with this understanding in mind that the contextual associations are made further.

It has been sixty years since the sixties, so it is only natural that the topical issues of that time now appear like concerns of the yesteryear. Postmodernism has come and gone, making one wonder what is this that we are going through now, what the after of an after should be called. Women's Rights (as Human Rights, to paraphrase the famous sentence Hillary Clinton used at a United Nations conference on women in September 1995, in Beijing) are now in place and feminism is moving steadily into its fourth phase (or wave). Censorship still exists, but it has found new targets. The contextual framework of the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in 1969, feels like writing a bit of the history of the cultural (and sexual) revolution.

In the foreword to the revised edition of his 1965 magnum opus, *The Magus*, Fowles hints briefly at the reason that prevented him from being too sexually explicit in the first version: "The erotic element is stronger in two scenes. I regard that as merely the correction of a past failure of nerve" (Fowles 1978). Predictably, Fowles's admission is placed in connection with the enforcement of the Obscene Publication Act (29th July 1959), "an Act to amend the law relating to the publication of obscene matter; to provide for the protection of literature and to strengthen the law concerning pornography," which had led to the (in)famous trial for banning D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960) on the grounds of being a "violation of the natural and social order". Natural order, Salami maintains in his study, *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*, was permissible, while deviant or 'unnatural' sexuality was evil and had to be banned (Salami 1992: 97). According to Cultural Materialist critic Jonathan Dollimore, the trial of Penguin Books *de jure* and of a fictional work *de facto* represented "the intersection of literature, sexuality, politics, ideology and law" (Dollimore 1983: 52), and this can be one explanation for the lack of eroticism in a novel that could have easily qualified as erotica. Another one, most certainly, could be its "entangle[ment] in the

Victorian culture and society that it originally sets out to challenge, to question, and to contest" (Salami 1992: 107), although this contestation could have been supported by a more accentuated subversion of Victorian prudishness through explicitness. Was it also a "failure of nerve" on the part of Fowles that "in deliberate contrast to the unexpurgated D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, sailing off the shelves of the bookstores in the late 1960s, sex as a described event is barely present in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*" making it "a disappointing read for anyone looking for explicit erotic detail"? (Kaplan 2007: 89)

But "the times, they are a-changing," as Bob Dylan would say (and Fay Weldon would later develop in *Big Women*) (Weldon 1998: 101), and with them, throughout the sixties and the seventies rages what now cultural history has retained under the synonymous concepts of 'sexual revolution' and 'sexual liberation'. Underpinned by second-wave feminists, women's sexual liberation was based on the assertion that the primacy of sexuality would be a major step towards the ultimate goal of their liberation. In 1970, Germaine Greer was giving the world *The Female Eunuch*, a daring, open taboo smasher, advertised as "the ultimate word of sexual freedom", which maintained that

[r]evolution ought to entail the correction of some of the false perspectives which our assumptions about womanhood, sex, love and society have combined to create. [...] It might even be thought to suggest that women should be deliberately promiscuous. It certainly maintains that they should be self-sufficient and consciously refrain from establishing exclusive dependencies and other kinds of neurotic symbioses. Much of what it points to is sheer irresponsibility, but when the stake is life and freedom, and the necessary condition is the recovery of a will to live, irresponsibility might be thought a small risk (Greer 2008: 22).

Another important feminist theorist, Bell Hooks, remarks in her book, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, that, during the early stages of the second-wave feminist movement "it has been a simple task for women to describe and criticize negative aspects of sexuality as it has been socially constructed in a sexist society, to expose male objectification and dehumanization of women, to denounce rape, pornography, sexualized violence, incest, etc. It has been a far more difficult task for women to envision new sexual paradigms, and to change the norms of sexuality (hooks 1984: 147).

This changing (or challenging) of the norms of sexuality (and textuality) can be perceived at the level of the Neo-Victorian novels written at that time. Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) are generally considered to be the "ur-texts" of the genre (MacDonald and Goggin 2013: 1) that look into femininities of the past, more precisely, into the role of Victorian women from a completely different

standpoint, one that places them into 'the world' and has them "react to the circumstances outside the text" (Salami 1992: 109). In Fowles's case, who was "not trying to write something one of the Victorian novelists forgot to write" (Fowles 1998: 15), it all began with an image: an enigmatic portrait of "a woman stand[ing] at the end of a deserted quay... star[ing] out to sea" (Fowles 1998: 13). This image/woman, which, to Fowles's mind, *had to be* Victorian, always with her back turned, with no face and no sexuality, as "a reproach on the Victorian age", was soon to develop into one of the most famous feminine characters of postmodernist literature, Sarah Woodruff, the French Lieutenant's Whore (in-text)/ Woman (on the cover, probably to appease some yet unextinguished Victorian prudery still dwelling in the 1960s, despite the loud claims of the advocates of the sexual revolution). Her story, inside the story of 'the author', inside the story Fowles sent out in a world that had recently been through the Paris civil unrest (1968) and the Woodstock Music and Art Fair (1969) but that was still living under the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, deconstructs and reconstructs Victorian modes and moods of storytelling/novel writing, femininity, sexuality, in an almost feminist vindication of women's rights, to be more than just dully, righteously, greyly represented in fiction.

The postmodernist game in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

Within the multiple frames John Fowles provided to his 1969 novel, a woman's silence narrates the private and the public, highlights prejudice and stereotype, reveals the inner workings of manipulation, interrogates the contamination of the real by the illusory, and offers food for thought on (un)expected literary representation. The text is contextualised, with overt and covert intertexts seeping through each and every section. The novel's sixty-one chapters are introduced by mottoes from authors like Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, Jane Austen, Arthur Hugh Clough, William Barnes, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Matthew Arnold, Leslie Stephen, George Malcolm Young, but also from newspaper articles and documents issued at the time: *Report from the Mining Districts*, *City Medical Report*, *Children's Employment Commission Report*, *A Letter in The Times*, *A Mid-Victorian Advertisement*. They bring the literary, historical, political, economic, journalistic standpoints of the era to the foreground, supporting Fowles's own twentieth-century re-writing, with clues into the goals and the practices of his Neo-Victorian demarche.

The architecture of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is reinforced further by the two diegetic levels which accommodate the past and the present, and allow the central metafictional debate on how the *then* was translated into fiction and how the *now* is capable of dismantling the inner mechanisms of the translation. As Fowles advises, "Remember the etymology of the word. A novel is

something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now – so don't ever pretend you live in 1867, or make sure the reader knows it" (Fowles 1998: 15). The pastiche slowly turns into parody as the Victorian mode of writing melts into a critical commentary on outdated world views, obsolete patterns of behaviour, as well as on the declared 'realist' mirroring of the status quo. Sarah and Charles's affair, propelled by that of Sarah and Varguennes, the French lieutenant, is revealed as resulting from the misreading of fiction as reality and is then subverted by the actual intrusion into the novel by the novelist, whose avatar is the 'author', indicating the postmodernist game while attempting to make the hermeneutical act transparent, even credible. The first intrusive section is shrewdly reserved for 'Chapter Thirteen', and its unexpected insertion at this point carries the additional weight of the (self-)irony deriving from the associated superstitious 'bad luck' (of the reader's being disillusioned).

I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind, any more than you control – [...] your children, colleagues, friends or even yourself (Fowles 1981: 86-87).

The entire exploration of controversial issues like the limits of fictionality and the presumed omniscience/omnipotence of authors is aided by references (Fowles 1981: 85) to Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Pour un nouveau roman*. (Paris: Minuit, 1963) and Roland Barthes ("The Death of the Author" / "La mort de l'auteur". Aspen, no. 5-6 (1967) / Manteia, no. 5 (1968)) – which, on the one hand, sheds light on the experimentation and the unsolved puzzle of the new(er) novel and, on the other hand, invites at distancing from authorial intentionalism and the biographically inspired decoding of ultimate literary meanings. In questioning authority and empowering the reader, Fowles also judges, though indirectly, the Victorians and their proclaimed realist novels, an endeavour supported by many writers at the time. A relevant case is that of Doris Lessing who, in the 1971 "Introduction" to one of the editions of her *The Golden Notebook* (1963), complained that, in searching for themes,

[i]t was not possible to find a novel which described the intellectual and moral climate of a hundred years ago, in the middle of the last century, in Britain, in the way that Tolstoy did for Russia, Stendhal for France. [...] To read *The Red and the Black*, and *Lucien Leuwen* is to know that France as if one were living there, to read *Anna Karenina* is to know that Russia. But a very useful Victorian novel never got itself written (Lessing 1999: xv).

What Lessing appears to be stressing is the absence of the novelists' skill to render the overall atmosphere of the Victorian Age and the incapacity to actually immerse readers in the world they reconstruct with words. In short, the 'useful portrayal' of ideology and psychology – governing individual manifestations and impacting the inner dimension – is missing from their superficial canvassing of an era and their moralising tendencies focus predominantly on metonymical characters and unresolved social issues, which probably also prompted Virginia Woolf to write the following:

The machine they describe; they succeed to some extent in making us believe in it; but the heart of it they leave untouched – is it because they cannot understand it? At any rate, we are left out, and history, in our opinion, lacks an eye (Woolf 1979: 36).

To this identifiable absence and acknowledged flaws, Fowles adds the criticism of the Victorians' passive, silent women, avenging the misdeed by constructing a female character who is not simply a crafted storyteller, but an excellent judge of human nature and societal norms. Without employing an inherently feminist prism to re-imagine his fictional universe, John Fowles seems to weave feminist politics into his (parodic) patriarchal aesthetics as Toril Moi (1988: 16, 69) would say. The novelist exposes the inner workings of manipulation through the act of telling, and his textual practice hints at sexual bias through the deliberate reversal of stereotypical gender and power roles: the teller is female, the listener is male. Angel and monster, Sarah Woodruff apparently embodies the nineteenth-century eternal feminine (seraphic beauty and sweetness) assumed to be passive, docile and selfless, yet is revealed firstly as rejecting the attributed role and the imposed submission, and secondly as potentially duplicitous because she has a story to tell, which gives her the choice of omission, deletion, transformation, generalisation, etc. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979); (Moi 1988: 58). This metamorphosis from victim to victimiser is juxtaposed to Charles Smithson's, in reverse. He falls into the traps set out by her narrative, epitomising the traditional reader – prisoner of "a convention universally accepted at the time of [the] story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does" (Fowles 1981: 85). It is Charles, nor Sarah, that Fowles develops his metafictional commentary around and that he uses to pinpoint the fundamental hypocrisy of the nineteenth century, especially in relation to women.

What are we faced with in the nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl for a few pounds – a few shillings if you wanted her for an hour or two. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel (the modern ratio would be nearer one in six

thousand). [...] Where the female body had never been so hidden from view; and where every sculptor was judged by his ability to carve naked women (Fowles 1981: 231).

In so doing, the novelist breaks the established norms and reformulates the ruling sexual politics. By addressing a twentieth-century reader, the irony is amplified, the criticism is honed, and the goal is readily attained. The dialogue is carried through, and the indeterminate speaker in Chapter Thirty-five gradually takes shape in the novelist/author having entered fiction, in Chapter Fifty-five – a “massively bearded”, “decidedly unpleasant man [...], so typical of the age”, with “something aggressively secure about him” (Fowles 1981: 346) – sitting across from Charles in a train carriage, inspecting him. The scene, resonant of Virginia Woolf’s *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924), reiterates the contempt for Victorian (male) authority, omniscience and omnipotence, rendered palatable by self-irony.

You may one day come under a similar gaze. And you may – in the less reserved context of our own century – be aware of it. The intent watcher will not wait till you are asleep. It will no doubt suggest something unpleasant, some kind of devious sexual approach... a desire to know you in a way you do not want to be known by a stranger (Fowles 1981: 347-348).

The violation, the use and the abuse committed by the Victorian realist become focal points in the discussion on novel writing, matching and justifying the characters, the stories, and the themes of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. Along these lines, Sarah’s invented sexual misadventure may be read as an unwelcome Frenchifying contamination of English fiction – easy prey since left undefended by either very innocent or very inert contributors and audiences. And yet, it functions as the perfect bait due to at least three unanticipated, unwarranted ingredients: a female narrator, an inappropriate subject, and an open ending. The successive diegetic layers it is enveloped in do not efface it; on the contrary, they replicate it, recycle it, and ultimately return to it. Sarah’s riddle, like that of a deceitful Greek sphinx – hinted at in the closing paragraph –, is not answered by Charles or anyone else, possibly for fear of retribution. Neither is the novel provided with one absolute resolution; it advances three possible endings, giving readers the (limited) freedom to choose, the possibility to throw the dice and take their own risk of being devoured.

Concluding remarks

Granted that all texts are engaged, as are their readings, John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* emerges as an exercise in experimenting with textual and sexual politics, using the tools of postmodernist metafiction, in the

tradition of anti-Victorian Neo-Victorianism. Ludic and intertextual, the novel plunges into past literary representations and non-literary concerns, interrogating the traces left on their contemporary counterparts. Its structure reveals careful deliberation, and its content gravitates towards the fuzzy frontier separating fiction from history, where women are constructed and where they fight back the construction, especially in relation to sexuality and sexist objectification. Despite the fact that, as Toril Moi suggests, analysing sexual politics does not actually take place outside “depoliticizing theoretical paradigms” (Moi 1988: 87-88), the respective undertaking seems relevant in the case of this particular novel, in which Fowles brings theory and practice together, while successfully marketing the book as a romance with a mysterious woman at its core, and efficiently employing the strategy of declaring but deferring eroticism.

Opening up the hermetic novel of the nineteenth century by creating one only to dismember it, John Fowles manages to outline, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a mini literary history, to which he adds ‘herstory’ with a vengeance. Mediating between world views and literary modes of writing one hundred years apart, he spotlights (Victorian) dominance and control, offers more gratifying (Postmodernist) alternatives, thus liberating readers from the unease of imposition and women from the thrall of misrepresentation.

References

- Barthes, R. (1968) “The Death of the Author” / “La morte de l’auteur”. *Aspen*, no. 5-6 (1967) / *Manteia*, no. 5 (1968).
- Carroll, S. J. (2010) “Putting the Neo Back into Neo-Victorian. The Neo-Victorian Novel as Postmodern Revisionist Fiction,” *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:2 (2010): 172-205.
- Cunningham, V. (1994) *In the Reading Goal. Postmodernity, Texts and History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cuțitaru, C. L. (1997) *Istoria depersonalizată [Depersonalized History]*. Iași: Al. I. Cuza University Press.
- Dollimore, J. (1983) “The Challenge of Sexuality”. *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Allan Sinfield London: Methuen. 51-85.
- Fowles, J. (1998) “Notes on an Unfinished Novel”, *Wormholes*. London: Jonathan Cape. 13-26.
- Fowles, J. (1981) *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Suffolk: Triad/Granada.
- Fowles, J. (1978) *The Magus*. Revised edition and Foreword. Little Brown & Company.
- Gilbert, S. M. and S. Gubar. (1979) *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Greenblatt, S. (2005) *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greer, G. (2008) *The Female Eunuch*. London: HarperCollins.

Cultural Intertexts
Year X Volume 13 (2023)

- Hadley, L. (2010) *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heilemann, A. and M. Llewellyn. (2010) *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988) *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Hutcheon, L. (2000) *A Theory of Parody. The Teachings of the Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. Illinois University Press.
- Jameson, F. (1998) "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity". *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. London & New York: Verso. 93-135.
- Jameson, F. (1991) *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kaplan, C. (2007) *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticisms*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kucich, J., D. F. Sadoff (eds.) (2000) *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lessing, D. (1999) *The Golden Notebook*. London: HarperCollins Perennial Classics.
- Liotard, J.-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by G. Bennington and B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- MacDonald, T. and J. Goggin (2013) "Introduction: Neo-Victorianism and Feminism." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6:2 (2013), 1-14.
- McHale, B. (1987) *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen.
- Moi, T. (1988) "Introduction. Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist readings of Woolf". *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge. 1-18.
- Moi, T. (1988) "Theoretical reflections". *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge. 70-88.
- Moi, T. (1988) "Women writing and writing about women". *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge. 50-69.
- Montrose, L. (1989) 'Professing the Renaissance: Poetics and Politics of Culture'. In H. A. Veaser (ed.) *The New Historicism*. London: Routledge. 15-36.
- Praisler, M. (2005) *On Modernism, Postmodernism and the Novel*. Bucharest: EDP.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. (1963) *Pour un nouveau roman*. Paris: Minuit.
- Salami, M. (1992) *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Weldon, F. (1998) *Big Women*. London: Flamingo.
- Woolf, V. (1924) *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. (1979) "Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century". *Books and Portraits*. St. Albans: Triad/Panther. 36-40.