



Radboud University Nijmegen

Moving on to the Past

Metamodernism in Neo-Victorian Biofiction

MA Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Door Metamodernisme in drie neo-Victoriaanse bioficties te bestuderen, toont dit onderzoek aan dat het Metamodernisme begrepen kan worden als een culturele logica die zowel verder gaat van als voortbeweegt met het Postmodernisme. Daarnaast beargumenteert deze scriptie hoe hedendaagse neo-Victoriaanse biofictie met de inherente Postmodernistische kwaliteiten van pastiche en hyperrealiteit niet langer enkel als Postmodernistisch kan worden geïnterpreteerd. De bioficties in dit onderzoek demonstreren hoe deze kwaliteiten als Metamodernistisch kunnen worden geïnterpreteerd. De resultaten van dit onderzoek tonen aan dat een academische re-evaluatie van ‘rewriting’ aan de orde is. Het onderzoek vult een leemte in het academische veld van biofictie, neo-Victorian studies, en Metamodernisme, omdat een dergelijk onderzoek waarbij deze drie aspecten worden gecombineerd nog niet heeft plaatsgevonden. Daarnaast biedt deze scriptie ook een mogelijke methode die in vervolgonderzoek naar Metamodernisme in hedendaagse literatuur kan worden overgenomen en geperfectioneerd.

KEY WORDS

Metamodernism, neo-Victorianism, biofiction, Modernism, Postmodernism, rewriting

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary fiction of the last couple of decades illustrates that neo-Victorian literature of the twenty-first century comes in many different forms. That is because the genre concerns itself with several different topics, which may cause one novel to focus on a rewriting of Victorian society, whereas the other might focus on the rewriting of a Victorian individual's life. The main goal of the genre is to break the silence and to make peace with the past by "reimagining past traumas" and by "acknowledging past injustices", which is made possible through a return to the Victorian period (Pettersen 16). Interestingly, many scholars have argued that the reconnection to the past through neo-Victorian literature often also directly relates to contemporary debates and dilemmas. The neo-Victorian fiction by Sarah Waters, for example, allows for new understandings and interpretations of homosexuality in the Victorian period, therefore producing a "creative but also analytical and theoretical matrix through which to reinterpret the overlap of contemporary feeling and historical understanding" (Keates 172). Or, as Boyce and Rousselot put it: neo-Victorianism "conveys the idea of celebrating while contesting, of looking back while moving forward" (qtd. in Reitz, 373).

What most neo-Victorian fictions has in common, besides reinterpreting the contemporary in relation to the historical, is a simplification of the past (Booth 287). It is through this simplification of the past that non-fictional narratives and the subject of truth can be approached in a different way, because it leaves room for creativity and interpretation. This opportunity for interpretation is convenient, as ideas about privacy and truth have changed significantly since the turn of the century. There is now a culture in which "important truths about the world" are expected to be found in "personal relationships and feelings" (Poore 315). Perhaps this is why the genre allows for many adaptations, or appropriations (Reitz 373), of the lives of Victorian authors in recent works of biofiction, where individual experience is a dominant feature. Jill Rubenstein certainly thinks so, stating that "Structured by association rather than by strict chronology, biofiction in this instance offers an alternative model for life-writing that privileges self-invention and identity-formation, that is, process rather than product, as the central experience of life" (qtd. in Kersten 21). It is not surprising then, that since the turn of the century biofictional narratives in general have seen an increase in number, and that the amount of biofictions about Victorian authors grew accordingly (Kersten 15-16).

Biofiction is a genre that combines elements of biography with those of fiction in whichever possible way. Thus far it has been argued that biofiction is a genre that is inherently connected to the ideals of Postmodernism (Kersten 19). Neo-Victorian biofiction specifically

is no different, since “Postmodernism defines itself in relation to an ‘other’, and, as is widely agreed, especially the other it creates in its incessant referencing of Victorian culture” (Kersten 163). The following research, however, aims to show that neo-Victorian biofiction shows a strong affiliation to Metamodernism. As will be discussed in the theoretical frame, Vermeulen and Van den Akker already hinted at the possibility of this affiliation in their 2010 publication when they argued that Metamodernism is best expressed through Romanticism, because narratives in this genre attempt to “turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized” (2010, 8). The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how neo-Victorian biofictional text not only depict Metamodern ethics, but also strongly carry out other Metamodernist techniques and features.

In order to do so, the following paragraphs will elaborate upon the theoretical framework of this research project. Then, the remainder of this introduction will introduce the corpus, outline the methodology and provide the main research question that is guiding the research along with the hypothesis. The thesis will then introduce three case studies, which are the novels *Becoming Jane Eyre* (2009) by Sheila Kohler, *The Master* (2004) by Colm Tóibín, and *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* (2003) by Louis Edwards. The conclusion of this thesis will discuss overarching results, answer the research question, provide new insights and refer to possibilities in future research. First, the theoretical frame will present the foundation for this research.

1 Theoretical Frame

This section will elaborate upon the three main concepts guiding the research, namely biofiction, neo-Victorianism, and Metamodernism. All concepts will be introduced by means of an explanation of the term itself, and are either followed or preceded by an overview of the current academic discussion on the concept. The academic overview of these concepts also leads to a critical theoretical interpretation from which the methodology is designed.

1.1 Biofiction: A History of Academic Interpretations

As Michael Lackey demonstrates in his 2017 publication *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*, the genre that is now commonly referred to as biofiction has a complicated history. One of the works included in Lackey’s book is Georg Lukács *The Historical Novel*, which was originally

published in 1937. In this text, Lukács theorises that biographical fiction in whichever shape of form will never gain appreciation as a genre because of the way in which it discusses historical characters. Biographical fiction, as opposed to the genre of the historical novel, idealises these characters, and thereby makes them into esteemed yet isolated personas with whom it is impossible to make a true connection as a reader (264). Lukács also argues that fiction is not a solution to filling in any gaps in personal or collective historical knowledge, by quoting Sainte-Beuve and stating that if any type of historic knowledge from a certain period is unknown to the artist, the work simply “cannot be made to live for us artistically” (263). When commenting on this text in his Introduction to the reader, Lackey contributes to it by stating that the biographical novel focusses too strongly on the internal psychological processes, which for the reader causes distortions in the understanding of history and inevitably leads to the misinterpretation of objective history in general (1). According to Lackey, Lukács’ research was ground-breaking at the time of publication and caused a scholarly disinterest in the genre of biographical fiction for the following couple of decades (12).

Eventually, through the rise in academic interest in biography, autobiography and life writing, biofiction scholarship also rose (Lackey 13). For example, in *The Art of Biography*, originally published in 1965, Paul Murray Kendall touches upon the subject of biofiction when he aimed to create a scale of measurement for the ratio between fact and fiction that is portrayed in biographical texts. Consequently, several other scholars introduced their own means of measurement to keep track of the different ways in which fiction was applied to biographical texts (Shabert 284). Others acknowledged that the boundary between biography and biographical fiction is a very vague one. Andrea Kirchknopf, for example, has stated that “literary biography slowly transforms into biofiction,” without there being a clear outer limit where the one genre ends and the other begins (359). Concerning the rise in academic interest in biofiction, it is important to take into consideration that this increase of interest in biofiction as a genre found its origin in the advances in research of the biographical novel, which was not always beneficial to the genre of biofiction. Scholars tended to focus on the biographical rather than the fictional element of biographies and works of biofiction, and were more concerned with studying the use of fact versus fiction than the perfect combination of these two elements in the rather new genre called biofiction (Lackey 13).

Since the rise of academic appreciation of the genres, there have been several ways in which to categorise the genres of biofiction and biography. In his 1965 publication *The Art of Biography*, Paul Murray Kendall recognises eight subgenres of biography, based on the extent to which the author does or does not employ fictional devices (282-283). Clifford discerns not

eight but five different types of biography, which he presents in a linear representation from most subjective to least subjective (Shabert 284). Neither Kendall nor Clifford include the genre of autobiography, which is believed by Parini to be the most fictitious form of biography possible (307). Regardless of the exact genre-definitions, all of these separate subgenres can be re-labelled from biographies to works of biofiction, because, as Ina Shabert argues, the term fiction in relation to biography does not necessarily mean fictitious or untrue:

The word *fiction* in such contexts is not always meant to indicate merely the unavoidable relativity of factual biography, the plurality of versions which legitimately exist in a pluralistic and dynamic community of authors and readers. It may be used to characterize works degraded from the normal standards of biographical writing, works grossly tendentious, simplistic, inventive. Of course, such violations of the compositional rules of factual biography do not produce a work of the fictional genre, which has its own laws of composition, although degenerate factual biography tends to appropriate the biographical novelist's right to selection and invention for its own, different purposes. (293, original italics)

This point is also made by Michael Lackey, when he states in his Introduction to *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*, that “the authors’ ideological orientation will inflect their representation of the biographical subject,” which an informed reader is naturally aware of and therefore does not necessarily render the work as fictitious (9). The definition of fiction in relation to the term biofiction means as much as “a purposeful and strategic alteration of fact” (Lackey 9). Lackey supports this interpretation by highlighting that authors of biofiction change historical facts unapologetically (8). Furthermore, he points out that ever since the genre of biofiction made an appearance, its authors have identified their works as belonging to the genre fiction rather than that of biography, and they have also made it a point to make this known to their audience. This is also the case for prominent, contemporary biographical novelists (2). Lackey concludes that biographical novelists, i.e. authors of biofiction, wish to represent truths that are very different from the truths that biographers wish to represent (9).

1.2 *Biofiction as Postmodern*

The interest in biofiction has since flourished not only in the academic sphere, but also in the public sphere of authors, readers and critics. Bethany Layne relates the emergence of the biofiction genre as it is generally understood as being twofold, since academics have identified two trends in contemporary literature in the last two decades that have made it possible for biofiction to have gained popularity in the literary field. In her essay “The ‘Supreme Portrait Artist’ and the ‘Mistress of the Phrase’: Contesting Oppositional Portrayals of Woolf and Bell, Life and Art, in Susan Sellers’s *Vanessa and Virginia*,” Layne illustrates how the first of these trends finds its origin in Modernism by reading contemporary fiction against that particular cultural dominant. She argues that since the turn of the twenty-first century, literary critics and academics have identified a shift in emphasis of contemporary fiction, namely “from the superficial and untrustworthy external world of the realist and towards the more fundamental and primary inner world of the subconscious” (78). Both the notion and our current understanding of the subconscious were developed in the Modernist period by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, although the term had already been coined in the mid-nineteenth-century. Layne continues her argument by suggesting that this also partly explains why Modernist authors make such appealing subjects in contemporary biofiction (78).

The second trend that can be recognised in the contemporary literary field that has increased the popularity of biofiction finds its origin not in Modernism but in Postmodernism. The trend can be explained simply as “the collapse of the distinction between fact and fiction” (Lackey qtd. in Layne 79). Biofiction is of course a direct product of this Postmodern collapse, since it blends the factual ‘bio’ with the imagined ‘fiction’. The well-known French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard pointed out that because of this collapse there is also nothing left that is real and that everything has become “hyperreal” (Baudrillard qtd. in Barry 86). In this Postmodern hyperreal situation, everything is an image, all is “surface without depth” (Barry 86). Layne also points out that it was Postmodernism that revealed how both genres, biography and biofiction, used noticeably similar strategies, rhetorical devices and techniques (79). Adding to this line of argumentation, academics in the field of Postmodernism argued that the genre of biography in essence is fictive, too. John Keener supports this claim, by asserting that biography is brought into existence through a subjective selection of facts by the author, who can frame biographical truths in whichever way s/he prefers (331). Common Postmodernist narrative techniques that can be associated with the hyperreal are deconstruction, irony, narcissism, and intertextual elements such as pastiche, parody, and illusion (Barry 87).

Like Layne, Alain Buisine, too, argues that Postmodernism allowed for the rise of biofiction as a genre and as a field of scholarly interest. In his essay “Biofictions” Buisine argues that since the Postmodern form of biography is automatically one of fiction, “an accurate representation of the biographical subject is no longer possible” (qtd. in Lackey 2). Ina Shabert also argues that fictional as well as factual biographies are works of fiction, even though both are based on historical fact, because of the way these works are constructed (295).

There is an ongoing scholarly debate about the relation between biography and biofiction (Lackey 13), but it has become clear that many academics agree that the genre of biography is typically Postmodern, and therefore the genre of biofiction is Postmodern too, since it contains many similar features that can also be found in the biography genre. Lackey explains this connection between biography and Postmodernism by highlighting a shift in the way in which symbols are understood. He argues that “the rise of Postmodernism led to a need for a more historically specific and empirically based literary symbol,” because in Postmodernism all overarching, historical symbols are untrustworthy (5-6). Marc Delrez also argues that biofiction is Postmodern since the concept of constructed truth, including historical truth, is the product of Postmodern scholarship, thereby classifying the biofiction genre as Postmodern (119-120). Monica Latham identifies Postmodernism in biofiction in how the genre conveys a “subjective representation of a subjects’ life,” which is a strategy that directly finds its origin in the Postmodern practice of manipulating “the real as well as [playing] with different layers of truths and pluralism of realities” (309). She also states that biofiction is inherently intertextual in nature, another feature she identifies as postmodern (422). Bethany Ober Mannon states that biographical works and biofiction alike share a “Postmodern distrust of universals and metanarratives” (53).

The influence of Postmodernism on the genre of biofiction is also identified in a more practical sense. In a continuation of the Postmodern notion that fact is fiction (Layne 79), Edward Saunders finds in his research of the biographical novel *Mozart* by Wolfgang Hildesheimer that the work is “Postmodern in character, being characterized by a distrust of structure and of reasoned suppositions, while containing a list of unanswered questions” (331). In a study of science-fiction in Romantic biofictions, Christine Kenyon Jones illustrates how these works explore their authors’ Postmodern environment. In the novels she identifies several Postmodern features as set out by Fredric Jameson, such as flatness or depthlessness, the “(alleged) loss of a discrete subjectivity,” and the use of pastiche (51). She also points out that biofiction is inherently a work of deconstruction, another Postmodern feature, since it takes the genre of biography and reconstructs it whilst shaping it into a form that is rather different (54).

Yet another aspect of Postmodernism, namely the hybridisation of genres, is identified by Valentina Vannucci in her article “The Canon and Biofiction: The Subjects of History and New Literary Worlds.” Vannucci argues that the non-assimilation of historical data, which she recognises as a distinct feature of biofiction, also relates to Postmodern narratives (389). Furthermore, she discusses how the field of rewriting, and therefore the field of biofiction, is strongly connected to Postmodernism, too, something that other academics have also pointed out (Vannucci 380, Szalóki, 2014).

However, there are also some academics who are hesitant to align biofiction and Postmodernism, or who at the very least identify certain problems when connecting the two. John Keener, for example, recognises that the definition of biofiction is complicated by Postmodern ideas of historical truth and its relation to identity (332), yet he is hesitant to relate features of biofiction directly to Postmodernism. Instead, he interprets the use of fragmentation as “not only an artistic prerogative but a pragmatic (if not psychological) necessity,” arguing that a linear biographical structure is nearly unattainable in biography as well as biofiction (332), and rather than using the term intertextuality, Keener discusses how “each representation of an historical figure implicates all its companion representations” (343). By using these descriptions of characteristics of the biofiction genre, Keener is purposefully avoiding linking these features solely to Postmodernism.

In her essay “‘Serv[ing] under two masters’: Virginia Woolf’s Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions,” Monica Latham illustrates how several biofictions which have Victorian author Virginia Woolf as their main protagonist, adopt Woolfian narrative techniques and copy her writing style (408). Latham recognises that the act of rewriting Virginia Woolf’s life, or, as she defines it, offering the reader “a simulacrum of a real life,” is part of a Postmodern practice because it entails multiple layers of truth and conveys more than one reality (309). However, she also recognises that the way in which the authors have made characteristics of Woolf’s writing style their own essentially produces a Modern rather than a Postmodern text. She shows how this is best portrayed in Michael Cunningham’s 1998 novel *The Hours*:

Cunningham puts into practice the artistic credo and the theory of modernist fiction – expressed by Woolf in her critical essays – in a postmodernist novel, which seems to suggest that there are no new stories, just new ways to retell, again and again, the same story. (...) The use of pastiche calls into attention Cunningham’s postmodernist practice of the mimicry of an idiosyncratic modernist style. Several recognizable Woolfian features appearing in *Mrs. Dalloway* and constituting its trademark are successfully employed by the author of *The Hours*: the free indirect speech, the change of focalization, the pictorial and poetic quality of descriptions, the particular use of punctuation, and the incantatory-like effect of repetition. (414-415)

Latham demonstrates that, apart from the actual act of rewriting, the novel itself is hardly Postmodern. She also recognises this development in the three other biographical novels about Virginia Woolf that she has taken into account for her research.

In *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama*, Martin Middeke also argues that the biofiction genre is not necessarily solely Postmodern. He illustrates how biofiction is reasonably paradoxical, since such texts both deconstruct and reconstruct historical knowledge at the same time (316). Deconstruction is a typically Postmodernist feature, but reconstruction is not. Middeke also highlights that history is not a tool that is commonly employed to “make sense in Postmodern times” (Kunow, qtd in Middeke 314). Interestingly, Middeke regards biography and biofiction as the “heir of the nineteenth-century realist novel,” rather than as a product of Postmodernism as is argued by several other scholars mentioned earlier (317). Furthermore, Middeke identifies Romantic features in biofiction, even in those texts that can be categorised as Postmodern, and discusses a number of differences between the two cultural logics in order to illustrate how their connection is contradictory rather than correlative (320-321).

Biofiction, then, is a genre that has been defined in many different ways, and its boundaries are still rather uncertain. The genre has generally been accepted as finding its origin in – or in the very least belonging to – a Postmodern cultural logic. However, several scholars have suggested, albeit indirectly, that this might not necessarily be the case. As will be shown in the following sections of this theoretical frame, the combination of Modern and Postmodern elements in biofiction already suggests that the classification of the genre in a category called Metamodernism might be in order.

As shown in her 2011 essay “The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre,” Andrea Kirchknopf is also hesitant to use the term Postmodernism. She identifies the contemporary world as Postmodern (351), and since biofiction offers the possibility to reflect on contemporary dilemmas, the genre is consequently determined to be Postmodern, too. However, she also discusses biofiction as a hybrid form, which consists of rewriting and therefore has a place in the field of adaptation (352), yet she only introduces these topics to illustrate that there is a contemporary literary trend where Victorian fiction is recontextualised to approach contemporary issues in the field of politics, culture or theory (366). This influence of Victorianism will be explored further in the following sections.

1.3 *Neo-Victorianism: Academic Interpretations*

Since the 1970s, the number of works of fiction that concern the Victorian period has increased, indicating that modern society is looking back to the past in order to understand itself and its future (Marks 33). The literary academic field recognised this trend, and as a result many different terms were used in the earlier academic works that were focused on identifying, defining and confining the genre. Some examples are “retro-Victorian”, “neoVictorian” (with a deliberate deletion of the hyphen) and “the neo-Victorian” as an independent noun (resp. Stetz 340, Zieger 2016, 132).

Even four decades later, the exact definition of the genre still appears to be somewhat unrefined. In a 2011 journal publication, Susan Zieger defines the genre by its most basic definition, namely as “fiction written since about 1970 and set in the Victorian period” (2011, 378). Five years later, however, she illustrates that interpreting the genre within the academic field may be more complicated, by asking whether it is “better understood as a subfield within contemporary literature in English? An accessory to Victorian studies? A field focused on historiographical and theoretical problems, for example within postcolonial studies and queer theory? A critical trend chasing popular Victorian historical fiction, biography, and related genres?” (2016, 131). For now, it appears that these questions remain unanswered.

When it comes to the usage of the term, Margaret Stetz argues that the term neo-Victorianism, in whichever form or definition, is mostly adopted within the academic field. She speculates that the term gained worldwide notoriety after a 2007 conference at the University of Exeter, which conveyed the term in its headline (340), and the peer-reviewed journal *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* that was introduced a year later (341). Since other participants of the

literary field, such as writers, reviewers, and booksellers, rarely use the term neo-Victorian, works that might have a place within the genre are often labelled under different categories such as “historical fiction” or “period drama” (340). The specific period that is referred to is often not even mentioned distinctively (340). However, Stetz does identify an increase in academic research that directly mentions the term in its title or subtitle in the past two decades (340). Beth Palmer also recognises this growth of interest in the academic field and states that “the fact that two monographs on neo-Victorian fiction have been published by the same press in the same year provides further evidence, if any were needed, that neo-Victorian fiction is a growth area for academic interest” (2012, 168).

1.4 *Neo-Victorianism as a Study of the Contemporary*

Clearly, the genre is still being identified and studied within the academic field. However, that does not mean that no boundaries of the neo-Victorian field have been established at all. Louisa Hadley simply defines the genre as “contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both” (qtd. in Marks 4). In a review of Hadley’s *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*, Beth Palmer offers a definition of the term neo-Victorian fiction that is a bit more elaborate:

Neo-Victoriana fiction looks back to the nineteenth century for stylistic interpretation, plot lines, characters, and settings, and engages with the cultural, moral, and social issues of the period. At the same time, the neo-Victorian novel is firmly rooted in the contemporary moment, keyed into the tastes of literary prize judges and Sunday evening television viewers. (168)

On the one hand, Palmer points out how broadly the genre can be defined, since according to this definition any type of fiction that is produced after the Victorian period and that in some way or form relates to that period can be classified as belonging to the neo-Victorian fiction genre. This means that more works can be categorised as neo-Victorian than has been indicated by Zieger. As also demonstrated by Palmer, this type of legacy appears to be similar to the concept of rewriting, which is a way of engaging with an older text with contemporary concerns in mind. On the other hand, Palmer stresses that neo-Victorian fiction not only relates to the Victorian period, but also shows a strong connection to the contemporary day and age. In her 2009 journal article “Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its

Legacies in the Twenty-First Century”, Palmer argues that “[Victorian] sensation fiction’s most significant and lasting legacy is a self-consciousness about how the contemporary moment is constructed in and by print culture as it mediates the past” (87).

Kelly Mays further illustrates this Victorian obsession with self-consciousness, but does so from another point of view. She argues that “nineteenth-century Britons” – a term she uses in order to distinguish between the people that lived during the Victorian period and the label “Victorian” which they applied to themselves – were extremely aware of how they would one day become an object of history, an object of interest, ready to be scrutinised and, above all, misinterpreted. According to Mays, this understanding of past and present during the Victorian period stems from the way in which the Victorians themselves studied the past, perhaps for the first time in human history realising the subjectivity that comes along with interpreting what has already been, and allowing that realisation to influence the way in which they conducted themselves in their present, too (447). By doing so, these nineteenth-century Britons fashioned “the first historicizing label of its kind invented by the very people to whom it continues to be applied to today” (445).

In contemporary fiction, the legacy of self-consciousness about the construction of the contemporary is reflected in the neo-Victorian novels by Faber and Waters, and according to Palmer is best recognised in terms of form. The number of pages, the sensational aspects, and the way in which print and non-print sources have a function in the narrative, are all aspects by means of which these contemporary authors demonstrate a Victorian self-consciousness of a novel’s place in present-day print culture. After all, both Victorian and neo-Victorian authors are part of an environment in which print culture is changing rapidly. The nineteenth century brought the printing press which introduced a larger and rather different audience to the world of literary fiction, whereas in the twenty-first century authors are confronted with the influence of all types of digital media, including but not limited to the way in which novels are consumed by the reader (Palmer 2009, 90).

David Amigoni argues that the way in which neo-Victorian fiction engages with the contemporary has a different foundation than just its form. He mentions that it is through an active engagement with multiple versions and narratives of a Victorian past that a “critical frisson” is created, enabling readers to look at their own society, including social and cultural relations, values and meanings, from a different perspective (178). Mariaconcetta Costantini, too, argues that revaluing the nineteenth century is critical for our understanding of the present, because the same social, political and sexual discourses are relevant to the modern society (18) and find their roots in the Victorian period (36). The contemporary reader is reminded of the

topicality of issues that were problematic in the Victorian period, and often still are today (27), by narratives that illustrate how these issues were a matter of public debate, or, on the contrary, silenced (21). Laura Helen Marks, a researcher of neo-Victorian literary and non-literary pornography, puts these theories into cultural practice. She identifies the Victorian period as the “richest space in which to stage such an illicit and sometimes unnerving thrills” and continues by stating that the Victorian aspects or thrills that are lingered upon by contemporary society (especially those aspects that push moral boundaries) are crucial in identifying which forms of nostalgia and which notions of history the contemporary society enjoys and fetishises, and which it prefers to alter (65). By recognising these aspects and their influence on modern society, contemporary cultural attitudes toward sexual identities are illuminated (65). Clearly, she recognises a direct influence of neo-Victorianism on present-day culture and society.

1.5 *Neo-Victorianism as Postmodern*

So far, neo-Victorian fiction has often been recognised as a Postmodern phenomenon. According to Peter Barry, the main characteristics of Postmodern literary fiction are deconstruction, irony, narcissism, and intertextual elements such as pastiche, parody and illusion (87). The main contrast in regard to Modernism, he argues, is the attitude with which Postmodernists approach the past. Modernism was rooted in a “deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full an authority intact,” whereas Postmodernism is guided by an “escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief” (80-81). Beth Palmer is one of the academics who argues that neo-Victorian literature is a representation of the same past that it pastiches by their awareness of material culture (2009, 87). She points out that the way in which neo-Victorian novels by Michel Faber and Sarah Waters show a self-reflexive interest in “the materiality of print culture and the status of their novels in comparison with others” is a direct legacy from the sensation fiction of the Victorian period. Within the Postmodern framework, this legacy becomes another pastiche (2009, 92).

Dana Schiller also categorises the neo-Victorian novel as a characteristic of Postmodernism in her article “The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel” (538). To this end she uses Frederic Jameson’s controversial theory on Postmodernism, which is characterised by a crisis in historicity (538), and which allows her to illustrate how neo-Victorian fiction is guided by a quest to “reconstruct the past by questioning the certitude of our historical knowledge” (541). In her research Schiller uses several case studies in order to illustrate how

neo-Victorian fiction borrows from Postmodern historiography (540). In contrast to Palmer, however, she also stresses that neo-Victorian literature is more than just a pastiche of Victorian literature. She even goes so far as to say that Postmodernist relativism in combination with nostalgic sentimentality are main characteristics of the neo-Victorian genre (554).

1.6 *Neo-Victorianism: From Postmodern to Metamodern*

As mentioned earlier, this affinity with the past is something that Barry recognises as a feature of the Modern framework, rather than a feature of the Postmodern framework. This duality of cultural dominants is recognised by other academics, too. Louisa Hadley and Kate Mitchell, for example, prefer to categorise neo-Victorian fiction within the genre of historical literature rather than interpreting it through a Postmodern framework. Nostalgia, again, is key, because it is through nostalgia that neo-Victorian fiction is able to remember and reconstruct Victorian history. Interestingly, Hadley and Mitchell both recognise the self-consciousness in the way that it relates itself to the Victorians' own interpretation of the past – which is one of the main characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction – yet they do not identify this as a Postmodern feature of the genre (Palmer 2012, 169). Stetz, too, recognises both Postmodern and non-Postmodern elements in neo-Victorian fiction, by highlighting that for contemporary neo-Victorian authors “neo-Victorianism is far more than a mere sub-category of or footnote to postmodernism. Nevertheless, their sense of the literary world of the present is grounded in the insight of postmodern theory. (...) Yet they also diverge from their predecessors among postmodern literary critics in their lively attention to *things*” (342, original italics).

Costantini also identifies a complicated relation between neo-Victorian literature and Postmodernism. In “‘Faux-Victorian Melodrama’ in the New Millennium: The Case of Sarah Waters”, she determines that there is a strong relation between the neo-Victorian fiction by Waters and a Postmodern framework, whilst at the same time recognising that Waters uses discursive and aesthetic elements that do not match that particular framework. Costantini argues that Waters' purpose is to “distinguish between the two historical dimensions”, which Costantini interprets as an aspect that does not fall in with Postmodernism (31). Furthermore, although Waters' relation of the past is through irony and by identifying it as a problematic cultural issue, certain aspects of her writing do not fit the Postmodern narrative:

Her adoption of what might be called a *new (meta)realism* and her lesbian militancy are at odds with postmodern tenets, such as the disbelief in the ‘reality’ of material objects and historical differences, the growing distrust of ideologies and the tendency to aestheticise the past. (19, original italics)

It is interesting that Costantini refers to a “new (meta)realism” for aspects of Waters’ fiction that she cannot relate to Postmodern features, especially since it also becomes clear that Costantini defines the contemporary world as Postmodern (36).

1.7 *The Emergence of Metamodernism*

What Costantini refers to with “new (meta)realism” is one of the ways in which the contemporary, in the broadest sense of the word, is being identified. Several scholars have recognised that contemporary fiction is distancing itself from, as well as engaging actively with, Postmodernism, although they find it hard to pinpoint exactly which elements of contemporary fiction contribute to this development. Contemporary fiction is therefore studied in various ways.

Few scholars have attempted to determine why the development in contemporary culture is one that is moving away from Postmodernism. In an attempt to find an explanation for the change in contemporary society, Bentley et al. have suggested three significant cultural landmarks since the turn of the century that have caused the change in contemporary society that indicates that Postmodernism has ended. The first of these landmarks is a historic one, namely the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 9 September 2001. Following these attacks, a collective shift in “thinking about contemporary society and politics” took place (14). Consequently, a philosophical shift occurred, too:

If postmodernism has to do with a sense of a radical skepticism towards all systems that claim totalizing narratives whether that be to the idea of truth, individual identity or the production of meaning, or a defining set of ideological parameters, then many writers in the 2000s began to think beyond that limit. (...) This end of postmodernism can be seen in the sense that perhaps its main ideas had become widely accepted this achieving any aesthetic, philosophical or political goals it might have had. (14-15)

This second landmark emerged more gradually, and is still ongoing as both writers and critics continue to explore the end(s) of Postmodernism, which means that what used to be considered as the experimental Postmodernist avant-garde, now appears to have become a part of collective contemporary culture. The third landmark that is identified by Bentley et al. has to do with cultural practice. Postmodernism is often associated with capitalist market forces and “neo-imperialistic practices” (15). The past couple of decades have seen great worldwide shifts in market economy, and thus in the process of accepting this current inevitability it makes sense for ideology to change also (14-16).

Others have indicated that the collective move from Postmodernism to a different mode is caused by contemporary crises, such as extreme political polarisation, environmental catastrophes, or the influence of digital technology and the internet on everyday life. According to Ralph Keyes, these types of conflicts only increase the complication of finding and defining truth, which automatically leads to the appropriate definition of the contemporary situation as the post-truth era (Hemelaar 3). Rather than focusing on crises, Lee Konstantinou finds the origin for societal change in the contemporary developments of socioeconomic organisation. By this he means that the way in which people relate to the world, to time and to experience has shifted, and that social and economic aspects are shifting accordingly (411). Another view is provided by David Rudrum, who refers to Lipvetsky’s theory on hyperindividualism in the twenty-first century. He argues that “the emphasis on a personal identity has not diminished one drop as a result of the postmodern assertion that all such identities are constructs”, and that personal identity appears to have become something sacrosanct (24). On an academic rather than a societal level, Van den Akker et al. have identified “a gap between the many postmodern theories circulating in various studies across the arts and culture and the actual material conditions and dominant artistic and cultural phenomena of the 2000s” (41). Furthermore, they “felt that the debate about postmodernism was in need of an intervention that differed from the single authorial voice” (42).

To this end, several academics have coined different terms that in their opinion best describe the contemporary situation and contemporary culture. Although these terms and their definitions range widely in name and argumentation, they all share the awareness of a return to Modernism. Furthermore, these terms all “foreground the particularities around our temporal moment in terms of problematizing of the idea of time itself,” and they recognise as a key characteristic of contemporary mainstream culture “a failure to acknowledge, create or take into account the particular temporal moment of the future” (Bentley et al. 9). The number of sub-terms is vast. A brief overview would be the following: “after postmodernism”,

“altermodernism”, “beyond postmodernism”, “digi(tal)modernism”, “metamodernism”, “the new puritans”, “the new sincerity”, “post-postmodernism” (Bentley et al. 16), “automodernism”, “cosmodernism”, “geomodernism”, “hypermodernism”, “neomodernism”, “performatism”, “remodernism”, “renewalism” (Rudrum 19, 22), “pseudomodernism” (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 3), and “postpositivist realism” (Konstantinou 411). It could be argued that the amount of specific sub-terms alone is a signifier of the “expanding number of different and diverse ways of experiencing and exploring our modernity,” or our “polymodern condition”, which implies that there is not (yet) one common denominator to encompass these varied experiences and that “contemporary modernity has so many different inflections that it is impossible to characterise” (Rudrum 28).

Interestingly, several of these terms interrogate ‘the way in which the digital humanities seem inherently modernist and how Modernism seems inherently digital’ (Ross 164). In other words, the contemporary situation is strongly influenced by technological developments. However, that is not the case for all of these terms, since some of them aim to convey culture in a broader sense. The term that at the time of writing is most widely and academically recognised, is Metamodernism. This term was first coined by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their 2010 publication “Notes on Metamodernism”. They aim to develop Metamodernism “as a period, structure of feeling, and cultural logic” (Van den Akker et al. 41) that conveys a discourse that is constantly “oscillating between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 1). The argument they provide for choosing the prefix “meta” is based on certain contemporary trends and tendencies they have identified that oscillate “between a typically modern commitment and a postmodern detachment” (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 2). The prefix accordingly signifies that these trends and tendencies are “situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism” (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 2, original italics).

1.8 *Metamodernism as a Blend of Cultural Logics*

With their 2010 publication, Vermeulen and Van den Akker invited the reader to join the debate on how to classify contemporary culture. A 2019 publication called “Metamodernism: Period, Structure of Feeling, and Cultural Logic – A Case Study of Contemporary Autofiction” shows that they have since developed their definition of Metamodernism, although the article also

emphasises that doing so is an ongoing project, in which Vermeulen and Van den Akker “seek to (1) map today’s dominant cultural developments by way of the arts; (2) develop an adequate language to discuss these dominant ways of feeling, doing, and thinking; and (3) relate these contemporary concepts, percepts, and affects to recent reconfigurations of Western capitalist societies” (42). Vermeulen and Van den Akker also use the platform of this article to underscore their interpretation of Metamodernism, which is multidisciplinary in essence, as containing features not just of Modernism, but also of Postmodernism, realism and romanticism (47).

Hans Bertens, author of *Eenentwintigste-Eeuws Modernisme: Nicola Barkers Darkmans*, uses a case study of a 2007 novel to illustrate how what he calls twenty-first-century Modernism includes Modernist, post-structuralist, Postmodernist and realist ideologies are brought to the reader through overtly Modernist techniques and style. He, too, recognises a great diversity in terms of the contemporary novel (37). He argues that this has always been the case, and that during periods that are now labelled as Postmodernism or Modernism works of fiction were still being produced that carried out a much more realist mode. However, because critics and readers alike identified other, newer features in Modernist and later in Postmodernist works, these types of fiction gained in dominance and eventually lead to periodisation (37). Bertens argues that the same is happening in fiction today, where the current situation is still being identified but certain changes are already being acknowledged (38). Using *House of Leaves* (2000) as a case study, Bertens aims to show that contemporary fiction regards Postmodernism as belonging to the past, but that these novels actually contain Postmodernist features (40). However, *Darkmans* also contains strong Modernist features. These are best expressed in the novel’s ideology, because of the way in which it refers to grander themes of hope and truth (53-54). Bertens concludes that the author of *House of Leaves* is without a doubt strongly affiliated with Postmodernism, and yet the novel itself opposes all Postmodernist’s key characteristics by returning to a Modernist mode of writing and ethics. Interestingly, Bertens argues that the author also moves away from a “classical Modernism,” in that she permits her novel to convey other features that are not associated with the Modernist mode as we know it from history (54). These case studies are an example of the blend of cultural logics that is Metamodernism.

This blend of cultural logics is also recognised by Andre Furlani in his essay “Postmodern and After: Guy Davenport.” He emphasises the vast amount of Postmodernist features that is detectable in Metamodernist works, stating that “metamodernism is a departure as well as a perpetuation” of Postmodernism (713). Regina Schober agrees, by describing

contemporary fiction as “oscillating between nostalgia for a bygone past and a pragmatic acceptance of a new media environment,” since the novels she has studied “neither express a belief in the future nor do they believe in the end of the future, but they rather incorporate a metamodernist awareness that history is moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end” (361). She also recognises that “contemporary fiction is marked by a pragmatic inconsistency between modernist techno-euphoria and a postmodernist scepticism towards human agency” (360). David Rudrum, too, argues that Metamodernism is influenced by more cultural dominants than just Modernism, but also aims to show that Postmodernism has never been the “vanquisher of” or the “successor to” Modernism (23). By acknowledging that Postmodernism did not mean the end of Modernism, Rudrum suggests that Metamodernism does not necessarily mean the end of Postmodernism. Instead, he argues, contemporary fiction is actively engaging with Postmodernism.

Nick Bentley et al. have investigated that relationship between contemporary fiction and Postmodernism a bit further. They find that works of fiction that have been published since the turn of the century show a “desire to interrogate the legacies of postmodernism,” which they argue is possible in three different ways (17). Firstly, they identify a form of fiction that adopts the same narrative techniques that are associated with Postmodernism but whose author has introduced “a set of grounded ethical positions” (17). Secondly, Bentley et al. identify a group of authors who produce texts that are influenced by a realist mode. They do stress however that this category has been persistent throughout history, with authors continuing to work in a realist mode as well as other authors that are returning to it (17). Lastly, they identify a group of authors that consists of those who “have self-consciously returned to modernist techniques as a way of return to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics” (17). This categorisation is further complicated by the existence of contemporary fiction that can be ascribed to more than one of these categories. Therefore, Bentley et al. emphasise that the interpretation of contemporary fiction “much depends on the critical lens” that is applied to specific features of a particular work (17). However, from their categorisation of contemporary fiction it becomes clear that it is influenced by more than one cultural logic. Interestingly, two of the three categories that they identify cannot be seen as a continuation of Postmodernism, but rather as the end of it. Bentley et al. state that fiction that is produced in a realist mode is “an implicit rejection of postmodernism”, and that returning to Modernist techniques is done consciously in order to move back to a pre-Postmodernist time (17). Bentley et al. are not the only ones who identify Metamodernism as the end of Postmodernism, as will be illustrated in the following section.

1.9 *Metamodernism as the End of Postmodernism*

David James and Urmila Seshagiri interpret Metamodernism in a different way than the academics that are mentioned in the section above. Perhaps because the subject of their research is focussed on twenty-first-century literary fiction, rather than also including other aspects of art or culture, they identify in these works of fiction “a conception of modernism as revolution” (87). The innovations of contemporary fiction, they argue, reveal unequivocal engagements with the innovations and developments that were introduced in the Modernist period. These mostly stylistic engagements reveal a self-conscious relationship with Modernism, yet they are also original and innovative (88). It is this self-conscious relationship with Modernism for which they use the label Metamodernism. The Metamodern aspects that they have recognised in contemporary literature are threefold. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, they recognise tributes to a Modernist style of writing. Secondly, contemporary fiction often shows an engagement with the perception and consciousness of Modernist authors, and finally, they perceive a detailed engagement with socio-political, historical and philosophical contexts that were prominent during the Modern period in contemporary fiction (93). In the most practical sense, James and Seshagiri directly relate Metamodernist practices to a move away from Postmodernism, and outline the workings of Metamodernism in contemporary fiction as follows:

Metamodernist narratives thus distinguish themselves from an earlier postmodernism through self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarization as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century. On one hand, twenty-first-century metamodernism demonstrates that the impulse to reform the very medium of narrative fiction reached a zenith a century ago (...) On the other hand, some metamodernist fictions actually perform historicizing acts, dynamically reflecting on modernism’s aesthetic prerogatives in order to mobilize innovations of their own. (93-94)

Crucial to the understanding of Metamodernism according to James and Seshagiri is that Modernism is available to contemporary authors both as a moment as well as a movement, which means that authors can rely on Modernism as a historical period as well as a means to politicise global practice (90, 93). They do not recognise Postmodern features in contemporary fiction, other than the acknowledgement that contemporary fiction is self-consciously moving away from it.

Several other academics view Metamodernism in the same way. Shawna Ross disregards the influence of Postmodernism on Metamodernism and views Metamodernism as “a contemporary genre that innovates by invoking and looking back to modernism” (180). In his publication “The Ends of Metafiction, or, The Romantic Time of Egan’s Goon Squad,” Josh Toth argues that the post-Postmodern aesthetic retaliates against “the perilous intensification of postmodernism” because contemporary fiction shifts the reader’s attention to an infinite Real (60-61).

Whether Metamodernism means the end of Postmodernism or functions as a continuation of it (or both), one thing is clear: Metamodernism shows that Modernism is back in contemporary culture – a culture that is, indeed, moving on to the past.

2 Approach and Methodology

This thesis explores the concept of Metamodernism in three contemporary neo-Victorian works of biofiction that were published since the turn of the century, namely *Becoming Jane Eyre* (2009) by Sheila Kohler, *The Master* (2004) by Colm Tóibín, and *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* (2003) by Louis Edwards. These novels tell (a part of) the life of respectively Charlotte Brontë, Henry James and Oscar Wilde. These particular novels were selected because of their strong biofictional and neo-Victorian elements, of which a brief overview will now be provided. A critical interpretation of the influence of these genres on the techniques and the ethics of the novels will be provided in the actual chapters and the conclusion of this thesis, where the link between the genres and Metamodernism will also be investigated. The practical academic method that is applied in this thesis will be elaborated upon after the overview and explanation of the choice of the novels.

2.1 *Becoming Jane Eyre*

In this novel the affinities with the neo-Victorian genre are mainly established through its subject and her surroundings, namely Charlotte Brontë during her adulthood from the year 1846 until 1853. In terms of narrative style and technique, however, the novel can be said to be contemporary rather than Victorian. The choice of words and the length of sentences are appropriate for a modern-day audience, and so is the density of the novel.

In the acknowledgement to the novel in the last pages of the *Becoming Jane Eyre* author Sheila Kohler expresses that she heavily depended on biographies about Charlotte Brontë whilst writing her novel (233). However, in the introduction to the novel she makes it clear that she did not feel obligated to stay close to factual truth. This is because firstly, there is always a selection of the facts that are referred to and those that are not when writing a biography (6). Secondly, Kohler feels that the areas of Charlotte's life that that she was interested in, could never have been known by anyone other than Charlotte herself. These areas are mostly made up by relationships, such as the bond between Charlotte and her father, and Charlotte's relationship with her sisters before and after their unfortunate fate (6). Thirdly, Kohler mentions that writing the truth also almost typically indicates another person will be upset by what is written (8). And yet, she stresses that she has made an effort not to alter certain facts, stating that "one cannot falsify the facts that are so well known, and I hope I have never done that" (6). It is in between these well-known facts that Kohler has let her "imagination run freely" (6). The writing process Kohler describes makes it clear that from the onset she has aimed to write a biofictional novel, because it was her aim to fill in the gaps in the well-known information about Charlotte Brontë, to the purpose of which she deployed fiction (233).

Other biofictional elements are also detectable in the book. For example, the very first phrase on the dust jacket is "A beautifully imagined tale of the Brontë sisters and the writing of *Jane Eyre*", which signals both the 'bio' and the 'fiction' elements of the novel. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier by Michael Lackey, the fact that the author or the work itself proclaims that the work is not a biography but a work of fiction, is one of the main characteristics of biofictional literature. The narrative of *Becoming Jane Eyre* itself contains many factual truths concerning the lives of the Brontë family, such as the eye operation of the father, the cause of death of the mother and each individual child, and the romantic relationships the family members had with others. The publishing history of the narratives that were produced by the Brontë sisters is also historically correct. The sentiment and the personal experience that goes with these historical facts, however, is fictitious. There are such sources as diaries and letters by Charlotte and her sisters, yet these do not convey emotional experience in the same way that is related in the novel. The inner monologues of Charlotte Brontë, for example, published in 2009, will certainly be fictional.

2.2 *The Master*

Unfortunately, Colm Tóibín does not provide the reader of his novel with a lengthy description of his project in which he also describes his motivation for writing the novel like Sheila Kohler does. The neo-Victorian element of this novel can be found in its setting, which is the end of the Victorian era. Technically, the novel takes place between 1895 and 1899, but because of the many memories and recollections of protagonist Henry James, the narrated time actually takes up several decades previous to those years. The result of this is that references to the Victorian society are made throughout the novel.

In terms of biofiction, Tóibín does state that he was heavily influenced by biographies of Henry James and collections of his letters and notebooks. He even emphasises that he wishes to “acknowledge that I have peppered the text with phrases and sentences from the writings of Henry James and his family” (360). That becomes clear throughout the narrative, in which the protagonist Henry James indeed produces Jamesian and Victorian utterances and thoughts. As is the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, however, in terms of narrative style and technique, the novel can be said to be contemporary rather than Victorian. The choice of words and the length of sentences are appropriate for a modern-day audience, and so is the density of the novel.

2.3 *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*

Since this novel is set in America during the 1880s, the environment in which the characters find themselves is hardly Victorian. The reason this novel can nonetheless be categorised as neo-Victorian is through the presence of character Oscar Wilde, who was a well-known Victorian author. Although he is not the protagonist in the novel, he is still very present in the narrative and greatly influences the protagonist. Following Beth Palmer’s definition of the term “Neo-Victoriana fiction” is fiction that “looks back to the nineteenth century for stylistic interpretation, plot lines, characters, and settings, and engages with the cultural, moral, and social issues of the period”, *Henry James Discovers America* is certainly appropriate (Palmer 2012, 168).

Author Louis Edwards, like Sheila Kohler, provides the reader of this novel with an argumentation of its purpose. Edwards, however, wants to take the reader on a journey of discovery throughout the narrative in order to figure it out. For example, before the narrative has begun the novel opens with two quotes about Oscar Wilde’s servant, who is coloured,

followed by a fragment that is similar in style to a police report that relates an incident on a train with Oscar Wilde and his servant. This incident is not included in the narrative, although many other comparable situations arise. At the end of the novel, Edwards has dedicated several pages to his sources and acknowledgement. In this section he indicates that he was inspired by biographies about Oscar Wilde and by a collection of essays about his lecture tour in America in 1882, and that he was especially stunted by the inaccuracy of some of the information that is provided in these texts (286). The aim of his novel has been to set the record straight and correct past mistakes, whilst using the techniques of contemporary fiction to do so (285-286). Again like Kohler, Edwards too stresses that his novel is a work of fiction, by stating that “The words and actions of the twenty-seven-year-old Oscar Wilde, as set forth here, are also almost entirely fiction”, and by referring to the novel as “this fiction – which has little to do with reality” (286). As mentioned earlier by Michael Lackey, the fact that the author or the work itself proclaims that the work is not a biography but a work of fiction, is one of the main characteristics of biofictional literature.

2.4 *Method*

The academic discussion of the genres biofiction and neo-Victorian fiction have been going on for a few decades and have provided the field of literary studies with practical information, as is shown in the theoretical frame. However, when it comes to Metamodernism, there are a few problematics in terms of identifying the contemporary as Metamodern in relation to contemporary fiction.

One of the problematics of Metamodernism is that there is no clear applicable method. First of all, Vermeulen and Van den Akker highlight the interdisciplinarity of Metamodernism, but their argument does not specifically engage with contemporary fiction. Instead, it concerns itself with art and culture in general. Since their aim is to begin and invite others to partake in a discussion about Metamodernism this is not surprising, but as a literary practice it is inefficient. Secondly, they overgeneralise Modernism as a pre-Postmodernism without concretely defining Modernist aspects of Metamodernism (Wolters 1). Thirdly, they state that Metamodernism is an oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism, but do not elaborate on what they mean by the specific term “oscillation”. For example, in fiction, this can be interpreted as a novel containing features of Modernism as well as Postmodernism which leads

to a tension between the two, or, it can mean that one work of fiction can be identified as Modernist as well as Postmodernist, i.e. it is both at the same time.

As is also discussed in the theoretical frame, another complication of Metamodernism is that there are two distinguishable definitions of the term. Some academics argue that Metamodernism is a blend of several cultural logics, one of which is Postmodernism. Metamodernism would be a continuation as well as a departure of Postmodernism. However, other academics claim that Metamodernism can only be seen as a discontinuation of Postmodernism through a clear return to Modernism. As can be seen in the sections above, since the 2010 publication of Vermeulen and Van den Akker's "Notes on Metamodernism" both these interpretations of Metamodernism have been applied in the field of literary studies.

In order to produce a research method through which Metamodernism can be studied in these novels, characteristics of Modernism, Postmodernism and Metamodernism have been collected from the literature that is discussed in this introduction and from *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry, a reader that provides clear distinctions between several cultural logics and the implication of those logics on the production of fiction. The features provided by Barry and the theoretical frame are the characteristics that the novels will be scrutinised for in order to determine their affiliation with Metamodernism. The Metamodernist characteristics that will be analysed in the novels, are:

- an oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism (Bertens 53-54, Vermeulen and Van den Akker 2),
- pursuing a goal that can never be achieved (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 8),
- a return to Modernist writing techniques (James & Seshagiri 87, Bentley et al. 17),
- Postmodern writing techniques with an alternative set of ethics (Bentley et al. 17).

The Modernist characteristics are:

- "A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on *how* we see rather than *what* we see", which leads to Modernist writing techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue (Barry 79, original italics),
- a movement away from "omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions" (Barry 79),
- experimentation and/or innovation (Barry 79),
- nostalgia (Barry 80).

The Postmodernist characteristics are:

- fragmentation (Barry 81),
- a distrust and/or deconstruction of authoritative grand narratives (Barry 83),

- a hyperreality where the distinction between fact and fiction is uncertain, which may lead to an unrealistic plot or unreliable narrator (Barry 84-86).

Whether or not these features are present in the novels, and if they are, in what way, will determine if they indeed portray a relation to the Metamodern in terms of writing technique, ethics or both.

3 Research Question and Hypothesis

As the theoretical frame has shown, the neo-Victorian genre is closely studied in relation to contemporary culture, since it allows for an exploration of both contemporary ethics and processing past trauma. Since neo-Victorian fiction re-tells a Victorian narrative, the dominant aspect of the genre is that of rewriting. As mentioned earlier, this is an inherently Postmodern feature. This is also the dominant aspect in works of biofiction, another genre that is driven by the forces of re-telling a narrative from the past. By identifying aspects of Metamodernism in these three novels, and thereby in the genres biofiction and neo-Victorian fiction, what this thesis calls for is a Metamodern re-evaluation of the rewriting concept and to illustrate what these new insights indicate on a cultural level. As the theoretical frame has also illustrated, at the time of writing such a research has not been carried out before. There are suggestions in the academic field that neo-Victorian fiction may show an affiliation with Metamodernism, but this new cultural logic has not yet been interpreted in relation to biofiction.

The research question guiding this research therefore is “How is Metamodernism manifested in neo-Victorian biofiction about British authors that is published in the twenty-first century?” The hypothesis is that all three novels will contain Metamodernist features, and that each novel will embody Metamodernism in a different way and to serve a different purpose. Furthermore, the expected Metamodernist features will be on a level of ethics as well as techniques, and they will be expected to be borrowing from both Modernism and Postmodernism. Therefore, the expected results will support the argument that Metamodernism is a blend of cultural logics rather than a signifier of the end of Postmodernism, and the expected results will demonstrate that contemporary neo-Victorianism biofictions do not solely relate to Postmodernism. Not solely, as the theoretical frame has shown that biofictions are inherently Postmodern in nature because of their “collapse of the distinction between fact and fiction” (Lackey qtd. in Layne 79). In Postmodernism this collapse is understood in the sense that at the same time nothing and everything is real, everything is “surface without depth” (Barry 86). The

situation of the “hyperreal” (Barry 86) in contemporary neo-Victorian biofiction, however, is a signifier of a change in contemporary society and conveys that the meaning or interpretation of the text goes beyond the text itself and therefore beyond a Postmodern interpretation into the Metamodern.

By means of a critical analysis of three novels, this thesis aims to show that contemporary neo-Victorian biofictions are Metamodern because 1) they move on from a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal because it conveys meaning beyond the text itself, 2) a Metamodern oscillation takes place between Modernism and Postmodernism within the writing techniques and/or the ethics in the novel, and 3) the novels convey other Metamodern features as are listed above.

CHAPTER 1 – BECOMING JANE EYRE

The novel *Becoming Jane Eyre* (2009) by Sheila Kohler tells the story of Charlotte Brontë, the author of the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), and of her family. Divided into three sections, *Becoming Jane Eyre* opens with Charlotte and her father in the year 1846. Her father has just undergone eye surgery and is now recovering, which means that Charlotte is constantly in his presence, attempting to take care of him on an emotional rather than practical level. Since her father is mostly resting, Charlotte takes advantage of the peace and quiet to write her novel *Jane Eyre*. Meanwhile, the reader of *Becoming Jane Eyre* is made aware of the similarities between Charlotte's life and that of the fictive Jane, such as the existence of a deadly ill sister, starting out as a teacher before becoming a governess, and the folklore tale of a madwoman. These similarities are often referred to directly, when Charlotte has a recollection of a memory and then decides to incorporate her personal experience in her own novel.

The next section of *Becoming Jane Eyre* is set during 1846-1848. Charlotte and her father have returned to their home in Haworth, where Charlotte's sisters and brother also reside. Ever since her return from Manchester, Charlotte is suffering from a writer's block. In their struggle of caring for their drug and alcohol addicted brother, it becomes clear that each of the Brontë sisters has a very different personality. Charlotte thinks of herself as innocent and pure, whereas her sisters see her as frightened of truly living life, which in turn makes her often envious of others. Emily, the youngest, is the bravest of the three, and Charlotte thinks that her writing is the worst. Finally there is Anne, who most resembles a domestic angel of the house. The three sisters have often sent out their bundled manuscripts under male pseudonyms, hoping to get them published, but to no avail. After waiting for years, one of the publishing bureaus wants to take on their project. It turns out that he is only interested in publishing Emily's narrative, and not in the work of the other two sisters. A while later, Anne also receives news that her novel will be published. However, both sisters first have to make alterations to their novels, which means that Charlotte is able to submit her *Jane Eyre* to a publisher before the final novels of her sisters can be published. *Jane Eyre* is an instant favourite with the public, causing further rivalry between the sisters.

The third and final section of *Becoming Jane Eyre* is set in London, from 1848 until 1853. Charlotte and Emily undertake a trip to London in order to confront their publisher with Charlotte's gender and convince him that she is the author of *Jane Eyre*, because there has been some confusion in readers and critics as to which work belongs to which author. Charlotte says that she wants to make clear that she is the one and only author of *Jane Eyre*, but Emily thinks

that Charlotte does not want her name associated with the works of her sisters. The publisher is intrigued by Charlotte and believes her instantly. This is how her life as a celebrity accelerates significantly. The epilogue briefly narrates how a couple of years later, Emily and Anne have passed away and Charlotte marries her lifelong friend Arthur Bell Nicholls. Nine months later, Charlotte also passes away due to complications from her pregnancy. Her father is now living alone, having outlived his wife and all of his children.

This chapter will discuss the Metamodern features of *Becoming Jane Eyre*. First, the Modern and Postmodern elements of the novel will be discussed in order to determine a Metamodern oscillation between the two cultural logics. Then, a critical interpretation of the distinction between fact and fiction, or, the hyperreal, will determine whether this can be explained as a characteristic of the Postmodern or of the Metamodern. Finally, any remaining Metamodern elements in the novel will be discussed.

1 An Oscillation Between Modernism and Postmodernism

According to Vermeulen and Van den Akker Metamodernism contains an oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism (2). What they do not refer to is their interpretation of the word oscillation, nor the way in which this oscillation would present itself in literary fiction. This research has interpreted the oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism as the possibility of a work of art, in this case, fiction, to contain elements of both cultural logics and to portray a movement between the two. It is this movement between both logics that may create a tension, which underscores Metamodern analysis. In order to research this oscillation between the two cultural logics, section 1.1 and 1.2 will illustrate the Modernist and Postmodernist characteristics of *Becoming Jane Eyre*. Section 1.3 of this chapter offers a critical interpretation of those characteristics in the light of Metamodernism and the possible oscillation between the two cultural logics.

1.1 Modernism in Becoming Jane Eyre

As mentioned in the introduction section of this thesis, the novels that are studied here are scrutinised for elements of Modernism as well as Postmodernism in terms of narrative style or technique and in terms of ethics. The Modernist characteristics are: “A new emphasis on

impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on *how* we see rather than *what* we see”, which leads to Modernist writing techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue (Barry 79, original italics), a movement away from “omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions” (Barry 79), experimentation and/or innovation (Barry 79), and nostalgia (Barry 80). Interestingly, all of these Modernist characteristics are present in *Becoming Jane Eyre*. Since James and Seshagiri argue that a contemporary engagement with Modernist stylistics is already indicative of Metamodernism, which they interpret as a return to Modernism (88), the fact that all of the Modernist features that are listed in this thesis are present in *Becoming Jane Eyre* proves that the novel can be read in light of this new cultural logic. In the following paragraphs these Modernist characteristics will be discussed from most to least occurring throughout the novel.

The most frequent of the Modernist elements that are listed above in *Becoming Jane Eyre* is that of the subconscious or interior monologue. In fact, the subconscious and interior monologue are the basis that make up the entire novel. Each chapter has its own focalisation, which usually is from Charlotte’s point of view. Although the narrative is written in the third person, the focalisation also contains interior thought such as memories and emotions. During the first part of the novel, the focalisation lies mainly with Charlotte. Out of fourteen chapters, only three chapters have a different focalisation. Two of those chapters are written from the perspective of Charlotte’s father, the other is written from their nurse’s point of view. The other chapters show some alternation in focalisation between intermittent paragraphs, yet each chapter focusses predominantly on Charlotte’s thought processes. The second part of the novel, in which Charlotte and her father have moved back to Haworth, shows more variation in terms of focalisation. Although Charlotte still carries most of the focalisation with five out of twelve chapters being written from her point of view, a shift towards the interior monologue of her sisters sheds a different light on the narrative. Anne Brontë is the focalisation of two of the chapters, Emily Brontë of three, one chapter is written from the viewpoint of a servant, and one of these chapters is written from the perspective of all three of the sisters. The final part of the novel is more similar to the first, in which Charlotte carries most of the focalisation. However, in this part the focalisation changes more rapidly within each chapter, which makes it difficult to determine one focalisation per chapter. Along with Charlotte, Mrs. Smith and Charlotte’s father also carry some of the focalisation.

Since the form of the narrative is almost entirely made up of interior monologue, examples can be found on nearly every page. Several of these monologues provide an explanation of Charlotte’s motivation to write about Jane in the first place, or they make up an

argument for Kohler's linking of the lives of Charlotte Brontë and that of the fictional Jane Eyre. When Charlotte thinks that "Writing is her way out of this room, this cell of solitude, darkness and despair" (35), Kohler has interpreted or imagined a possible reason for Charlotte's intrinsic motivation to write. Another example on page 64:

She would like to reach other women, large numbers of them. She would like to entertain, to startle, to give voice to what they hold in secret to their hearts, to allow them to feel they are part of a larger community of sufferers. She would like to show them all that a woman feels: the boredom of a life confined to tedious domestic tasks.

When describing the relationship between Jane Eyre and her employer Mr. Fairfax, Charlotte deliberately compares it to her own relationship with her old schoolmaster: "Thus she describes Jane's first meeting with her Master at Thornfield, Mr. Rochester. She has her walk with him in the garden, as she has done with Monsieur H. She lets her speak up, as Charlotte has not dared to" (97). These two types of interior monologue enable the novel to portray an interpretation of Charlotte Brontë and form the basis of a reasoning as to why Charlotte wrote the novel that she did.

There is one other type of interior monologue present in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, which cannot be attributed to Charlotte alone. This type of direct interior monologue is highlighted by Kohler in italics, and portrays a direct reflection by the character on the situation that he or she is in. In the one chapter where all sisters share the focalisation, Charlotte is the one to have one of these thoughts. From the previous paragraph in the novel it has become clear that she is upset her sisters would publish their works without attempting to convince the publisher to print Charlotte's work also. Charlotte hopes her sisters will realise this on their own, and therefore attempts to be kind and generous: "But she goes on dutifully, attempting to be sensible and, above all, fair. 'You cannot give up on an opportunity of this kind. Your book could be expanded, and might even be improved, as the publishers suggest.' *Dear God, don't let them leave me out!*" (144, original italics). Another example when Mrs. Smith is entertaining Charlotte and Emily in London, without having any information as to who they are and why her son is spending so much energy on them:

Surely this must be a business arrangement. In matters of business, Mrs. Smith has entire confidence in her enterprising son, young as he is. He has always been her favorite, she thinks, turning back a smile at him in the shadows behind her and to squeeze his hand and raise her eyebrows with a glance of complexity. *You see how good I'm being, making polite conversation with these two poor women, all for you, my dear.* (210, original italics)

These types of interior insights allow for Kohler to develop more well-rounded characters by showing they have individual and distinguishable intrinsic motivation. The effect the interior monologue here, is that it further engages the reader, because they get to know the characters better than if they were presented merely with third person narrative.

These examples of interior monologue that are presented in italics are also the only instance of experimentation or innovation that the novel conveys. Although there is some alteration in the chronology of the narrative and the chapters contain fragmented interpretations and shifts in focalisation, aspects that were indeed modern and original once, these alternatives in form and structure can hardly be called innovative nowadays. Using italics within a narrative to convey internal thoughts is not unprecedented, yet it can also not be called common or mainstream. Therefore, these instances of interruption of the narrative with interior monologue are interpreted as the experimental feature of this novel.

Interestingly, since each focalisation is personal and contains individual monologue, and especially since the first part of the novel is for the most part conveyed through one point of view, the reader is automatically convinced that the narrator is trustworthy. It is not until the second part of the novel that the focalisation and interior monologue presented by Charlotte's sisters that the reader becomes aware that there are different sides to Charlotte's interpretation of events, and that perhaps she was not such a trustworthy narrator after all. Clearly, there is a movement away from "omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions" (Barry 79), since multiple characters are presented with the focalisation and the reader is given insight into their personal and intrinsic behaviour. The move away from clear-cut moral positions also becomes clear from the differences in focalisation, since in one chapter Charlotte may have related to a certain occasion in one way, when in a later chapter her sister will reveal that she has interpreted it in a rather different manner. Each of the individuals that carries focalisation tells the truth as they see it, and are therefore trustworthy in terms of their personal experience which is as truthful as they know it. On a grander level, however,

these dissimilarities in experience can also be interpreted as that none of the individuals can be trusted completely. Or, these co-existing yet contesting truths imply that there is no such thing as absolute truth at all.

Finally, there is also the Modernist characteristic of nostalgia. Throughout the novel this is represented by Charlotte's father, who has a grim disposition and is set in his ways. He does not do well with change and is rather conservative. This outlook on life also presents itself in the way he lives his life according to his Catholic faith. This becomes clear when Charlotte tells him about the success she has had with her novel *Jane Eyre*:

‘Printed!’ he exclaims, appalled, putting down his magnifying glass. Now, he suspects, the girl has lost her mind, too. He had had such dreams once. But he has faced reality, curtailed his efforts. He has not tried to publish or even write anything for years apart from his letters, his weekly sermons – and even those are often composed on the spot. (...) What is this mania for fame and glory in this family? Why can they not, as good Christian women, accept their poverty, their insignificance, as their mother did? What folly! (188)

Clearly, the Brontë patriarch has accepted that there is no reason to dream, no hope for a future other than is realistically your own. He is nostalgic for a past in which women knew their place in society, and in which the times were generally simpler because he did not have to make an effort to understand the troubles of his daughters.

As will be shown in the next section of this thesis that concerns itself with Postmodern features in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, not all characters in this novel have such a grim perspective of life. However, overall, this is the structure of feeling that is represented throughout the novel. This becomes clear from the way in which the narrative is structured around certain tragedies. When a Brontë family member dies, the remaining characters are not shown to have any type of emotion, not even grief. Their deaths are dealt with in a stoic manner, not just by the other characters but by the author, too, in that Kohler merely quickly presents those occurrences as facts. Even when main protagonist Charlotte passes away, it takes up just one sentence and there is no indication that this has any emotional impact. In these moments it is the lack of emotion that signals an overwhelming presence of it, which conveys that a nostalgia to a happier time is so covertly present that it becomes overt.

1.2 *Postmodernism in Becoming Jane Eyre*

The Postmodern elements that the novels in this research are scrutinised for, are: fragmentation (Barry 81), a distrust and/or deconstruction of authoritative grand narratives (Barry 83), and a hyperreality where the distinction between fact and fiction is uncertain, which may lead to an unrealistic plot or unreliable narrator (Barry 84-86). Again, these characteristics are all present in the novel and will be discussed in order from most to least often occurring throughout the novel.

The Postmodernist element that recurs most often in this novel is that of fragmentation. As a whole, the novel follows a clear chronology. This is established by the three different parts of the novel, all of which are labelled as a certain time period where the next part directly follows the previous. However, there are many instances of fragmentation in the narrative. First of all, almost each chapter is fragmented because of shifts in the point of focalisation. These shifts are indicated by a white space between the paragraphs which in the middle contains a small branch with five leaves. The text itself does not necessarily make it clear whether there has been a shift in focalisation, but it does become clear rather quickly by for example a change of gender in the pronouns that are used. Furthermore, since the narrative is written in the third person, within a couple of sentences the bearer of the new focal point will present themselves by sentences that indicate a personal characteristic such as a name or function. An example can be found on page 106, where the previous paragraph has been written from Charlotte's point of view and the next paragraph opens with "The servant nods and smiles approvingly at these three young women she thinks of as her bairns." The reader is immediately made aware of the servant's inner thought process and therefore of the shift in point of view and possibly also of the shift in time, as the following paragraph will illustrate.

A few times these breaks between paragraphs do not instigate a shift in focalisation, but rather a shift in reality or in chronology. Since the protagonist is writing a novel and fragments of her writing are included between such paragraph breaks, sometimes it is difficult to identify the situation immediately. On page 81, for example, there are two paragraph breaks. The first section is told from Charlotte's point of view. In the second, it only becomes clear in the sixth sentence that this section is about the fictional Jane Eyre. The third, without introduction, is back in the current narrative with Charlotte and her father. At other moments, these breaks allow for a distortion in chronology because of the recollection of a memory. The opening of chapter 12, for example:

Since she was sent away to school as a young child, she has often been homesick. It comes to her now, alone with her father in the dark, that old feeling of abandonment, the longing for home, for a mother she has never really known, for her dead older sisters, for her brother as he was as a boy, for the closeness of her family as she once knew it. She remembers how she went out into the world to earn her bread for her brilliant brother, so that he could go up to London to become a painter. It was all so much harder than she could have imagined.

Her tooth aches and when she bends her head lower to her page, it is worse. Yet she realizes that she wants only these calm, autumn days in this strange city, days of uninterrupted work in these small, shuttered rooms. (79)

Throughout the narrative, the white paragraph breaks with the small illustration of a branch are used most often to enable a transition between reality and memory. Since usually there is no clear indication as to when or why such a transition takes place, and there is no clear structure per chapter, the reader may experience the narrative as fragmented.

The previous section on Modernism in *Becoming Jane Eyre* touched briefly upon the implication that shifts in focalisation might lead to the realisation that none of the protagonists are trustworthy. There are some moments in the novel where this appears to be the case. One of these moments is related to the publishing history of the Brontë sisters. In chapter 17 Emily reveals that “It was out of pity for Charlotte, a fear that she might make herself ill after suffering for two years from unrequited love, that she had agreed to publish her poems prematurely. Still, Emily cannot forgive her for exposing her most secret experiences to the public” (118). In chapter 20, however, when Charlotte is devastated that her sisters would publish their novels without taking her feelings into consideration, she is angry because “without her they would never have seen their poems published or received the encouraging reviews” (145). From Emily’s points of view, Charlotte is the desolate sister, who she has attempted to comfort by doing something she wanted. Emily clearly takes the moral high ground. However, in Charlotte’s version of the same circumstances, it was she who was able to help her sister achieve the goal of publishing her poetry. This makes Charlotte the more overtly morally persuaded character. These contradictions make it difficult for the reader to discern who is the truthful narrator, if there is any. On a micro-level, this is an example of the way in which the novel blends facts with fiction by presenting narrative facts from different points of view. This renders those narrative facts as fictitious, since their interpretation clearly depends on personal

experience. On a macro-level, the novel is an example of this form of hyperreality in terms of its genre, namely biofiction. This will be discussed further under section 2 of this chapter.

The Postmodernist aspect that remains is the deconstruction of authoritative or grand narratives. This too is detectable in the novel, albeit in terms of theme rather than writing technique. All throughout the novel, Charlotte is under oppression from her father in terms of her behaviour and of her career (as is also illustrated by the fragment in section 1.1, where Charlotte's father's conservative nature is explained as a form of nostalgia). The fact that she is eventually able to break free from this her father's authority shows that she is deconstructing the grand narrative that is patriarchy. And successfully so, since she becomes a famous female author and is still able to live a happy life. Since her father is also shown to be conservative in terms of religion and Charlotte is not, this can also be considered as one of the grand narratives that the novel is distrusting of. After all, her Catholic father becomes so desperately ill that he needs a constant companion by his side, whereas the other characters, who are not overtly portrayed as Catholic, appear to live more happy lives. Then again, the final chapter reveals that the father outlives all his children, so perhaps this grand narrative was able to redeem itself in the end.

1.3 *A Metamodern Oscillation*

Clearly, *Becoming Jane Eyre* contains many key elements of both Modernism and Postmodernism, signifying that it is indeed a blend of the two cultural logics. Van den Akker et al. point out, Metamodernism is in essence a structure of feeling that contains characteristics not just of Modernism, but of Postmodernism and other cultural logics, too (47). This novel strongly conveys aspects of both Modernism and Postmodernism, and can therefore be categorised as Metamodern.

The oscillation that takes place between these two cultural logics, an oscillation which in this thesis is understood as a movement hence and forth between Modernism and Postmodernism, is present in the focalisation of the novel. This focalisation provides the reader with an insight into the characters' mind, which often conveys an intrinsic motivation for particular behaviour or expresses a certain belief system. Since interior monologue is listed as one of the main characteristics of Modernism by Peter Barry, this feature in the novel was read against that particular cultural logic. However, the focalisation did not stay with one character. Instead, it shifted between several characters throughout the narrative and sometimes even mid-

chapter and without introduction, which caused fragmentation in narrative and temporal space. Again, according to Peter Barry, such a fragmentation is a distinctive Postmodern feature, and therefore the focalisation in the novel was also read against that cultural logic. The quite literal oscillation of focalisation between the characters indirectly caused an oscillation between the Modernist aim to portray individual experience through interior monologue and a Postmodern distortion of time and reality.

2 An Interpretation of the Hyperreal

In Postmodernism, the hyperreal is understood as an obscuring of the border between what is real and what is simulated, which ultimately leads to a replacement of the real by the hyperreal where everything is a simulation (Barry 86). This obscuring also happens in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, a novel that reads more like a biography than a work of fiction. In the Acknowledgement that is provided in the novel, Kohler states that she was heavily influenced by biographies about the Brontë sisters and has tried not to deviate from the well-known factual truth in the production of her narrative (233-237). However, she also makes it clear that her aim was not to provide another biography about Charlotte Brontë. Indeed, on the contrary; the novel's dust flap opens with the words "A beautifully imagined tale of the Brontë sisters and the writing of *Jane Eyre*." The novel itself, then, makes it quite clear that the pages to follow convey an interpretation of a life that lies beyond the possibilities of human memory, and that therefore the entire narrative is an undetectable blend of fiction and non-fiction, a clear example of the hyperreal.

However, the novel is not just a biofiction. Because of its main protagonist and setting, it can also be categorised as a neo-Victorian novel. As the theoretical frame has shown, one of the main characteristics of this genre is that it not only relates to the Victorian period, but also shows a strong connection to the contemporary day and age (Palmer 2009, Amigoni). The main theme of *Becoming Jane Eyre* is that of female empowerment, a topic that is indeed still relevant today. The Charlotte Brontë in the novel is oppressed by two male characters. From the very first chapter it becomes clear that her father does not approve of her writing nor of her search for stardom, and it takes Charlotte a while to realise that her father does not really have power over her anymore since he has fallen ill. Then, when she has finally been able to publish her novel *Jane Eyre*, she had to do so under a male pseudonym and actually had to convince her publisher that it was she who authored the novel. Both attempts of breaking free from the

established patriarchy prove to be successful, yet neither of them was easy. Watching Charlotte's struggle for female empowerment forces the reader to think critically about their own society and its attitude towards women. Although these issues are very different today from what they were in Victorian society, it is not hard to see that there is still an active feminist movement in the year 2020. In a country such as The Netherlands, where, for example, women on average still earn fourteen percent less per hour than men in the same position, it is clear that gender-equality has not yet been attained (CBS). *Becoming Jane Eyre* is a reminder that women were treated unfairly in Victorian society, and because of that reminder some of the issues that are present in contemporary society become more evident to the reader today.

What this novel accomplishes, is to encourage the reader to actively interpret its narrative as a mirror for contemporary society. By doing so, the text is going beyond the narrative itself. In a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal that is not a possibility, because everything is a model or an image and therefore the text cannot convey anything other than the text itself. Since the hyperreal in *Becoming Jane Eyre* is able to do so nonetheless, is an indication that in this case the biofictional genre can be read against a different cultural logic than Postmodernism alone.

3 Metamodernist Characteristics

The previous sections have shown that *Becoming Jane Eyre* can be read as Metamodern because of its strong affiliation with Modernism (James and Seshagiri), because of its oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van den Akker), and because of the move away from Postmodernism in terms of the interpretation of the hyperreal (James and Seshagiri). In terms of other Metamodernist characteristics, there are two remaining features of the cultural logic provided in the theoretical frame. The first one is the combination of Postmodern writing techniques with an alternative set of ethics (Bentley et al. 17), and the second one is the pursuit a goal that can never be achieved (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 8).

The first of these features is that of combining Modernist elements with a different set of ethics. Since the novel encourages the reader to critically evaluate their contemporary society, it could be argued that it uses Modernist techniques and stimulates a different set of ethics at the same time. This argument however is rather poor and is in dire need of concrete examples from the narrative, which the novel cannot provide. The real combination of the two cultural logics is apparent in how the novel is able to deconstruct certain grand narratives, such

as the patriarchal society, whilst using Modernist narrative techniques such as interior monologue and a move away from clear-cut moral positions. The opposite of what Bentley et al. claim to be present in Metamodern fiction is displayed in *Becoming Jane Eyre*; instead of a novel that contains Postmodern writing techniques and a different set of ethics, the novel contains Modern *and* Postmodern writing techniques and includes Postmodern ethics, rather than a different set of ethics.

The second Metamodern feature, the pursuit of a goal that can never be achieved, is not present in the novel in terms of its characters or narrative. After a significant struggle, Charlotte is not only able to publish her book, she is even able to do so under her own name and eventually is even happy in marriage. Clearly, all her personal goals are achieved. The narrative, too, is concluded with Charlotte's death and the direct aftermath thereof, completing the plot in which Charlotte became a version of her fictive character. However, that does not imply that this Metamodern pursuit is not present in the novel. As Kohler has stated in the interview that is provided at the end of her book, her inspiration for writing *Becoming Jane Eyre* was inspired by the "shortcomings of history", after she had read a biography about Charlotte Brontë in which the biography's author mentioned that "what happened as she sat with Papa in that darkened room in Boundary Streets remains in shadow" (Gordon qtd. in Kohler, 5). Her novel is an attempt at answering that question, an attempt at filling in the gaps that exist in historical knowledge of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters. It could be argued that what Kohler is looking for is an answer that can never be examined or confirmed, since these particular parts of history are permanently lost. This means that her journey of eliminating history's shortcomings is one that can never truly be fulfilled, because it will always remain an attempt that cannot be rewarded with the acknowledgment of historical accuracy.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that *Becoming Jane Eyre* is Metamodern in many different ways. First of all, it contains several Modernist elements, which according to James and Seshagiri is a clear indication of contemporary Metamodernism. Secondly, the novel also contains Postmodern elements, a sign that the novel is influenced by more than one cultural logic. This is considered Metamodern by several academics (Bentley et al., Bertens, Vermeulen and Van den Akker). *Becoming Jane Eyre* also conveys the Metamodern oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism that is argued by Vermeulen and Van den Akker as well as Regina Schober to

be a main characteristic of Metamodernism, and the novel does so in terms of its focalisation. Furthermore, the themes of the novel illustrate that the hyperreality that is inherently present in the biofictional genre can be analysed in a different way that goes beyond the Postmodern interpretation of a text. Moving beyond Postmodernism to a new cultural logic is also recognised as one of the indications that Metamodernism has established itself (James and Seshagiri). Finally, the Metamodern characteristic of the pursuit a goal that can never be achieved is also present in the novel (Vermeulen and Van den Akker). This final feature is provided by the author herself in her motivation for writing the novel, a motivation which can quite literally be interpreted as the pursuit of a goal that cannot be achieved.

CHAPTER 2 – THE MASTER

Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004) narrates the life of Victorian author Henry James from January 1895 until October 1899. The novel contains eleven chapters and each chapter describes just one month of the (roughly) five-year period, which is indicated by the chapters' titles. However, since all chapters are filled with both the present and with James' recollections of his life prior to the year 1895, and because no further temporal indications are provided throughout the narrative, the book appears to relate more than just what has occurred in those few months and it becomes difficult to ascertain the exact amount of time that each chapter discusses.

When the novel opens, James is anxious that his new play will become a complete disaster. On the opening night of his play, James decides to visit a play by Oscar Wilde and dislikes everything about it. A month later, when his play has been met with mixed reviews, James is concerned about his popularity. Not out of vanity, but because he wants his fiction to sell. He travels to Ireland, where he stays with his friend Lady Wolseley and is her guest at many parties. During his stay he is assisted by Hammond, who he both likes and dislikes, and it is vaguely suggested to the reader that they might be homosexual. During one of Lady Wolseley's parties there is a beautiful young female who is the star of the evening, which inspires James but at the same time makes him miss his American friends and relatives and underscores his feeling of exile in this country. During the following month James has many memories about his childhood and his sister Alice in particular. He also remembers how a certain Ms. Katherine Loring cared for her until her untimely death. During the following month, James and his friends are obsessed with the Oscar Wilde trial for unspecified reasons. They discuss the trial and Wilde's defence at length, and at one point it is suggested by one of his friends that James is homosexual, too, but James dismisses the question entirely before it is even properly asked.

The next chapter of the novel is set a year later, in May 1896. James has many memories of his family, his father in particular, and of his travels and his friend Minny. During one of these travels, James and his guest Oliver Wendell Holmes spend a night together in bed, fully naked. As far as the reader is aware nothing else has occurred, yet the scene brims with sexual tension. The chapter ends when Holmes visits James in his home in Rye and accuses him of speeding up Minny's death by not being a good friend to her.

The following chapter takes place in February 1897. James now has the need for a stenographer in order to keep writing his fiction. He decides to buy a new house and Lady

Wolseley helps him furnish it. The narration then skips forward to April 1898 and consists of memories about James' brother William, who appears to be James' opposite in every possible way. The following June, James has moved into his new house, which is called Lamb House, and hires two servants called Mr. and Mrs. Smith. The longer he works with them, the more he becomes concerned that they are drunks, yet he does not relieve them of their service until they embarrass him in front of a guest. Lady Norton has come to visit him and when she leaves James realises that he feels safe and protected in his new home.

The novel again skips forward quite a bit, to March 1899, when James travels to Venice in order to come to terms with his best friend Constance's death, whilst recollecting their time together in England and Italy. He meets Minny's friends in Venice, as well as Constance's family. He becomes the one to clear out her apartment, which means that he has to sort through all her personal items. He eventually decides to bury all her clothes at sea and to hide some of her personal letters from her family. Two months later James is in Rome and meets a young sculptor called Hendrik Andersen, who he befriends. They then spend every day together. James invites Andersen to stay with him in Rye for a bit, and while he waits for Andersen's arrival it becomes clear to the reader that James is probably in love with him.

In the final chapter, which describes October 1899, James' ill brother William and his wife Alice visit him in Rye. Alice suggests that James' sister Alice and her friend Ms. Loring were in a romantic relationship, which makes James think about his "special bond" with his friend Minny and the "one big secret" that bound them together. To the reader, then, it is finally confirmed that James is indeed homosexual. James has many other visitors that month, and he is at peace again when they all leave.

The following part of this thesis will discuss the Metamodern features of *The Master*. First, the Modern and Postmodern elements of the novel will be discussed in order to determine a Metamodern oscillation between the two cultural logics. Then, a critical interpretation of the distinction between fact and fiction, or, the hyperreal, will determine whether this can be explained as a characteristic of the Postmodern or of the Metamodern. Finally, any remaining Metamodern elements in the novel will be discussed.

1 An Oscillation Between Modernism and Postmodernism

As the previous chapter demonstrated, this thesis aims to show the ways in which contemporary biofiction can be interpreted as Metamodern. Part of the argumentation is the presence of an

oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism, either in writing technique or in terms of ethics. The following sub-chapters will therefore illustrate the Modern and Postmodern characteristics of the novel, which will then be studied as an oscillation between the two cultural logics in section 1.3 of this chapter.

1.1 *Modernism in The Master*

As mentioned earlier, the Modern features that the novels in this research are scrutinised for, are: “A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on *how* we see rather than *what* we see”, which leads to Modernist writing techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue (Barry 79, original italics), a movement away from “omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions” (Barry 79), experimentation and/or innovation (Barry 79), and nostalgia (Barry 80). Interestingly, not all of these Modernist characteristics are present in *The Master*, so this novel is already different from *Becoming Jane Eyre*. What was lacking in the novel is the Modernist experimentation or innovation. In the following paragraphs the Modernist characteristics that are present in the novel will be discussed from most to least occurring throughout the novel.

Again, the Modernist feature that is present most frequently is that of the subconscious or interior monologue. Just as is the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, the narration takes place in the third person and it is because of the glimpses into the subconscious that the reader will come to know the main character more intimately than the other characters. In contrast to Charlotte Brontë, however, Henry James appears much less emotional and more secretive. Instances of interior monologue or a glimpse into the subconscious are therefore harder to detect, and the scarcity thereof creates distance between the reader and the character of Henry James. Whenever those moments do occur, they provide an insight into James’ emotional state of being. An example on page 40: “He was disturbed by the idea that he longed, now more than ever before, in this strange house in this strange country, for someone to hold him, not speak or move even, but to embrace him, stay with him. He needed that now, and making himself say it brought the need closer, made it more urgent and more impossible.” Another example just a few pages later: “For the first time in years, he felt the deep sadness of exile, knowing that he was alone here, an outsider, and too alert to the ironies, the niceties, the manners and, indeed, the morals to be able to participate” (47). It is in those moments that the reader may think that they can understand James. However, as has been mentioned earlier, James is a secretive

character that borders on the uncommunicative, which makes it harder for the reader to establish a connection with his character and to truly understand him. In most cases, the interior monologue explains to the reader that James is an anxious and nervous creature, desperately looking for some “continuity and certainty” (131).

At other times, the interior monologue provides a motivation or argumentation for the existence of James’ fiction. On page 67 for example, when it is described how James finds inspiration for his novels:

Often, ideas came like this, casually, without warning; often, they occurred to him at moments when he was busy with other things. This new idea for a story about a brother and sister developed with a sort of urgency, as something that he barely needed to write down. He would not forget it. It stayed fresh and clear in his imagination. Slowly and mysteriously, it began to fuse with the ghost story told to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and slowly he began to see something fixed and exact as though the processes of imagination themselves were as a ghost, becoming more and more corporeal. (...) Once it became more solid, the emerging story and all its ramifications and possibilities lifted him out of the gloom of his failure. (67-68)

This section reveals an external motivation for creating this particular work of fiction, namely the idea of a brother and sister that merges with a story that was once related to him, as well as an internal motivation where producing a new narrative to James is a source of hope and good spirits. It is not common for the interior monologue in this novel to take up more than half a page, as is the case for the excerpt above. Usually, the glimpse into James’ psyche will be precisely that: a brief moment where he has a certain feeling, after which he returns to a more factual thought process. In chapter six, for example, he describes at length his youth with his sister Alice, the way that she rebelled against their aunt Kate and was funny and respectful to others, and then briefly mentions that he has incorporated this entire setting into his new novel. After a brief and factual overview of the particular situations that he will copy from their life, there is a small hint at James’ sentiment: “This was the world he made for Miles and Flora, his two innocent and beautiful and abandoned children. (...) and the years he was now facing in an old house to which he would soon go, like his governess, full of hope, but full also of a foreboding which he could not erase” (152-153). By writing his own history into his novel he not only processes a trauma from his own youth, but also comes to terms with his emotional state of being at the time of writing.

These glimpses into James' psyche create a relationship of trust between him and the reader. On the whole, James proves himself to be a trustworthy character who does not provide the reader with false information. At times, however, the novel consciously withholds information from the reader. It is already on the first couple of pages of the novel that the reader is confronted with the absence of context or details, when James receives a visitor. On the fourth page of the novel it is described that his visitor is a female who will visit London for the last time and who has been married to a Russian prince. On the fifth page the reader still knows nothing of her appearance or her relationship to James, but does find out that she spent most of her time in France. It is only until she herself mentions at the bottom of the page that " 'At my age,' she smiled at him, 'nothing is comfortable'," that the reader discovers the visitor is actually an elderly lady (5). Throughout the novel, her name is not mentioned a single time, and her relationship to James remains a mystery. Where a regular narrator would introduce a new character by describing their outward features and provide the reader with a context as to why this character is present in the narrative, the narrator in *The Master* does the opposite. It is only when James' memory is triggered by the arrival of a new character that the reader is provided with some background or context, which at that point in the narrative may or may not even be relevant to the reader.

The lack of information does mean that there is a move away from external and omniscient narration, as well as clear-cut moral positions. This also becomes clear in the issue with James' sexuality, which is dismissed rather briskly at the beginning of the novel, yet proves to be true after all on the very last pages. The reader is taken along on James' journey of self-discovery, which on the one hand is frustrating because the reader may already be convinced of his homosexuality when James is still in denial. On the other hand, this oscillation between acceptance and denial can be seen as a truthful representation when it comes to human experience of self-contemplation. Overall, then, the narrator is a trustworthy individual, and the narration is focused on individual experience.

The nostalgia in the novel becomes clear from the structure of the narrative. As mentioned earlier the actual amount of time that is conveyed in the novel as a whole is unclear, because although each chapter is headed by a temporal indication, the vast amount of memories make it difficult to ascertain what event is taking place at the time of narration and what event occurred at a different time. This is complicated further by the lack of references to dates or other indications of time, leaving it up to the reader to connect certain elements by the description of an environment or the characters that are present. Although the novel technically tells James' life from 1885 until 1899, the actual narrative time takes up several decades and

goes all the way back to James' childhood. Since the novel contains more memories and recollections than narrated time in the present that it conveys, i.e. 1885-1899, it becomes clear that the protagonist is driven by a nostalgia for his past. An example of this nostalgia can be found in the way in which the novel approaches the death of James' dearest friends: his sister Alice and his best friend and cousin Minny. James thinks of them fondly, but his memories are "darkening" in the sense that they make him feel gloomy (224). Furthermore, lengthy descriptions of Minny's virtues after her death are in stark contrast to how James conducted himself whilst she was still alive: in chapter five it becomes clear that when she was alive he ignored her letters for quite a while and did not want to fulfil her greatest wish by accompanying her to Rome, but that after her death he cannot stop thinking about how intelligent and kind she was. By providing the reader with many related memories of their time together, it becomes clear that James is nostalgic for a happier time.

1.2 Postmodernism in *The Master*

The Postmodern elements that the novels in this research are scrutinised for, are: fragmentation (Barry 81), a distrust and/or deconstruction of authoritative grand narratives (Barry 83), and a hyperreality where the distinction between fact and fiction is uncertain, which may lead to an unrealistic plot or unreliable narrator (Barry 84-86). As was the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, these characteristics are all present in the novel, but one of them will not be mentioned in the following section because it has already been discussed in section 1.1 of this chapter, namely the influence of hyperreality on the reliability of the narrator. Since all instances of the unreliable narrator are a direct product of withholding information for the reader, as has been concluded in the previous section, this arguably only enhances the narrator's trustworthiness because it reflects a truthful human experience of self-discovery. Another influence of hyperreality can be that it causes an unrealistic plot. Throughout the narrative Tóibín stays close to factual events from the life of Henry James. This automatically leads to a plot that is, in essence, chronological and realistic. The other Postmodernist characteristics that are present in *The Master* will be discussed in the following section in order from most to least often occurring throughout the novel.

The most frequent Postmodernist feature is irrefutably that of fragmentation. Although the chapters may indicate a chronological order, the chapters themselves do not incorporate that same property. At the very beginning of the chapter it is already difficult for the reader to

determine in what year and in what location James finds himself in in his narration. As memories and reality intertwine, the reader might even understand part of the narrative as happening at present only to discover after a few pages that that is not the case. An example can be found in chapter nine, in which James travels to Venice. On page 226 there is a temporal indication which makes it clear that he is now travelling to the city for the first time in five years, and that during his last visit he had travelled there in order to sort out his deceased friend Constance's affairs. The remainder of the chapter is filled with flashbacks to his previous visit, but these are not introduced or distinguished from the present in any way. Therefore, it becomes difficult to determine what part of the narration belongs to which event. An example is found on page 238, when the beginning of a memory is signalled by the words "In January". The next section, which starts on the following page, begins with "In Venice." It continues to describe places that James visits and friends he made in the city. After one page, James suddenly misses Constance: "... he realized that even though his time at Bellosguardo had lasted a mere three weeks, he missed the companionship, he missed his life with Constance Fenimore Woolson. He missed the mixture of sharpness and reticence in her manners, the American life she carried with her so abundantly, the aura which her hours alone gave her," etcetera (240). The reader already knows that Constance has passed away, and therefore draws the conclusion that James is back in the present and wondering through the streets of Venice and mourns his friend. However, half a page later, James writes Constance a letter and "Constance replied immediately" (241). She is clearly alive and well, which leaves the indication of time open for interpretation.

Such ambiguity also exists in spatial cues. At the beginning of the fifth chapter, for example, James is struggling with a cramped hand and thinks back to visitors that he has received in the past. By stating that "[he] wished that London made his American guests express themselves as Howells did," it is insinuated that Henry is now in London (84). A couple of pages later however, a lengthy description about the nature in Rye suggests that Henry is there instead of in London. This idea is supported by the phrase "Before he left London, he had purchased the bicycle which now lay waiting for him in the lane that led to the beach" (87). The word "now" is a strong indicator of the present, and for the remaining pages of the chapter it has become clear that the present takes place in Rye. James' memories, however, still fluctuate between England, Geneva, America and Florence. Sometimes the beginning of a new paragraph will include a spatial or temporal cue, such as "In England" or "In the summer of 1865" but this remains an anomaly (resp. 94, 111).

When it comes to grand narratives, there are a few comments to be found in the novel. Minny, for example, has a discussion with Henry James senior when he points out that women are inferior to men, as was commonly believed at the time and was taught in Catholic society. Minny feels that just because men are physically stronger than women, it does not mean that they are superior in other aspects. The discussion becomes a scandal. Clearly, it was not Minny's place to question her role in society, and to fight against the grand authority that is the patriarchy. In this moment, James does not reveal a moral standpoint to the reader. This leaves the matter up to the reader to decide whether they agree with Minny or with James senior, and therefore whether they too distrust the grand narrative of the established patriarchy.

There are also two instances where James reflects on grand narratives himself. The first one takes place when James goes to visit a play by Oscar Wilde on the opening night of his own play. Of Wilde's play, James thinks:

[Henry] did not laugh once; he thought not a moment was funny, but more importantly, he thought not a moment was true. Every line, every scene was acted out as though silliness were a higher manifestation of truth. No opportunity was missed in portraying witlessness as wit; the obvious and shallow and glib provoked the audience into hearty and hilarious laughter. (16)

Clearly, James believes that the grand narrative and tradition that is the theatre should be respected by playwrights as well as the audience. It is for that reason that he cannot believe the ridiculousness of Wilde's play and its visitors, which do not conform to such an absolute truth and instead aim to ridicule it. The way in which James reflects on Wilde's play shows that he is rather conservative and trusting of grand narratives rather than wanting to deconstruct them. Another moment, further on in the novel in chapter ten, reveals that he has become aware of the deconstruction of grand narratives all around him, and that he is nostalgic for a time when they were still immaculate in his eyes. This becomes clear from the conversation he has with Andersen when they are taking a stroll at a cemetery. James states that he is envious of the dead, because "the state of not-knowing and not-feeling which belonged to the dead seemed to him closer to resolved happiness than he had ever imagined possible" (285). James apparently is now aware that there are no absolute truths, and knowing that has become one of the causes for his anxiety.

Interestingly, the narrative as a whole deconstructs a grand narrative, namely that of a heteronormative society. By suggesting that Henry James is homosexual, the narrative counters what is a commonly represented and a widely accepted fact about James' sexuality. *The Master*

is not unique in doing so, but critique on similar interpretations has exemplified how a heterosexual interpretation of James is the highly valued norm in studies about his life (Leavitt). Furthermore, heteronormativity in society, which is structurally intertwined with gender hierarchy, is an issue that finds its origin in collective history and is being addressed in contemporary culture where it is still being deconstructed today (Jackson 138).

1.3 *A Metamodern Oscillation*

This attitude towards grand narratives is very different from the one that has been shown to be present in *Becoming Jane Eyre*. In Kohler's novel there was a clear movement between Modernist and Postmodernist features in the quite literal oscillation between characters and their focalisation. In *The Master* it would seem that this oscillation is not as literal, if it is present at all. As the section above has shown, James is trusting on grand narratives in his daily life, which serve as his moral compass. At the end of the novel he is aware that such grand narratives are deconstructed all around him as society is changing, which makes him nostalgic for times when those authoritative structures were still in place. Throughout this research nostalgia is interpreted as a characteristic of Modernism, but a trust in grand narratives is not necessarily Modernist. Both Modernism and Postmodernism are aware that grand truths do not exist, but the respective attitude towards them is very different and in Postmodernism leads to a deconstruction of them (Barry 80). This deconstruction itself does not happen in the character of Henry James, just in his surroundings and his acceptance of that deconstruction as a mere fact. An actual oscillation between the two cultural logics appears not to take place.

When the narrative conveys a deconstruction of the grand narrative of patriarchy (when Minny not only goes against the patriarchal head of the family but also against his views of women in society as a whole), the novel does not reveal to the reader which character has the moral high ground. By doing so, the novel moves away from clear-cut moral positions, one of the features that is listed throughout this research as Modernist. This moment shows that this Postmodern deconstruction of a grand truth is narrated in a Modernist fashion. This is the exact opposite of what Bentley et al. argued when they stated that one of the ways in which Metamodernism is present in fiction is through Postmodernist narrative techniques with a different set of ethics, because what is shown here is a novel that contains Modernist as well as Postmodernist elements in terms of narrative techniques and combines that with a Postmodern set of ethics (17). As the previous chapter has shown, this is also the case in *Becoming Jane*

Eyre. The difference between the two novels is that in *The Master* there is no oscillation in terms of movement between the two cultural logics, because both are present at the same time.

2 An Interpretation of the Hyperreal

According to Peter Barry, the hyperreal in Postmodern theory is understood as an obscuring of the border between what is real and what is simulated, which ultimately leads to a replacement of the real by the hyperreal where everything is a simulation (84-86). This obscuring also takes place in *The Master*, although the novel in general appears to take historical facts less seriously than *Becoming Jane Eyre*. Like Kohler, Tóibín too states in the Acknowledgement of the novel that he was greatly inspired by several biographies about his protagonist. He does not provide as clear a motivation for the production of his writing as Kohler does, but from the novel itself it becomes clear that, again, like Kohler, Tóibín is attempting to answer the “shortcomings of history” (Gordon qtd. in Kohler, 5). The novel itself, like *Becoming Jane*, makes it quite clear that the pages to follow convey an interpretation of a life that lies beyond the possibilities of human memory, and that therefore the entire narrative is an undetectable blend of fiction and non-fiction, a clear example of the hyperreal.

The previous chapter made clear that in *Becoming Jane Eyre* hyperreality is present, but that it can be interpreted differently than is conventional in Postmodernism since the novel’s aim is to go beyond the text itself by providing a mirror for contemporary society. This is also a characteristic of the neo-Victorian genre, and is possible through the main theme of the novel, which is female empowerment. The main themes in *The Master* are more difficult to detect than in Kohler’s novel, since the narrative mostly offers an interpretation of James’ life concerning his relationships with friends, family, and romantic interests. But because the novel gives its reader insight into Henry James’ sexual orientation, a part of his life that is a mystery to the contemporary reader because there are limited sources that discuss the topic of James’ romantic relationships (Kersten 55), it addresses a topic that is still prevalent in contemporary society, namely gender relations and sexual orientation. As the critical reading previous in this chapter has illustrated, the Henry James as protagonist of the novel finds this topic difficult to process. At first, he dismisses the topic entirely, and it is not until the final chapters of the novel that the reader becomes aware that perhaps James has come to terms with his homosexuality, since by then he has attained a special relationship with the sculptor Andersen and is waiting impatiently for him to visit. In the final chapter, his sister in law Alice mentions that James’ sister was in a

lesbian relationship with her friend Ms. Loring, without batting an eyelid. How difficult the topic really is to discuss, becomes clear from the way in which it is not even mentioned when it is addressed directly:

‘You know, Harry, the maid at home would talk, and, indeed, Aunt Kate might not always knock on the bedroom door before entering, and I think that in England Miss Loring and Alice could have found the sort of happiness together that is not mentioned in the Bible. (...) Women, you know, are not above suspicion in these matters, or in any others,’ she continued. (326)

By addressing Alice James’ homosexuality, Henry’s sister in law is indirectly asking him the question of his own sexuality. James does not satisfy her with a response, but immediately thinks the special bond he had with his sister which reveals to the reader that he is indeed a homosexual, and ready to admit it to himself. As is discussed in section 1.1 of this chapter, the untrustworthiness of the narrator that comes with hyperreality is an example of personal growth and self-discovery and therefore becomes only more relatable to the reader. By doing so, the reader is invited to consider the experience of people in contemporary society that may struggle with their sexual orientation, an experience that may well be similar to the one of Henry James in *The Master*.

Like *Becoming Jane Eyre*, what this novel accomplishes, is to encourage the reader to actively interpret its narrative as a mirror for contemporary society. By doing so, the text is going beyond the narrative itself. In a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal that is not a possibility, because everything is a model or an image and therefore the text cannot convey anything other than the text itself. Since the situation of the hyperreal in *The Master* is able to do so nonetheless, it is an indication that here too the biofictional genre can be read against a different cultural logic than Postmodernism alone.

3 Metamodernist Characteristics

The previous sections have shown that *The Master* can be read as Metamodern because of its strong affiliation with Modernism (James and Seshagiri), and because of the move away from Postmodernism in terms of the interpretation of the hyperreal (James and Seshagiri). As opposed to Kohler’s novel, *The Master* does not convey an oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism. In terms of other Metamodernist characteristics, there are two remaining

features of the cultural logic provided in the theoretical frame. The first one is the combination of Postmodern writing techniques with an alternative set of ethics (Bentley et al. 17), which was discussed in section 1.3 of this chapter, and the second one is the pursuit a goal that can never be achieved (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 8).

As is the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, this pursuit is not present in the narrative itself. If it is James' goal to process his traumas from the past, he has become successful in the final chapter of the novel when he finds peace all alone in Lamb House. Like Kohler, it appears that Tóibín is attempting to fill in the gaps that exist in historical knowledge of his protagonist and his personal relationships. It could be argued that what Tóibín is looking for is an answer that can never be examined or confirmed, since these particular parts of history are permanently lost. This means that his journey of eliminating history's shortcomings is one that can never truly be fulfilled, because it will always remain an attempt that cannot be rewarded with the acknowledgment of historical accuracy.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that *The Master* can be read in the light of Metamodernism. First of all, the novel contains several Modernist elements, which according to James and Seshagiri is a clear indication of contemporary Metamodernism. Secondly, the novel also contains Postmodern elements, a sign that the novel is influenced by more than one cultural logic. This is considered Metamodern by several academics (Bentley et al., Bertens, Vermeulen and Van den Akker). Interestingly, *The Master* does not convey an oscillation between the two cultural logics as was the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*. However, the theme of the novel illustrates that the hyperreality that is inherently present in the biofictional genre can be analysed in a different way that goes beyond the Postmodern interpretation of a text. Moving beyond Postmodernism to a new cultural logic is also recognised as one of the indications that Metamodernism has established itself (James and Seshagiri). Finally, the Metamodern characteristic of the pursuit a goal that can never be achieved is also present in the novel (Vermeulen and Van den Akker). This final feature is provided by the author himself in his motivation for writing the novel, a motivation which can quite literally be interpreted as the pursuit of a goal that cannot be achieved.

CHAPTER 3 – OSCAR WILDE DISCOVERS AMERICA

Louis Edward's *Oscar Wilde discovers America* (2003) describes the lecture tour that Wilde dedicated himself to in the year 1882. The novel is split into two parts, and the first part tells the story of the entire tour in 1882. This first part is divided into four separate sections. In each section, the chapters' titles reveal a location of the narrative, which indicates a different city of the tour. There is one exception: the final chapter is just called "Traquair". The second part of the novel is set in 1936 and contains just one chapter without a title. Throughout the novel Wilde is a secondary character, since the role of the protagonist is reserved for his American valet called William Traquair. At the start of the novel, William is twenty-two years old and has just graduated from college. His father is a servant for Mr. Gable, who has a son called Baxter that is similar in age to William. The boys grew up together but were forced to live separate lives in college. When Oscar Wilde comes to America, Mr. Gable accepts the position of his valet on William's behalf. At first, William is reluctant to accept a form of employment that he thinks is somewhat degrading to a man of his intellect, but when he finds out that he will be accompanying the great Oscar Wilde he becomes ecstatic. With his love of literature and philosophy, William proves to be quite the match for Wilde in any type of conversation. Wilde states that, since he knows too many disappointing Williams, he will call William Traquair by his last name. After a few months of travelling William realises more and more that Wilde is a man with many flaws, like any other person, and becomes less enthusiastic about his professional obligations. Yet, he makes sure that his level of professionalism remains the same. All in all, these travels have greatly influenced William as a person, enabling him to become more worldly, wise and mature, and to reconnect him with new friends and lost family members.

At the end of the novel, when William has discovered that his parents are actually cousins, that his biological father is Mr. Gables, and when his heart is broken by his first love, he visits Wilde again for the first time since the tour has ended. Wilde confesses to having been in love with William all along and they share a night of passion. The final part of the novel reveals that William has stayed celibate ever since that event. He is now seventy-five years old and a book has just been released about Oscar Wilde and his lecture tours in America, but William is hardly ever mentioned. One of the authors does mention him briefly, but under the wrong name. William is offended by this and does not like the book at all, but he also knows that he will continue to re-read it until his death because it transports him back to all those amazing memories.

This chapter of this thesis will discuss the Metamodern features of *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*. First, the Modern and Postmodern elements of the novel will be discussed in order to determine a Metamodern oscillation between the two cultural logics. Then, a critical interpretation of the distinction between fact and fiction, or, the hyperreal, will determine whether this can be explained as a characteristic of the Postmodern or of the Metamodern. Finally, any remaining Metamodernist elements of the novel will be discussed.

1 An Oscillation Between Modernism and Postmodernism

As was the case in the past two chapters, the following sub-chapters will illustrate the Modern and Postmodern characteristics of the novel, which will then be studied as an oscillation between the two cultural logics in section 1.3 of this chapter. Overall, there were a lot less of the listed features present in *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* than in the previous two novels.

1.1 *Modernism in Oscar Wilde Discovers America*

In comparison to the other two novels, *Oscar Wilde discovers America* does not include as many Modernist features. However, the features that it does contain solely relate to writing techniques. The most frequent Modernist writing techniques in this novel are innovation and interior monologue, all instances of which concern to the use of italics within the narrative. Frequently, the italics are used in order to portray any kind of emphasis in the sentence. For example, on page 9: “Baxter had his war; he was off to conquer Europe. But what about *me*? William had moped, sighing like Sumter. Where is *my* continent?” In instances like this, the italics assist the reader in understanding the focal point at this time in the narrative. It also introduces the main theme of the novel, namely self-discovery and personal growth.

At times, longer paragraphs or even several pages will be written only in italics. In all those instances it concerns a letter, headed by a greeting and the date on which the letter was written. At other times, entire sentences might be written in italics when William remembers a certain phrase. For example, on page 81: “*In a world so filled with possessive personalities, it’s odd that no one knows what to do with the apostrophe*, Oscar had said once to Traquair.” The italics here serve the purpose of informing the reader that there is a small break from the narrative, and that the phrase is a memory and therefore not something that is being uttered in

the present time. Another example can be found on page 225, where the fact that it concerns a recollection is introduced more elaborately: “Perhaps because he felt guilty of betraying Oscar, his foreign friend (Oscar had predicted this moment in their very first conversation – *‘I should hate to be attended by a known enemy – it so spoils the subsequent surprise of treachery’*), and maybe because he felt that in what he was going to utter he would somehow be committing the sin that is forgiveness (...).” Not only is the memory introduced by reminding the reader how Oscar has spoken them before, the sentence in italics is even placed between apostrophes to stimulate the reader’s recollection of the conversation.

The narrative is told from a third-person perspective and through an omniscient narrator, so there is no indication of the Modernist “move away omniscient external narration” (Barry 79). At times, however, certain instances of words in italics may offer an insight in the protagonist’s psyche. An example can be found on page 32, when Wilde has just asked William to drop the formalities and call him by his first name: “ ‘I thought we had an understanding about formalities when we are alone, Traquair – there are to be none.’ Traquair did not respond to this comment. He set Wilde – *Oscar* – on the bed and carried the coat and jacket to the armoire, where he hung them with the wardrobe.” Here, the italics strongly resemble an internal thought pattern, where the protagonist is trying to process new information and instantly corrects himself. Another example can be found when William has discovered that the newspapers have mentioned him, but in a rather odd way. Instead of printing his name, the papers have related to him as Mr. Wilde’s liver-coloured servant (100). William is repulsed by being described as having the same colour as liver and cannot ignore the situation:

Liver, liver, liver. He glared down at the word, focusing on it to the exclusion of its cuing neighbors. And in its sudden isolation, bereft of context, the word lost its meaning, or rather it took on a different meaning, took on a new identity, even, for the word ‘liver’ did have such an ability, and he read it anew. ‘Liver’: *one who lives.* (103)

Here, the first phrase in italics is a representation of William’s internal thought process. He has become obsessed with the word, which has led to the consistent repetition in his mind. The second phrase in italics can be interpreted as the eureka-moment that has occurred in his thoughts, when William suddenly stumbled upon a different interpretation of the word. To the reader, it provides an insight into William’s mind and a clear emphasis of the paragraph, which reminds the reader of the novel’s themes of self-discovery and personal growth, which the rest of page 103 and the following pages explore further.

There is one other Modernist writing technique in the novel which occurs just one time, and that is the use of stream-of-consciousness. The following excerpt shows how the reader is provided with a clearer insight into William's thought process than at any other moment in the narrative, and that is made possible because of the stream-of-consciousness-like writing technique:

If *I* have a dual nature, what is it? There. That's what I want to know. *To know*, Traquair thought, returning himself to a proposition he had considered recently (Where? he asked himself, the trail of cities starting to trick his memory. San Jose, Leavenworth?), to know was the dangerous thing he desired. (129)

By presenting a clear thought process in the first part of the excerpt and then by interrupting the narrative mid-sentence with another thought process, this small section closely mirrors the stream-of-consciousness writing technique.

1.2 *Postmodernism in Oscar Wilde Discovers America*

Just as in *The Master*, the most dominant Postmodern writing technique is that of fragmentation. However, contrary to *The Master*, the narrative within the chapters of *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* usually follows a clear chronological narrative structure. From the third part of the first section of the novel, some chapters are divided into sections by the insertion of three asterisks. These moments fragment the narrative as a whole, because apart from the beginning of the chapter there is now the possibility for a second beginning in medias res within the same narratively chronological structure. The asterisks symbolise information that is not revealed to the reader. This information can be irrelevant to the interpretation or understanding of the narrative, but can also convey critical information. An example of the former can be found on page 143-144, which begins with William and his father discussing William's uncle Moses:

‘You have your judgement of him. I have mine. On this matter, I am not afraid of a lasting disagreement.’

‘Neither am I.’ Traquair looked at his father out of the corners of his eyes and added, ‘A family that has nothing to disagree about simply isn’t communicating.’

His father slapped him on the back and then took him by the arm. ‘Come. Help me prepare the parlor for your Mr. Wilde,’ he said. As they walked toward the front of the house, Mr. Traquair whispered, ‘Is his wife *really* a Chinawoman?’

Traquair retired to his room to read the latest news from Baxter.

What follows is a letter from Baxter, which takes up several pages of the novel. It is not until the end of the letter that it becomes clear that the supper has not yet taken place, and that probably only a couple of hours have passed that have not been narrated. During this time, it would appear that nothing has taken place that is of value to the reader.

What also becomes clear from the previous excerpt is that the main type of fragmentation in Edwards’ novel consists of that what is not narrated. Another way in which this is made clear, is by how the majority of the chapters is introduced only by the name of the city that the tour has moved on to, but not how the characters travelled there or what their current situation is. This means that almost every chapter starts in medias res, and it is unclear how much time has passed between one chapter and the next. The narrative is also fragmented by the insertion of letters, which often have a place at the beginning or at the very end of a chapter. The letters are usually not introduced or discussed, which means that the reader has to make do with the information that is presented in the letters themselves rather than an interpretation of that information by the protagonist.

This type of fragmentation causes a lack of information. At certain moments in the novel this leads to a distrust of the narrator, especially when the reader is confronted directly with the deprivation of information by the narrator. The letters to and from Baxter are a good example of these moments. For example, when William has written a letter to Baxter in which he informs his friend that Oscar Wilde has come for dinner with Mr. Gable and it went horribly wrong. The reader is aware that after the dinner, William was summoned to his father’s study where they had a serious discussion on his work for Mr. Wilde and the ethical grounds on which his father thinks he should no longer continue to accompany Mr. Wilde on his tour. William has

no issues with Mr. Wilde's utterances at the dinner table and will continue to work for him. To the reader, that was the end of the matter. But the letter to Baxter reveals that the day after the dinner party William was asked to join Mr. Gable in his study, where they spoke about the end of the Civil War and how Mr. Gable has always been proud of the companionship between Baxter and William, implying that he is proud it is strong regardless of the colour of their skin (165). This information is relevant to the reader, because it hints at the special relationship between Mr. Gable and William that is not yet known to the protagonist but which becomes available to the reader in snippets of insights like these. Chronologically, this conversation occurred within the narrative's timeframe, so it seems that the narrator has made the conscious decision not to relate it to the reader. Withholding important information therefore makes the narrator untrustworthy. And it happens more than once. On page 229, for example: "They had promised to visit each other frequently, but with the arrival of Lillie Langtry in late October, Oscar had become preoccupied with the actress, whose beauty he had helped to make famous back in England (and whose most scandalous secret Traquair had learned from Baxter)." At this point, the reader is aware that Baxter has met Ms. Langtry in London and that she behaved in an awkward manner, but the secret that William is apparently familiar with has not been disclosed to the reader. The narrator is quite literally keeping secrets from the reader, because its contents are not revealed at any point in the narrative. This too makes the narrator untrustworthy.

1.3 *A Metamodern Oscillation*

Although the novel borrows several writing techniques from both Modernism and Postmodernism, the frequency of these features cannot be compared to the other novels in this research project. From Modernism, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* borrows a certain level of innovation in the way that written language is combined with interior monologue, and the creation of emphasis, as well as a moment of stream-of-consciousness writing. All of these moments stimulate the reader's insights into the protagonist's inner subconscious. From Postmodernism, the novel borrows several types of fragmentation that induce an unreliable narrator. The other novels were clearly more dependent on those logics in terms of both writing technique and ethics.

Since the only (Post)Modernist features in this novel are writing techniques, there is no possibility here of understanding Metamodernist fiction as using narrative techniques that are

influenced by Postmodernism whilst introducing a contrasting set of ethics (Bentley et al.), and there is also no clear movement or oscillation between the two cultural logics (Vermeulen and Van den Akker). Interestingly, two of these narrative techniques from the cultural logics are combined, namely Modernist interior monologue and Postmodernist fragmentation. The excerpts above illustrate that one of the ways in which the narrative is fragmented, is through insights into or representations of the subconscious of the protagonist. Whether fragmentation enables these insights or vice versa, it appears that there is not an oscillation between these two features. Rather, they exist at the same time, and it is because of their collaboration that the Modernist focus on individual experience and the Postmodernist attribute of the fragmented narrative can both flourish.

2 An Interpretation of the Hyperreal

As is the case in *Becoming Jane Eyre*, the influence of the neo-Victorian genre is overtly present throughout the narrative and has an influence on the interpretation of the hyperreal. One of the main characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction is that it looks to the Victorian past in order to encourage the reader to reinvestigate contemporary society (Amigoni 178). The contemporary reader is reminded of the topicality of issues that were problematic in the Victorian period and confronted with how they are still relevant today (Costantini 27). As is the case in the previous two novels in this research project, certain contemporary issues are reflected in the themes of *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, such as self-discovery and personal growth. This is because the psychological journey that the protagonist undertakes could be similar to that of any person alive today, as the coming-of-age type of experience is unchanged and timeless. Of course, these experiences are not identical, since Victorian and contemporary society and culture are drastically different, yet the psychological exploration of discovering what you wish to do in your life and where your passion truly lies in the twenty-first century is not very different from such a process in the nineteenth century.

Another theme in the novel is revealed by the same type of fragmentation that has been discussed earlier in this chapter, and is that of ethnic segregation. The subject is never discussed directly, yet is omnipresent throughout the novel. For example, the novel opens with two quotes that mention “black valet” and “slave”, even before the novel’s title has been mentioned and the narrative has started. Then, the first pages of chapter one discuss how William and Baxter have gone to college: “William and Baxter had remained close even when they had gone away

to separate colleges, Baxter, as expected, to Harvard, William to Bowdoin” (8). Explicitly, the excerpt states that the two boys enjoyed their education at different colleges. What the excerpt states implicitly, however, is that William has a different ethnicity than Baxter and is not allowed by law to go to Harvard. This excerpt is indicative of the way in which racism and racial profiling are discussed throughout the narrative; the reader has to interpret the plot by reading between the lines and by thinking critically about the segments that are left out. By introducing this theme and the subject of racism in a non-confrontational manner, the novel gradually brings the subject to the reader’s attention. As the previous two novels have demonstrated, this also encourages the reader to think about this issue in relation to contemporary society. And it is indeed still an issue, as the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 has epitomised. What this novel accomplishes, is to encourage the reader to actively interpret its narrative as a mirror for contemporary society. By doing so, the text is going beyond the narrative itself, something that is not possible in a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal.

In the final section of the book, which contains an Acknowledgement and a discussion of sources, Edwards is adamant about the inspiration for this work of fiction. He noticed that in the biographies about Oscar Wilde, there was little to no mention of his valet. When the valet was mentioned, the sources would be incongruent about his name, age, or any other type of fact, which Edwards found intriguing (285). This is also what Edwards has integrated into his narrative, when William reads the article where he is said to be liver-coloured. By producing this novel, Edwards has brought back the memory of the life of a man who has been overlooked not just in his own time but also by historicists and biographers. In a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal that is not a possibility because everything is a simulation, yet this novel has reproduced the life of a historical figure through the genre of biofiction, i.e. by blurring the line between fact and fiction and creating a hyperreal environment. The next section will discuss the implication of this tension.

3 Metamodernist Characteristics

The previous sections of this chapter have already illustrated that some of the Metamodern characteristics that are listed in this research do not apply to *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, such as the combination of Postmodernist writing techniques with an alternative set of ethics (Bentley et al.), or an oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van

den Akker). Although the novel uses Modernist writing techniques, the frequency with which these are present in the narrative does not compare with the vast amount that has been found in the other two novels. It is therefore difficult to argue that the novel is Metamodern because of its definite return to Modernist writing techniques (James and Seshagiri). The remaining Metamodernist feature is the pursuit of a goal that cannot be achieved (Vermeulen and Van den Akker). Similar to the other novels in this research, this feature is not present in terms of narrative. Although the protagonist is on a soul-searching expedition for the most part of the narrative, asking questions such as “What is God?” and “What is truth?”, the final chapter reveals that he has since made peace with himself and with his existence, which illustrates that his goals in self-discovery have been satisfied. As section 2 of this chapter has shown, Edwards’ motivation for the production of this narrative is to restore the life of a historical person in the contemporary reader’s mind. By using the well-known figure of Oscar Wilde, the novel also introduces a critical reading of contemporary society. These two goals have clearly successfully been achieved.

The interpretation of the hyperreal, however, suggests a goal that cannot be achieved. Since biofiction is understood as a Postmodernist genre that blurs the line between fiction and reality to the point of hyperreality, it is not possible for that text to convey a life or a meaning outside of that text. And yet, the novel’s goal is to reintroduce the forgotten life of historical figure William Traquair into contemporary collective memory. This paradox itself illustrates a goal that cannot be achieved.

4 Conclusion

Louis Edwards’ *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* does contain Modernist as well as Postmodernist characteristics. However, these are not abundant throughout the narrative, and there is no oscillation between the two cultural logics. There are two characteristics that interact, or rather, co-exist, namely interior monologue and fragmentation.

This novel also shows that although the narrative creates a hyperreal situation, this situation is not similar to the hyperreal as it is understood in Postmodernism. This is because the narrative is able to go beyond the text itself, since it encourages the reader to think critically about their own society and because the narrative is able to reconstruct the life of a, perhaps forgotten, historical figure. If according to the Postmodern interpretation the hyperreal means that everything is simulated, that is not possible. Thus, the hyperreal aspect of the novel can be

read within Metamodernism rather than Postmodernism. This Metamodernist interpretation of the hyperreal also indicates a goal that cannot be achieved.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has researched the manifestation of Metamodernism in three contemporary neo-Victorian biofictions that have been published in the twenty-first century by asking “How is Metamodernism manifested in neo-Victorian biofiction about British authors that is published in the twenty-first century?”. In order to answer this question, a method was created based on articles about Metamodernism by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, Hans Bertens, David James and Urmila Seshagiri, and Nick Bentley et al., and based on the reader on literary and cultural theory by Peter Barry. From these texts, typically Metamodernist, Postmodernist and Modernist characteristics were selected, which were consequently studied in the novels. The hypothesis was that the novels would all convey signs of Metamodernism, but that each novel would do so with a different effect and with a different combination of writing techniques and ethics that were influenced by other cultural logics. According to the research method, a novel would be considered Metamodern when it conveyed a Metamodern oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism, when it moved on from a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal because it conveys meaning beyond the text itself, and when it contained the other Metamodern features that have been established in the theoretical frame.

The results show that the first novel in this research, *Becoming Jane Eyre*, meets all these requirements and that the others do not. All three novels contain Modernist characteristics in their writing techniques, which according to James and Seshagiri illustrates that they are Metamodern (93). However, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* conveyed a lot less of these characteristics than the other two novels. All three novels did contain Postmodernist writing techniques too, which indicates that Metamodernism is a continuation rather than a termination of Postmodernism according to several academics (Bertens, Furlani, Rudrum, Schober, Vermeulen and Van den Akker). A possible interpretation of Metamodernism provided by Nick Bentley et al. as the combination of Postmodernist writing techniques with a different set of ethics was not present in any of the novels.

What sets the first novel apart from the other two novels is the lack of a Metamodernist oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism in *The Master* and *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*. Where *Becoming Jane Eyre* shows a quite literal movement between the two cultural logics, in the other two novels these logics collaborate by co-existing rather than through active movement. Perhaps this calls for a specification of the term oscillation, which in the article by Vermeulen and Van den Akker remains rather vague. If the term can be understood as it has been throughout this thesis, i.e. as a movement between the two cultural logics, as well as the

situation where both cultural logics can exist alongside each other and at the same time, then all three novels are Metamodern because they would contain an oscillation of Modernism and Postmodernism.

Another difference between the novels can be found in the presence of the other Metamodernist characteristics, such as the pursuit of a goal that cannot be achieved (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 2010, 8). *Becoming Jane Eyre* and *The Master* both illustrate this characteristic in terms of the production of the novel itself since their authors are looking to fill in the gaps that are left in contemporary historical knowledge, a goal that can never truly be achieved since that part of history is forgotten. *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, however, conveys a different purpose of the narrative. Edwards has made it clear in the Acknowledgement section of the novel that he wishes to restore the forgotten life of a historical figure into contemporary collective memory, a goal that is achieved by producing the novel. Another goal of this novel is to make the reader aware of a critical issue in contemporary society, by addressing the same issue in society in 1882. That is a feature that all novels have in common, and that is strongly influenced by their neo-Victorian genre. The main characteristic of this genre is that it encourages the contemporary reader to critically review their own society (Amigoni, Costantini), and all three novels in this research project establish such a relationship between Victorian and contemporary society. By doing so, the novels confront the reader with the existence of a reality outside of the text. In Postmodern theory, where the hyperreal indicates that everything is a simulation and nothing real can exist beyond the boundaries of a text, that is not possible. Clearly, these novels show that a Postmodern interpretation of the hyperreal is still valid and at the same time is not. This paradox also illustrates the Metamodernist characteristic of a goal that cannot be achieved.

First of all, these results confirm that Metamodernism is indeed both a continuation as well as a termination of Postmodernism (Furlani), since all three novels contain Postmodernist characteristics yet also distance themselves from a Postmodern interpretation of hyperreality. Secondly, they also illustrate that Metamodernism involves a return to Modernist writing technique (James and Seshagiri, Ross), since again all three novels contained such features. Thirdly, the results show that Metamodernism is a blend of cultural logics (Bertens), as all novels contained elements from not just Modernism, but Postmodernism too. What the results do not confirm is the Metamodernist oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van den Akker, Schober). As is mentioned above, this may be the result of ambiguity in the theory on Metamodernism that has so far been published. If the term oscillation can be understood in a different way than it has been throughout this thesis, namely as

containing characteristics of both Modernism as well as Postmodernism at the same time, the results of all three novels also illustrate the oscillation between the two cultural logics. This new insight highlights the ambiguity of the term as it is described Vermeulen and Van den Akker's article.

It would therefore be interesting for further research to study how this aspect of Metamodernism is manifested in other sources of contemporary literature, in order to study if this new interpretation of being Modernist and Postmodernist at the same time rather than a movement between the two also occurs in other texts. Perhaps this would also lead to the next step in producing a practical Metamodernist method that can be applied to literature, since for this research project a method had to be constructed from scratch. Another direction for further research would be in the field of biofiction alone, since in the majority of the novels in this research project the influence of neo-Victorianism has produced the existence of a reality outside of the text, which has been interpreted as an important sign that Postmodernism has, at least for some part, come to an end, and that Metamodernism has influenced these works of fiction. It would therefore be interesting to see if other contemporary biofictions also go beyond the Postmodernist interpretation of the hyperreal and convey meaning beyond the text itself. Further research could also be directed towards studying the Metamodern interpretation of rewriting in texts other than biofictions, as well as in different art forms in general.

Since the method that has been applied in this research project had to be created based on a critical literary study, the method can be improved for further research. For example, the results of this research have shown that a different interpretation of the Metamodern oscillation might be more appropriate. Furthermore, the characteristic of fragmentation was interpreted as solely Postmodernist whereas some Modernist fictions also use that particular writing technique. The difference in attitude regarding those techniques, which determines whether it can be interpreted as Modernist or Postmodernist, has not been taken into account. Also, the case studies that were selected for this research have not been valued based on the origin of production and therefore contains both British and American works. The suggestion that this might indicate a global or local Metamodernism has not been evaluated in this research project.

This thesis has added to the academic discussion on Metamodernism by interpreting the cultural logic in three neo-Victorian biofictions. The combination of these genres and the new cultural logic is, at the time of writing, unprecedented. By studying Metamodernism in neo-Victorian biofiction, this research project has called for a new academic evaluation of rewriting and has shown that contemporary culture is, indeed, moving on to the past.

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY

The genres neo-Victorianism and biofiction are generally understood as Postmodernist genres. Biofiction often uses writing techniques that are typically Postmodern and it blurs the distinction between reality and fiction, which leads to the creation of a Postmodern hyperreality (Layne, Barry). Buisine supports this argument by stating that in biofiction an accurate representation of the subject is not possible. Neo-Victorian fiction is interpreted as Postmodernist because it is a direct pastiche of Victorian literature (Palmer) and a reconstruction of the past (Schiller). However, the main characteristic of neo-Victorian literature is that it through the active engagement with the Victorian past, a mirror for contemporary society is created and the reader is encouraged to think critically about their contemporary environment (Amigoni). Therefore, some recent research and academic discussion have suggested that this genre, and publications in the twenty-first century in particular, can be interpreted as Metamodern rather than Postmodern, and it has been recognised that neo-Victoriana can be influenced by more cultural logics than just Postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van den Akker).

This thesis researches how Metamodernism is present in three publications of neo-Victorian biofictions that have been published in the twenty-first century. In order to do so, a method had to be created for the purpose of this research, since at the time of writing no such research has been carried out. The method is a combination of several interpretations of Metamodernism, where at the one hand it is solely understood as a return to Modernism and signifying the end of Postmodernism, and on the other hand it is understood as a cultural logic that is influenced by more than one cultural logic and functions as a termination as well as a continuation of Postmodernism.

Following the research question “How is Metamodernism manifested in neo-Victorian biofictions about British authors published in the twenty-first century?”, the novels in this research are scrutinised for Modernist, Postmodernist and Metamodernist aspects in terms of writing technique as well as ethics. By doing so, the results show that these three novels portray elements of all three cultural logics, illustrating that Metamodernism in neo-Victorian biofiction is influenced by several cultural logics and can indeed be a continuation as well as a termination of Postmodernism. Furthermore, the results illustrate that the Postmodernist obscuring of the border between fact and fiction, or, the creation of a hyperreality, is present in all three novels yet cannot be interpreted in the same way as is common in Postmodern theory, since all novels encourage their reader to think critically about their contemporary situation and therefore the

narrative goes beyond the text towards something 'real'. Arguably, biofiction also has this effect because it narrates the life of a historical figure, a person that can also be interpreted as 'real'.

The hypothesis in this project was that all three novels would contain Metamodernist features, but different ones and not to the same purpose. This has been proven to be correct, although one of the novels contained significantly less Modernist, Postmodernist and Metamodernist characteristics. Crucially, two of the novels do not convey a Metamodernist oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism, a feature that in academic discussion has been prominent. Since there is some ambiguity on the interpretation of the term oscillation in current academic discussion on Metamodernism, throughout this research project this oscillation has been understood as a movement between Modernist and Postmodernist characteristics in the novel or in the interpretation thereof. The results have actually suggested that instead of a conveying a movement, these characteristics often collaborate in co-existence. This thesis therefore has added to the Metamodernist debate and provided an example of a practical method that can be applied in literary studies. Naturally, this method contains its flaws and should be developed further.

By illustrating that Metamodernism is present in neo-Victorian biofictions, this thesis has called for a re-evaluation of rewriting. This research project argues that contemporary rewritings such as the case studies in this project have moved with and beyond Postmodernism, by conveying a different purpose and enabling different interpretations.