

Masteropleiding Letterkunde

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Titel van het document:

A Remix of Genres: Neo-Victorianism. Defining a new genre through reception

Datum van indiening:

31-03-2023

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A Remix of Genres: Neo-Victorianism

Defining a new genre through reception

MA Thesis

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MA Literary Studies: The Book Business

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31 March 2023

ABSTRACT

Door de receptie van vier neo-Victoriaanse boeken te bestuderen, laat dit onderzoek zien dat recensenten van zowel gepubliceerde als online recensies onbewust kenmerken benoemen die behoren tot neo-Victoriaanse fictie volgens academici. Hiervoor gebruiken de recensenten vaak andere termen dan gebruikt worden in academisch onderzoek. Daarnaast toont het onderzoek ook aan dat de receptie van neo-Victoriaanse boeken nog onderontwikkeld is ten opzichte van het academische veld. Voor het onderzoek zijn vier boeken geselecteerd die meermaals besproken werden in onderzoek binnen het veld van neo-Victoriaanse fictie. Een selectie van recensies van deze boeken werd geanalyseerd op zowel kwalitatief en kwantitatief niveau. De methode van dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op soortgelijk onderzoek naar Metamodernisme. De resultaten van de scriptie tonen aan dat recensenten, voornamelijk van gepubliceerde recensies, kenmerken benoemen die vallen binnen de definitie van neo-Victoriaanse fictie en het boek indirect zo categoriseren. Daarnaast was er een duidelijke splitsing te zien tussen de boeken, waarvan de recensenten bij twee boeken duidelijk meer kenmerken benoemen dan de bij de andere twee. Ook bleken de online recensies veel minder kenmerken te noemen dan de gepubliceerde recensies. Het onderzoeken van de receptie van neo-Victoriaanse boeken is een nog onderbelicht onderwerp binnen academische onderzoek naar het genre en vult zo een leemte in het academische veld van neo-Victorian studies. Deze scriptie biedt ook mogelijkheden voor vervolgonderzoek waarin de methode kan worden overgenomen en verbeterd.

KEY WORDS

Neo-Victorianism, Historical fiction, Postmodernism, reception

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INTRODUCTION

‘This is a Victorian novel the Victorians never dreamed of writing. Yet Waters keeps reminding us of what they did write.’¹

Neo-Victorian literature of the twenty-first century is not merely a copy of its nineteenth century predecessors but goes beyond its conventions as Tom Gilling acknowledges in his quote above from his review on Sarah Waters’s *Fingersmith* (2002). The genre comes in many different forms, but they all return to the Victorian period. According to Shiller there are two strategies that can be identified within neo-Victorian fiction:

- [1] Some of these texts imitate Victorian literary conventions, either by creating altogether new stories or by reimagining specific Victorian novels from a new angle ...
 [2] while others are more overtly ‘postmodern’ in style and tone, but concern themselves with Victorian subjects.²

Shiller’s strategies are based on Frederic Jameson’s argument on postmodernism and its relation to the past but counters his statements too. Jameson believes that there is ‘an ever-widening gap between the actual lived past and its representation in novels.’³ Shiller however claims the opposite in that even if neo-Victorian fiction predominantly tells stories about events ‘that are usually left out of histories, they nonetheless manage to preserve and celebrate the Victorian past.’⁴ Waters’s novel *Fingersmith*, for example tells a story set in the nineteenth century but illustrates how the Victorians may have dealt with homosexuality in the Victorian period. Other novels can be a reimagining of a Victorian novel from the viewpoint of a different character.

There are already many articles and a few books written about neo-Victorianism, but there still is no clear definition of the genre. Mark Llewellyn has conducted lots of research on the genre and uses an ironic list by the Little Professor which summarizes some characteristics of the neo-Victorian novel at the start of one of his articles.⁵ Still, this list has

¹ Tom Gilling, “Our Mutual Attraction,” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, February 24 2002, accessed April 5 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/books/our-mutual-attraction.html>.

² Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 5.

³ Dana Shiller, “The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel,” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 539.

⁴ Ibid: 541.

⁵ Mark Llewellyn, “Neo-Victorianism: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Appropriation,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 20, no. 1-2 (2009): 27-28.

some truth to it and names elements regularly found in novels that could be considered as neo-Victorian. Some points on the list for instance are sexually frustrated middle- and upper-class women in the novel, the presence of either an alcoholic figure or prostitute with a good heart, a scene or scenes in a slum and the hero or heroine disregards ‘all differences of class, race, and sex.’⁶

These characteristics are commonly found in Victorian fiction. Most neo-Victorian novels are also set in the nineteenth century and employ Victorian literary conventions as Shiller already argued. There are however many different characteristics to various genres within neo-Victorian fiction, such as novels with a detective plot, as in Julian Barnes’s *Arthur & George* (2005)⁷ or novels that engage with ghosts such as Waters’s *Affinity* (1999).⁸ Still, when one searches for these novels on the internet they are usually classified as historical fiction instead of neo-Victorian fiction. This tends to happen because the term “neo-Victorian” ‘remains largely unused by writers, readers, reviewers, librarians or booksellers outside of academe’⁹ as Stetz has argued. This research project, however, focuses on the reception of neo-Victorian novels to show that reviewers do use and identify certain characteristics of the genre although they do not name it as such. They are indirectly aware of the genre. Similar research by Kersten and Wilbers on Metamodernism showed that reviewers name the same characteristics from this genre while using other words than scholars do. This thesis is based on their research which will be discussed in the theoretical framework.

1. Research Question and Hypothesis

Even though neo-Victorianism has been an established genre in academia for quite a while now that does not mean that the genre is well-known outside of it. The reception of neo-Victorian fiction is not well represented in the academic debate though since book editors, critics and readers are not yet using the term “neo-Victorian fiction” as was already mentioned before. By analysing the reception of four novels that are considered as neo-Victorian by academics, this thesis will provide a new insight into the academic debate on the level of reception. The criticism on neo-Victorian fiction has also developed rapidly over the last period as popular neo-Victorian fiction is gaining more popularity as Cox points out. She

⁶ Mark Llewellyn, “Neo-Victorianism: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Appropriation,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 20, no. 1-2 (2009): 27.

⁷ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 59.

⁸ *Ibid*: 85.

⁹ Margaret D. Stetz, “Neo-Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 340.

states that this trend is ‘an implicit acknowledgement of both the widespread influence of Victorian popular writing on neo-Victorian texts, and of contemporary popular fiction’s persistent engagement with Victorian literature and culture, as well as a recognition of the relevance of critical discourses on popular culture to the field.’¹⁰ This change in the field makes it important to conduct research that moves beyond academia with the use of published and online reviews now.

The research question guiding this thesis therefore is “How does the reception, both published and online, of neo-Victorian novels correspond with their academic interpretation?” The hypothesis is that in all four case studies both the published and online reviews name multiple characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction as is described in the academic definition. The reviews, however may use different labels than the ones used in academic discussions. The reviewers thus are unaware of their use of these characteristics of the genre since they are not familiar with them. As a result, the expected results will show that both groups of reviewers are aware of the similarities between neo-Victorian fiction and Victorian fiction. The reviewers may name some qualities of neo-Victorianism in their reviews but do not define it as such. It is also likely that the published reviews will name more characteristics than the online ones since these critics generally have an academic background in literature and are more experienced readers.

Through a critical analysis of the reception of the four neo-Victorian novels, this thesis aims to show that the reception of neo-Victorian fiction corresponds with its academic interpretation as reviewers can identify characteristics that are a part of the definition of neo-Victorianism even though it is not perceived as an established genre outside of academics yet.

2. Theoretical framework

‘The contemporary fascination with the Victorians seems to be particularly marked within the realm of fiction, where it has spawned the genre of neo-Victorian fiction.’¹¹

As Hadley states in her book, even more than 100 years after the death of Queen Victoria there still are many books written and rewritten about the Victorian period. These books fit within a new genre of neo-Victorian fiction; a term mostly used in academia. This theoretical

¹⁰ Jessica Cox, “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism,” *English*, vol. 66, no. 253 (2017): 109.

¹¹ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 1-2.

framework section will introduce the term neo-Victorianism with an overview of the academic debate as it stands now. Furthermore, the genre Metamodernism will also be briefly explained as research on the genre inspired the current research and reception theory too as this will be part of the methodology.

2.1 Neo-Victorianism

There has been a visible trend since the 1960s in the emergence of novels which engage with the Victorian period and its narratives as Andrea Kirchknopf points out. She marks these novels as ‘postmodern rewrites of Victorian texts’¹² which create ‘a dialogue between narratives of the present day and the nineteenth century, strongly based on the concept of intertextuality’.¹³ These ‘contemporary rewrites manage to supply different perspectives from the canonised Victorian ones.’¹⁴ This trend is recognised in academics where they came up with many different terms to define the genre. Some terms used in academic research are neo-Victorian¹⁵, post-Victorian, retro-Victorian, Victoriana and Victoriographies¹⁶ for example.

There seems to be a consensus on the term neo-Victorian as Stetz pointed out. She claims that a growing number of scholarly works all appeared in the time span of three years with ‘all of them referring in their titles or subtitles to neo-Victorian fiction, neo-Victorian tropes, NeoVictorian returns (with a capital “N” and no hyphen), neo-Victorianism, and even to “the neo-Victorian” as a stand-alone adjective or noun.’¹⁷ Hadley explains her preference for this term because it ‘suggests that while the Victorian era is brought into contact with a new context, it is not subsumed within that new context.’¹⁸ There are several explanations of the term. Hadley, for example broadly defines neo-Victorian fiction as ‘contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure or both’.¹⁹ Still, there are many questions to be answered around the genre which indicates the difficulty in defining

¹² Andrea Kirchknopf, “The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011): 54.

¹³ Andrea Kirchknopf, “The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011): 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid*: 54.

¹⁵ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 1-2.

¹⁶ Andrea Kirchknopf, “The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011): 54.

¹⁷ Margaret D. Stetz, “Neo-Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 340.

¹⁸ *Ibid*: 3.

¹⁹ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 4.

and identifying it. Kirchknopf illustrates some of the problems by asking the questions ‘but do we know what we mean by Victorian? Does the term refer to an age, a set of conventions, or an image of both based on a limited and biased selection of sources?’²⁰ These questions remain unanswered for now.

The term neo-Victorian gained its worldwide recognition at the 2007 “Neo-Victorianism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Appropriation” conference in Exeter²¹ and a peer-reviewed journal about neo-Victorian studies followed a year later. Only two years after the journal was started Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn published the book *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Stetz even calls this publication ‘the most ambitious of the book-length studies’²² in the field. Their argument throughout the book is that neo-Victorian fiction ‘is *more* than historical fiction set in the nineteenth century.’²³ They explore these ideas throughout different chapters about the generic and cultural uses to which the neo-Victorian has been applied. One of their arguments is that the resurfacing of texts from the Gothic and Victorian period in literature is interrelated with ‘ideas of collective trauma’²⁴ and this comes through in neo-Victorian texts with the use of journals and diary entries for example. Another chapter broadly discusses how the Victorian period is brought to the mainstream marketplace with adaptations into movies and series.

In their book Heilmann and Llewellyn distinguish between neo-Victorian fiction and ‘historical fiction set in the nineteenth century’.²⁵ This distinction of neo-Victorian fiction as a separate genre to historical fiction, or even a ‘subset’²⁶ as Shiller calls it, is made by multiple scholars. She even reads it as ‘at once characteristic of postmodernism and imbued with a historicity reminiscent of the nineteenth century novel.’²⁷ Shiller’s argument uses Frederic Jameson’s critique on postmodernism, especially his critique on postmodern historicity. He believes that postmodern representations of history create ‘an ever-widening gap between the

²⁰ Andrea Kirchknopf, “The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011): 54.

²¹ Margaret D. Stetz, “Neo-Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 340.

²² *Ibid*: 341.

²³ *Ibid*: 341

²⁴ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 28.

²⁵ *Ibid*: 6.

²⁶ Dana Shiller, “The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel,” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 538.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 538.

actual lived past and its representation.’²⁸ While Jameson argues that postmodernism creates a gap between history and how it is represented, Shiller on the other hand tries to argue that neo-Victorian fiction ‘takes a revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from postmodern historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative’.²⁹ In her explanation the gap between history and its representation is filled by the present.

Shiller continues her argument and mentions that neo-Victorian novels combine this sense of postmodern historicity with George Eliot’s view of significant history. Eliot views significant history as quotidian, as ‘a series of private moments and undocumented acts of a sort that many nineteenth century novels were concerned to render.’³⁰ Eliot’s concept coincides with the postmodern belief that history is fluid and open to reinterpretation. This mixture between Eliot’s view of history and the postmodern fluidity of history is the core of Shiller’s argument. She claims that neo-Victorian novels ‘reconstruct the past by questioning the certitude of our historical knowledge’ and they ‘emphasize events that are usually left out of histories’³¹. Elizabeth Ho also acknowledges this idea and argues that neo-Victorianism has the ability ‘to disrupt teleology and readmit lost voices and texts.’³² An example of a neo-Victorian novel that uses an event that is not written about before from the Victorian period is Sarah Waters’s *Fingersmith*. This novel tells a story set in the nineteenth century but focuses on a lesbian relationship which was something that did not exist in Victorian times according to Queen Victoria as Hadley points out.³³ This opinion of Queen Victoria and many other ones have been ‘debunked in scholarly circles’³⁴ but still depict the prudish picture we nowadays have of the Victorians. This perception is primarily shaped by biographical narratives as it is through these that we know the characters, both historical and fictional, of the Victorian period as argued by Hadley. The Victorians were self-conscious about their place in history as this era knew a great deal of posterity and an important revolution as pointed out by both Hadley³⁵ and Mays³⁶.

²⁸ Dana Shiller, "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 538.

²⁹ *Ibid*: 540.

³⁰ *Ibid*: 540.

³¹ *Ibid*: 541.

³² Elizabeth Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*. (London & New York: Continuum, 2012): 7.

³³ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 30.

³⁴ *Ibid*: 30.

³⁵ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 30.

³⁶ Kelly J. Mays, "Looking Backward, Looking Forward: The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror of Future History," *Victorian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 3 (2011): 446.

Biographical narratives were a way to preserve their history through literature and this trend is also visible in neo-Victorian fiction as Victorian characters are often revived. By resurrecting these figures, the authors ‘engage with questions that are central to the way in which we narrate the Victorian past.’³⁷ An example of a contemporary author who brought Victorian characters back is James Wilson with his Wilkie Collins’s inspired novel *The Dark Clue*. The well-known fictional characters from Collins’s *The Woman in White* are featured in this novel alongside the historical figure of Victorian painter Turner. Hadley states that ‘Wilson’s narrative technique, which sees the entirety of the novel narrated through a series of letters and diary entries, clearly aligns *The Dark Clue* with this intention to enact’ biography.³⁸ Still, this way of narrating a novel is a technique that Collins used too. This creates an intertextual relationship between both novels but it also a way for Wilson to highlight ‘his concern with Victorian forms of biographical narrative’³⁹ according to Hadley. This argument is shared by Heilmann and Llewellyn. The use of biographical narratives in neo-Victorian fiction is a way of coping with the reconstruction of the past as they argue in their book. The narrative then becomes ‘a patchwork of texts, fictional and factual’⁴⁰ as can be seen in Wilson’s novel for example. The character of painter J.M.W Turner is factual, but the other characters of Walter Hartright and Marian Halcombe are fictional and driven from other literary works by Collins. It all blends together and resembles its nineteenth century counterpart.

It becomes clear that the neo-Victorian novel is a subset of the historical novel or even a distinct genre on its own rather than being merely a part of historical fiction. This argument is shared by Palmer who in her review of books by Hadley and Mitchell discusses how they both ‘position the neo-Victorian within the genre of the historical novel, rather than aligning it with the postmodern’.⁴¹ Neo-Victorianism may possibly even combine elements of historical fiction with postmodernism as she argues. This argumentation runs through Hadley’s book *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* too where she places the neo-Victorian novel in relation to historical fiction where ‘both its Victorian and postmodern context impacts its

³⁷ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 33.

³⁸ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 39.

³⁹ Ibid: 39.

⁴⁰ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 34.

⁴¹ Beth Palmer, “Neo Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us, by Louisa Hadley; History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages, by Kate Mitchell,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 11 (Autumn 2012): 169.

engagement with historical narratives.⁴² There is, however one major difference between the Victorian canon of the nineteenth century and the neo-Victorian canon of the contemporary. This expansion beyond the original canon is recognised by Jessica Cox. Her article shows how the neo-Victorian canon now also includes popular culture for example. The historical and geographical expansion is even more remarkable. Cox argues that ‘works set outside of the boundaries of Victoria’s reign and empire are increasingly cited as “neo-Victorian”’.⁴³ This recent trend moves away from idea that ‘the nineteenth century should be remembered as the “high noon of empire”’⁴⁴ as Ho mentions in her book. The expansion of the neo-Victorian canon is acknowledged by Stetz too. She remarks that ‘neo-Victorian texts are everywhere, inside and outside of the academy, and most certainly throughout both transatlantic and postcolonial literary and popular culture.’⁴⁵ The genre moves beyond the parameters of Victorian literature.

When one tries to explain why neo-Victorianism should not be seen as part of historical fiction, the genre of postmodernism and its characteristics play a critical role. It is mentioned several times by Shiller for example as some of its features are commonly found in neo-Victorian texts alongside ones from historical fiction. Hadley incorporates the genre of post-modernism as part of neo-Victorianism alongside its characteristics stemming from historical fiction. As mentioned earlier, she focuses on the fact that the Victorians were self-conscious about their position in history. This self-consciousness can also be found in neo-Victorian fiction and ‘manifests [itself] as a concern with the modes of narrating’.⁴⁶ The connection to post-modernism is made by Hadley who states that ‘this concern often prompts an exploration of the boundary between history and fiction, a process that is generally considered a feature of postmodern fiction.’⁴⁷ Main characteristics of postmodern literature, according to Peter Barry’s article are ‘deconstruction, irony, narcissism, and intertextual elements such as pastiche, parody and illusion’.⁴⁸ The postmodern element of pastiche, regularly found in neo-Victorian fiction and is the focus of Beth Palmer’s argument on the

⁴² Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 5.

⁴³ Jessica Cox, “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism,” *English*, vol. 66, no. 253 (2017): 115.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*. (London & New York: Continuum, 2012): 5.

⁴⁵ Margaret D. Stetz, “Neo-Victorian Studies,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 345.

⁴⁶ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 21.

⁴⁷ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 21.

⁴⁸ Peter Barry. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022): 87.

Victorian legacy in contemporary fiction. According to *the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* pastiche is ‘a literary work composed from elements borrowed from various other writers or from a particular earlier author.’⁴⁹ The definition in the book even mentions John Fowles’s novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) as a prime example. This novel is commonly described in academia as a neo-Victorian novel.

Palmer’s article focuses on two neo-Victorian novels by Sarah Waters and Michel Faber which ‘take up the sensation novels’ awareness of material culture.’⁵⁰ She argues that neo-Victorian literature represents the same past as it pastiches ‘the self-conscious construct of print and paper.’⁵¹ Both contemporary authors took inspiration from sensation novels from the 1860s. Sensation fiction emerged at the same time as the printing culture changed in the Victorian period when fiction could be produced more easily and more cheaper. Novels then were serialized first and later published in the form of one volume. Sensation novels played with this method by using ‘their cliff-hangers and red herrings’⁵². Palmer recognises the sensation novel as ‘situated at the center of these anxieties about a rapidly technologizing print culture and its perceived effects on readerships and was very conscious of its status as such.’⁵³

Palmer argues that contemporary writers such as Waters and Faber are writing at a time when print culture is changing. The difference between writers then and now is that contemporary writers are aware of these changes in print culture as Palmer claims. This ‘self-consciousness regarding a book’s place in print culture is a legacy of the sensation novels they pastiche.’⁵⁴ This self-consciousness is visible in the form of the novels. The novels’ sheer size, the use of different forms of print culture (such as diaries and newspaper articles) and the use of Victorian and even earlier literary texts in the novels are all examples of this self-consciousness.

⁴⁹ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 269.

⁵⁰ Beth Palmer, “Are the Victorians Still With Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2009): 87.

⁵¹ *Ibid*: 87.

⁵² *Ibid*: 86.

⁵³ Beth Palmer, “Are the Victorians Still With Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2009): 87.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 90.

2.2 Metamodernism

This thesis is inspired by research on the reception of contemporary novels to examine how Modernist labels are used in the reviews. This research by Kersten & Wilbers was executed within the academic debate around Metamodernism, a new genre just like neo-Victorianism. To explain their research, first the academic debate on Metamodernism should be introduced.

The term Metamodernism gained momentum after the publication of Vermeulen and Van den Akker's article 'Notes on Metamodernism' in 2010. The debate takes place across cultural contexts and academic disciplines. In literary studies, the focus initially was on the resurfacing of Modernism in contemporary novels. Another definition within the debate argues that Metamodernism goes back to both Modernism and Postmodernism. The latter one is how Vermeulen and Van den Akker explain it in their groundbreaking article. They call it an oscillation 'between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity.'⁵⁵ They essentially argue that Metamodernism responds to both Modernism and Postmodernism, yet ultimately moves beyond these literary traditions to forge a new form of art.

One who agrees with the definition of Vermeulen and Van den Akker is Alison Gibbons. She starts off with the question: 'Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?' (2019) Here she acknowledges that there have been multiple arguments that Postmodernism is dead, and a new era started with the fall of the Berlin Wall and 'gaining momentum throughout the 1990s and beyond.'⁵⁶ She argues that Postmodernism rejected grand narratives while today's cultural climate has a 'renewed engagement with history and a revival of mythic meaning-making'.⁵⁷ Gibbons does not give this current cultural climate a name though, but the consistent mentioning of 'a legacy of modernist and postmodernist stylistic practice, and a rehabilitated ethical consciousness'⁵⁸ with the different names it has in academia. This ultimately is in accordance with Vermeulen and Van den Akker's claim.

The article by Vermeulen and Van den Akker focusses on different cultural contexts such as architecture, paintings and literature. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson

⁵⁵ Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, vol. 2 (2010): 5-6.

⁵⁶ Alison Gibbons, "Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?," Times Literary Supplement, 18 February 2019, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Alison Gibbons, "Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?," Times Literary Supplement, 18 February 2019, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>.

instead focus solely on literature and connect the assumed death of Postmodernism to contemporary British fiction. They are also part of the argument which believes that Metamodernism is just the resurfacing of Modernism. They argue that the period of Postmodernism has ended and ‘can be seen in the sense that perhaps its main ideas had become widely accepted’.⁵⁹ Their argument is concluded with three different strands they identified on how British novelists mirror the legacy that Postmodernism has left. The first strand consists of novelists who use narrative techniques that are associated with Postmodernism but introduced a set of grounded ethical positions. The second are novelists who implicitly reject Postmodernism and want to return to Realism instead. The third are novelists who returned to Modernist techniques to go back to the period before Postmodernism.

Another article in the literary debate that argues that Metamodernism is return to Modernism is the one by James and Seshagiri. They relate Metamodernism to the works of contemporary authors like Julian Barnes, J.M. Coetzee, Ian McEwan, Cynthia Ozick, Will Self and Zadie Smith and argue that they ‘place a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions, styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing.’⁶⁰ As opposed to Vermeulen and Van den Akker, they do not incorporate Postmodernism and its techniques in the definition of Metamodernism. With this explanation they reject the option that contemporary authors could also be influenced by literary trends that followed Modernism, such as Postmodernism.

This thesis is inspired by similar research by Kersten and Wilbers on Metamodernism. With their research on the literary movement Metamodernism they showed that even though reviewers do not use the exact term of Metamodernism in their reviews, they do use labels that are associated with the movement. They pointed out that Metamodernism was acknowledged as a new genre in academia, but the term had not yet been used by writers, readers etcetera. Their research used the reception of Tom McCarthy’s novel *C* (2010) to analyse at the labels associated with Modernism and how they are used at present.

They gathered both published and online reviews from British print media and online reviewing platforms. After a close reading of the reviews, they came up with a list of different

⁵⁹ Nick Bentley et al, “Introduction Fiction of the 2000s. Political Contexts, Seeing the Contemporary, and the End(s) of Postmodernism.” In: *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 15.

⁶⁰ David James & Urmila Seshagiri, “Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution,” *PLMA* vol. 129, no. 1 (2010): 87.

labels that may be associated with Modernism such as avant-garde. This list of labels was ‘fed into the MAXQDA data analysis programme’⁶¹, which scans all reviews for the use of the labels included and marks the positions in which they occur.’ This program showed the number of charts each label received in the whole corpus. Their results were that ‘readers tend to associate both “Modernism” and “avant-garde” with writing from a particular period in literary history’⁶² in their reviews of Tom McCarthy’s *C* which may indicate that it shows Metamodernist traits. The current research will not use the MAXQDA program since it only analyses a small section of the reception of four novels.

2.3 Reception theory

As reception theory is a great part of the methodology used for this thesis, it is important to understand how it originated in the first place. Literary theory initially focused mostly on the text regarding its meaning (the New Criticism), its form or structure (Structuralism) or politics, but readers were not part of literary theory. This changed in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of reader-response criticism, or reception theory as it is also called, in Germany and the United States. Jauss wanted to bridge the gap between the historical (or Marxist) and aesthetical (or formalist) approaches to literature with his reader-response theory. Former literary approaches neglected the part of the reader which Jauss stressed was an essential part of the historical life of a literary work.

Jauss wanted to point out that a literary work is not on an object but rather an event which ‘strikes new chords among its readers’⁶³. As a literary work moves on past different generations it is modified in its assumptions and creates an ongoing dialogue between work and reader. Jauss uses the term “horizon of expectations” as the body of assumptions and expectations that both the reader and author can have. Essentially it is the structure by which a person comprehends and appraises a text based on literary and cultural conventions particular to their time in history. So, different generations will have different horizons of expectations in the reception of the same literary work. This idea is also presented in the introduction of *Neo-Victorianism. The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* by Heilmann and Llewellyn where they use a quote from Chase’s book *Middlemarch in the Twenty-first*

⁶¹ Dennis Kersten & Usha Wilbers, “‘A Tale of Two Labels. The Use of ‘Modernism and ‘Avant-garde’ in the Reception of Tom McCarthy’s *C*,” *Reception: texts, readers, audiences, history*, vol. 12 (2020): 26.

⁶² Dennis Kersten & Usha Wilbers, “‘A Tale of Two Labels. The Use of ‘Modernism and ‘Avant-garde’ in the Reception of Tom McCarthy’s *C*,” *Reception: texts, readers, audiences, history*, vol. 12 (2020): 33.

⁶³ Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 10.

Century. Here Chase points out that even though ‘the text of *Middlemarch* remains unchanged [...] its meaning changes both within the culture and within the consciousness of individual readers.’⁶⁴

Jauss’s reception theory was one of the first theories to focus on the reader rather than the text. Other theories can also be used for research that has reception at its core. The current research uses reception in the same way as was done in the research by Kersten and Wilbers on the use of labels of Metamodernism in critical reception. They based their research partly on Bourdieu’s theory. According to Bourdieu a literary work has no intrinsic value to begin with. Value is always attributed by others, readers for example. This happens in the field of cultural production. The social world is divided into different fields (economic, political, cultural) each with its own sets of rules, knowledge and forms of capital. Different agents such as publishers and critics for example move within these different fields with a habitus.⁶⁵ Habitus is one of Bourdieu’s most influential terms which is the way someone acts within the fields. The different forms of capital in Bourdieu’s field of cultural production can be important for the current study. He differentiates several types of capital such as economic, symbolic, academic and cultural. Economic capital can be expressed in money whereas symbolic capital is defined as capital of honourability.⁶⁶ When an object has great economic capital, the symbolic capital is probably low and this works similarly the other way around. Critical reception and the praise of novels can add to the symbolic capital of a novel.

3. Methodology

This thesis tries to show that characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction as described by academics are also used in the reception of these novels. The research explores this by studying the reception of four case studies, namely *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters, *The Dark Clue* (2001) by James Wilson, *Arthur & George* (2005) by Julian Barnes and *The Seance* (2008) by John Harwood. These novels were selected because of their representation in academic research on neo-Victorianism and popularity among reviewers. In this way the thesis is assured to find enough reviews to analyse for the research and relate its findings to academic research.

⁶⁴ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 1.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “The production of belief: contribution to an economy of symbolic goods,” *Media Culture Society* 2, (1980): 265.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*: 262.

The research will analyse the reception of four neo-Victorian novels using both quantitative and qualitative research. It will not only use published reviews but online reviews too. The online reviews are incorporated to represent reviewers who have not made it their profession and are therefore not likely to have an academic background in literature for example. This ensures that the results are not biased. For each case study a total of ten published and ten online reviews will be analysed. The published reviews must all been issued in newspapers from the United Kingdom, America or Australia and will be collected through the Nexis Uni database. The online reviews will be gathered from internet searches on online reviewing platforms such as Amazon, Goodreads and online blogs. All reviews in the corpus must contain 250 words or more to eliminate any reviews that may contain only one or a few sentences.

After the corpus for each case study is compiled a list of characteristics of neo-Victorianism is made. These characteristics are derived from the theoretical framework. The neo-Victorian characteristics that will be searched for in the reviews are in Table 1 below:

Table 1: *List of neo-Victorian characteristics*

Wilkie Collins	Mary Elizabeth Braddon	Charles Dickens	Victorian	Nineteenth (19 th) century	Dual plot (structure
Asylum	Ghosts / spirit	Secondary (Victorian) literature	Newspapers / diaries	Slum	Detective
Pastiche	Historical fiction	Contemporary	Sentation(al)	Sex(ual)	Rewritten
Postmodern					

These characteristics were all mentioned as commonly found in neo-Victorian fiction within the academic books and articles that were used for the theoretical framework. Heilmann and Llewellyn devoted a whole chapter in their book on the role of the ghosts and spirits in neo-Victorian texts for instance. In her article on Sarah Waters, Constantini defines multiple elements that can be found in *Fingersmith* as characteristics of the genre of neo-

Victorianism. According to her, the novel ‘suggested comparisons with writers like Charles Dickens or Wilkie Collins’⁶⁷ and

‘incorporates explicit references to Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Mrs Henry (Ellen) Wood, Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, and other writers, including the less- known (often anonymous) authors of Victorian pornographic literature. Moreover, she creates a series of ‘internymic’ relations with nineteenth-century texts, and makes recourse to narrative strategies that evoke specific Victorian works and genres.’⁶⁸

In short, Waters includes secondary Victorian literature into her plot. This is also acknowledged by Palmer who argues that ‘both Faber and Waters invoke a range of Victorian and pre-Victorian literary texts in their works.’⁶⁹ Hadley is even more straightforward in argument by stating that:

‘The most obvious, and seemingly most passive, mode of engaging with Victorian literature is the actual incorporation of Victorian texts within neo-Victorian fictions.’⁷⁰

Hadley’s book on neo-Victorianism acknowledges that the dual plot structure is a feature frequently seen in the genre. As these labels are derived from academic sources, it may occur that the exact words are not used as shown in Table 1 in that way. Therefore, it is important to use a two-step analysis for this research. The reviews of each case study will be individually analysed for the use of these labels both on a quantitative and qualitative level. Each review is charted for the use of these labels as part of the quantitative research and these numbers will later be evaluated through close reading for the qualitative part. The qualitative research is pivotal for the research to analyse the way the reviewers use the labels. They could use these labels as part of a quote from another reviewer for example.

The research on Metamodernism by Kersten & Wilbers used the data program MAXQDA for charting all the labels in the reviews. This research does not have access to this

⁶⁷ Mariaconcetta Constantini, “‘Faux-Victorian Melodrama’ in the New Millennium: The Case of Sarah Waters,” *Critical Survey*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2006): 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid: 18.

⁶⁹ Beth Palmer, “Are the Victorians Still With Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2009): 91.

⁷⁰ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 144.

program though and is smaller in its scope. The reviews are analysed on the use of labels with the help of the search option in Microsoft Word and through close reading.

4. Chapter outline

This research will look at four case studies, the reception of the novels *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters, *The Dark Clue* (2001) by James Wilson, *Arthur & George* (2005) by Julian Barnes and *The Seance* (2008) by John Harwood. The following chapters will each analyse the research on the published and online reviews of each individual novel and share the results at the end of the chapter. Finally, the conclusion will answer the research question based on the overarching results of the four case studies and describe these, mention improvements for further research and give suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 1 – Fingersmith

‘A good story filled with ingenuity, twists and surprises is welcome, but this one also comes with a 21st-century through-line about class and gender.’⁷¹

Iris Fanger perfectly describes the modern twists that possibly make *Fingersmith* (2002) a neo-Victorian novel in her review of the novel's stage-adaptation. Although it is not directly about the novel itself, it gives a vivid impression. The novel is set in the Victorian period and contains several characteristics from Victorian literature as will be discussed in this chapter, but it also has some modern features. This first chapter will discuss the results from analysing the published and online reviews on the first case study: *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters.

The novel was published in 2002 and was Waters's third novel. *Fingersmith* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Orange Prize and even won the CWA Ellis Peters Historical Award for historical crime fiction in 2002.⁷² The novel has been adapted for television with a series broadcast by the BBC with the same name in 2015. It was also adapted for the stage and into a film.⁷³ South-Korean producer and director Park Chan-wook adapted it into a film set in Korea in the 1930s called *The Handmaiden* and playwright Alexa Jung took the story to the stage with her production at the American Repertory Theater in 2016.⁷⁴

Fingersmith is published by Little, Brown Book group. The publisher's website does not give that much information about the novel other than its nominations, a short summary and mentions the film adaptation. It is remarkable though that the publisher puts the novel in the genre of 'fiction & related items / modern & contemporary fiction (post C 1945)'⁷⁵. It is indeed a work of fiction, but the novel is set in the Victorian period which could also make it historical fiction rather than modern and contemporary. This chapter will look at ten published and ten online reviews on the novel and analyse its quantitative and qualitative results based on the list of labels shown in the introduction section. The use of labels and its

⁷¹ "Reviews: Fingersmith," Theatermania, accessed 19 December, 2022, https://www.theatermania.com/boston-theater/reviews/fingersmith_79486.html.

⁷² "Fingersmith by Sarah Waters," Little, Brown Book Group, accessed 14 June, 2022, <https://www.littlebrown.co.uk/titles/sarah-waters/fingersmith/9781860498831/>.

⁷³ "Reviews: Fingersmith," Theatermania, accessed 19 December, 2022, https://www.theatermania.com/boston-theater/reviews/fingersmith_79486.html.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Fingersmith by Sarah Waters," Little, Brown Book Group, accessed 14 June, 2022, <https://www.littlebrown.co.uk/titles/sarah-waters/fingersmith/9781860498831/>.

critical analysis will partly determine whether the critics may categorise *Fingersmith* as a neo-Victorian novel.

1.1 Published reviews

Ten published reviews of *Fingersmith* were selected for the analysis. All reviews were retrieved from the Nexis Uni database and came from the United Kingdom, Australia or America. They all had a length 250 words or more. Table 2 below shows the newspapers and reviewer that published each review used in the analysis of published reviews on *Fingersmith*.

Table 2: *List of published reviews on Fingersmith*

Review	Newspaper and reviewer
Review 1	<i>The Times</i> , Rachel Campbell-Johnston
Review 2	<i>The Times</i> , Laura Shepherd-Robinson
Review 3	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> , Helen Brown
Review 4	<i>The Observer</i> , Adam Mars-Jones
Review 5	<i>The Guardian</i> , Julie Myerson
Review 6	<i>The New York Times</i> , Tom Gilling
Review 7	<i>USA Today</i> , Ann Prichard
Review 8	<i>The Globe and Mail</i> , Sandra Gulland
Review 9	<i>New Statesman</i> , Patricia Duncker
Review 10	<i>Morning Star</i> , Bunmi Daramola

1.1.1 Quantitative results

The ten published reviews were retrieved from the Nexis Uni database and were all analysed with the use of the labels listed in Table 1 in the methodology section earlier. The results are gathered in another table that gives an overview of how many times each label is mentioned in one review. In this way, it also becomes visible if certain labels are not used at all in the reviews or maybe even used in all of them. All labels are listed on the left side of Table 3 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table. The reviews are shortened to R accompanied with the number corresponding to the ones listed in Table 2 above. So, review 1 for example is referred to as R1 in the table below.

Table 3: Results published reviews on *Fingersmith*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins	1	1	4		2				3	1
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens		1		2		2			1	2
Dickensian	1			2		3	1	1		
Victorian	1	3	4	1		2	3	1	2	3
Period	1			1			1			
Nineteenth century / 19 th century	1		1	2					3	1
Historical fiction				1		2				
Contemporary / modern	2		1		1					1
Postmodern										
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse	1	1	1	1	1	1		1		
Ghost / spirit										
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries										
Slum				1						
Detective										
Sensation(al)	1		2							
Sex(uality)		1	2			1	1		1	
Rewritten										
Pastiche	1									

At first glance, there are a few things that stand out from these results. The labels *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, *postmodern*, *dual plot (structure)*, *ghost/spirit*, *secondary (Victorian) literature*, *newspaper*, *diaries* and *rewritten* were not mentioned in any of the ten published reviews. For some, there is an easy explanation. The label *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, for example did not occur in the reviews because *Fingersmith* does not resemble any of her novels. It does, however resemble novels by Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. This explains why the label *Wilkie Collins* occurred in six reviews and *Charles Dickens* in five reviews. Other labels that are more concerned with the plot of the novel such as *ghost/spirit*, *newspaper* and *diaries* could not have been mentioned in the reviews simply because they do not appear in Waters's novel. The labels *postmodern*, *dual plot (structure)* and *secondary (Victorian) literature* are characteristics of neo-Victorian literature. So, these labels may not have been mentioned in the published reviews since the reviewers are not aware of this new genre or merely because they are not present in the novel.

Two labels that were mentioned multiple times in different reviews are the labels about the setting or period of the novel, namely *Victorian* and *19th century*. The label *Victorian* was used in nine of the published reviews and *19th century* in five reviews. The reviewers almost all acknowledge that the novel is set in the Victorian period, yet four reviewers also classify the novel as contemporary or modern. This coincides with the definition of the genre neo-Victorianism where the novel contains modern elements or themes. Certain plot elements that occur regularly in neo-Victorian fiction were charted in several reviews too. These labels are *asylum/madhouse*, *sensation(al)* and *sex(uality)*. This thesis claims that neo-Victorianism is defined as combining aspects from Victorian fiction with postmodern literature and the contemporary. This definition is shared within literary criticism by Hadley⁷⁶, Stetz⁷⁷ and Kirchknopf⁷⁸ for example. There is one review that stands out regarding this claim, namely review 1. This review used labels that are concerned with Victorian fiction which are: *Wilkie Collins*, *Dickensian*, *Victorian*, *period* and *19th century*. It also used labels concerned with postmodern literature namely: *contemporary/modern* and *pastiche*. The results from this review are a prime example of a critic who is unaware of the genre neo-Victorianism but still indirectly defines this novel as such according to the quantitative results.

Still, there are also two reviews who place *Fingersmith* in the genre of historical fiction, namely review 4 and 6. Both reviews used the labels *Charles Dickens*, *Dickensian* and *Victorian* too. This could be a case of critics who are not yet aware of neo-Victorian fiction and therefore define it as historical fiction.

1.1.2 Qualitative results

The quantitative results as shown in Table 3 already give a lot of information on the labels critics use in published reviews on *Fingersmith*. Still, there is more valuable data to be collected when the reviews are closely read. There may have been different labels that were not in the list but are relevant to the research. This section will look at the qualitative results through close reading the reviews and reporting upon data that stands out.

Table 3 already showed that the labels *Wilkie Collins* and *Charles Dickens* were charted in several of the published reviews and from close reading the reviews one can note

⁷⁶ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁷⁷ Andrea Kirchknopf, "The Future of the Post-Victorian Novel: A Speculation in Genre", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2011.

⁷⁸ Margaret D. Stetz, "Neo-Victorian Studies", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012).

that Collins's novel *The Woman in White* (1859) and Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (1838) were mentioned in seven of the ten reviews. The close reading of the reviews also made clear why these novels were mentioned in seven of the reviews in *Fingersmith*. The plot of Waters's novel 'echoes that of Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*'⁷⁹ as Rachel Campbell-Johnston argues in review 1 and 'the beginning of the novel [has] an arch reference to *Oliver Twist*'⁸⁰ as Laura Shepherd-Robinson points out in review 2. Campbell-Johnston also mentions how 'all the Dickensian tics are there: the onomatopoeic names, the attention to evocative detail, the patterns of period language, the tendency to sentimentalise.'⁸¹ This statement already mentions multiple themes that occur regularly in Victorian fiction, combining this with 'a creeping modern relevance'⁸² and it may seem like a neo-Victorian novel to some as described in academics.

Review 1 from *The Times* has some other interesting phrases in it. Campbell-Johnston praises Waters for being 'meticulous in her search for historical accuracy'⁸³ and creating a novel 'carefully worked out within the historical structures'⁸⁴. These aspects are also characteristics of neo-Victorianism which uses elements from historical fiction. This was also noted in another review too. Adam Mars-Jones also discusses in review 4 how *Fingersmith* contains references to secondary literature or literature dating from the Victorian period 'from Dickens and Mayhew to Bronte and Poe'⁸⁵ and even 'further back in literary history'.⁸⁶ This coincides with the label of *secondary (Victorian) literature*.

Another characteristic which is mentioned several times in academic research on neo-Victorianism is the dual plot structure. This essentially means that the narrative is told from two different perspectives. This label was not charted in the quantitative results, but close reading shows that three reviews introduce this feature but in other terms. Sandra Gulland argues that 'the story is told and then retold from two differing first-person perspectives'⁸⁷ in *The Globe and Mail* which essentially equals as a dual plot structure. The same point is made by Patricia Dunker in review 9 and Bunmi Daramola in review 10 who praises Waters for the

⁷⁹ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "Twisting a Tale," *The Times* (London), January 26, 2002.

⁸⁰ Laura Shepherd-Robinson, "Rereading: *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters review – a daring novel that pickpockets from the best of Victorian fiction," *The Times* (London), September 21, 2021.

⁸¹ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "Twisting a Tale," *The Times* (London), January 26, 2002.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Laura Shepherd-Robinson, "Rereading: *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters review – a daring novel that pickpockets from the best of Victorian fiction," *The Times* (London), September 21, 2021.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Adam Mars-Jones, "Review: Books: Why the secret of success in Victorian London involved being beastly to the knife-boy," *The Observer* (London), January 27, 2002.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Sandra Gulland, "The family that steals together...", *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 2, 2002.

‘different points of view [that] make for a brilliant development of story’.⁸⁸ These examples demonstrate that the qualitative results can be pivotal for the research. All three reviews refer to an element is regularly present in neo-Victorian fiction and would not have been noticed when only reviewing the results in Table 3.

The dual-plot structure in the novel may not have been directly mentioned in the published reviews on *Fingersmith*, one critic did however define the novel as ‘a brilliant piece of modern Victoriana’⁸⁹ which is another term for neo-Victorian as pointed out earlier in this thesis. Shepherd-Robinson notices how Waters takes inspiration from Collins and Dickens but adds a modern twist to her novel. This thought is shared by Brown⁹⁰, Myerson⁹¹ and Gilling who characterises *Fingersmith*’s main character Sue Trinder as ‘Oliver Twist with a twist: female and sexually aware.’⁹² It is even in the title of Myerson’s review: ‘hooked on a modern Wilkie Collins’⁹³ in *The Guardian*.

Review 10 is interesting in a way that deserves to be explained separately. Table 3 shows that the review used the labels *Wilkie Collins*, *Charles Dickens* twice and *19th century*, *modern* and *Victorian* even three times. This review is a prime example why the qualitative results are needed next to the quantitative results. The review in the *Morning Star* starts with the following sentences:

‘ON English literature courses throughout the land, it is a pretty sure bet that the great novels of the 19th century appear somewhere, with works by Charles Dickens, Charlotte and Emily Bronte and Wilkie Collins, no doubt featuring large. It is hardly surprising that the Victorian era produced so much omnipotent work. After all, it was a seminal point in the British empire, both at home and abroad.’⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Bunmi Daramola, “A rip-roaring Victorian yarn: Bunmi Daramola reviews *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters Virago, GBP 15.99,” *Morning Star* (London), March 4, 2002.

⁸⁹ Laura Shepherd-Robinson, “Rereading: *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters review – a daring novel that pickpockets from the best of Victorian fiction,” *The Times* (London), September 21, 2021.

⁹⁰ Helen Brown, “The flesh revealed,” *The Daily Telegraph* (London), January 26, 2002.

⁹¹ Julie Myerson, “Corsets and cliffhangers: Julie Myerson is hooked on a modern Wilkie Collins: *Fingersmith*,” *The Guardian* (London), February 2, 2002.

⁹² Tom Gilling, “Our Mutual Attraction,” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, February 24 2002, accessed April 5 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/books/our-mutual-attraction.html>.

⁹³ Julie Myerson, “Corsets and cliffhangers: Julie Myerson is hooked on a modern Wilkie Collins: *Fingersmith*,” *The Guardian* (London), February 2, 2002.

⁹⁴ Bunmi Daramola, “A rip-roaring Victorian yarn: Bunmi Daramola reviews *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters Virago, GBP 15.99,” *Morning Star* (London), March 4, 2002.

This introduction already has four hits with the list of labels but does not give us anything information about Waters's novel *Fingersmith*. Further on the reviewer does talk about the novel as Victorian, from 'a modern-day perspective'⁹⁵ and taking inspiration from Dickens. Though, this illustrates how one cannot depend on the quantitative results alone as was already discussed in the introduction.

1.2 Online reviews

Ten online reviews of *Fingersmith* were gathered for the analysis. All reviews were retrieved from internet searches on online reviewing platforms. Four reviews are from Amazon, four from Goodreads and two from book blogs. They all had a length of 250 words or more. Table 4 below shows the website the review is from and name of the reviewer of each online review used in the analysis.

Table 4: *List of online reviews on Fingersmith*

Review	Website and name reviewer
Review 1	Amazon, Josh Mauthe
Review 2	Amazon, Jennifer
Review 3	Amazon, Molly
Review 4	Amazon, Cheri Crystal
Review 5	Goodreads, Karen
Review 6	Goodreads, Violet Wells
Review 7	Goodreads, Sofia
Review 8	Goodreads, Dem
Review 9	Blog, the constant reader
Review 10	Blog, reviews by Lola

1.1.3 Quantitative results

The ten online reviews were retrieved from internet searches and were analysed with the list of labels in Table 1. The results are charted in Table 5 below. This table again gives an overview of the number of hits per review. All labels all listed on the left side of Table 5 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table.

⁹⁵ Bunmi Daramola, "A rip-roaring Victorian yarn: Bunmi Daramola reviews *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters Virago, GBP 15.99," *Morning Star* (London), March 4, 2002.

Table 5: Results online reviews on *Fingersmith*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins					1					
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens			1	1	3	2				
Dickensian										
Victorian	2	7	1	1	2	2	1		3	2
Period	1									1
Nineteenth century / 19 th century										
Historical fiction		1								
Contemporary / modern								1		
Postmodern									1	
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse			2						1	
Ghost / spirit										
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries										
Slum										
Detective					1					
Sensation(al)										
Sex(uality)										
Rewritten										
Pastiche						3				

When one compares these results to the results of the published reviews there are some labels that were not mentioned with both sets of reviews. These labels are *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, *dual plot (structure)*, *ghost/spirit*, *secondary (Victorian) literature*, *newspaper*, *diaries* and *rewritten*. Why these labels were not used in the online reviews can be explained in the same way as with the published reviews. *Fingersmith* does not resemble a novel by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the plot elements of ghosts, newspapers and diaries do not occur in the novel as well. Some labels were not mentioned in the online reviews but were mentioned in the published ones, such as *Dickensian*, *slum*, *sensation(al)* and *sex(uality)*. The one unused label that is noteworthy is *19th century* which occurred in five of the published reviews. This observation does not mean that the online reviewers were not aware of the setting of the novel, because nine reviews used the label Victorian which indirectly means the 19th century. The results in Table 5 also show the labels that were not used in the published reviews, namely *postmodern* and *detective*.

Table 5 reveals that the number of hits in the online reviews is significantly lower than the results in Table 3 with the published reviews. This also makes it harder to conclude something from these results. It does however show that four of the critics link Waters's novel to Victorian authors Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens but they do not connect it to either historical, contemporary or postmodern fiction. Review 6 attracts attention, because Violet Wells used the label *pastiche* three times and did not mention the label *postmodern* while this is an important characteristic of postmodernity. This review will be analysed more closely in the next section with qualitative results.

1.1.4 Qualitative results

The close reading of the online reviews of *Fingersmith* did not result in as many crucial insights as it did with the published reviews. There are only two reviews that will be looked at more closely: review 1 and review 6.

First, review 1 from Amazon by Josh Mauthe. Table 5 above shows that this review had three hits with the list of labels that was compiled at the start of the research. It mentioned the label *Victorian* twice and *period* once. However, close reading illustrates that he also mentions other features of the novel that are important to consider for this thesis. The reviewer talks about how *Fingersmith* 'veers into psychiatric treatments for hysteria, objectification of women, mother-daughter relationships, and much, much more'⁹⁶ which are some characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction as mentioned earlier in the introduction and can be related to asylums. Then, further on in the review he mentions that the novel is 'too historically-grounded'⁹⁷ and has 'multiple perspectives'⁹⁸ which is also related to historical fiction and the dual plot structure.

Then, review 6 by Violet Wells on Goodreads. This review is interesting because it used the label *pastiche* three times. Wells uses this label to express her disliking of the novel by Waters, but at the same time makes a pivotal observation by stating that the novel is a pastiche of 'most popular Victorian literature.'⁹⁹ Earlier on this research tried to define what neo-Victorianism precisely is and one of the definitions that seemed to occur multiple times in different articles and books is that neo-Victorian literature is a pastiche of Victorian

⁹⁶ Josh Mauthe, "Review Fingersmith," Amazon, April 12, 2021, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Fingersmith-Sarah-Waters/dp/1860498833>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Violet Wells, "Review Fingersmith," Goodreads, August 6, 2015, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8913370-fingersmith>.

literature. This aspect of the genre is something negative in the eyes of Wells, but in stating that the novel is a pastiche she indirectly defines it as neo-Victorian without even knowing so herself. She argues that the ‘novel [...] traffics in pastiche (plagiarism?)’¹⁰⁰ and is ‘all pastiche, pasteboard and mirrors’¹⁰¹.

1.3 Conclusion

The quantitative results on both the published and online reviews of Sarah Waters’s novel *Fingersmith* clearly showed that the published reviews gave significantly more hits than the online reviews. The online reviews only indicated that almost every reviewer mentioned the label *Victorian* in their review which is not unusual since the novel is set in the Victorian age. The published reviews mainly referred more to Victorian authors Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens in their reviews because the novel is inspired by their Victorian novels. The qualitative results also showed that these Victorian novels, namely *The Woman in White* and *Oliver Twist* were also mentioned in the reviews.

Another striking outcome that set the published reviews apart from the online reviews was the fact that some critics used the labels *historical fiction* and *contemporary/modern*. These labels were both used once in the online reviews as opposed to eight times in the published reviews. This contradiction between the novel containing features from historical fiction or contemporary fiction is part of the discussion on the definition of neo-Victorian fiction together with postmodernism. So, for the results to see this discrepancy can indicate that critics are unaware of the discussion but are indirectly in on it too. They mention several characteristics that are seen in the novel but are part of the definition of neo-Victorianism as well.

¹⁰⁰ Violet Wells, “Review Fingersmith,” Goodreads, August 6, 2015, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8913370-fingersmith>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2 - The Dark Clue

‘This epistolary sequel to *The Woman in White* sets Wilkie Collins’s hero the herculean task of writing a life of the legendary English painter J.M.W. Turner.’¹⁰²

This tagline from the online review on Kirkus reviews immediately mentions a key characteristic of neo-Victorian literature: it is based on or is a sequel to a novel by a Victorian author, Wilkie Collins in this case. This already shows why it was chosen for this research. In this chapter the results from analysing the published and online reviews on *The Dark Clue* (2001) by James Wilson will be discussed. These results will show whether critics describe it as a neo-Victorian novel. It is his first novel and was published in 2001 by Faber in the UK and by Grove/Atlantic in the US.¹⁰³ It is interesting to note that the websites of both the UK and US publisher categorise the novel in the genre of historical fiction. The website of Faber even mentions that the novel ‘takes us into Victorian England in all its staggering extremes; of poverty and wealth, of slums and stately homes, of public morality and private vice in an unforgettable tale of suspense.’¹⁰⁴ The results will depict where the reviewers place the novel.

Both websites also give a short summary of the novel and already mention that the novel has two of the main characters from Wilkie Collins’s novel *The Woman in White* in it. Faber’s website mentions the names of the characters and the Victorian author where the website of Grove/Atlantic only mentions the names of Walter and Marian.

2.1 Published reviews

Ten published reviews of *The Dark Clue* were selected for the analysis. All ten reviews were collected from the Nexis Uni database, came from either the United Kingdom, Australia or America and all contained over 250 words. Table 6 below shows the newspapers and reviewers that published each review used in this chapter on *The Dark Clue*.

¹⁰² “The Dark Clue,” Kirkus, accessed 19 December 2022, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/james-wilson/the-dark-clue/>.

¹⁰³ “James Wilson,” Grove Atlantic, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://groveatlantic.com/author/james-wilson/>.

¹⁰⁴ “The Dark Clue by James Wilson,” Faber, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.faber.co.uk/product/9780571202768-the-dark-clue/>.

Table 6: *List of published reviews on The Dark Clue*

Review	Newspaper and reviewer
Review 1	<i>The Express</i> , Amanda Craig
Review 2	<i>The Guardian</i> , Alfred Hickling
Review 3	<i>The Herald</i> , Lesley McDowell
Review 4	<i>The Independent on Sunday</i> , Matthew Sweet
Review 5	<i>The Globe and Mail</i> , Marnie Woodrow
Review 6	<i>The Sunday Times</i> , David Grylls
Review 7	<i>The Times</i> , Sophie Ratcliffe
Review 8	<i>St John's Telegram</i> , Jamie Portman
Review 9	<i>The Scotsman</i> , Allan Massie
Review 10	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> , Nigel Spivey

2.1.1 Quantitative results

The ten published reviews that were retrieved from the Nexis Uni database were all analysed with the use of the labels listed in Table 1 in the methodology section earlier. The results are gathered in the same way as with the first case study on *Fingersmith*. All labels are again listed on the left side of Table 7 below while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table. The reviews are shortened to R accompanied with the number corresponding to the ones listed in Table 6 above.

Table 7: *Results published reviews on The Dark Clue*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins		3	8	5	3	3	2	1	8	2
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens					1				1	
Dickensian										
Victorian	2	1			3	3	3	3	3	3
Period			1						1	
Nineteenth century / 19 th century			2	1				2		1
Historical fiction										
Contemporary / modern					1		1			
Postmodern										
Dual plot (structure)					1					
Asylum / madhouse	1					1				
Ghost / spirit										
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries				1						1
Slum	1	1								
Detective	1						1			
Sensation(al)		1	4		2		1	1		

Sex(uality)			1		1			1		1
Rewritten					1					
Pastiche		1		1			1		1	

The quantitative results of the published reviews on *The Dark Clue* already show that nine of the critics acknowledged the similarities between Wilson's novel and the Victorian classic by Wilkie Collins. Review 1 is the only review that did not mention the label *Wilkie Collins*. There is an obvious explanation why nine out of ten reviews referred to Wilkie Collins in their reviews since *The Dark Clue* contains two of the main characters from Collins's sensation novel. Victorian author Charles Dickens was also mentioned in two of the reviews whereas Mary Elizabeth Braddon was not mentioned in any of the reviews.

The label *Wilkie Collins* generated many hits, but the same can be said for the label *Victorian* which again can be explained simply because the novel is set in this period. The same can be said about the label *nineteenth century*. There however are two other labels that did occur in many of the reviews and are interesting to highlight for this research. The first one is *sensation(al)* that was mentioned in five reviews and occurred nine times in total. One can argue that Wilson's novel is a continuation of *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins which is a famous sensation novel from the 1860s. The critics may have acknowledged this and commented on it in their reviews. This option will be explored more in the next section. The second label is *pastiche* which is a pivotal part of the definition of neo-Victorianism and part of postmodernism. The definition includes that neo-Victorian fiction may be a pastiche of Victorian fiction. Four critics used this label in their review, which thus makes these fascinating to further research in the next section as well.

There are two other labels that are significant in the definition of neo-Victorian fiction. These labels are about genre and the discussion whether the novel can be classified under historical, contemporary or postmodern fiction. That is why the labels *historical fiction*, *postmodern* and *contemporary/modern* are incorporated in the research. The results on the published reviews of *The Dark Clue* show that the *contemporary/modern* label is the only one that occurred in two reviews. The other two labels were not mentioned at all.

2.1.2 Qualitative results

The quantitative results in Table 7 already give a lot of information on whether *The Dark Clue* could be classified as neo-Victorian by reviewers. Close reading the reviews might bring more crucial information to light. It also gives one the opportunity to confirm some assumptions that were made in the previous section.

Table 7 showed that nine out of ten of the published reviews used the label *Wilkie Collins* in their reviews. Review 1 was the only one that did not mention this label. Close reading revealed that Amanda Craig did mention his novel *The Woman in White* in her review. All ten of the published reviews even referred to this novel. It is even more noticeable that six of the reviews described *The Dark Clue* a sequel or continuation of *The Woman in White* was speculated in the previous section. Lesley McDowell confirms this suspicion by stating that ‘for his debut novel, James Wilson has chosen to write a sequel to Wilkie Collins’s much-loved sensation mystery, *The Woman in White*.’¹⁰⁵

Then there were four critics that used the label *pastiche* in their reviews which needs closer examination. Review 2 and 7 mention that *The Dark Clue* is a pastiche but do not argue as to why they think that it is a pastiche. The other two reviews, review 4 and 9, do add intriguing observations. Matthew Sweet praises Wilson for writing a novel that is considered by him as a ‘straight pastiche’¹⁰⁶. He describes it as ‘an exploration of the common aesthetic and biographical ground between Collins, John Ruskin and JMW Turner, and disguised it as 19th-century noir’¹⁰⁷ in *The Independent*. According to Sweet, Wilson moved beyond a pastiche and combined this postmodern feature with a 19th century novel, which can be seen as part of neo-Victorian fiction. Then review 9 in *The Scotsman* where Allan Massie argues that Wilson’s novel is ‘neither parody nor pastiche’¹⁰⁸ but ‘wrestles with the structure of Victorian detective-fiction from a modern perspective, setting the tightly coiled spring of plot against the vortex-like whirls of Turner’s paintings.’¹⁰⁹ It is striking that Massie does not see Wilson’s novel as a pastiche of Collins’s work, but he does however mention that it has the structure of a Victorian novel with a modern perspective. That could be seen as a characteristic of neo-Victorianism.

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Hickling, “A darker shade of white; *The Dark Clue* by James Wilson; Faber 390pp £ 10.99 (£9),” *Guardian Weekly* (London), May 30, 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Lesley McDowell, “Classic study in black and white,” *The Herald* (Glasgow), June 9, 2001.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Allan Massie, “Grim brush with genius,” *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), May 26, 2001.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

This modern or contemporary perspective as a part of neo-Victorian was already acknowledged before. It is also a label from the list and was mentioned in two of the reviews, namely review 5 and 7. The result from review 7 is already shown above. Close reading shows that review 5 in *The Globe and Mail* argues that *The Dark Clue* has ‘21st-century conceptions of the contemporary thriller’ which has nothing to do with neo-Victorianism, but links it to the genre of thrillers. These two reviews are examples why close reading is crucial for the current research because they received hits in with quantitative results but do not give any relevant information with regards to answering the research question. The opposite is shown in review 3 and 6 though. Both critics describe a tension between the modern and Victorian that is present in *The Dark Clue*. Matthew Sweet argues that the novel is ‘an exploration of the common aesthetic and biographical ground between Collins, John Ruskin and JMW Turner, and disguised it as 19th-century noir.’¹¹⁰ Ratcliffe is more to the point in her line of reasoning and simply defines the novel as ‘Victorian detective-fiction from a modern perspective’¹¹¹ which is close to the definition of a neo-Victorian novel.

Sweet’s quote above already mentions how the novel could be seen as a biography of several Victorians. Romantic painter William Turner is the main character in the novel and according to the critics in review 1 and 2, he is depicted as a typical Victorian character. Craig describes him as ‘a disturbingly elusive figure small and ugly, he grew up in a Covent Garden slum; his father was a barber and his mother ended her days in a lunatic asylum.’¹¹² His lifestyle is described more closely by Hickling in *The Guardian* and even compares it to ‘a Victorian sensation novel.’¹¹³

Besides having a Victorian as its main character, *The Dark Clue* shares another similarity with the Victorian novel: its structure. The dual-plot structure was mentioned in the previous chapter on *Fingersmith* as a feature of both Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction. This feature can be seen in Wilson’s novel too. According to Hickling, Wilson ‘mimics *The Woman in White*’s revolutionary technique of presenting the narrative in the form of conflicting testimonies.’¹¹⁴ His observation about taking inspiration for the structure from Collins is shared by McDowell, Portman and Massie. These critics do not describe the narrative style as a dual plot structure which is why the quantitative results did not show this.

¹¹⁰ Matthew Sweet, “A splasher and a dauber: Matthew Sweet delights in a devilishly clever homage to Wilkie Collins, John Rushkin and JMW Turner,” *Independent on Sunday* (London), May 13, 2001.

¹¹¹ Sophie Ratcliffe, “Following up,” *The Times* (London), May 26, 2001.

¹¹² Amanda Craig, “The Dark Clue, James Wilson, Faber,” *The Express*, (London), May 6, 2001.

¹¹³ Alfred Hickling, “A darker shade of white; The Dark Clue by James Wilson; Faber 390pp £ 10.99 (£9),” *Guardian Weekly* (London), May 30, 2001.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

There was one critic who did express it in these exact words though. Marnie Woodrow points out that ‘*The Dark Clue*’s dual narrative plays out in a series of letters and journal entries’¹¹⁵ which is the same as the other four critics tried to explain.

2.2 Online reviews

The list of online reviews on *The Dark Clue* differ from the other list in the case studies because there were only nine online reviews found that met the qualifications used in this research. Other online reviews contained less than 250 words. So, nine online reviews were gathered for the analysis. All reviews were retrieved from internet searches on online reviewing platforms. Three reviews are from Amazon, three from Goodreads and three from book blogs. This distribution of online reviews and where they were retrieved from also differs from the first case study as the criteria of word count was not reached in other cases. All nine did have a length of 250 words or more. Table 8 below shows the website it is from and name of the reviewer of each online used in the analysis.

Table 8: *List of online reviews on The Dark Clue*

Review	Website and name reviewer
Review 1	Amazon, Glynn Young
Review 2	Amazon, tregatt
Review 3	Amazon, taking a rest
Review 4	Goodreads, Janice Bridger
Review 5	Goodreads, Simon Mcleish
Review 6	Goodreads, victorian_addict
Review 7	Blog, Book reporter Lorretta Ruggiero
Review 8	Blog, Nathan Hobby
Review 9	Blog, Kirkus reviews

2.2.1 Quantitative results

The nine online reviews were retrieved from internet searches and were analysed with the list of labels in Table 1. The results are shown in Table 9 below. This table again gives an overview of the number of hits per review. All labels all listed on the left side of Table 9 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table.

¹¹⁵ Marnie Woodrow, “Dark Clue a bright light,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 15, 2001.

Table 9: Results online reviews on *The Dark Clue*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9
Wilkie Collins	2	3	3	1	7		2	1	2
Mary Elizabeth Braddon									
Charles Dickens									
Dickensian				1					
Victorian	7	2	1	1	1		2	7	1
Period	1								
Nineteenth century / 19 th century			1						
Historical fiction									
Contemporary / modern	1						1		
Postmodern									
Dual plot (structure)									
Asylum / madhouse									
Ghost / spirit									
Secondary (Victorian) literature									
Newspaper									
Diaries					1				
Slum		1							
Detective									
Sensation(al)									
Sex(uality)								1	
Rewritten									
Pastiche									

The results in Table 9 already show a great difference compared to the results in Table 7. The results for the online reviews on *The Dark Clue* had far less hits than the published reviews. There are only two labels that occurred a lot in the reviews, these are *Wilkie Collins* and *Victorian*. Both can be easily explained since the novel is set in the Victorian period and is a continuation of a novel by Victorian author Wilkie Collins.

Furthermore, the only label that was mentioned in more than one review is *contemporary/modern*. The context in which the label is used will be looked at more closely in the next section. Another label that will be further investigated in the following section is *Dickensian* that was used once in review 4.

2.2.2 Qualitative results

The previous section already suggested that three out of the nine online reviews should be analysed more closely. These reviews are number 1, 4 and 7. This section will focus on close reading these three reviews in relation to the labels that were charted in them. One thing stood out while close reading all nine of the reviews in comparison to the published reviews. Seven out of nine online critics mentioned Wilkie Collins's novel *The Woman in White* in their reviews. This amount is almost the same as with the published reviews where all ten mentioned the novel. However, six of the published reviews mentioned that it was a sequel to Collins's novel whereas only two online reviews argued this.

Then review 1 which used the label *contemporary/modern* as seen in Table 9. Glynn Young critiques Wilson for the story becoming 'something else, something less Victorian and more contemporary'¹¹⁶ in her review on Amazon. This is a negative point for the novel, but interesting for the research. Neo-Victorian fiction can be classified as containing elements from Victorian and contemporary fiction which could be what Young is hinting at. This argument is not developed further in the review however. The other review that mentions this label is review 7 by Lorretta Ruggiero. Her use of the label is not interesting for this research though. She mentions how 'it is not unusual for contemporary authors to borrow characters from the classics'¹¹⁷. So, she makes a statement about authorship nowadays and not about the genre or characteristics of the novel.

Finally, review 4 by Janice Berger who used the label *Dickensian* in her review. Close reading this review reveals how Berger argues that the novel 'descends into a Victorian Dickensian kind of hell'¹¹⁸. She uses the adjective to demonstrate that the novel is a novel from the Victorian period which is regularly associated with Charles Dickens.

¹¹⁶ Glynn Young, "Review The Dark Clue," Amazon, October 24, 2014, <https://www.amazon.com/Dark-Clue-Novel-James-Wilson/dp/0802139299>.

¹¹⁷ Lorretta Ruggiero, "The Dark Clue: A Novel of Suspense," Book Reporter, January 21 2011, accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.bookreporter.com/reviews/the-dark-clue-a-novel-of-suspense>.

¹¹⁸ Janice Bridger, "Review The Dark Clue," Goodreads, June 2, 2021, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/576549.The_Dark_Clue.

2.3 Conclusion

Again, the results showed that the published reviews on *The Dark Clue* resulted in more hits with the list of labels than the online reviews did. Both sets of reviews however did recognise that the novel was a sequel to the Victorian classic by Wilkie Collins. Both results gave a lot of hits on the label *Wilkie Collins* and the close reading demonstrated that many of the published reviews even mentioned that it was a sequel or continuation in their review which is a characteristic of neo-Victorianism.

The published reviews did have some results with labels that are concerned with the definition of neo-Victorianism such as pastiche and dual-plot structure. The online results did not have these labels in them and show a slight discrepancy between both sets of reviews. The published reviews thus show that they may be more aware of the underlying genre of the novel than the online reviews are. Although they still do not use the term neo-Victorian.

CHAPTER 3 – Arthur & George

‘Arthur & George is a novel in which the events of a hundred years ago constantly set off contemporary echoes. It is a novel about low crime and high spirituality; guilt and innocence; identity, nationality and race; and thwarted passion.’¹¹⁹

This description on Julian Barnes’s website perfectly shows how his novel *Arthur & George* could be interpreted as neo-Victorian. It is set in the 19th century but has contemporary themes too. The novel contains several motifs that are generally believed to be a part of Victorian literature such as crime and spirituality. This chapter will show in what genre the reviewers place the novel.

Arthur & George was published by Penguin Random House in 2005. Julian Barnes won the Man Booker Prize in 2011 for his novel *The Sense of an Ending* and was shortlisted for three other novels, including *Arthur & George*. The novel is translated into many different languages and was even adapted for television and the stage. The stage adaptation was written by David Edgar and was first performed at Birmingham Rep and Nottingham Playhouse in 2010.¹²⁰ The television mini-series aired in three parts in 2015 on ITV.¹²¹

3.1 Published reviews

Ten published reviews of *Arthur & George* were selected for the analysis. All ten reviews were collected from the Nexis Uni database, came from either the United Kingdom, Australia or America and all contained over 250 words. Table 10 below shows the newspapers and names of reviewers that published each review used in this analysis.

Table 10: *List of published reviews on Arthur & George*

Review	Newspaper
Review 1	<i>Time out</i> , author unknown
Review 2	<i>The Observer</i> , Alex Clark
Review 3	<i>Publisher’s Weekly</i> , author unknown
Review 4	<i>Richmond Times Dispatch</i> , Doug Childers
Review 5	<i>The Observer</i> , Tim Adams
Review 6	<i>The Herald</i> , Rosemary Goring
Review 7	<i>The Globe and Mail</i> , Zsuzsi Gartner
Review 8	<i>The Scotsman</i> , Andrew Crumey
Review 9	<i>Slate Magazine</i> , Wendy Lesser

¹¹⁹“Arthur & George,” Julian Barnes, accessed July 30, 2022, <http://www.julianbarnes.com/books/arthur.html>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹“Arthur & George,” IMDB, Amazon, accessed July 30, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4439928/>.

Review 10	<i>The New York Times</i> , Terrence Lafferty
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3.1.1 Quantitative results

The ten published reviews that were retrieved from the Nexis Uni database were all analysed with the use of the labels listed in Table 1 in the methodology section earlier. The results are gathered in the same way as with the results of the previous case studies. All labels are again listed on the left side of Table 11 below while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table. The reviews are shortened to R accompanied with the number corresponding to the ones listed in Table 10 above.

Table 11: *Results published reviews on Arthur & George*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins										
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens										
Dickensian										1
Victorian	2				1			2		
Period	1									
Nineteenth century / 19 th century									1	
Historical fiction	1									
Contemporary / modern						2				
Postmodern							1			
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse										
Ghost / spirit						1	1			8
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries										
Slum										
Detective	1		1	1	3	1	1	3		2
Sensation(al)										
Sex(uality)							1			
Rewritten										
Pastiche										

When one compares the quantitative results on the published reviews from the two earlier discussed case studies to these results, it immediately becomes clear that the table above shows rather disappointing results as opposed to the results of previous case studies with the published reviews. There are only two labels that were mentioned in three or more reviews which are *Victorian* and *detective*. Both can be easily explained. The novel is set in

the Victorian period which is probably why this label was used a total of five times in three reviews and the plot is about a detective solving a mystery which clarifies why this label occurred thirteen times in eight reviews.

Another label that was mentioned multiple times is *ghost/spirit*. It was used a total of ten times in three reviews, review 10 however made up for eight of those ten. The plot of *Arthur & George* is partly concerned with ghosts and spirituality which is probably the reason it occurred ten times. Novels containing spirits or ghosts are generally considered to be a recurring theme in Victorian and neo-Victorian literature as became clear in the literature review in the introduction. Another recurring theme according to research seems to be sex or sexuality. This theme was mentioned once in review 7.

The other two case studies had some results with the published reviews with the labels of the Victorian authors. This was not the case with *Arthur & George* as these labels were not used in any of them. Review 10 from *the Evening Times* did have a hit with the label *Dickensian* which will be explored more in the next section. Barnes's novel however is not based on a novel by a Victorian author which could be the reason why they were not mentioned in the reviews. It does however involve the character of Arthur Conan Doyle, inspired by the Victorian author of Sherlock Holmes, but he is not part of the list.

Finally, the labels that were used in the reviews regarding the genre of the novel. Neo-Victorian fiction contains elements from historical and postmodern literature. So, it is interesting to note that both the label *historical fiction* and *postmodern* were charted as well as the label *contemporary/modern*. These labels were each used in different reviews though. This contradiction between these reviews will be further investigated in the next section.

3.1.2 Qualitative results

After close reading all ten of the published reviews on Barnes's *Arthur & George* there are two things that were mentioned in all reviews. They all note that the novel contains the character of Victorian author Arthur Conan Doyle, who is the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle is one of the main characters in the novel and tries to solve a mystery as a detective. This is probably also the reason why the three Victorian authors in the list were not charted in the published reviews at all. Barnes's novel is not based on any of their novels and does not contain characters created by them. There however was one review that received a chart for the label *Dickensian* and that is review 10 by Terrence Lafferty. Lafferty uses the label in his review by stating the following:

‘To clarify: Julian Barnes has written a deeply English novel, in the grand manner, about the sorts of existential questions the English on the whole prefer to leave to the French. "Arthur and George" conceals its contemplation of the imponderables slyly, discreetly hiding it behind the curtains while scenes of Dickensian force and color play out in firelit rooms.’¹²²

His argument on how Barnes has written an imitation of the work of Dickens could be seen as a reason why the novel is neo-Victorian.

There is another review that also argues that *Arthur & George* mimics or even replicates other novels, not necessarily by Dickens. Review 1 from *Time Out* describes how ‘Barnes takes evident luxurious enjoyment in replicating period modes of writing, be it the lengthy and formal exposition of the Late Victorian/ Edwardian literary style or the uninterrupted chunks of reported speech.’¹²³ This literary style of Barnes was noticed by Tim Adams in his review in *The Observer* too. He interpreted the writing style as ‘a kind of homage to the stateliness of late Victorian letters’¹²⁴.

These typical Victorian modes of writing were not only noticed by these two critics. Three other reviews mention how Barnes used alternating chapters throughout his novel that go back and forth between the two main characters Arthur and George. This could also be described as a dual plot structure which is a label from the list that was not used in any of the reviews. Close reading showed that reviews 7, 8 and 9 did comment on this though where Zsuzsi Gartner expresses in the *Globe and Mail* how Barnes ‘cross-cuts back and forth, to gripping and emotionally convincing effect, between Arthur and George's disparate lives’¹²⁵. This observation is shared by Andrew Crumey who explains how the childhoods of the characters are ‘alternately described’¹²⁶ and Wendy Lesser who describes the narrative structure as ‘alternating chapters’¹²⁷. These three examples perfectly show why close reading is pivotal to the research. This characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction would otherwise not have been noticed.

¹²² Terrance Lafferty, “The Game’s Afoot,” *The New York Times* (New York), January 15, 2006.

¹²³ “Arthur & George Julian Barnes Cape BGP 17.99; Books: Preview,” *Time Out* (London), July 6, 2005.

¹²⁴ Tim Adams, “Review: Books: Fiction: Show me the way to go Holmes: Julian Barnes’s wonderfully executed new novel recounts Conan Doyle’s own detective adventure,” *The Observer* (London), June 26, 2005.

¹²⁵ Zsuzsi Gartner, “A palpable hit, by George! Arthur & George is a masterful book by one of the world’s greatest living writers, a page-turner that also more than fulfils all literary expectations,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 7, 2005.

¹²⁶ Andrew Crumey, “Books Review: Arthur & George: stranger than any fiction,” *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), July 3, 2005.

¹²⁷ Wendy Lesser, “The Strange Case of Julian Barnes,” *Slate Magazine* (New York), January 3, 2006.

Another characteristic of the genre is the use of secondary (Victorian) literature, letters or excerpts from newspapers and diaries. These are also labels in the list that were not charted in the published reviews in Table 11. The qualitative results however show that three reviews do mention something about the historical information that is used in the novel. These again are reviews 7, 8 and 9. Gartner recognises how the novel is ‘based on a case from the history books’¹²⁸. Both Crumey and Lesser state that ‘Barnes has drawn on copious historical material’¹²⁹.

Gartner and Crumey describe some other interesting points from the novel in their reviews. They mention several themes that keep recurring throughout Victorian literature and neo-Victorian literature as well. Gartner describes how the character of Arthur ‘loves and is loved by more than one woman’¹³⁰ and how the novel ‘tackles religion and faith, the nature of love, bigotry’¹³¹ where Crumey mentions how George’s character is ‘aware of the Victorian notion of Christian humility’¹³². These themes were all mentioned in the theoretical framework.

Finally, the contradiction in genre between the reviews should be discussed further. The previous section already mentioned that three of the labels concerning genre were mentioned each in different reviews. *Time Out* defines Barnes’s novel as ‘a blend of imaginative biography and historical novel’¹³³ whereas *Publisher’s Weekly* argues that the novel is a ‘combination psychological novel, detective story and literary thriller’¹³⁴. The idea of placing the novel under the genre of detective is shared by Lesser in *The Scotsman* who defines it as a ‘whodunnit’¹³⁵ and Lafferty who argues that it is a ‘true mystery story’¹³⁶ in review 10. Neo-Victorian fiction is defined as a combination of historical fiction and contemporary fiction with nods to postmodernism. The label *contemporary / modern* occurred

¹²⁸ Zsuzsi Gartner, “A palpable hit, by George! Arthur & George is a masterful book by one of the world’s greatest living writers, a page-turner that also more than fulfils all literary expectations,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 7, 2005.

¹²⁹ Andrew Crumey, “Books Review: Arthur & George: stranger than any fiction,” *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), July 3, 2005.

¹³⁰ Zsuzsi Gartner, “A palpable hit, by George! Arthur & George is a masterful book by one of the world’s greatest living writers, a page-turner that also more than fulfils all literary expectations,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 7, 2005.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Andrew Crumey, “Books Review: Arthur & George: stranger than any fiction,” *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), July 3, 2005.

¹³³ Time Out, “Arthur & George Julian Barnes Cape BGP 17.99; Books: Preview,” *Time Out* (London), July 6, 2005.

¹³⁴ *Publisher’s Weekly*, “Arthur & George”, *Publisher’s Weekly* (New York City), November 7, 2005.

¹³⁵ Andrew Crumey, “Books Review: Arthur & George: stranger than any fiction,” *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), July 3, 2005.

¹³⁶ Terrance Lafferty, “The Game’s Afoot,” *The New York Times* (New York), January 15, 2006.

twice in review 6, but this result unfortunately does not report upon what genre Rosemary Goring categorises the novel as. The term is used by Goring to explain how Barnes illustrates the period of the novel in its ‘modern state’¹³⁷ and how George’s ‘stance is far more modern and recognisable than Arthur’s.’¹³⁸ The label *postmodern* was used in review 7 too where Gartner explains how Barnes ‘is the most accessible of postmodernists’¹³⁹ which again tell us nothing about the genre of the novel.

3.2 Online reviews

Ten online reviews on *Arthur & George* were collected. All reviews were retrieved from internet searches on online reviewing platforms. Four reviews are from Amazon, four from Goodreads and two from book blogs. All ten reviews have a length of 250 words or more. Table 12 below shows the website it is from and name of the reviewer of each online review used in the analysis.

Table 12: *List of online reviews on Arthur & George*

Review	Website and name reviewer
Review 1	Amazon, PlantBirdWoman
Review 2	Amazon, Glynn Young
Review 3	Amazon, Richard Seltzer
Review 4	Amazon, Norman Housley
Review 5	Goodreads, Jim Fonseca
Review 6	Goodreads, Cecily
Review 7	Goodreads, Trevor
Review 8	Goodreads, Robin
Review 9	Blog, complete review
Review 10	Blog, Chris Saliba book reviews

3.2.1 Quantitative results

The ten online reviews were retrieved from internet searches and were analysed with the list of labels in Table 1. The results are shown in Table 13 below. This table again gives an overview of the number of hits per review. All labels all listed on the left side of Table 13 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table.

¹³⁷ Rosemary Goring, “The whole sleuth Julian Barnes meshes fact and fiction in the life of Arthur Conan Doyle,” *The Herald* (Glasgow), July 2, 2005.

¹³⁸ Ibid,

¹³⁹ Zsuzsi Gartner, “A palpable hit, by George! *Arthur & George* is a masterful book by one of the world’s greatest living writers, a page-turner that also more than fulfils all literary expectations,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 7, 2005.

Table 13: *Results online reviews on Arthur & George*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins										
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens										
Dickensian										
Victorian						1				
Period										
Nineteenth century / 19 th century	1									
Historical fiction					1					
Contemporary / modern	1						1			
Postmodern										
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse										
Ghost / spirit	1			1	1	1		1	1	
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper						1				
Diaries										
Slum										
Detective	1				2	1	1			
Sensation(al)										
Sex(uality)							1			
Rewritten										
Pastiche	1									

The results from the online reviews on *Arthur & George* do not show that many differences compared to the results from the published reviews. The reviews overall did not use as many of the labels as opposed to the two previously discussed novels. The results of this case study share some similarities. Both sets of reviews did not have mention any of the three well-known Victorian authors. A possible reason for this was already explained earlier.

The published reviews already showed that there were only two labels from the list that were mentioned in three or more reviews. The online results show a similar trend. Only two of the labels were used in more than two reviews in this case. The results reveal that the label *detective* occurred in eight published reviews and five times in four online reviews. This is easily explained since the plot is about a detective solving mystery. The other label that was used six times in six online reviews was *ghost/spirit*. Spirituality is one of the central themes in the novel which probably explains why this label was used several times.

Spirituality is one of the motifs generally found in neo-Victorian fiction. The results in Table 13 also shows some other labels that are commonly found in the plot of a neo-Victorian novel and were mentioned in the online reviews. These labels are *newspaper* and *sex(uality)*,

which were both found in one review. This could be an indication that the reviewer indirectly labels *Arthur & George* as neo-Victorian.

Another indication that the reviewers could be indirectly identifying the novel as neo-Victorian is the contradiction in the genre of the novel. Some categorise it within the genre of historical fiction where other place it under contemporary fiction or even postmodern. This contradiction is also reflected in the results from the online reviews. Review 5 defined it as historical fiction whereas review 1 and 7 used the label *contemporary/modern*. It is also interesting to see that the label *pastiche* was mentioned in review 1 as well. Neo-Victorian fiction is generally defined as a pastiche of Victorian fiction and themes. This review needs to be further investigated through close reading to see if this result is interesting for the research.

3.2.2 Qualitative results

Close reading the online reviews gave a similar result as with the published reviews. The results in Table 13 already showed that the three Victorian authors in the list were not named, but another author was. Arthur Conan Doyle was mentioned in almost every online review, only review 5 did not mention the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle, however is one of the protagonists of *Arthur & George* as was mentioned before, which explains why he is mentioned in nine of the online reviews.

The quantitative results revealed two labels which describe themes commonly found in neo-Victorian literature which occurred in two of the online reviews. These labels are *newspaper* and *sex(uality)*. Fragments from newspapers are found regularly in Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction. In review 6 from Goodreads, Cecily describes how ‘the book reads like a novel, but is factual; it quotes real documents, newspapers, transcripts, and records, and the gist of the case is in the blurb.’¹⁴⁰ Then the other label *sex(uality)*, sex is a central theme in Victorian fiction whereas sexuality commonly is in neo-Victorian novels. This hit unfortunately was a false one. In his review on Goodreads, Trevor asks certain questions about the novel, and one goes as follows: ‘Was George a sexual deviant?’ which does not necessarily mean that it is a theme in the novel.

Another characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction is that the plot could be derived from either Victorian novels or true events that happened in the Victorian period. The latter applies to *Arthur & George* and is acknowledged in five of the ten online reviews. As

¹⁴⁰ Cecily, “Review Arthur & George,” Goodreads, March 4, 2014. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45369.Arthur_George.

PlantBirdWoman states in review 1 ‘the book is based on true events’¹⁴¹ and the critics from review 5, 8, 9 and 10 agree with her. These reviews use different terms to express the same. Jim Fonseca describes it as ‘real life drama’¹⁴², Robin then calls it ‘historically accurate’, where completerevuew and Chris Saliba both define it as a ‘fictional account of a shocking true crime’¹⁴³.

Saliba defines the novel as true crime in review 10 which could also be read as the genre of true crime. The question of genre is what the current research is partly about, and the online reviews gave contrasting results. The five reviews that are discussed above could identify the novel as true crime since they all claim that the plot is based on true events. Review 5, however also received a hit for the label *historical fiction*. Fonseca starts his review by describing it as ‘a historical novel based on true events in England in the late 1800’s to early 1900’s.’¹⁴⁴ This statement shows that he places the novel under the genre historical fiction rather than true crime. The results from Table 13 also show that two reviews used the label *contemporary / modern* which could indicate that the novel contains elements from contemporary fiction. Trevor in review 7 used the label by stating that Barnes ‘reminds [him] of a modern day Montaigne’¹⁴⁵ which clearly gives no information about genre. In review 1, PlantBirdWoman argues that Sherlock Holmes still ‘fascinates much of the world, as evidenced by the popularity of modern movies, television shows, and literary pastiches featuring him.’¹⁴⁶ Again, the use of the label *modern* does not give any information about the genre of the novel. However, she does use another label that could give insight her view of in the genre of *Arthur & George*, namely the label *pastiche*. This element is commonly found in postmodern literature, but she uses the label in a general comment and not one regarding Barnes’s novel. She uses the labels in the following way: ‘He still fascinates me as he still fascinates much of the world, as evidenced by the popularity of modern movies, television shows, and literary pastiches featuring him.’¹⁴⁷ Finally, the novel was also defined as a

¹⁴¹ PlantBirdWoman, “Review Arthur & George,” Amazon, September 19, 2015, <https://www.amazon.nl/Arthur-George-a-novel/dp/0739469851>.

¹⁴² Jim Fonseca, “Review Arthur & George,” Goodreads, January 27, 2021, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45369.Arthur_George.

¹⁴³ Chris Saliba, “Arthur & George by Julian Barnes,” Chris Saliba book reviews, September 26, 2014, <http://chrissalibabookreviews.blogspot.com/2014/09/arthur-and-george-by-julian-barnes.html>

¹⁴⁴ Jim Fonseca, “Review Arthur & George,” Goodreads, January 27, 2021, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45369.Arthur_George.

¹⁴⁵ Robin, “Review Arthur & George,” Goodreads, March 4, 2017, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45369.Arthur_George.

¹⁴⁶ PlantBirdWoman, “Review Arthur & George,” Amazon, September 19, 2015, <https://www.amazon.nl/Arthur-George-a-novel/dp/0739469851>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

‘mystery story’¹⁴⁸ in review 3 and ‘Edwardian crime story’¹⁴⁹ in review 6. The question on genre remains largely unanswered after analysing the results from the online reviews.

3.3 Conclusion

This case study clearly resulted in less hits with the labels than the previous two case studies did. It still had some interesting results. Both the published and online reviews acknowledged that one of the main characters was Arthur Conan Doyle who was a Victorian author. The Victorian authors from the list were not charted in the reviews though. Close reading showed that the reviewers of both the published and online reviews mentioned several characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction. Many critics described how the novel has a dual plot structure, is based on true historic events and contains themes commonly found in neo-Victorian fiction.

The reviewers mostly defined the novel as a detective or historical novel. One published review did however mention that Barnes is a postmodern author in general which could indicate that the novel might contain elements from the genre. It is more interesting though that the reviews on *Arthur & George* mentioned several labels from the list and especially the qualitative results that showed that many reviews described elements from neo-Victorian fiction.

¹⁴⁸ Richard Seltzer, “Review Arthur & Geroge,” Amazon, April 25, 2006, <https://www.amazon.nl/Arthur-George-a-novel/dp/0739469851>.

¹⁴⁹ Cecily, “Review Arthur & George,” Goodreads, March 4, 2014, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45369.Arthur_George.

CHAPTER 4 – *The Seance*

‘Set in Victorian England, Harwood's spellbinding second novel (after *The Ghost Writer*) pays homage to such 19th-century suspense masters as Wilkie Collins and Sheridan LeFanu.’¹⁵⁰

This description of *The Seance* on the website of Publisher’s Weekly coincides with some of the characteristics of neo-Victorianism as described in the literature review. The novel is set in Victorian England and can be compared to Victorian authors such as Wilkie Collins.

John Harwood is the author of Victorian suspense novels and his debut novel *The Ghost Writer* ‘won the International Horror Guild's First Novel Award.’¹⁵¹ *The Seance* was published in 2009 by Jonathan Cape which is an imprint of Penguin Random House. This chapter will explore published and online reviews on Harwood’s novel and analyse whether critics may consider it as a neo-Victorian novel or rather a gothic novel based on the themes in the novel. This could perhaps also be based on the novels he has previously written.

1.1 Published reviews

Ten published reviews of *The Seance* were selected for the analysis. All ten reviews were collected from the Nexis Uni database, came from either the United Kingdom, Australia or America and all contained over 250 words. Table 14 below shows the newspapers and names of reviewers that published each review used in this analysis.

Table 14: *List of published reviews on The Seance*

Review	Newspaper
Review 1	<i>The Independent</i> , Andrew Taylor
Review 2	<i>Aberdeen Press and Journal</i> , Jenny Thomson
Review 3	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> , Kerryn Goldsworthy
Review 4	<i>Herald Sun</i> , Claire Sutherland
Review 5	<i>Hobart Mercury</i> , Jonathan Dawson
Review 6	<i>The Anniston Star</i> , Brett Buckner
Review 7	<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i> , Judith Flanders
Review 8	<i>The Age</i> , Lucy Sussex
Review 9	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> , Sinclair McKay
Review 10	<i>The Canberra Times</i> , author unknown

¹⁵⁰ “The Seance,” Publisher’s Weekly, accessed August 14, 2022, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780151012039>.

¹⁵¹ “John Harwood,” Harper Collins, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.harpercollins.com/blogs/authors/john-harwood-75963#:~:text=John%20Harwood%20is%20the%20author,Horror%20Guild's%20First%20Novel%20Award.>

1.1.1 Quantitative results

The ten published reviews that were retrieved from the Nexis Uni database were all analysed with the use of the labels listed in Table 1 in the methodology section earlier. The results were gathered in the same way as with the results of the previous case studies. All labels are again listed on the left side of Table 15 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table. The reviews are shortened to R accompanied with the number corresponding to the ones listed in Table 14 above.

Table 15: *Results published reviews on The Seance*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins	1		1		1	1		1		1
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens			1		1	1		1		
Dickensian										
Victorian	3	3	4		4	2	4	5	3	7
Period					1					
Nineteenth century / 19 th century	1	2							2	1
Historical fiction			1							
Contemporary / modern	1		1				1	1		
Postmodern								1		
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse									1	1
Ghost / spirit	1		1		1	1	3	5	1	1
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries										
Slum										
Detective										
Sensation(al)										
Sex(uality)								2		
Rewritten										
Pastiche					1					

The results of the published results on *The Seance* show a similar number of hits compared to the first two case studies where the previous case study used fewer of the labels in the reviews. At first glance, there are a few labels that were not used in the ten reviews, which are: *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, *Dickensian*, *dual plot (structure)*, *secondary (Victorian) literature*, *newspaper*, *diaries*, *slum* and *detective*. It is also remarkable that review 4 did not

use any of the labels from the list. Victorian author Mary Elizabeth Braddon probably was not mentioned in the reviews because *The Seance* does not resemble any of her novels. The other labels that did not occur in the reviews are all characteristics of or elements from neo-Victorian literature. They could not have been mentioned because they are not featured in the novel, or the reviewers described them in different terms. The qualitative results should give more information about this.

The label *Victorian* occurred a vast total of 35 times in nine reviews which is not that surprising since the novel is set in the Victorian period. This is probably also the reason why *nineteenth century* was used six times in four reviews and *period* received one hit.

Two other labels that were used several times and are related to the label *Victorian* are the labels concerning the two Victorian authors. The label *Wilkie Collins* was mentioned six times in six reviews and *Charles Dickens* four times in four different reviews. It is also interesting to note that each review that mentioned Dickens, mentioned Collins too. The authors were likely brought up because Harwood's novel resembles their novels. This is also considered to be a common characteristic found in neo-Victorian fiction.

Other characteristics from the list that were mentioned are the labels *asylum/madhouse*, *ghost/spirit* and *sex(uality)*. The label *ghost/spirit* occurred fourteen times in eight of the published reviews and it is a central theme in the novel where Harwood explores spirituality and the supernatural. The other two were used twice and possibly are minor features in the plot.

Finally, the discussion about the genre of the novel remains. The results on *The Seance* show that all four of the labels that concern genre were used. *Pastiche*, an element from postmodernity was mentioned once in a review just like the label *postmodern*. They did not occur in the same review though. The label *postmodern* was mentioned in review 8, just as the label *contemporary modern* which could be interesting for the research. While review 8 mentioned both *postmodern* and *contemporary/modern*, review 3 mentioned both *contemporary modern* and the label *historical fiction* which is another possible element from neo-Victorianism. This review was also the only one to mention *historical fiction* in it.

1.1.2 Qualitative results

The qualitative results of the published reviews on *The Seance* give a lot of extra information to the earlier discussed quantitative results. The reviews share some similar statements regarding the novel possibly being neo-Victorian. The previous three case studies showed that many critics linked the novels to well-known Victorian authors such as Wilkie Collins and

Charles Dickens. This is also the case with the published reviews on *The Seance*, but two reviews also mention contemporary authors whose novels are considered to be neo-Victorian in research. In review 1 from *The Independent*, Andrew Taylor claims the ‘publishers compare *The Seance* to the work of MR James and Sarah Waters’¹⁵². He agrees with them but still thinks there are ‘are closer parallels in the fiction of Wilkie Collins and Conan Doyle’¹⁵³. So, Harwood’s publishers linked the novel to those of Waters but Taylor still agrees with them to a certain point. The other neo-Victorian author was mentioned in review 8 in *The Age*. Here Lucy Sussex introduces her article about how contemporary writers go back to the Victorian times which could be defined as Victoriana when ‘something of our present era intrudes’¹⁵⁴. She praises A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* as an example of Victoriana done well. This statement itself is interesting in defining neo-Victorianism but does not define the genre of *The Seance*.

Nine of the ten published reviews linked Harwood’s novel to one or multiple Victorian authors, besides the two previously discussed modern authors. Review 7 is the only review that did not mention any other author. The Victorian authors that were discussed in the reviews are MR James, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters, Bram Stoker, Henry James and Matthew Lewis.

The fact that some of the authors such as Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley are known for their gothic novels is interesting for the question of the genre of *The Seance*. Six of the ten reviews mentioned how *The Seance* contained gothic elements or even labelled it as a gothic novel. Jenny Thomson labels the novel as a ‘gothic murder mystery’¹⁵⁵ in review 2 and this opinion is shared by reviews 4, 6 and 9. Kerry Goldsworthy even notices how Harwood uses ‘a number of other Victorian and pre-Victorian gothic motifs’¹⁵⁶ and a similar claim is made by Sussex who claims Harwood ‘mingles the motifs of the Gothic and the Victorian ghost story.’¹⁵⁷ These statements are all quite intriguing as the novel contains elements from the gothic as well. The reviewers are probably not aware of the genre of neo-Victorianism which could also be the reason why they place it with the genre of gothic.

Besides gothic elements, *The Seance* contains elements from neo-Victorian fiction as well. One characteristic that was mentioned in almost every review was the dual plot structure

¹⁵² Andrew Taylor, “The disputed borderland between Victorian science and the paranormal; The Tuesday Book; The Seance by John Harwood,” *The Independent* (London), April 15, 2008.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Lucy Sussex, “Odd echoes of Victorian spirits,” *The Age* (Melbourne), May 24, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Jenny Thomson, “Book of the week,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (Aberdeen), October 13, 2011.

¹⁵⁶ Kerry Goldsworthy, “In short – Fiction,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), April 25, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Lucy Sussex, “Odd echoes of Victorian spirits,” *The Age* (Melbourne), May 24, 2008.

of the novel. The quantitative results showed that the critics did not define it as a dual plot, but close reading showed differently. Review 6 is the only one that does not mention anything about the structure of the plot other than how the novel ‘follows several generations of owners’¹⁵⁸ which is a bit too vague to assume a dual plot structure is meant by this. The other nine reviews all describe how the novel ‘uses (just as Bram Stoker did in *Dracula*) several narrative viewpoints’¹⁵⁹ as Jonathan Dawson explains it. Another characteristic from neo-Victorian fiction is the old decaying mansion as a recurring setting for the novel. This setting was also seen in *The Seance* and acknowledged in six reviews.

Another term for neo-Victorian is Victoriana as was already explained in the introduction. This term is not used as much in academia as neo-Victorian is. This term was not seen before in any of the previously studied reviews but came up twice in the review by Sussex in *The Age*. The first time she mentions Victoriana is already described above where she basically explains how authors go back to the Victorian but certain modern elements enter the plot as well. The second use of the term is very interesting for the current research as she states that ‘*The Seance* is Victoriana revisited at a high level, if not quite as sumptuously as *The Ghost Writer*, then still a classy antique shop of horrors.’¹⁶⁰ Through this statement Sussex acknowledges that she thinks that the novel is neo-Victorian.

The quantitative results showed some questions about genre too. Again, review 8 had used two labels that consider genre. It had a hit for *postmodern* and one for *contemporary/modern*. The label *modern* was used when Sussex explains how ‘many modern writers look back to the Victorian age’¹⁶¹ and then describes how ‘their approaches can vary, from the post-modern and knowing, to the devoted recreation of a lost past, in which things were done differently.’¹⁶² These statements are about neo-Victorian fiction but are more general and not about Harwood’s novel. An element from postmodernism that is seen multiple times in neo-Victorian fiction is pastiche. This was also label which was used once in review 5. Dawson argues that ‘*The Seance* is not only the best “Tasmanian” novel for quite a while, it reminds us that if you want to attempt period pastiche, as is the current middlebrow literary fashion, then some rules may apply.’¹⁶³ There is no further explanation of what the

¹⁵⁸ Brett Buckner, “The Seance conjures up more than ghosts,” *The Anniston Star* (Alabama), April 12, 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Dawson, “Thriller of love among the ruins,” *Hobart Mercury* (Hobart), April 11, 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Lucy Sussex, “Odd echoes of Victorian spirits,” *The Age* (Melbourne), May 24, 2008.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Jonathan Dawson, “Thriller of love among the ruins,” *Hobart Mercury* (Hobart), April 11, 2009.

novel is a pastiche, but this statement is in line with how review 8 claims that the novel is Victoriana.

Neo-Victorianism contains elements from postmodernism and historical fiction. The latter was charted in review 3. Goldsworthy introduces Harwood as a scholar who:

‘knows exactly what a 19th-century novel looks and sounds like. He also knows how to make up a proper plot, how to write fiction that has some abstract or allegorical dimension of meaning, how to write a historical novel that is not full of anachronistic howlers and how to invent characters who are neither thinly disguised versions of himself nor openly based on some other real person. In the landscape of the contemporary novel, this makes him quite an unusual writer.’¹⁶⁴

The label *historical* is used not to describe elements of the novel but to describe all the knowledge that Harwood already has being a scholar for many years.

4.2 Online reviews

Ten online reviews on *The Seance* were collected. All reviews were retrieved from internet searches on online reviewing platforms. Four reviews are from Amazon, four from Goodreads and two from book blogs. All ten reviews have a length of 250 words or more. Table 16 below shows the website it is from and name of the reviewer of each online review used in the analysis.

Table 16: *List of online reviews on The Seance*

Review	Website and name reviewer
Review 1	Amazon, Clarice Marchman-Jones
Review 2	Amazon, Brendan Moody
Review 3	Amazon, Smokey
Review 4	Amazon, Mini
Review 5	Goodreads, Scarlett
Review 6	Goodreads, Tony
Review 7	Goodreads, Michael
Review 8	Goodreads, Beth The Vampire
Review 9	Blog, Madbibliophile
Review 10	Blog, Shereadsnovels

¹⁶⁴ Kerryn Goldsworthy, “In short – Fiction,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), April 25, 2008.

4.2.1 Quantitative results

The ten online reviews were retrieved from internet searches and were analysed with the list of labels in Table 1. The results are shown in Table 17 below. This table again gives an overview of the number of hits per review. All labels all listed on the left side of Table 17 while the reviews are listed in the first row of the table.

Table 17: *Results online reviews on The Seance*

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Wilkie Collins							1			2
Mary Elizabeth Braddon										
Charles Dickens							1			
Dickensian										
Victorian		3	1	1	1	1	1			4
Period									1	1
Nineteenth century / 19 th century		1				1				
Historical fiction										
Contemporary / modern										
Postmodern										
Dual plot (structure)										
Asylum / madhouse								1		
Ghost / spirit		3	1	1			1		1	3
Secondary (Victorian) literature										
Newspaper										
Diaries							1			
Slum										
Detective										
Sensation(al)		1								2
Sex(uality)										
Rewritten										
Pastiche										

When one compares the results of the online results to the results of the published reviews, there are some similarities. Seven labels from the list were not mentioned in both the published and online reviews on *The Seance*. These labels are *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, *dual plot (structure)*, *secondary (Victorian) literature*, *newspaper*, *slum*, *detective* and *rewritten*. The possible reasons as to why these labels were mentioned were already mentioned in the section above on the published reviews.

There is a set of labels that belong together as they all are connected to the genre of the novel. All four of these labels were not used in the ten online reviews but were used in the

published reviews. These labels are *historical fiction*, *contemporary/modern*, *postmodern* and *pastiche*. The close reading of the online reviews will show whether the reviewers did express an opinion regarding the genre of the novel that did not show in the quantitative results.

Another label that occurred in the published reviews but not in the online reviews is *sex(uality)* which is a theme commonly found in Victorian and neo-Victorian literature. Other characteristics from the genre were mentioned in the reviews such as *asylum/madhouse* which was used once, just as the label *diaries*. The label *sensation(al)* was mentioned three times in two reviews and *ghost/spirit* occurred ten times in six of the online reviews.

A major characteristic of the genre is that the plot is set fully or partly in the Victorian period, the 19th century. This was acknowledged in the online reviews as the labels *Victorian*, *nineteenth century* and *period* were all used in the reviews. The latter two each occurred once in two reviews while *Victorian* was used twelve times in seven reviews. These numbers are quite high, but still not the same as with the published reviews.

Two other labels that were also often mentioned but not as many times as with the published reviews are *Wilkie Collins* and *Charles Dickens*. Both were mentioned once in review 7 and Wilkie Collins was mentioned twice in review 10.

4.2.2 Qualitative results

Close reading the online reviews showed similarities with the qualitative results of the published reviews. Both sets of reviews linked the novel to Victorian and even neo-Victorian authors. The published reviews linked *The Seance* to novels by Sarah Waters and A.S. Byatt who are both considered as neo-Victorian authors in academics. One of the online reviews compared Harwood's novel to *Affinity* by Sarah Waters as both explore 'the connections among grief, nineteenth-century rationalism, and gender roles.'¹⁶⁵ These themes are recurring themes in several neo-Victorian novels. Four online reviews mentioned Victorian authors like Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Edgar Allen Poe, Henry James and Arthur Conan Doyle. Not as many as with the published reviews but still some and the authors that they linked to the novel to are similar to the ones mentioned in the published reviews.

Another similarity to the published reviews is that many of the online review describe the narrative structure as a dual plot structure. This style of writing is commonly found in Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction. Seven of the online reviews mention this structure but do not use the exact term just as with the published reviews. The Amazon review by Clarice

¹⁶⁵ Brendan Moody, "Review The Seance," Amazon, October 12, 2011, <https://www.amazon.nl/Seance-John-Harwood/dp/0547247826>.

Marchman-Jones starts off by stating that the ‘story was told in 6 parts by 3 different characters’¹⁶⁶. This opinion is shared by reviews 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 who all explain it as ‘various points of views from a couple of other characters’.¹⁶⁷ Two reviews also picked up on another characteristic from neo-Victorian fiction namely is the use of letters, newspapers and diary entries. Smokey argues how *The Seance* ‘is told through journals, one written in "present" late 1880s and the others written in the "past" in the 1870s’¹⁶⁸ and Michael shares this opinion as he states the novel is told ‘through diaries and journals’¹⁶⁹ as well.

There is another point that came up in multiple of the online reviews which was the ghost or gothic story. The novel contains some elements which could be considered as gothic elements such as the old decaying mansion and the element of the supernatural and spiritualism. Eight of the online reviews defined the novel as gothic or containing gothic elements. Smokey claims the novel to be ‘deliciously old-fashioned gothic novel’¹⁷⁰ in review 3 for example. The labels from the list regarding genre were all not charted in the online reviews. So, the online reviews generally speak of a gothic story but see some elements from neo-Victorian fiction as well.

¹⁶⁶ Clarice Marchman-Jones, “Review The Seance,” Amazon, June 28, 2012, <https://www.amazon.nl/Seance-John-Harwood/dp/0547247826>.

¹⁶⁷ Mini, “Review The Seance,” Amazon, August 6, 2010, <https://www.amazon.nl/Seance-John-Harwood/dp/0547247826>.

¹⁶⁸ Smokey, “Review The Seance,” Amazon, October 12, 2011, <https://www.amazon.nl/Seance-John-Harwood/dp/0547247826>.

¹⁶⁹ Michael, “Review the Seance,” Goodreads, March 23, 2011, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3218327-the-seance?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=tOkUNdx9DD&rank=4.

¹⁷⁰ Smokey, “Review The Seance,” Amazon, October 12, 2011, <https://www.amazon.nl/Seance-John-Harwood/dp/0547247826>.

4.3 Conclusion

This final case study had one published review that used the term Victoriana which is another term for neo-Victorian. This was the first time a critic mentioned of such a term and the review contained quite an elaborate explanation of Victoriana too. Sussex however did not claim that Harwood's novel is neo-Victorian but did compare it to such novels. The other reviews, both published and online mostly defined the novel as a gothic novel though, probably because the novel contains certain elements found in gothic novels such as an old decaying mansion. This element is also found in neo-Victorian too.

The reviews also mentioned several other characteristics from neo-Victorian fiction such as the structure of the novel, themes such as spirituality and it was linked to Victorian authors such as Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has researched the use of labels in the published and online reviews of four contemporary novels which could be categorised as neo-Victorian. The labels used for this research are all related to this new genre widely discussed in academia. The research question guiding this thesis was “How does the reception, both published and online, of neo-Victorian novels correspond with their academic interpretation?”. In order to create a method to test this research question, a clear definition of the genre neo-Victorianism was required. This definition was needed to compile a list of labels. These labels are all based on academic books and articles that discuss the topic of neo-Victorianism. According to the secondary literature used for the definition, a novel could be neo-Victorian when it consists of elements from historical fiction, postmodernism and contemporary themes. It is fiction that ‘engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure or both’¹⁷¹ as Hadley defined it in her book. The novels incorporate certain contemporary themes or motives such as same sex relationships for example. The postmodern element mainly seen in neo-Victorian fiction is the element of pastiche where elements from earlier literature are imitated or borrowed and the novels bear ‘a historicity reminiscent of the nineteenth century novel’¹⁷² as Shiller points out as part of historical fiction. The four novels that were selected for this thesis were consequently discussed in the academic books and articles on neo-Victorianism.

The method that was created to answer the research question is primarily based on similar research by Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers on Metamodernism. Their research showed that a two-way analysis, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, is pivotal when researching reviews. The method used in this thesis is based partly on their article and texts by Jauss on reception theory. The hypothesis was that in all four case studies both the published and online reviews named multiple characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction as described in its definition. The reviewers may have used different labels than the labels gathered from academic sources since they are unaware of this new genre. The discussion on neo-Victorianism is mainly an academic one as Stetz argues by stating that ‘this term for the genre remains largely unused by writers, readers, reviewers, librarians, or booksellers outside of academe.’¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 4.

¹⁷² Dana Shiller, "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 538.

¹⁷³ Margaret D. Stetz, "Neo-Victorian Studies," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 340.

The results show that a division can be made between the first two novels, *Fingersmith* and *The Dark Clue*, and the last two novels, *Arthur & George* and *The Seance*, based on the number of labels that were mentioned in the reviews. A reason for this could be because *Fingersmith* is a novel widely discussed in the academic debate around neo-Victorianism. It also portrays several characteristics of the genre too. The results from the published reviews showed that they linked Waters's novel to Victorian authors Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens and the qualitative results revealed that the critics compared it to Victorian novels such as *The Woman in White* and *Oliver Twist*. Wilson's novel was also linked to *The Woman in White* and was even labelled as a sequel or pastiche of Collins's novel. The pastiche is a characteristic found in postmodern literature, of which neo-Victorianism is debated to be a part of. Another key feature of neo-Victorian literature is the dual plot structure which was mentioned in the qualitative results of *The Dark Clue* too as Hickling acknowledges how Wilson presents his novel in the same form as Collins did.¹⁷⁴ The reviews on *The Dark Clue* also discuss the tension between two genres within the novel (historical fiction and postmodernism) by noting its dual-plot structure, identifying it as a sequel to *The Woman in White* and calling it a pastiche. This tension is also visible in *Fingersmith*, but this novel portrays elements from historical fiction in its setting and structure and themes from contemporary fiction as it deals with a same sex relationship.

What sets the final two novels apart from the first two is not only the fact that they received fewer hits with the list of labels that was compiled, but they also focus more on one theme commonly found in literature overall. The plot of *Arthur & George* is similar to a detective novel, which is probably why the label *detective* occurred multiple times the reviews. A similar thing happened with *The Seance* where the label *ghost/spirit* was mentioned many times in the reviews but can easily be explained since it is a central theme in the novel. Some critics even categorised the novel as part of the gothic. The reviewers probably focused more on these two themes in the novel and therefore did not pick up on any of the other neo-Victorian characteristics. They simply identified the novels as a detective novel and gothic novel.

The results from the fourth case study showed the importance of close reading the reviews next to a quantitative analysis as one review attracted attention. Its reviewer, Lucy Sussex defined the novel as Victoriana and impeccably explained what made the novel part of

¹⁷⁴ Alfred Hickling, "A darker shade of white; The Dark Clue by James Wilson; Faber 390pp £ 10.99 (£9)," *Guardian Weekly* (London), May 30, 2001.

neo-Victorian literature.¹⁷⁵ This happened in some other reviews too where reviewers linked the novels masterfully to the definition of neo-Victorian fiction as described in academia. After finishing the research and analysing its results, the reviewers from all of the published reviews were further examined. It became clear that some reviewers are professors of literature, historians, have a master's degree in English or in the case of Lucy Sussex even specialise in the Victorian period. This explains why some reviewers immediately link the novels in this thesis to the genre of neo-Victorianism. The review by Lucy Sussex accurately analyses *The Seance* as a neo-Victorian novel whereas other reviewers who are not as familiar with the current academic discussion in literature cannot describe it in the same way.

First, it became clear from the results that that some case studies generated more results with the quantitative results than other case studies, as with *Fingersmith* for example. A reason for this can be found if one looks at the newspapers where the reviews were published. Sarah Waters is a renowned British author and therefore may be reviewed more in established newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Times* as opposed to John Harwood who is an Australian author and is reviewed more in Australian newspapers. The initial plan for the methodology of this thesis was to research newspapers only from England or America, but this changed since these reviews were not that easily found for each of the case studies.

Then there was an apparent difference in the use of labels between the published and online reviews. The qualitative results show that where the professional critics demonstrate their ability to analyse the novels in a critical way, the non-professional critics are a bit more hesitant which is confirmed when one compares the quantitative results. The published reviews had a total of 293 hits within the list of labels whereas the online reviews had a total of 156 hit, almost half. When one examines the separate labels closely it becomes clear that the online reviewers mostly used the labels *Collins* and *Victorian* and none of the labels that are concerned with the characteristics of the genre of neo-Victorianism. The published reviews also used these labels frequently, but other labels such as *19th century*, *detective* and *contemporary/modern* were also used often. The online reviews showed another limitation with the requirement for a length of 250 words or more. With *Fingersmith*, the first case study, the online reviews easily met the required wordcount or even largely exceed it. For the third case study, *Arthur & George*, however it proved to be particularly difficult to find reviews that met the word count that was required. Many of the reviews were just 200 words or more. This may be something to focus on more for potential further research.

¹⁷⁵ Lucy Sussex, "Odd echoes of Victorian spirits," *The Age* (Melbourne), May 24, 2008.

The method of this research could also be improved in several ways. First, the list of labels that formed the basis of the method should be clearer. Multiple labels from the list are mostly concerned with different themes than could be found in the novels such as *ghost* and *detective*. Therefore, the reviews on *Arthur & George* by Julian Barnes mentioned the label *detective* a lot since the novel is a detective story. This was also the case with *The Seance* by John Harwood which mentioned *ghost/spirit* multiple times and the novel is concerned with the theme of spirituality. The list of labels could therefore be improved by only selecting labels that truly define the genre of neo-Victorianism. Then the selection of the sources is a point where the research could be improved upon too. The newspapers where the reviewers were selected from differ from more established newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* to more regional papers such as *The Hobart Mercury*. The search for reviews should therefore be more thorough if this research should be reproduced and incorporate reviews that are of the same calibre. The same can be said about the selection of professional reviewers. One should consider their academic backgrounds more and select them based on this.

The results confirm that in this research the reviewers of the published reviews use more labels that are connected to neo-Victorian fiction in their reviews than the reviewers of the online reviews. The published reviews overall used more labels than the online ones and thus are indirectly more aware of the current academic discussion around the new genre. This also validates the hypothesis made at the beginning of this thesis that the reviewers are not familiar with neo-Victorianism but indirectly analyse the novels as part of the genre. The results however do not confirm that the reviewers all analysed the novels from one clear definition. The results showed that the reviewers have different opinions on which elements from historical, contemporary, and postmodern fiction are featured in the novels.

This thesis has added to the academic discussion on neo-Victorianism by including the reviews of four novels into the discussion. The combination of academic discussion and non-academic view on these novels is not featured in academia yet. This thesis has called for a new perspective in the evaluation around this new genre of neo-Victorianism. The genre is considered as quite new in academia and therefore it is interesting to see how the knowledge on this subject is projected outside of academia. It has showed that the genre is not only known to people in academics but sparks some interest in reviewers too. This research project has also revealed that the genre is too new for the less experienced online reviewers. Some suggestions for further research are primarily based on the selection of the novels and its reviewers. Further research could focus more on the body of work of one author such as Sarah

Waters who has written multiple novels that could be neo-Victorian. Water has also studied Victorian literature herself and is therefore an interesting subject to discuss alongside her novels in relation to neo-Victorianism. Like Waters, some reviewers are also specialised in the Victorian and their literature and even academics in some cases as with Lucy Sussex. One could concentrate research solely on critics who have an academic background in the Victorians and see how they analyse these novels for the public. In this way, it could give further insight in how these novels and its characteristics are explained to common readers.

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