

# **Traversing Trauma and Consuming Perverse Pleasures in the Neo-Victorian Novel**

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## Abstract

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This thesis focusses upon evidencing a pervasive contemporary interest in Victorian traumas and corporeal suffering as a means of examining the extent to which this interest manifests itself as a form of ‘perverse nostalgia’ - which proffers the ‘degraded’ past as a seeming nostrum for the taboo or prurient interests of a contemporary readership - within the neo-Victorian novel. Recognising perverse nostalgia as a distinct mode through which the neo-Victorian engages with the Victorian past while also reflecting upon and exploring a contemporary fascination with trauma and the wounded or suffering body, the forthcoming discussion reveals trauma itself to have become intertwined with a myriad of seemingly diffuse – but in fact intrinsically related – contemporary consumption practices relating to or featuring the corporeal; the erotic, or pornographic; the visual; and historical (trauma) ‘tourism’ and exploration, all of which feature as modes of consumer-centred exoticism in the neo-Victorian novel.

This revelation enables – and indeed compels – an assessment of the motivations for, and implications of, the exoticisation of historical traumas. Contributing an interdisciplinary perspective to a currently underexplored area in the field of neo-Victorian studies, and proffering an approach to the function of nostalgia in the neo-Victorian novel which departs from its traditional deployment and the negative connotations which frequently accompany the concept, this thesis examines the specific ways in which representations of historical traumas both facilitate *and* frustrate the exoticist desires of the reader, simultaneously working to summon and eschew their engagement with the ‘exoticised’ Victorian past. In doing so, this project illuminates how the neo-Victorian novel (or, more specifically, a set of texts which operate in critical and often subversive ‘obeisance’ to the late-Victorian adventure novel, and which I have termed the ‘neo-adventure’ novel) ‘imports’ contemporary anxieties, preoccupations, and concerns to its pages while representationally ‘exporting’ them into different historical moments, locations, and scenarios in the nineteenth-century. In this way, the ‘neo-adventure’ novel enables an exploration of prohibited, antithetic, or contentious subjects at a reassuring temporal remove, revealing ambiguities and problematic perspectives while also promoting consideration of the moral and ethical implications inherent to the literary appropriation of historically-situated traumatic representations themselves.

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## **Author's Declaration**

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Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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## Dissemination and Publications

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### Publications

2014 - 'We were again on the trail of cannibals': Consuming Trauma and Frustrating Exoticism in Robert Edric's *The Book of the Heathen*. In E. Rousselot (Ed.), *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction* (pp.69-83). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

2013 (November) - Review of Helen Davies's 'Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(4), 452-453.

2013 (May) - Review of Patrick Brantlinger's 'Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians'. *Victoriographies*, 3(1), 91-93.

2011 (November) - Review of Katherine Byrne's 'Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination'. *Victoriographies*, 2(2), 194-195.

2010 (May) - Review of Jill Galvan's 'The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channelling, The Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919'. *Victoriographies*, 2(1), 68-70.

### Conference papers and presentations

#### 2013

24<sup>th</sup> July – Liverpool John Moores University, 'Neo-Victorian Cultures: The Victorians Today'

**Title of Paper:** *Exploring the Neo-Victorian Consumption of Trauma in Robert Edric's The Book of the Heathen.*

5<sup>th</sup> July – University of Liverpool, 'On Liberties: Victorian Liberals and their Legacies'

**Title of Paper:** *'Taking Liberties' with Pisanus Fraxi? Neo-Victorian Literature and the Legacy of Henry Spencer Ashbee.*

#### 2012

14<sup>th</sup> June – University of Portsmouth Postgraduate Symposium, 'Wounded Bodies, Tortured Souls: Narratives of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Trauma'

**Title of Paper:** *Binding the Body: Inscribing trauma onto 'De humani corporis fabrica' in Belinda Starling's The Journal of Dora Damage.*

#### 2011

14<sup>th</sup> June – University of Portsmouth CSL Symposium, 'Neo-Historical Exoticism and Contemporary Fiction'

**Title of Paper:** *'Unto the Third Generation': From exotic nostalgia to trans-generational trauma in John Harwood's The Ghost Writer.*

## Introduction

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### **‘10 truly bizarre Victorian deaths’: Evidencing a contemporary fascination with Victorian traumas**

On Christmas Day, 2013, the BBC News Magazine online published an article compiled by Jeremy Clay titled ‘10 truly bizarre Victorian deaths’, offering short descriptions of a host of unusual circumstances in which ten poor Victorian souls had ‘come a cropper’ having reached a notably sticky, unpleasant, or gruesome end. A striking deviation from the more traditionally nostalgic stories about the Victorians which often appear in the news during the festive season,<sup>1</sup> the content of the stories themselves ranged from the sublime (such as the man ‘seized by fits of uncontrollable laughter’ who ‘died from exhaustion’) to the somewhat ridiculous (such as the ‘drunken bear’ that ‘hugged to death the tavern keeper [and] his two sons and daughter’); from the humorously ironic (such as the pall bearer who ‘caught his foot on a stone and stumbled’ and was consequently crushed to death by the coffin he was carrying) to the disturbingly nauseating (such as the man who swallowed a mouse which ‘began to tear and bite inside the man’s throat and chest’, causing the man to die in ‘horrible agony’).

The inclusion of the tales as one facet of the Christmas news – all of which are stated as being based upon newspaper reports from the sensational Victorian ‘penny newspaper’, the *Illustrated Police News* (IPN)<sup>2</sup> – is particularly striking. Alice Smalley notes that the IPN itself ‘was mainly interested in publishing stories of murder and violent crime, although accidents and disasters could also receive some coverage, especially if there was a spectacular scene or loss of life’ (2012, p.154). Reflecting upon the constitution of the sensational Victorian newspaper, Linda Stratmann asserts that the ‘obvious quality of the publication and the proprietors’ stated intention of an educational

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<sup>1</sup> For example, ‘Queen Victoria popularised our Christmas traditions’ (Emma Midgley, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010); ‘Six-metre high Christmas trees and a silver-gilt centrepiece designed by Prince Albert: Windsor Castle has a festive Victorian makeover’ (Bianca London, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2013); ‘The Costs of Christmas past and Christmas present’ (Sarah Treanor, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Linda Stratmann describes the IPN as a ‘hybrid of the penny newspaper and the penny blood’ (2001, p.8) and claims that the significance of the *Illustrated Police News* has been long overlooked, having been ‘Omitted from scholarly studies of the popular press’ and instead ‘listed with the cheap sensational magazines of the nineteenth century’ (2011, p.7). Stratmann perceives this as an injustice and oversight, claiming the paper to have been ‘an imaginative and well-executed response to the need for affordable illustrated news reporting for the masses’ (2011, p.7); indeed, as E.B. (full name undisclosed) summarises for the *Contemporary Review*, ‘it reported real (not invented) crimes and events, and [...] its illustrations were not made up’; consequently, the publication should be ‘treated seriously’ (E.B., 2011, p.522).

purpose, gave it the sheen of respectability’, and consequently the IPN ‘held out a hint of acceptable raciness’ (2011, p.8) which seemingly made its often disturbing contents more acceptable for its Victorian readership.

In the months following the publication of this unusual Christmas article the BBC News Magazine continued in a similar vein, publishing a collection of twenty-four articles (to date) under the generic title of ‘Victorian Strangeness’ in which Clay continues to explore ‘A series of bizarre episodes culled from 19th Century newspapers’, including (among others) the story of ‘The death of a curious monkey’ (Clay, 2014a), and of a ‘man killed by a bell-chiming automaton’ (Clay, 2014b). Each brief story serves – as Clay explains – as a demonstration that ‘Life in Victorian times was arguably considerably more dangerous than now’; that is, at least, ‘if the newspaper reports of the time are anything to go by’ (2013, para.1). The proliferation of these stories seem to reflect a somewhat ‘perverse nostalgia’, a concept defined by Marie-Luise Kohlke as a specifically ‘retrospective yearning not for imagined certainties of the past but for the past’s crises of violent extremity’ (2009, p.27) and which recalls eminent trauma theorist Roger Luckhurst’s idea of ‘traumatophilia’, defined as ‘taking a kind of perverse delight in the repetition or abject assumption of a collapsed trauma subjectivity’ (2008, p.111).

Clay’s revival of these traumatic stories in the present day and within a prominent mainstream forum characterises the focus of this thesis, serving as a manifestation not only of the evident popularity of the Victorian in the present but of a specific interest in tales and histories which document the strange and macabre, the perilous and dreadful, and – most pertinently – the *corporeal* and *traumatic* within a *specifically Victorian* setting. Taking on board Cora Kaplan’s assertion that ‘distance from the [Victorian] period [...] has gradually lent it over time the charm of antiquity and the exotic, so that increasingly, in the new millennium, even its worst abuses seem to fascinate rather than appal’ (2007, p.6), this thesis explores how our inherited interest in Victorian traumas manifests itself as a perverse nostalgia for exoticised suffering in the neo-Victorian novel, and the narrative techniques and strategies employed to undermine this engagement. Where Graham Huggan describes nostalgia as ‘Offering a spurious panacea for disaffection with a “degraded” present’ (2001, p.179), perverse nostalgia instead seems to proffer the ‘degraded’ *past* as a nostrum for the taboo or prurient interests of a contemporary readership at a reassuring temporal remove which might appeal as a means of abrogating the reader’s sense of moral or ethical responsibility towards the suffering they encounter. As Patricia Duncker suggests, ‘adultery, infidelity, perversion, and sexual treachery no longer have deadly

consequences. Marital breakdown now leads to screaming, a few scenes and rich lawyers, not social ostracism, moral condemnation, nasty encounters with God, repentance, and death. Seduction and betrayal have lost their sting. Let us return to the Victorians where class war is still brutal and sexual desire can have terrible consequences' (2014, p.20).

Fittingly, the term 'nostalgia' itself is etymologically derived from the Greek word *nostos* – or, to return home – and *algia* – a painful condition (Davis, 1979, p.1), a particularly appropriate etymological nexus for a discussion of the neo-Victorian's mode of 'return' to past traumas and 'painful' (literal and metaphorical) scenarios. Originally perceived as an illness – specifically, in fact, a disease – which 'caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present' (Boym, 2001, p.3), this thesis integrally demonstrates that a specifically *perverse* nostalgia in fact serves to *reinforce* the neo-Victorian novel's connection with the present (rather than the Victorian past) by reflecting upon the contemporaneity of the themes and issues mediated within its pages, enabling an exploration of timely or antithetic subjects with the benefit of temporal distance which provides perspective and clarity to the issues raised. A phenomenon which prompts and indeed compels reflection regarding the motivations for, and implications of, this specific mode of return to historically-situated traumas, this project examines how and why *perverse* nostalgia manifests itself within specific neo-Victorian texts, as well as how traumatic representations themselves are employed – somewhat paradoxically – to *frustrate* the reader's engagement with the very 'exoticised' traumas they may initially have sought. The actual narrativisation of trauma itself is revealed as a means of eschewing the neo-Victorian's potentially exoticist function, instead working to reveal the reader's own problematic 'consumption' of (historical) trauma, suffering, and subjugation.

In light of Jerome De Groot's recognition that 'The ways in which contemporary culture engages with the past are hybrid and complex, and in this teeming diversity lies the challenge and the concern for historians' (2009, p.249), and also in conjunction with Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw's recognition that '[i]f every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma' (2002, p.1), this project considers the neo-Victorian engagement with trauma – and particularly the genre's 're-embodiment' of historical suffering – as a prominent and unprecedented mode through which present-day culture re-engages with the Victorian past. The prominence of representations which focus upon corporeal affliction constitutes a particular area of interest as a means of exploring how the

‘symptoms’<sup>3</sup> of our ‘age of trauma’ manifest themselves on the neo-Victorian body (as well as in the ‘body’ of neo-Victorian literature), and through modes of fascination which have emerged and developed from Victorian culture specifically – for example, in relation to anatomical, anthropological, and ethnographic scrutiny – which in fact serve as a reflection of distinctly contemporary cultural and social preoccupations. To employ a fittingly somatic allegory, the forthcoming discussion examines ‘how the *scars* of the past persist into the present, [and] how the past’s presence in the present determines the nature of that present’ (Widdowson, 2006, p.93, my emphasis) by providing an ‘interpretation of cultural symptoms - of the growths, wounds, scars on a social body, and its compulsive, repeated actions’ (Berger, 1997, p.573) which manifest within the neo-Victorian novel.

This thesis comprises four main chapters, each of which explores one neo-Victorian text in detail, namely (and in order of discussion) Belinda Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007), Andrea Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998), Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers* (2000), and Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* (2000). Chosen for the variety of reflections that they can offer regarding the ways in which the neo-Victorian text ‘imports’ contemporary anxieties and traumas to its pages while representationally ‘exporting’ them into different historical moments, locations, and scenarios in the nineteenth century, the discursive analysis of these texts reveals trauma to have become intertwined with a myriad of seemingly diffuse – but in fact intrinsically related - consumption practices relating to or featuring the corporeal; the erotic, or pornographic; the visual; and historical (trauma) ‘tourism’ and exploration, all of which feature as modes of consumer-centred exoticism. By examining how these engagements manifest themselves within the texts, this project establishes a means of interrogating not only the ways in which the neo-Victorian ostensibly features traumatic histories as a readerly ‘experience’, but also how, and the extent to which, traumatic representation itself works to frustrate, problematize, or ultimately negate the reader’s engagement.

This inquiry espouses an ancillary set of pertinent and timely considerations regarding the moral and ethical implications of revisiting historical suffering within the neo-Victorian which also constitutes an innate subject for reflection within this thesis. One primary consideration manifests itself through the basic acknowledgement of the neo-Victorian as a medium which is itself essentially underscored by a ‘certain commercial orientation’ (Gutleben, 2001, p.46), and the extent to which this renders the narrative re-

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<sup>3</sup> The appropriation of the physical ‘symptom’ as a literal manifestation of traumatic experience is considered in Chapter Four in relation to Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* (2000). Indeed, this concept proves particularly useful in relation to the multiple representations of illness and contagion which occur periodically throughout the text.

appropriation of historical traumas a fundamentally exploitative engagement. Indeed, the ‘neo-Victorian market sales corollary’ (Llewellyn, 2009, p.42) is a timely concern for many critics<sup>4</sup> who have noticed a trend – not only in literature but in a variety of media, including drama, film, and even pop-music – in which a ‘commonality lies in the bond between Western discourse and its seemingly pre-emptive and presumptive analysis of the Other as variously exotic, quaint, fashionable, or horrid, so long as it is marketable’ (Ward, 2011, p.1). Arguably, the ‘marketability’ of historical traumas sits somewhat ‘at odds’ with the allegedly redemptive and potentially didactic function of the neo-Victorian which, according to Kohlke, ‘repeatedly raise[s] important questions of social justice and may yet prove instrumental in interrogating, perhaps even changing, current attitudes and influencing historical consciousness in the future’ (2008, p.10).

Kohlke’s perception itself is challenged by Geoffrey Hartman’s understanding that ‘the revival of a notion of *paedia* [...] invite[s] us to rethink our relation to literature without superseding it in the fervour of our commitment to social justice’, raising reservations regarding the fact that ‘what may be called the ethical may turn out to be [...] a displaced evangelical intensity’ (1995, p.549, original emphasis). As Hartman summarises, ‘A question therefore remains about how this ethical perspective can differentiate itself from advocacy teaching’ which ‘succeeds not so much by astringent evidence or humane conversation as by *scandal*, publicity, and *sheer force of display in the “society of the spectacle”*’ (1995, p.550, my emphasis). Indeed, as Hartman puts it, ‘The “memento trauma” aspect is not all that far from a “memento mori”’ (1995, p.549). This concern sits at the ‘heart’ of this thesis, revealing the perplexing fact of the neo-Victorian novel’s seemingly paradoxical but arguably unavoidable ‘participation’ in the very mode(s) of exploitation that it seemingly seeks to denounce. It also promotes consideration of the extent to which (re)presentations of suffering and trauma might work to produce ‘a shared consciousness of corporeal vulnerability’ (Rothberg, 2014, p.6) and, in consequence, a demand for readerly responsibility towards those who may be perceived as the culturally ‘Other’.

Engaging with pertinent trauma theory, and particularly with Dominick LaCapra’s notion of ‘empathic unsettlement’ (2001), the forthcoming discussion also considers the ambiguous boundaries between readerly subject-positions and what Michael Rothberg has termed the ‘implicated subject’ (2013, p.40). Rothberg employs an ‘open-ended’ idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Such critics – to name just a few – include Huggan’s critical work on *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), Marita Sturken’s *Tourists of History* (2007) and Rainer Emig & Oliver Lindner’s *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism* (2010).

implication in relation to traumatic events which encompasses ‘bystanders, beneficiaries, latecomers of the post-memory generation and others connected ‘prosthetically’ to pasts they did not directly experience’ (2013, p.40). This scenario renders the reader ‘neither simply perpetrator nor victim, though potentially either or both’ (Rothberg, 2014, p.xiv), ambiguous subject positions which ‘move us away from more overt questions of guilt and innocence and leave us in a more complex and uncertain moral and ethical terrain – a terrain in which many of us live most of the time’ (Rothberg, 2013, p.40). In contributing to an understanding of how the neo-Victorian traverses this ‘terrain’, it is my hope that this project might have a role in ‘coming to terms with and mapping undesirable forms of implication in historical traumas’ (Rothberg, 2013, p.41), as well as how these forms of implication can translate to a renewed awareness of the parallels which can be located between neo-Victorian traumatic representations and specifically contemporary concerns and anxieties.

The timeliness and pertinence of this study is perhaps most prominently reflected by the notable lack of scholarship pertaining to neo-Victorian exoticism specifically. A wealth of scholarly insights have been proffered regarding the intrinsically related concept of neo-Victorian nostalgia: however, the vast majority of these have focussed upon the negative implications of the traditional, retrospective understanding of a nostalgic engagement. This thesis, however, acknowledges Enderwitz and Feldman’s recognition that ‘nostalgia’s significance as a cultural and psychological force is only gradually achieving fuller recognition in critical discourses on neo-Victorianism’ (2014, p.52) by understanding perverse nostalgia as distinct mode of dissident ‘variance’ which evidences a contemporary fascination with trauma and the wounded or suffering body of the ‘Other’, and in doing so provides an invaluable means of exploring the forms and implications of the reader’s contemporary ‘consumption’ of trauma. Albeit only one ‘stepping stone’ towards a more useful and positive approach to nostalgia in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, this thesis hopes to promote consideration of other, more beneficial ways of approaching the concept which move away from its traditional deployment and its related negative connotations.

Additionally, while research surrounding neo-Victorian trauma has gained critical mass since Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben published their landmark collection of essays on the subject of *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma* (2010), scholarship focussing upon how and why neo-Victorian texts employ exoticising strategies (particularly in relation to trauma), and particularly *how* the neo-Victorian works to

undermine the ‘exoticist’ desires of the reader, currently constitutes a markedly underexplored area. Indeed, with the exception of Elizabeth Wesseling’s (2010) discussion of ‘Unmanning Exoticism: The Breakdown of Christian Manliness’ in relation to Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* (2000), critical insights dedicated to this specific area are largely reduced to the peripheral and incidental.<sup>5</sup>

However, Elodie Rousselot’s essay collection titled *Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*<sup>6</sup> (2014) - the first collection dedicated to this emerging area of interest - marks the inception of more sustained and focused attention to this branch of neo-Victorian criticism in the future. By considering the lexicon between neo-Victorian exoticism and traumatic representation specifically, this thesis contributes an interdisciplinary perspective to this emergent area of neo-Victorian studies, while also attempting to acknowledge and begin to answer to the charge of the fundamental need to ‘restore the prevalence of ethics’ in neo-Victorian studies. This project addresses this concern through its consideration of ‘the possible parallels or continuations’ of Victorian injustices and traumas ‘in our own contemporary period’ (Gutleben, 2009/2010, pp.138-139), as well as the idea of implication, transmission, and ‘the dangers of [traumatic] narrative being co-opted or colonized by the listener’ (Ho, 2012, p.19) (or in this case, the reader) of neo-Victorian literature.

The remainder of this introductory discussion commences with a theoretical overview of relevant critics and theoretical perspectives pertaining to contemporary trauma theory and current research relating to neo-Victorian trauma, introducing key concepts of significance to the rest of the discussion and contextualising this project within the wider field of neo-Victorian study. I then explore the contentious issue of nostalgia (which has been a long-standing concern of neo-Victorian study) and its intrinsic relationship with exoticism as a means of situating the idea of commodified historical ‘travelling’ and what I have termed the ‘neo-adventure’ novel (and which is discussed in full later in this introductory discussion). The commodification and marketability of exoticised traumas in relation to the neo-Victorian constitutes a final intersecting point of consideration in relation to the motivations for, and ethical implications of, ‘touring’ and ‘consuming’

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Kym Brindle fleetingly mentions the exoticisation of the past in relation to nostalgia in the neo-Victorian diary confession (2013, p.122), while Kohlke and Gutleben have collaboratively noted the possibility of neo-Victorian literature proffering ‘spectacle at a reassuring temporal remove’, which might ‘[consign] neo-Victorian fiction to roles of either nostalgia or exploitation (2010, p. 8); however, this is discussed without specifically focussing on the ‘exoticising’ strategies of the neo-Victorian itself, or how the neo-Victorian frustrates the reader’s exoticist desires and engagement.

<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, the discussion of Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen* in Chapter Four has formed the basis for a chapter within Rousselot’s essay collection, which is titled: ‘We were again on the trail of cannibals’: Consuming Trauma and Frustrating Exoticism in Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen*’.

historical traumas, after which this introduction concludes with a brief explanation of the texts selected to evidence and illuminate the previously-outlined concerns of this thesis.

## **Neo-Victorian Trauma: Context, Motivations, and Ethical Considerations**

### **Trauma Theory and Literature: An overview of key concepts, theorists, and issues**

Contemporary trauma theory is a notoriously diffuse, comprehensive, and multifaceted area of study: as Susan Suleiman explains, ‘Trauma studies constitutes a huge field today, keeping whole armies of theorists – philosophers, literary scholars, and historians as well as clinicians – very busy’ (2008, p.276). Luckhurst also notes the extraordinarily wide scope of the field, referring to trauma itself as a ‘hybrid assemblage’ (2008, p.14) which ‘tangle[s] up questions of science, law, technology, capitalism, politics, medicine and risk’ (2008, pp.14-15). Despite this seemingly chaotic ‘assemblage’ of disciplines, most critics<sup>7</sup> nonetheless recognise the nineteenth century as the genus of contemporary understandings of trauma. Accordingly, neo-Victorian scholars such as Kohlke and Gutleben have also recognised the significance of the nineteenth century as the ‘cradle’ of scientific, artistic, and social interests in trauma and its subsequent re-appropriation in the neo-Victorian novel:

From the study of hysteria to ‘railway spine’ to neurasthenia and the US Civil War disorder of ‘soldier’s heart’ [...] prefiguring the later concept of shellshock, the pathological private self, its existence disrupted by symptomatic obsessions, ritualistic repetitions, and inexplicable aberrations, became as much a focus of interest as the rational public self, the standard bearer of enlightened political, economic, and intellectual progress that supposedly undergirded nineteenth-century social reform and nation and empire building.

(Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.2)

One of the most prominent strands of trauma theory espoused during the nineteenth century is that of psychoanalytic theory, which originated within the work of Sigmund Freud. Cathy Caruth – hailed as one of the most influential contemporary trauma theorists – predicates her own theorisation within a Freudian understanding of trauma as a means to

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<sup>7</sup> Irene Visser, for example, attests to the fact that ‘A [full] understanding of the concept of trauma in cultural trauma theory entails a delineation of its origin in Freudian psychoanalysis’ which ‘genealogists of trauma theory agree [...] remains the theory’s explicit and inevitable foundation’ (2011, p.273).

explore how traumatic events translate into narrative or text. In her ground-breaking study *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth tells us that the word 'Trauma' itself is derived from the Greek word meaning 'wound', and was initially employed – according to Luckhurst, in the seventeenth century (2008, p.2) – to refer specifically to a physical wound, or 'an injury inflicted upon the body' (Caruth, 1996, p.3). It was only in the last decade of the nineteenth century that the use of the term 'trauma' evolved from the physical to encompass the psychological, and came to be understood as 'a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind' (Caruth, 1996, p.3).

Using Freud's understanding that 'a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action* [*nachträglich*]' (1966, p.356, original emphasis), Caruth employs the idea of a psychological 'wound' to compound her definition of trauma as 'the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (1996, p.91), due to what Freud terms 'the compulsion to repeat' (1955b, p.19). In doing so, Caruth evidences that 'the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located' (1996, p.8). In consequence, for Caruth, trauma can be described as 'a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact *a break in the mind's experience of time*' (1996, p.61, my emphasis). Another eminent trauma theorist, Ruth Leys, corroborates this perception with the explanation that 'owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed': consequently, 'the experience of trauma, frozen or fixed in time, refuses to be presented *as past*, but is perpetually reexperienced [*sic*] in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present' (2000, p.2, original emphasis).

It is this 'belatedness' – the 'break' in the experience of time – implicated within the idea of 'return' and the 'perpetual re-experiencing' of trauma which has given rise to the poignancy of historical and neo-Victorian narratives which revisit the Victorian period as the 'cradle' of interest in trauma. Kohlke and Gutleben proffer the neo-Victorian novel as a particularly apt medium for exploring historical traumas due to the fact that it 'could be said to mimic the double temporality of traumatic consciousness, whereby the subject occupies, at one and the same time, both the interminable present moment of the catastrophe [...] and the post-traumatic present that seems to come after but is paradoxically coterminous' (2010, p.2). In Freud's terms as stated in 'Beyond the Pleasure

Principle' (originally published 1920), the traumatised subject – in much the same way as the neo-Victorian trauma narrative – is 'obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience, instead of [...] *remembering* it as something belonging to the past' (1955b, p.18, original emphasis).

For Dori Laub, however, 'The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time', and consequently, 'trauma is [...] an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after' and so 'continues into the present and is current in every respect' (1992a, p.69). Through the collapse of temporalities, past and present traumas are themselves implicated, meaning a study of neo-Victorian trauma can be of relevance to understanding contemporary issues and anxieties and revealing how, 'In a catastrophic age [...] trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures' (Caruth, 1995, p.11). For Caruth, 'history, like trauma, is never simply one's own': indeed, 'history is precisely the way we are *implicated* in each other's traumas' (1996, p.24, my emphasis). As 'historical narrative arises from [the] intersections of traumatic repetitions', it follows that 'a concept of trauma can be of great value in the study of history and historical narrative [...] as the verbal representation of temporality' (Berger, 1997, p.578; p.572), while the notion of 'implication' constitutes a point of contingency between Caruth's theory and Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject and, perhaps more importantly, its intrinsic moral and ethical considerations, which are explored throughout this thesis.

However, this perceptible 'link' between temporalities is not, of itself, unproblematic. Several trauma theorists have noted that the very 'belatedness' of trauma gives rise to what Caruth describes as 'a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness' (1996, pp.91-92), a recognition which highlights the problematic disparity between the '*elision* of memory and the *precision* of recall' (Caruth, 1996, p.153): LaCapra, for example, constitutes one critic to have made a similar attestation to the fact that the 'traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only after a temporal gap or period of latency, at which time it is immediately repressed, split off, or disavowed' (1994, p.174).

Indeed, even after a period of latency, the belated 'register' of trauma still renders understanding problematic, with many critics compounding its characterisation as 'unspeakable' (Herman, 1992, p.1), or in terms of an intrinsic 'unrepresentability' (Kaplan, 2005, p.37). Chad May cites Shoshana Felman's emphasis of this latter quality as he states

that 'Evading the continuity of memory, trauma is marked by its very incomprehensibility, its defiance of understanding. As a result, the traumatic experience shatters any interpretive structure, whether from the individual memory or the cultural project of history' (May, 2005, p.102), a shattering which - for Felman - negates 'the reduction of a threatening and incomprehensible event to a reassuring mythic, totalizing unity of explanation' (1992, p.266). As such, as Hartman concisely professes, 'Traumatic knowledge [...] would seem to be a contradiction in terms. It is as close to nescience as to knowledge' (1995, p.537).

The 'shattering' of interpretative structures has given rise to what Astrid Erll terms a 'crisis of representation' (2011, p.80) in relation to how trauma is mediated within narrative. Leys, for one, has described it as 'a crisis manifested at the level of language itself' (2000, p.268), in concurrence with the perception that traumatic re-presentations are inherently short-circuited by the 'constitutive failure of linguistic representation in the post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima, post-Vietnam era' (Leys, 2000, p.267). In her work *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead notes that 'Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection' as well as by 'intertextuality [...] and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice', features which formally 'mirror' the effects of trauma (2004, p.3; p.84). Similarly, for Leys, the 'gap or aporia in consciousness and representation that is held to characterise the individual traumatic experience comes to stand for the materiality of the signifier' (2000, p.266).<sup>8</sup> In such a way, the form of narratives detailing trauma might come to reflect content.

However, despite the purportedly aporetic nature of linguistic (re)presentations of trauma, many critics have championed the importance of narrative accounts. Jean-François Lyotard, for example, finds that 'What art can do is bear witness [...] to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it *cannot* say it' (1990, p.47, my emphasis). LaCapra has also attested to the role of art, literature and film in relation to the mediation of traumatic events, focussing particularly on those works which exhibit an 'experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation of trauma in what might be called traumatised or post-traumatic writing' due to the fragmentary and disorientating experience engendered when reading such 'markedly *performative*' works (2001, p.105, my emphasis).

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<sup>8</sup> Leys cites Paul de Man's (1979) theorisation of a 'moment' of materiality that 'on the one hand belongs to language but on the other is aporetically severed from the speech act of signification of meaning' (Leys, 2000, p.266) as another means of exemplifying this theoretical perspective.

LaCapra's phrase pertinently calls to mind 'the self-consciously performative nature of neo-Victorian [...] fiction' itself (Bowler & Cox, 2009/2010, p.11) (by which I mean, how the neo-Victorian novel 'performs' historicity while remaining a contemporary literary product of the present, a dual temporality which, as explained previously, comprises an elemental overlapping modality between trauma and the neo-Victorian itself). Of additional significance is Kaplan's assertion that 'if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being "translated" via art' (2005, p.19), a function which the neo-Victorian can arguably fulfil through the mediation and re-presentation of Victorian traumas. This, and the fact of our contemporary moment as a veritable 'age of trauma', lead Christian Gutleben and Julian Wolfreys to conclude that 'to speak the unspeakable, to say the unsayable [...] becomes neo-Victorian fiction's specifically poetic task in the sense of a fictional attempt at a linguistic re-creation of trauma' (2010, p.68).

At this juncture, and before approaching the subject of neo-Victorian trauma specifically, I will briefly interrupt this theoretical overview to clarify my approach to trauma in the context of this project specifically. I do this in acknowledgement of Allen Feldman's admonition with regards to the term's 'general lack of specificity' when 'deployed as a description and as a diagnostic tool' which leaves readers uninformed as to 'what theory of trauma is being deployed when it is invoked' (2004, p.184), and which Kohlke also employs as a caution pertaining to 'the dangers of using trauma rather loosely and generically, as well as aesthetically and possibly ahistorically' (2009, p.26). As mentioned initially, this project focusses primarily upon representations of corporeal traumas (i.e. on representations of physical wounding, scarring, and subjugation), as well as how traumatic representations themselves operate within the neo-Victorian novel to frustrate the reader's exoticist desires. However, as this thesis demonstrates, focussed attention upon the corporeally abject concurrently reveals that just as trauma physically constitutes 'a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication' (Luckhurst, 2008, p.4) via bodily wounding, it also 'collapses' a multitude of categories including those between inside and outside, public and private, subject and witness, and self and Other.

My approach to trauma operates in a similar mode to this notion of 'collapse'. Somewhat in keeping with Luckhurst's proposal that 'Trauma is [...] always a breaching of disciplines' (2008, p.4) and a 'hybrid assemblage', and also LaCapra's observation that 'No genre or discipline [...] can provide definitive boundaries for [trauma]' (2001, p.96),

this thesis itself appropriates a ‘hybridised’ approach to understanding and theorising the traumatic which itself collapses categories, exploring individual and cultural, as well as physical and symbolic, forms of trauma, using a small, select variety of theoretical perspectives from contemporary trauma theory which are delineated within this Introduction. In doing so, this thesis aims to facilitate a communication between different approaches and understandings of trauma, and ultimately to demonstrate how a focus on corporeal traumas undergoes a different kind of ‘collapse’ into psychical and introspective reflection on the part of the reader.

### **Trauma and its function in the neo-Victorian novel: An overview**

Given our existence within a ‘catastrophic age’ (Caruth, 1995, p.11), it is unsurprising that trauma has become a ‘prevalent feature in contemporary literature’, a fact which ‘reflects a broader trend within modern culture in which trauma narratives – personal, political, national and international – are a persistent presence in newspapers, magazines, soap operas and the cinema’ (Cox, 2014, p.138). Indeed, our cultural landscape in our ‘age of trauma’ is perhaps unsurprisingly ‘characterised by the pervasiveness of collective and individual afflictions’ (Nadal & Calvo, 2014, p.1). On this subject, Justin Sausman specifically advances the validity of the parallel between contemporary trauma texts such as the ‘misery memoir’ (or ‘mis lit’) and the neo-Victorian due to the fact that ‘both are concerned with treading an uneasy path between ethical witnessing and [...] potentially exploitative renderings of experience’ (2011, p.127). Pertinently, however, an article in *The Guardian* has noted a downturn in ‘mis-lit’ in the last few years, aptly quoting one publishing-editor’s comment that ‘maybe we’ve reached a saturation point with this sort of story. I think misery is not what people want to read about in a recession, *they want escapist books*’ (Flood, 2008, para.6, my emphasis). Given the neo-Victorian trauma novel’s seeming combination of both of these qualities, Sausman’s correlation prompts a pertinent and timely concern regarding the extent to which it is appropriate to continue to revisit (and, in doing so, potentially exploit) historical suffering as a form of perverse nostalgia or exoticised escapism in the neo-Victorian novel as a popular commercial product.

It is also unsurprising that authors of neo-Victorian literature often return to the ‘cradle’ of trauma theory in examination of the intersection of Victorian scientific, artistic, and social interests the traumatic, the present-day popularity of which is evident due to the

proliferation of neo-Victorian texts which engage with these themes. In many texts, the ‘objectifying gaze of nineteenth-century science’, which can incorporate sexual, anatomical, as well as ethnographic modes of scrutiny and ‘scientific racism and sexism’ (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2010, p.110), are revealed to be both exploitative and traumatic for those who become the subjects of its focus. Neo-Victorian texts which return to this specific lexicon include three in particular which are discussed in this thesis – Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, and Kneale’s *English Passengers* – as well as Barbara Chase-Riboud’s *Hottentot Venus: A Novel* (2003); Sebastian Faulks’ *Human Traces* (2005); and Jane Harris’s *The Observations* (2006), to name just a few.

On a tangential but related note, Georges Letissier has also focussed upon the specific idea of traumas relating to Darwinian theories of evolution in his essay titled ‘Trauma by Proxy in the “Age of Testimony”’: Paradoxes of Darwinism in the Neo-Victorian Novel’ which was published in Kohlke and Gutleben’s previously-mentioned essay collection *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma* (2010). Letissier’s essay reveals the pertinence and impact of Darwinian science in texts including Roger McDonald’s *Mr Darwin’s Shooter* (1998) and Harry Thompson’s *This Thing of Darkness* (2006), evidencing an on-going present-day fascination with Victorian science, race, and ideas of evolution and ‘progress’ which were once used to justify exploitative scientific and ethnographic practices and Victorian imperialist rhetoric. The significance of the return to Victorian scientific practices, and the intersection of scientific, artistic, and social concepts is explored in greater detail in the first three chapters in this thesis which offer more comprehensive insights into how these themes relate to neo-Victorian notions of ‘travel’ and exploration, as well as to trauma and perverse nostalgia specifically.

Kohlke and Gutleben’s essay collection arguably signalled the advent of a sustained interest in the neo-Victorian traumatic.<sup>9</sup> Kohlke – who initially defined the specific sub-genre of the ‘neo-Victorian trauma novel’ – usefully and concisely outlines a spectrum of the wide variety of ‘types’ of traumas explored by neo-Victorian authors: ranging from ‘the social to the inter-cultural, encompassing nineteenth century violent

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<sup>9</sup> Since the publication of this inaugural volume, both critics have also published two additional collections, one of which is based on the somewhat divergent area of *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (2011), as well as another on the slightly more relatable topic of *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century* (2012). Both of these essay collections – to a greater or lesser extent – also refer to the pertinence of trauma to the field, for example in relation to familial (see Kohlke & Gutleben 2011, Part Three from p.267 regarding ‘Familial Trauma, Dissolution, and Transformation’), transgenerational, (see Kohlke & Gutleben, 2011, p.34), and ‘imperial’ traumas (See Edelson in Kohlke & Gutleben, 2012, p.93), amongst others.

crime and the exploitations of the sex-trade, the institutionalised brutality of penitentiaries and asylums, epidemics and famines, the horrors of slavery and imperialist colonisation, massacres and genocide, civil and international wars' (2009, p.25). The evident scope of the 'types' of trauma that are (re)presented in the neo-Victorian perhaps provides some initial insight in response to Susan Sontag's judicious and germane question: 'Which atrocities from the incurable past do we think we are obliged to visit?' (2003, p.93). However, it also simultaneously raises what might be a more pertinent question regarding *why* the neo-Victorian chooses to engage with these particular traumatic histories in the first instance.

Situated at the crux of the concerns explored within this thesis stands Kohlke's assertion that the neo-Victorian proffers a perverse nostalgia for the reader's pleasure, as she suggests that 'we extract politically incorrect pleasure from what has become inadmissible or ethically *unimaginable* as a focus of desire in our own time. We thus enjoy neo-Victorian fiction at least in part to feel debased or outraged, to revel in degradation, *reading for defilement*' (2006, p.2, original emphasis). Theodor Adorno has raised this concern with regards to traumatic representations of the Holocaust specifically, in relation to which he states the issue that 'The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of [others] [...] contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it' (1997, p.252). As Stephen Atchison has similarly stressed, 'Readings may call forth the temptation for experiential tourism through which readers derive pleasure from the pain of others, leading further toward simulated acts where readers embody the suffering of the narrator thus delving into aesthetic pleasures found in the mimesis of artistic representation' (2008, p.46).

However, the discussion in this thesis reveals that visiting these 'politically incorrect pleasures' as a form of 'experiential tourism' in the neo-Victorian is rendered a problematic and frustrated process, and one which in fact prompts self-awareness and introspection about what actually motivates and fuels such readerly desires. In such a way, the very process of engaging in this 'experiential tourism' is revealed as a means of collapsing the boundaries between 'Self' and 'Other' in such a way that reveals the disjuncture between the two without enabling identification, instead promoting an empathetic reading experience and an ethical approach to the neo-Victorian text.

The idea of 'reading for defilement' itself also constitutes only one facet of a more complex set of 'justifications' for narrative returns to Victorian traumas which, perhaps unsurprisingly, reveal themselves to be – to some extent – contingent on, or relatable to,

each other. Kate Mitchell, for example, frames an understanding of neo-Victorian trauma in relation to ‘cultural memory work’, or ‘[writing] traumatic history into contemporary cultural memory’ (2010b, p.254) as a form of ‘witnessing’ or ‘testifying’ to historical traumas. Gutleben (2009/2010, p.146) has employed Whitehead’s understanding of the second-hand ‘witness’ of trauma to support this perception that, in order to embrace an ‘ethics of witnessing’ in relation to historical traumas, neo-Victorian fiction ‘requires a highly collaborative relationship between speaker and listener. The listener bears a dual responsibility: to receive the testimony but also to avoid appropriating the story as his or her own. A fragile balance is engendered between the necessity to witness sympathetically that which testimonial writing cannot fully represent and a simultaneous respect for the otherness of the experience’ (Whitehead, 2004, p.7). Although this thesis privileges an understanding of the modes through which the neo-Victorian ‘exports’ contemporary anxieties and traumas in to the past over the idea of ‘witnessing’ historical traumas (while still recognising this as a vital function of the neo-Victorian), Whitehead’s emphasis upon the pertinence of the relational ‘balance’ between speaker and listener recalls Miller and Tougaw’s assertion of a contemporary ‘desire for common grounds – if not an identity-bound shared experience, then one that is shareable through identification’ (2002, p.2).

However, the idea of identification is problematic for LaCapra, as he explains in relation to his notion of establishing ‘empathic unsettlement’ through traumatic representation. The significance of promoting empathic unsettlement in the reader has been acknowledged by several critics in relation to the neo-Victorian novel including Kohlke and Gutleben (2010, p.7), Diane Sadoff (2010, p.188), Kate Mitchell (2010b, pp.264-265), and Matthew Kaiser (2011, p.57). As ‘an affective component of understanding’ which is ‘desirable or even necessary for a certain form of understanding that is constitutively limited but significant’ (LaCapra, 2004, p.125), the effects of empathic unsettlement are achieved through the ‘virtual’ experience of trauma, in which ‘one may imaginatively put oneself in the victim’s position while respecting the difference between self and other and recognizing that one cannot take the victim’s place or speak in the victim’s voice’ (LaCapra, 2004, p.125). This subject position ‘manifests empathy (but not full identification) with the victim’, as opposed to the ‘vicarious’ experience of trauma which occurs when ‘one perhaps unconsciously identifies with the victim, becomes a surrogate victim, and lives the event in an imaginary way that, in extreme cases, may lead to confusion about one’s participation in the actual events’ (LaCapra, 2004, p.267; p.125). LaCapra professes that ‘in history there is a crucial role for empathic unsettlement as an

aspect of understanding which stylistically upsets the narrative voice and counteracts harmonizing narration or unqualified objectification yet allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response' (2001, p.109). Identification, then, is a problematic and undesirable facet in relation to representations of trauma.

Of relevance to this point is the capacity for the neo-Victorian to situate suffering at a temporal remove while employing overtly graphic and 'visual' representations, as well as descriptions which evoke somatic and sensorial experience, to engender a sense of proximity – or even, to an extent, of relatability - to the historical suffering or traumatic event being described. Chris Jenks notes that 'the way that we think about the way that we think in Western culture is guided by a visual paradigm. Looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined' (1995, p.1): indeed, the epistemological interests of the reader relate to the idea of 'knowing' the difference of the historical, as well as the corporeally 'other', as revealed in the texts chosen for discussion in this thesis which explore the problematics of indulging scopophilic desires. While Kaplan finds that 'trauma itself is characterised by visibility' (2005, p.126), Hartman also recognises that, as readers, 'We are drawn into a species of belief by the recovery of certain visceral sensations; extremes of heat, cold and thirst, glare of color [sic], horror of the void, loss of speech' (1995, p.541). Employing a combination of 'visual' and sensory representations arguably renders the neo-Victorian novel more of a participatory 'experience', or one of implication (to use Rothberg's term) which, as my discussion will reveal, can prove problematic due to the destabilisation of virtual and vicarious readerly subject-positions.

Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau suggest that LaCapra's notion of empathic unsettlement 'can be related to Levinas' ethics of alterity which demands of the reader an attitude of responsibility towards the Other and its emphasis on the individual's capacity to feel with the Other, especially the Other's suffering, while recognising his or her utter Otherness' (Onega & Ganteau, 2011, p.59). In Levinas' own terms, 'The plenitude of power through which the sovereignty of the Same maintains itself does not extend to the Other (Autrui) to conquer him, but to support him. But to support the burden of the Other is, at the same time, to confirm it in its substantiality, situating it above the I. The I remains accountable for this burden to the one that it supports. The one to whom I am responsible is also the one to whom I have to respond' (1996, pp.18-19). On a relatable note, Gutleben and Wolfreys suggest that 'contemporary fiction turns away from the present scene of trauma and reverts to other situations and chronotopes predating that

trauma exactly to escape [a] postmodern sense of crisis, loss and disenchantment' (2010, p.54) which in fact serves to facilitate an ethical concern for the (historical) 'Other', 'which necessarily finds expression in an investigation of alternative subjectivities' (2010, p.56). For Gutleben and Wolfreys, the importance of establishing an 'empathic [and] ethical concurrence with the other' (2010, p.66) – what Letissier refers to as a 'positive, humanitarian stance' (2010, p.92) – seems particularly pertinent in the face of present-day humanitarian concerns regarding the distant suffering and violence that takes place on a global scale, and perhaps particularly for Western readers, at a remove. As Ann Kaplan reflects, 'most of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly' due to our existence in 'an era when global media project images of catastrophes all over the world as they are happening' (2005, p.87).

Of relevance to this idea of humanitarian redress in relation to the neo-Victorian novel as a mode of historical restitution with contemporary significance is Collette Colligan's citation of research carried out by Karen Halttunen which reveals how present-day interest in representations of physical suffering and trauma are in fact surprisingly rooted in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century humanitarian efforts. During this time, as Colligan summarises, 'sentimental portraits of suffering and tortured animals, women, and slaves satisfied a sadistic spectatorship that helped shape the new erotics of cruelty in the late eighteenth century' (2005, p.68), a product which transcended from a pre-existing 'literature of sensibility' whose aim was to '[popularize] the basic tenets of sentimental ethics' (Halttunen, 1995, p.307). Halttunen reinforces the nineteenth-century as the locus of a prurient fascination with the traumatic as she asserts that 'The eighteenth-century cult of sensibility redefined pain as unacceptable and indeed eradicable and thus opened the door to a new revulsion from pain, which, though later regarded as "instinctive" or "natural," has in fact proved to be distinctly modern' (1995, p.307). Describing 'the pornography of pain' as 'a phenomenon closely related to this emergent revulsion from pain', Halttunen professes that representations of suffering were 'obscenely titillating precisely because the humanitarian sensibility deemed it unacceptable, taboo'; ergo, and somewhat paradoxically, 'The modern pornography of pain taking shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not merely a seamy sideline to humanitarian reform literature but rather an integral aspect of the humanitarian sensibility' (1995, p.304). Interestingly, then, the 'pornography of pain' which fully manifested itself at the turn of the nineteenth century was in fact born of *humanitarian* efforts to highlight and *redress* social injustice. The parallels which can be drawn between this dilemma and the

same professed function of redress in the neo-Victorian novel reveals a point of correlation between the nineteenth-century appropriation of trauma and its re-deployment in contemporary re-writings.

On the subject of ‘redress’, Peter Mandler champions the redeeming qualities afforded by the temporal gap proffered by neo-Victorian fiction as a means of assessing pertinent ethical questions of relevance to our contemporary experience:

The imaginative capability of history is closely connected to its ethical capability. One of the purposes of *historical time travel* is to transport our modern selves into *alien* situations which allow us to highlight by contrast our own values and assumptions. Sometimes it is easier to examine complex ethical questions honestly and openly in an historical rather than in a contemporary setting, the *distance* involved in taking out some of the heat of the moment without disengaging entirely contemporary values and attitudes. In this aspect history asks us not to lose ourselves in the past but to view the past from our own standpoint; in fact, *one of its functions is to help us define our standpoint more clearly.*

(2002, p.147, my emphasis)

In summary, for Mandler, the temporal gap provides a means of distancing present-day issues and ethical quandaries to facilitate a clearer perspective of them rather than to redress them directly, a point of correlation for Kohlke and Gutleben who find that trauma in the neo-Victorian novel ‘may function as a belated abreaction or “working through” of nineteenth-century traumas, as well as those of our own times’ (2010, p.3). Significantly, Mandler’s point also refers to the idea of ‘time travel, which constitutes a pertinent concept in relation to neo-Victorian exoticism; however, and in accordance with Mandler’s recognition that history requires us not to ‘lose’ themselves in the past, the kind of ‘time travel’ proffered by the neo-Victorian only *seemingly* renders the past more proximate, while in fact remaining rooted within – and reflective of – our present moment.

In consideration of the seeming ‘glut’ of neo-Victorian novels which engage overtly graphic representations of violence, corporeal subjection and suffering, it is plausible to infer that our increasing temporal distance from the Victorian past perhaps necessitates the use of repeated and often graphic emphasis upon the lived, corporeal *physicality* of historical exploitation and suffering in pursuit of what Gutleben and Wolfreys previously termed the ‘specifically poetic task’ of re-presenting historical trauma in the neo-Victorian novel. Arguably, focussing upon the physical reality of lived, corporeal subjection and suffering renders historical traumas more proximate and, therefore, more affecting, in the face of the distancing effects of the temporal gap. The

research conducted in this thesis finds that the authors of the texts under discussion employ what can be characterised as a representational lexicon of visuality, corporeality and materiality which seemingly enhances, but in fact paradoxically works to eschew, the reader's sense of proximity to the suffering and subjection depicted (as explained more thoroughly momentarily), while the previously-mentioned desire of 'reading for defilement' – intrinsic to the concept of a perverse nostalgia – might promote interest in the reader to begin with, undermining their initial desires in favour of self-conscious consideration or, to repeat Mandler's phrase, to enable them to define their own standpoint in relation to historical traumas – and their present-day parallels – more clearly.

Several critics have discussed the ways in which traumatic representation inherently undermines the reader's connection to the historical 'world' of suffering proffered by the neo-Victorian, as well as providing consideration of the problematic implications of traumatic representations themselves. Sadoff employs Ley's theorisation of trauma to support her proposition that even though 'Neo-Victorian reading and writing immerses us in the scene of trauma, submitting us to the "hypnotic imitation" of reading-as-suffering', these narrative accounts simultaneously 'remind us that traumatic neurosis, memory, or mimesis is a kind of "fabrication or simulation" of the real' (Sadoff, 2010, p.165; citing Leys, 2000, p.8; p.10). This not only short-circuits any perceived 'proximity' to the Victorian past by highlighting the fictionality and contemporaneity of neo-Victorian narrative returns to the period, but also reveals the instability and short-circuitedness of traumatic memory (and its mediation) itself.

Sontag similarly reveals the illusory nature of perceived proximity to mediated suffering in her statement that 'The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images<sup>10</sup> suggests a link between the far-away sufferers [...] and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power' (2003, p.102). Kohlke raises a relatable point of concern in recognition of trauma's potential *divisiveness* as 'in spite of its potential to create experiential connectivity between different peoples, societies, and periods', trauma can also be responsible for 're-inscribing an unbridgeable alterity' (2008, pp.7-8), in this case between the (contemporary) 'self' and the (historical) 'Other'.

In contrast to the potential re-inscription of alterity, Laub highlights an alternative issue with regards to establishing the reader as a virtual (rather than vicarious) witness to

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<sup>10</sup> Although Sontag specifically refers to 'images' of suffering, I find that the employment of overtly 'visual' language and descriptions afforded to neo-Victorian representations of suffering and trauma – many of which are overtly graphic, and attempt to engage the reader in acts of 'seeing' and 'witnessing' – can be correlated (to an extent) to Sontag's point as another medium through which suffering is 'visualised'.

suffering, speculating instead about the possibility of the linguistic or narrative *transmission* of trauma as a means of implicating the reader in that trauma as a ‘co-owner’ or secondary, vicarious witness, recalling the troubling instability of readerly subject positions as theorised by LaCapra. In a similar mode to Rothberg’s idea of the implicated subject, Laub contends that ‘the listener to trauma [or, in this case, the *reader* of traumatic accounts] comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event’ as ‘through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself’ (1992a, p.57). Ann Kaplan similarly proposes that media saturation of traumatic events constitutes an exposure which ‘may result in symptoms of secondary trauma’ (2005, p.87),<sup>11</sup> summarising the implications of this form of vicarious traumatising as being two-fold: ‘Arguably, being vicariously traumatized invites members of a society to confront, rather than conceal, catastrophes, and in that way might be useful’; yet ‘[o]n the other hand, it might arouse anxiety and trigger defence against further exposure’ (2005, p.87).

The potential for secondary traumatising such as this certainly raises some urgent ethical questions relating neo-Victorian representations of trauma, as does Kaplan’s recognition of the potentially cumulative effects of the daily ‘dose’ of visual images depicting large-scale international catastrophe which permeate social media (Kaplan, 2005, p.105). Kaplan questions whether this type of trauma saturation may be responsible for eliciting ‘empty’ empathy from an audience by virtue of that fact that suffering is encountered regularly and indirectly, and often via visual media without a preliminary understanding of the context of the images (2005, p.87). The idea of engaging with trauma in absence of its original context recalls Frederick Jameson’s contentious charge that contemporary historical narratives are themselves ‘engendered by the disappearance of the historical referent’ (1991, p.24), resulting in a surface or ‘pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history’ (1991, p.19).

However, Sontag concisely upholds the role of visuality in relation to representations of somatic suffering as a *necessity* for inciting attention. Sontag states that ‘Most depictions of tormented, mutilated bodies [...] arouse a prurient interest’ because ‘we live in a “society of spectacle”’; ergo, ‘Each situation *has* to be turned into a spectacle to be real – that is, interesting – to us’ (2003, p.95; p.109, my emphasis). For Sontag, and

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<sup>11</sup> Kaplan focuses specifically upon the prominence of media images from war-torn Rwanda and Iraq to explore the degree to which such images can be ‘pro social’, as well as the extent to which such images ‘may turn viewers away from the suffering of others’ (2005, p.21). Visser, however, has countered this perception by stressing the existence evidence which proves that ‘readers and viewers of traumatic material are not in fact impacted to any serious degree’, but instead can exhibit ‘a relative indifference’ (2011, p.275). Luckhurst attributes this to what he describes as the ‘rise and rise of the trauma paradigm in the West’ which ‘appears superficially to be a paradigm that might address atrocity [...] but shockingly fail[s] to do so’ (2008, p.212).

recalling Colligan's expositions regarding the 'pornography of pain' as a supposed mode of 'redress', 'the appetite for pictures of the body in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked' (2003, p.41): indeed, 'All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic', resulting in 'both a mortification of the feelings and a liberation of tabooed erotic knowledge' (2003, p.41; p.98). These sentiments raise a not unproblematic correlation between suffering and eroticised spectacle, a combination which sits uneasily with the idea of empathy for the Other's suffering or of redress but that again recalls Kohlke's conceptualisation of a perverse nostalgia, and how this concept can be used to identify current drives and desires. Eroticised spectacle and its concomitant issues and implications are considered further later in this thesis.

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection – discussed in her landmark study *Powers of Horror* (1982) – constitutes a useful means of broaching how the neo-Victorian itself concomitantly engages and undermines the reader's desire for the exoticised 'spectacle' of historical suffering and traumas. Appropriating Kristeva's theory might render an understanding of how 'reading for defilement' can in fact be reconfigured as a useful – indeed, vital – means of eliciting empathic unsettlement within the neo-Victorian novel which, to repeat LaCapra's point, is integral for eliciting even a limited understanding of trauma, particularly those situated at a historical remove. Kristeva theorises that representations of the suffering, wounded body, as well as of the cadaver or corpse (1982, p.3) constitute subjects of abjection.<sup>12</sup> Defining how we come to perceive something specifically as abject, Kristeva describes the concept as precisely 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982, p.4). Abjection, then, is not to be understood in terms solely relating to the corporeal, but is also 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you' (Kristeva, 1982, p.4) – namely, the disturbingly incongruous, or the fundamentally irreconcilable, and a source of 'instinctive' repulsion. In the opening paragraph of her work, Kristeva explains that:

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<sup>12</sup> Kristeva also cites other examples to illuminate how she characterises the abject, including (among others) 'food, filth, waste or dung', and even the 'skin' that forms 'on the surface of [warm] milk' (1982, p.1; p.2).

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it *cannot be assimilated*. It beseeches, worries, and *fascinates desire*, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, *desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects*. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflinchingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.

(Kristeva, 1982, p.1)

What Kristeva describes in these opening sentiments to *Powers of Horror* is the ‘vortex of summons and repulsion’ which occurs in relation to (re)presentations of suffering and the traumatic, which synchronously prompts fascination and disgust. Kristeva explains what could be characterised as a ‘perverse fascination’ in terms of a ‘jouissance’ which itself ‘causes the abject to exist as such’, as ‘One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on enjouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion.’ (1982, p.9). The pleasure of the abject constitutes a ‘jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones’ (1982, p.9, original emphasis). In this sense, abjection refuses to enable the subject to ‘enjoy’ its perverse pleasures by threatening to collapse the boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’: ‘Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, "subject" and "object" push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject’ (Kristeva, 1982, p.18). Ultimately, the abject is inherently destabilising for the subject, but – vitally – defies assimilation.

Kristeva’s recognition of a perverse ‘jouissance’ itself is relatable to the concept of ‘perverse nostalgia’ in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, which also simultaneously works to summon and renounce the reader’s proximity to, and capacity for assimilation of, historical traumas. In Kristeva’s terms, such representations ‘impl[y] an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside [...] by means of the displacements of verbal play’ (1982, p.16): in this sense, the abject might fulfil LaCapra’s charge of establishing an empathic unsettlement in the reader by refusing identification but promoting a temporary, fleeting moment of imaginary ‘involvement’. This idea also recalls Rothberg’s idea of the implicated subject, and the strategies employed by certain authors of neo-Victorian fiction to infer (and subsequently frustrate) proximity to events on the part

of the reader. Indeed, at once fascinating and repulsive, traumatic representations are revealed as integral to both eliciting interest in the reader, as well as unsettling and destabilising their engagement.

Kristeva's sentiments regarding abjection ultimately mirror the paradox embodied by neo-Victorian trauma fiction which reveals itself as 'rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies' (1982, p.17). Narrativising historical traumas in the neo-Victorian text (either as a mode of pure acknowledgement, memorialisation, 'working through', or as a means of reflecting upon and coming to a greater understanding of contemporary parallels and relatable anxieties, issues, and ethical concerns) necessitates 'participation' (albeit of a subversive and self-reflexive nature) in the very problematic mode(s) of exploitation that they seemingly seek to denounce.

At this juncture, and given the parallels which can be rendered between Kristeva's theorisation of the abject and the concept of perverse nostalgia, this discussion will shift its focus to explore the intricacies and issues inherent to neo-Victorian nostalgia and exoticism, and its capacity for the exportation and exploration of distinctly contemporary concerns. Beginning with a brief contextual overview of the fractious issue of neo-Victorian nostalgia, the ensuing exposition will chart the implications of perverse nostalgic engagement in relation to the ideas of travel and exploration, tourism, and commodity culture as a means of further delineating an understanding of how trauma functions in the neo-Victorian novel.

## **Contextualising an approach towards Perverse Nostalgia and Exoticism in the Neo-Victorian Novel**

### **The contentious issue of neo-Victorian nostalgia**

Why do so many contemporary authors return to the Victorian period specifically for its traumatic histories? Or, for that matter, what is it that prompts narrative returns to the Victorian period at all? Duncker pertinently combines the 'essence' of these two enquiries as she asks, 'What is the literary lure of the Victorian period to which contemporary novelists are attracted, like maggots to a corpse?' (2014, p.1). This question, as Maciej Sulmicki notes, proffers no 'simple answer' as 'Multiple factors could have influenced the growing popularity of neo-Victorian fiction at the end of the twentieth century' (2011, p.152). Sulmicki cites the centenary of Queen Victoria's death and the proliferation of

retrospective Victorian political and social discourse that arose during the 1980s as possible reasons (2011, p.152), before suggesting that ‘the distance between “now” and “then” is large enough to arouse nostalgia and enable the simplifications necessary to talk of the period as a whole, while at the same time small enough to allow for a feeling of familiarity’ (2011, p.153). Matthew Sweet, on the other hand, detects an attitude of sentimentality for the Victorians as a desire ‘to go back to the past, to return to a world uncomplicated by welfare, feminism, multiculturalism. In Britain, it has merged with a less fundamentalist attitude to the past, a conservative nostalgia visible on the streets in the form of faux-Victorian litter bins and lampposts’ (2001, p.228). Perhaps most vitally, though, he also recognises our contemporary indebtedness to the experiences of our Victorian precursors as he states that ‘Most of the pleasures that we imagine to be our own, the Victorians enjoyed first. They invented the theme park, the shopping mall, the movies, the amusement arcade, the roller-coaster, the crime novel and the sensational newspaper story. They were engaged in a continuous search for bigger and better thrills’ (Sweet, 2001, pp.x-xi). Sweet’s reference to the Victorian desire for ‘thrills’ is of particular relevance and will be discussed in relation to its full significance in relation to neo-Victorian exoticism in the forthcoming discussion. First, however, and to effectively contextualise a specifically ‘perverse’ nostalgia in the neo-Victorian novel, it is of benefit to return briefly to some of the initial debates in neo-Victorian scholarship.

Since the genre’s inception, the ‘neo-Victorian’ has been somewhat loosely defined and has consequently proven a somewhat contentious point in the field of study, with debate regarding the most appropriate way to characterise the exact mode of return offered by the literary genre being fuelled by the terminology itself. Judith Johnston and Catherine Waters, for example, have raised issue with the prefix ‘neo’ as ‘when used in conjunction with a political movement,’ the term ‘implies a desire to return to the political beliefs of that movement’s past [...] and a desire for the reinstatement of earlier, and often conservative, values as opposed to more radical change’; yet somehow, when ‘used in conjunction with a genre, the implication is rather a new, modified, or more modern style’ (2008, pp.10-11, footnote 5). Indeed, the definition of ‘neo’ – from the Greek, ‘neos’ - is simply ‘new’, discounting the afore-mentioned implications of ‘return’ inherent in the term’s political usage.

Kaplan contends that the term ‘Victoriana’ ‘might usefully embrace the whole phenomenon, the astonishing range of representations and reproductions for which the Victorian – whether as the origin of late twentieth century modernity, its antithesis, or both

at once – is the common referent’ (2007, p.3), although this ‘umbrella’ term runs the risk of being too vague and subsequently negating the specific contemporaneity of the genre. In fact, other critics have challenged the very idea of ‘newness’ in relation to the neo-Victorian, reflecting instead upon its aesthetic and narrative indebtedness to its Victorian textual precursors. For Jameson, for example, ‘[the] historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past’, resulting in a surface or ‘pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history’ (1991, p.24; p.19).

Gutleben has also criticised the aestheticisation of contemporary literary returns to the Victorian era, concluding that the focus upon aesthetics becomes exemplary of a ‘nostalgic postmodernism’ (2001, p.10). Gutleben subsequently endorses the term ‘retro-Victorian’<sup>13</sup> in acknowledgement of what he perceives to be the genre’s indefatigable ‘repetition, recycling, [and] want of originality and creativity’ (2001, p.29). His perception of the ‘imitative activity of the numerous pastiches’ inherent to the neo-Victorian leads Gutleben to conclude that contemporary returns to the Victorians are necessarily subject to ‘a paradoxical form of wistful revisionism [which] eventually leads to an aesthetic and ideological deadlock’ (2001, p.10).

The prominence of the re-appropriation of Victorian aesthetics to this debate is also professed by Llewellyn who states that the neo-Victorian text is ‘not contemporary literature as a substitute for the nineteenth century but as a mediator into the experience of reading the ‘real’ thing; after all, neo-Victorian texts are, in the main, processes of writing that act out the results of reading the Victorians and their literary productions’ (2008, p.168). This recalls Gutleben’s contentious charge that for authors of neo-Victorian texts, the Victorian novel is ‘where, according to them, the voice of authority originates’ (2001, p.18), while Andrea Kirchknopf’s allusions to the neo-Victorian texts as ‘adaptations or appropriations’ (2008, p.68) also foments what Samantha Carroll describes as a ‘derivative feel’ (2010, p.193).

The idea of the neo-Victorian as a ‘mediator’ for the ‘‘real’ thing’ is particularly problematic, not least for its seemingly detractive charge of proffering a ‘nostalgic tug’ (Flint, 2005, p.230) at the Victorian past. The charge of a nostalgic engagement, according to Carroll, derogatorily renders ‘the nineteenth-century past as the privileged site of return for a mal-adjusted present’ as ‘the Victorian era is [...] converted to an immature longing for an irrecoverable Victorian past – a retrograde activity associated with conservatism and

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<sup>13</sup> An appellation initially coined by Sally Shuttleworth, who associates the term with an explicit textual nostalgia (1998, p.253).

intellectual regression and, finally, a refusal to graduate to more fitting contemporary concerns' (2010, p.176).

The prospect of an uncritical nostalgic engagement also problematically negates the fundamental reality of the neo-Victorian text as a *distinctly contemporary product* which mediates and explores contemporary preoccupations, anxieties, and concerns in a historical setting, or as 'self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians' (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2010, p.4). Sweet describes how 'The Victorians invented us, and we in our turn invented the Victorians' (2001, p.xii), a point championed by Robin Gilmour who asserts that 'the [Victorian past] exists in dynamic relation to the present, which it both interprets and is interpreted by', and that consequently, 'Evoking the Victorians and their world has not been an antiquarian activity but a means of getting a fresh perspective on the present' (2000, p.200). De Groot has similarly promoted what he terms the 'historical imaginary' as a 'popular' (i.e. non-academic) mode through which to 'reflect the complexity of contemporary cultural and social interface' (2009, p.3; p.6).

Duncker has stated that 'We should take the Victorians as seriously as they took themselves and treat their myths with suspicion, but *we must also study our own times*, and not presume to understand them. And we must not look back rather than forwards simply because we are afraid of whatever we might see, reflected in the glass' (2014, p.23, my emphasis). However, Simon Joyce answers to this charge by emphasising and upholding the neo-Victorian's contemporaneity, appropriating the idea of the rearview mirror as a (literal) reflection of the fact that the Victorian period 'no longer seems as distant as we might like to think, but instead forms the horizon for many of our most pressing debates' (2007, p.16). The 'glass' offered by the neo-Victorian novel is indeed one which enables – and in fact, demands – that we 'study our own time' as per Duncker's admonition. On this subject, where Widdowson has described 'the more generalising historical tendency of contemporary fiction to oscillate dialectically between past and present (2007, p.504), Daniel Bormann instead argues that the prefix 'retro-' places emphasis on the text's relation to the past, while 'neo-' conversely emphasises the text's relation to the *future* (2002, p.61). Arguably, the 'neo-' prefix best acknowledges the relevance of these literary returns as specific products and reflections of the present: while Louisa Hadley maintains that this is the case 'if only because of the position of the author' (2010, p.62), this thesis demonstrates that this is in fact more to do with the genre's subversive potential to depart from its historical moorings in reflection of distinctly current preoccupations and concerns,

and – in many cases, and demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis specifically - the ways in which these might develop in the future.

It is perhaps for this reason that not all critics perceive the charge of a nostalgic re-engagement as a decidedly negative aspect of the neo-Victorian, or – fundamentally – even one that necessarily manifests in the traditional sense as a ‘warmth associated with an idealised past’ (De Groot, 2009, p.205). Typically, nostalgia has been defined as ‘a positively toned evocation of a lived past’ which is ‘infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, [and] love’ (Davis, 1979, p.14; p.18). Indeed, traditionally, nostalgia is perceptibly ‘never infused with those sentiments we commonly think of as negative – for example, unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate, shame, abuse’ (Davis, 1979, p.14). The neo-Victorian texts examined within this thesis subvert and undermine the traditional mode of nostalgic engagement through their appropriation of the traumatic as a point of desirable return, and indeed, a source of fascination. In doing so, these works reveal that ‘nostalgia is not confined to trivialized mass representations, or sentimentalized expressions of regret and yearning for times past [...] Nostalgia is more complex than that, and covers a range of ways of orienting to and engaging with the past’ (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.926). Mitchell, for one, champions ‘a more positive and productive role in recalling the past’ as she proposes that ‘nostalgia might be productive, giving voice to the desire for cultural memory to which [neo-Victorian] novels bear witness’ (2010a, p.5), while De Groot also finds that nostalgia has the ability ‘to open up multiple spaces for reflection and dissidence’, and posits that ‘in the historical’s ability to contain complication, difference, ideology, interrogation, artifice, virtuality, escape and experience, that is, in its sheer multiplying variance in popular culture, might be seen its true value as a discourse’ (2009, p.250).

It is in this vein that the discussion proffered within this thesis situates itself. To briefly reiterate, this thesis finds perverse nostalgia to constitute one of these modes of nostalgic dissident ‘variance’ which evidences a contemporary fascination with trauma and the wounded or suffering body of the ‘Other’, and in doing so provides a means of exploring the forms and implications of the reader’s contemporary ‘consumption’ of such traumas. If, as David Lowenthal states, nostalgia is ‘memory with the pain removed’ (1985, p.8), *perverse* nostalgia (as it manifests in the texts under discussion in this thesis) certainly subverts a traditional understanding of the concept by underscoring a very *literal*

pain which is both corporeal and eminently traumatic.<sup>14</sup> The ensuing discussion expands upon perverse nostalgia as a form of historical ‘consumption’ which operates in relation to historical ‘travelling’ and exoticism, and how this thematic intersection manifests itself within the neo-Victorian novel.

### **Neo-Victorian ‘travelling’: Exotic nostalgia and the ‘neo-Adventure novel’**

Despite constituting two disparate concepts, nostalgia and exoticism are fundamentally relatable as manifestations of a similar longing for a place and/or time that, to all intents and purposes, never ‘was’. Figueira explains that ‘Beyond its evocative and poetic possibilities, the exotic exists as a mode of self-definition. It does so in two respects. On the initial level, it functions as a mode of escapism. Exoticism exhibits a “philosophical nostalgia” for a “traditional, binding, serenely fatalistic order”. [...] The exotic is [also] seen as a function of the ‘Other’, alterity, [...] difference, and subalterneity’ (1994, p.2; citing Remak, 1978, p.53). Ideas of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ are indeed integral to exoticism, not least because of the etymology of the Latin word ‘exoticus’ from which the term derives, the meaning of which translates as ‘foreign, alien or Other’ (Shapiro, 2000, p.43).<sup>15</sup> In his seminal study *Exotic Memories* (1991), Chris Bongie defines exoticism as ‘a nineteenth-century literary and existential practice that posited another space, the space of an Other, outside or beyond the confines of a “civilization” [...] that, by virtue of its modernity, was perceived by many writers as being incompatible with certain essential values’ (1991, p.5). Often these spaces were geographically distant ones, spaces which were perceived as strange, ‘foreign’, and unexplored, although Lowenthal also concisely notes that ‘In

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in light of this it seems particularly fitting that, historically, nostalgia itself – once considered the ‘disease of an afflicted imagination’ – also ‘afflicted the body’, resulting in physical symptoms including ‘nausea, loss of appetite [...] and marasmus’ (Boym, 2001, p.4), as well as other troubling symptoms which interestingly also reveal parallels with the effects of trauma itself, such as ‘troublesome dreams [...] continuous fear [...] and anxiety’ (Boym, 2001, p.5).

<sup>15</sup> Often perceived as synonymous with the concept of ‘Orientalism’, most famously theorised by Edward Said (1978) in his study of the same name, these two concepts ‘remain extremely different in their aims’ (Malibat, 2008, p.7). Said explains Orientalism as ‘a form of thought for dealing with the foreign has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinctions as “East” and “West”: to channel thought into a West or an East compartment. Because this tendency is right at the center [sic] of Orientalist theory, practice, and values found in the West, the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth’ (1978, p.54). However, Shapiro disputes that Orientalism and Exoticism amount to the same thing despite their common alignment in postcolonial theory (2000, p.42), as does Claire Malibat who describes the essential difference between exoticism and orientalism in the following terms: ‘whilst exoticism enables artists (in whatever art-form) to broaden their artistic palate [sic] and to explore new artistic mediums, images and styles, orientalism depicts another culture in such a way as to create comment, or to highlight (often negative) difference. The former appreciates and embraces cultural diversity, whereas the latter (generally) disparages or criticizes it. Even though orientalism may use elements of exoticism within its processes, these concepts remain extremely different in their aims’ (2008, p.7).

Victorian Britain the past became a refuge from an all-too-new and disillusioning present' (1985, p.xxi).

Huggan focusses upon the function of exoticism in more contemporary terms as 'a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery' (2001, p.13). For this very reason, the marked (and marketable) interest in neo-Victorian returns to the nineteenth century may well be perceived as being fuelled by essentially 'exoticist' motivations as the Victorian past – by virtue of temporal, rather than geographic, distance – becomes an alternative kind of exotic 'location' for the reader to 'explore'. As Kohlke explains, 'As the spread of more interdependent globalised economies, mass tourism, and new technologies continuously diminishes the availability of unexplored geographical "dark areas" for reconfiguration into mirrors of our own desires, a displacement occurs from the spatial to the temporal axis' (2006, p.12).

The memorable and oft-quoted opening lines to L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953), which read '[t]he past is a foreign country: they do things differently there' (1953, p.5), effectively capture what the neo-Victorian text seemingly purports to offer in terms of 'exoticised' experience. Where once the traditional Victorian adventure novel<sup>16</sup> came to constitute 'a symbolic form uniquely suited for preserving, in a (spatially or temporally) distant locale, whatever seemed no longer to have a place in the rapidly changing world of the Industrial Revolution' (Bongie, 1991, p.12), the neo-Victorian novel perceptibly offers the nineteenth century itself as an exotic 'location' (or Hartley's 'foreign country') and one which seems to facilitate historical 'travelling' – or what Johnston and Waters have referred to as 'armchair travel' (2008, p.4) – by the reader. Like Victorian narratives, neo-Victorian texts often employ representations of literal journeys to distant geographic locations, most commonly by boat or by train; similarly, just as Victorian travel narratives utilised 'inclusive rhetoric' in an attempt to 'make the reader feel a sense of participation in the journeys described' (Byerly, 2013, p.290), so too the neo-Victorian employs similar techniques to seemingly implicate the reader within participatory, or vicarious, 'travel'. However, while each of the texts selected for discussion within this thesis examine – to a greater or lesser extent – the implications of travel and exploration, they also reveal a

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<sup>16</sup> Bongie identifies 'a significant difference in approach between the eighteenth-century adventure novel and its nineteenth-century successor' (1991, p.13): for a full account see Bongie (1991, pp.12-5). Some examples of literary works which can be incorporated under the 'umbrella' of the Victorian adventure genre include R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857), G.A. Henty's *With Clive in India* (1884), and H. R. Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), as well as his novel published shortly after, *She* (1887).

critical and deliberate departure from, and frustration of, exoticist desires on the part of the reader in a manner somewhat in keeping with (or, more specifically, operating in self-aware and critical genuflection of)<sup>17</sup> the late-Victorian adventure novel. Bongie explains that despite being greeted with initial optimism, the Victorian exoticist project eventually '[gave] way in the second half of the century to a deep pessimism stemming from the rapid spread of colonial and technological power' (1991, p.5) towards the end of the nineteenth century. 'As a project', Bongie continues, 'exoticism necessarily presumes that, at some point in the future, what has been lost will be attained "elsewhere": however, 'if exoticism partakes of modernity and its promise, what the future promises [...] is a recovery of the past and of all that a triumphant modernity has effaced' (1991, p.15). Therefore, 'Because of this vicious circle that draws the future and the past together, the exoticist project is, from its very beginnings, short-circuited: it can never keep its promise' (Bongie, 1991, p.15). In concurrence with this shift in perceptions, where once the traditional Victorian adventure novel 'purported to chronicle [...] English adventure in the lands beyond Europe then being explored and colonized, but they did so in such a manner that they formed the energizing myth of English imperialism' (White, 1993, p.6), in its late-Victorian form the genre instead came to focus upon the 'degradation of adventure' (Brantlinger, 1985, p.245). As 'exploration [...] rapidly declined into mere travel', and the 'penetration' of imperial spaces 'turned in to a sordid spectacle of tourism and commercial exploitation' (Brantlinger, 1988, pp.37-38), Victorian literature also came to register the exotic as 'a space of absence, a dream already given over to the past' (Bongie, 1991, p.22) in criticism of its textual precursors.

I perceive that the parallels which can be drawn between the late-Victorian adventure novel and neo-Victorian texts which critically re-engage with this nexus of Victorian travel, exploration, and exoticism can be considered constitutive of a specific type of neo-Victorian engagement, which I propose gives rise to the formulation of a distinct subgenre that I will term the 'neo-adventure novel'<sup>18</sup> (and which will appear henceforth without quotation marks). In a similar way to the characteristics of the late-

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Hillis Miller seems to most effectively capture the essence of such a paradoxical dynamic through his attribution of the two seemingly incompatible terms 'homage' and 'critique' (2004, p.30) in relation to both Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx: The Inheritance of John Huffam* (1989), as well as to the neo-Victorian project in general.

<sup>18</sup> Other examples of texts which could fit this sub-genre could include Robert Edric's *The Broken Lands: A Novel of Arctic Disaster* (1992), Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie* (2011), Jay Parini's *The Passages of Herman Melville* (2012), Jeremy Page's *The Collector of Lost Things: A Novel* (2013), in addition to Barrett's *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), and Edric's *The Book of the Heathen* (2000), all three of which are discussed within this thesis. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is merely intended as an indicative set of texts.

Victorian adventure novel outlined by Brantlinger, I characterise the neo-adventure novel as being preoccupied with representing and delineating the devolution of the traditional idea of ‘exploration’ into a form of exploitative and/or commercialised touristic spectacle of ‘otherness’. The neo-adventure novel self-consciously reflects upon the reader’s idea of genuine historical ‘exploration’ – a perceptibly ‘authentic’ engagement which implicitly recalls a historically distant epoch when the world was still largely unexplored and required analysing, categorising, and demystifying – only to frustrate it. Just as Huggan has described exoticism as ‘enact[ing] a complex dialectic of desire [which] seeks a past of its own invention it knows in advance to be impossible’ (2001, p.179), I argue that the neo-adventure novel similarly reveals the reader’s exoticist engagement as one which is fundamentally and intrinsically short-circuited, and which has conversely come to incorporate somewhat more superficial connotations with novelty, commercialisation, and inauthenticity and, in doing so, treading a somewhat tenuous ethical ‘line’.

As Lowenthal pertinently points out, ‘We may fancy an exotic past that contrasts with a humdrum or unhappy present, but we forge it with *modern tools*. The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today’s predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our preservation of its vestiges’ (1985, p.xvii, my emphasis). In consequence, the neo-Victorian’s rendering of the nineteenth century as what Bongie previously described as ‘the space of the Other’ is negated, and rendered unstable by virtue of traumatic representation, revealing itself instead as a space of self-reflexivity in relation to contemporary fascinations, anxieties, and preoccupations, as well as of a return to the ‘Self’ rather than to the ‘Other’. To employ Roger Célestin’s figuration of exoticism which departs from its traditional usage, exoticism operates ‘as the means for the subject of a powerful, dominant culture to *counter* that culture in the very process of *returning* to it’, and in this way, ‘exoticism – or more specifically the texts of exoticism – *contain both the voyage out and the return*’ (1996, p.3, original emphasis).

The perceptions of Claude Lévi-Strauss are particularly useful for explaining this point. In the opening sentiments of his work *Tristes Tropiques* (1973), Lévi-Strauss captures the ‘essence’ of what the neo-Victorian text purports to offer as he asserts that travel books ‘create the illusion of something which no longer exists but still should exist, if we were to have any hope of avoiding the overwhelming conclusion that the history of the past twenty thousand years is irrevocable’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p.38). ‘I wished I had lived in the days of real journeys’, Lévi-Strauss reflects, ‘when it was still possible to see the full splendour of a spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted and spoilt; I

wished I had not trodden on that ground as myself, but as Bernier, Tavernier or Manucci did' (1973, p.43).

Yet Lévi-Strauss also recognises the essential futility or 'short-circuited' nature of such a desire as he proceeds to acknowledge that 'while I complain of being able to glimpse no more than a shadow of the past, *I may be insensitive to reality as it is taking shape at this very moment, since I have not reached the stage of development at which I would be capable of perceiving it.* A few hundred years hence, in this same place, another traveller, as despairing as myself, will mourn the disappearance of what I might have seen, but failed to see' (Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p.43, my emphasis). Consequently, Lévi-Strauss describes himself as being subject to the 'double infirmity' (1973, p.43) of feeling disenfranchised within the present, and so continuing the perpetual cycle of longing for the 'exotic' past. These sentiments are particularly pertinent in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, epitomising the argument for how the genre representationally 'exports' current concerns, anxieties, and traumas in to the past, as in the present we may remain 'insensitive to reality as it is taking shape' and therefore incapable of 'perceiving' them. The 'double-infirmity' defined by Lévi-Strauss also has significance for the neo-Victorian, which is itself subject to the 'double infirmity' of mediating both past and present, as well as of necessary participation in the modes of exoticism it seeks to frustrate and the forms of exploitation that it seemingly seeks to denounce.

Of additional significance for the neo-Victorian is Lévi-Strauss's recognition that 'Nowadays, being an explorer is a trade, which consists not, as one might think, in discovering hitherto unknown facts after years of study, but in covering a great many miles and assembling lantern-slides or motion picture, preferably in colour, so as to fill a hall with an audience' for whom '*platitudes and commonplaces seem to have been miraculously transmuted into revelations*' (1973, pp.17-18, my emphasis). These sentiments capture what the neo-Victorian novel purports to offer, rendering that which is already known, discovered, experienced, anew once more by rendering it strange, exciting, sensational, and purportedly 'Other'.

For Shapiro, 'some degree of exoticism is intrinsic to the cognition of otherness since otherness is, by definition, constructed from a single position'; therefore, exoticism constitutes a part of an 'ordinary mental process', and one which Shapiro fundamentally differentiates from the '*fetishisation of the Other*' (2000, p.42).<sup>19</sup> Yet, as several other critics have professed, this is unstable ground to tread, not least due to the intrinsic

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<sup>19</sup> The concept of 'fetishisation' itself is discussed more fully towards the end of this introductory discussion.

inequality of power relations involved within the dichotomy of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and the ‘possible political uses to which imaginative ideas can be put on the other’ (Shapiro, 2000, p.43). Huggan, for one, explains that ‘The exoticist rhetoric of fetishised otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function’ (2001, p.14); he also proposes that, in an imperial context, exoticism undergoes a ‘transformation of power-politics into spectacle’ (2001, p.14), citing Edward Said’s influential study *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) in pursuit of demonstrating how ‘exoticism functions in a variety of imperial contexts as a mechanism of aesthetic substitution’ (Huggan, 2001, p.14). In Said’s words:

after the natives have been displaced from their historical location on their land, their history is rewritten as a function of the imperial one. This process uses narrative to dispel contradictory memories and *occlude* violence – the exotic replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of *curiosity* – with the imperial presence so dominating as to make impossible any effort to separate it from historical necessity.

(1993, p.159, my emphasis)

This dynamic recalls the neo-Victorian proffering of historical spectacle as speaking to exoticist curiosities at a temporal remove; pertinently, as this thesis evidences and explores in greater detail in the forthcoming chapters, many neo-Victorian novels choose to forefront – rather than ‘occlude’ – representations of violence in such a way that also enables exploration of ‘power politics’ and ‘spectacle’ in relation to the reader’s voyeuristic ‘gaze’. As Huggan explains in relation to Said’s point, ‘It is not that exotic spectacle and the curiosity it arouses replaces power, but rather that it functions as a decoy to *disguise* it’, and as such masks the ‘hierarchical encodings of cultural difference [...] through which exoticist discourses and industries continue to function’ (Huggan, 2001, p.14; p.15). The forthcoming discussion will expand upon the idea of exoticist discourses and ‘industries’ in relation to the ideas of commercialised historical ‘travelling’, and how this contemporary phenomena is relatable to the neo-Victorian specifically.

## **Tourism, Consumerism, and the Fetishisation of Historical Traumas**

### **(Thana)Tourists of History**

In her timely study *Tourists of History* (2007), Marita Sturken reflects upon ‘how consumerism, media images, souvenirs, popular culture, and museum and architectural

reenactments' contribute to 'a form of tourism that has as its goal a "cathartic" experience of history' (2007, p.9). Sturken posits the concept of the 'tourist' as a vehicle through which it is possible to consider how the individual is 'encouraged to situate themselves in relationship to history, and in particular to world history' (2007, p.10). Referring to practices in which 'native rituals are staged for tourists, and now-lost cultures are consumed by tourists in artificial settings' (2007, p.10), Sturken explains that tourists 'visit places that are understood to be authentic in part because they see their own world as an inauthentic, (modern) one' (2007, p.10), recalling the previous discussion regarding the motivations of the Victorian exoticist project. The tourist of history necessarily experiences the past at a temporal remove which fosters a simultaneous perception of innocence and detachment while also providing 'a means to feel one has been authentically close to an event' (2007, p.12): and yet despite this, 'the activity of tourism is usually regarded as an *inauthentic* activity, one that must often be apologized for' (2007, pp.10-11, my emphasis). This charge of inauthenticity recalls Llewellyn's problematic indictment of the neo-Victorian novel as a mediator for reading the 'real thing', as well as Gutleben's assertion of a want of creative ingenuity which renders the neo-Victorian a spurious or inferior contemporary product in relation to the 'authentic' Victorian 'original'. Despite this, Sturken's seemingly simple acknowledgement of such modes of tourism as 'an experience nonetheless' (2007, p.9) takes on meaning as a prompt for consideration of the motivations for *wanting* to partake in these activities – which both promises and frustrates 'authenticity' – in the first place.

This point itself also arguably takes on additional significance in consideration of Sturken's subsequent proposal that sites of 'collective trauma' are widely considered 'as having a particular kind of authenticity', and in consequence are 'often the focus of tourist activity' (2007, p.11). Indeed, the recent surge of interest in 'thanatourism'<sup>20</sup> – more commonly referred to as 'dark tourism' (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p.3) – in both social and academic realms highlights the significance of this phenomenon as a prominent branch of contemporary tourism. Sturken posits thanatourism as an enterprise 'preoccupied with tourist experiences which seem to be beyond [...] reproach' (Sturken, 2007, p.11), while The Institute for Dark Tourism Research (or 'iDTR')<sup>21</sup> describes the phenomena

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<sup>20</sup> A term initially coined by Tony Seaton in 1996 in a journal article titled 'Guided by the dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism'.

<sup>21</sup> The iDTR's website reports that thanatourism has taken on great significance as an area of academic interest in recent years and 'is to be the subject of a dedicated centre for academic research at the University of Central Lancashire' (Coughlan, 2012, n.p.). The centre is reported to be 'the world's *first* such academic centre' (Coughlan, 2012, para.1, my emphasis), a turn of phrase which seems to anticipate the creation of other institutes dedicated to pursuing research into 'the commodification of death' and therefore

specifically as ‘a broad ranging and often contentious consumer activity that can provoke debate about how death and the dead are packaged up and consumed’.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth pointing out that, despite its contemporary significance as a prominent and increasingly commercialised consumer activity, ‘trauma tourism’ is not, in fact, a new phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> The BBC News website very recently revealed this fact in an article titled ‘Day out at the gallows and other bygone photographic oddities’,<sup>24</sup> featuring a black-and-white photograph of a group of people (believed to be a ‘family group, as ‘there are resemblances to be seen’) in wintery Victorian dress (hats and scarves) gathered next to a wooden gallows based in Elsdon, Northumberland, called ‘Winter’s Gibbet’. For Chris Wild (the author of the article and self-titled ‘retronaut’, an interesting self-imbued title which captures the idea of historical ‘travelling’ through time and space due to its similarity with the term ‘astronaut’), ‘What is perhaps most surprising to us about this picture [...] is the seeming formality of the group’s clothes’, leading him to question: ‘What [...] brought them together? What were they commemorating in this photograph, under the wooden head of William Winter?’<sup>25</sup> This site allegedly ‘remains a popular venue for a day’s excursion’, despite the fact that ‘the current gibbet is the latest in a long line of wooden replacements’, an interesting point which both reveals the lingering significance of historical trauma-tourism, as well as revealing its essential inauthenticity.

As well as recognising the Victorian era as the seeming genus of the contemporary (commercialised) phenomenon of thanatourism, the idea of visiting sites of historical suffering and trauma in conjunction with Sturken’s previous comments invites consideration of the moral and ethical quandaries of visiting – or in the case of the neo-Victorian specifically, of *re*-visiting – and thereby potentially exploiting, historical traumas, or traumas situated specifically within a Victorian setting. The distinction between these two characterisations alone is a pertinent one which prompts consideration of the notion of authenticity in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, which is itself characterised by epistemological considerations regarding what can truly be ‘known’ of Victorian history. This ambiguity grants the author ‘artistic license’ to re-appropriate genuine (or factually documented) traumatic scenarios, events, and even the names and

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acknowledging it as a burgeoning and pertinent area of contemporary interest and significance (‘Research at the iDTR’, n.d. Retrieved 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2012, from <http://dark-tourism.org.uk/research>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> This is also compounded towards the end of Chapter Two in relation to the idea of ‘battlefield tourism’.

<sup>24</sup> Retrived September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, from the BBC News website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-29246071>

<sup>25</sup> According to the article, the gibbet was apparently named after William Winter, who was hanged at Newcastle’s Westgate in 1792 for murder. His body was purportdly left there on display as a warning to others.

experiences of genuine victims of traumas which might ordinarily have remained unacknowledged, or conversely to fabricate their own traumatic scenarios. However, as the forthcoming textual analysis demonstrates, the experiences of genuine historical subjects are often re-imagined in overtly graphic and violent ways, their suffering commandeered for the potentially prurient interests of a potentially disaffected readership which, to some minds, raises the question of contemporary ethical responsibilities towards real historical subjects.

John Glendening has surmised that representations based on factual materials do not tend to raise ethical quandaries due to historical distance: ‘because the Victorian material they treat is for the most part historically distanced, they usually do not raise ethical concerns of the sort that plague representations of more ideologically charged or recent phenomena such as the Holocaust, the Iraq War, or the lives of notable people alive or not long deceased’; at the most, according to Glendening, the neo-Victorian’s ‘treatments of class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, or evolution might provoke some readers’ (2013, p.13). However, as a counter to this, David Andress has championed ‘an ethical approach to history [that] involves the viewing of people in the past as “ethical subjects” – entitled to the same consideration for their actions and perspectives as we would hope to receive for our own’ (1998, p.240). Is it right, then, that genuine historical subjects are represented contemporarily in ways which are often overtly graphic and sensational, their suffering persistently ‘played out’ representationally and indiscriminately for the potential titillation of the consumer under the guise of historical ‘redress’ or memorialisation?

Additionally, this ‘license’ on the part of the author not only raises what Kohlke describes as ‘uncomfortable questions as to *whose* trauma is being represented, by and for whom, and with what degree of verifiable “authenticity”’ (2008, p.7, original emphasis), but also raises the questions as to whether this is at all problematized if the reader themselves remains unaware of the historical (f)actuality of specific representations. Is it an issue that both factual and fictional representations of suffering seem capable of eliciting similar responses? Does the fact that certain authors might choose *not* to inform the reader of the historical veracity of represented events or situations potentially *negate* a sense of responsibility on the part of the reader? Should the reader simply assume that *all* representations of suffering in the neo-Victorian novel are based on actual events, or that ‘things *like* this happened’ (Sontag, 2003, p.42)? And what effect, if any, would knowledge of the actuality of the re-presented historical suffering or traumatic event have upon the

reader? In response to these concerns, Greenblatt contends that the distinction between an imagined horror and a factual one ‘fundamentally alters our mode of reading the texts and changes our ethical position toward them’ as ‘the existence or absence of a real world, real body, real pain, makes a difference’ (1990, p.20); yet on the other hand, Susan Sontag opposes this view as she conversely warns that ‘[a]n invented horror can be quite overwhelming’ (2003, p.42). As LaCapra attests, ‘[w]hether or not the past is re-enacted or repeated in its precise literality [...] one experientially feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses’ (2004, p.119).

Sturken’s comments also raise the germane question of what motivates such a prominent contemporary interest in trauma in the first instance. Luckhurst pronounces that the ‘trauma paradigm [...] has come to pervade the understanding of subjectivity and experience in the advanced industrial world’ (2008, p.1), which is perhaps unsurprising in light of accolades testifying to our contemporary moment in time as ‘the true age of anxiety’ (Bracken, 2002, p.181), as well as Sontag’s recognition of ‘a mounting level of acceptable violence and sadism in mass culture: films, television, comics, computer games’ (2003, p.100). On this note, in his work on ‘Body Horror’ in relation to photojournalism John Taylor finds that the proliferation of images of suffering in the media may also facilitate an indulgence in ‘looking’ at images of suffering, as ‘the press adopts the rhetoric of “public interest” while having no special or consistent agenda. This means that actuality photographs of hideous events do not necessarily elicit – nor are intended to elicit – humanitarian concern for the welfare of suffering fellow human beings’, and in consequence, ‘rather than feeling ashamed, readers [or viewers] of newspapers [...] may take pleasure from peering at photographs of bodies in distress’ (1998, p.5). Indeed, ‘the distance from even the reports of events [...] may implicate the reader in voyeurism, that type of prurient looking or intrusive, secret gawking with dubious intent. [...] It is impossible to deny that horror is fascinating’ (Taylor, 1998, pp.5-6).

Mark Seltzer has also asserted the significance of trauma in relation to the concerns of contemporary society as he finds that ‘the modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma’ (1997, p.18). Indeed, Seltzer views the pervasiveness of the present-day fascination with trauma and corporeal affliction in terms of a contemporary ‘wound culture’, which he characterises as a ‘public fascination with torn and opened bodies and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound’ (1997, p.3). Seltzer employs the idea of ‘wound culture’ as a means of

establishing an understanding of ‘the "impact" of the social-symbolic on the subject as violation and wounding’, which he terms ‘the sociality of the wound’, and which he describes as constitutive of ‘the relays between bodies and signs, wounding and sociality, that make up a wound culture’ (1997, p.12). Seltzer’s understanding of trauma and wound culture centres around the idea of the ‘collapse’ of categories and the yielding of distinctions between ‘inner and outer, observer and scene, representation and perception’ (Seltzer, 1998, p.269), as well as of public and private which, integrally, reveals what he terms a ‘pathological public sphere’ (Seltzer, 1997, p.5). In his own words:

The pathological public sphere is everywhere crossed by the vague and shifting lines between the singularity or privacy of the subject, on the one side, and collective forms of representation, exhibition, and witnessing, on the other. Along these lines, [...] *trauma has surfaced as a sort of crossing-point of the "psycho-social."* The very uncertainties as to the status of the wound in trauma - as physical or psychical, as private or public, *as a matter of representation (fantasy) or as a matter of perception (event)* - are markers, on several levels, of this excruciated crossing. The notion of trauma has thus come to function not merely as a sort of switch point between bodily and psychic orders; it has, beyond that, come to function as a switch point between individual and collective, private and public orders of things. The wound and its strange attractions have become one way, that is, of locating the violence and the erotics, the erotic violence, at the crossing point of private fantasy and collective space: one way of locating what I have been calling the pathological public sphere.  
(Seltzer, 1997, pp.5-6, my emphasis)

Seltzer’s lengthy exposition refers to and explains a pervasive ‘collapsing’ of categories, including those which have separated public and private, as well as physical and psychical spheres in such a way that recalls the previously-considered notions of the ‘collapse’ of the categorisation of trauma itself, as well as of the collapse of boundaries when confronted with the abject. For Seltzer, this ‘collapse’ serves to reveal the ‘erotics’ of violence which manifest themselves at the intersection between private and collective space, or the ‘pathological public sphere’, and can subsequently operate to frustrate and problematize ‘the subject’s proper distance with respect to representation’ (Seltzer, 1998, p.269) within the neo-Victorian novel.

### **Souvenirs and (narrative) fetishism**

On the subject of the ‘consumption’ of trauma intrinsic to the idea of Seltzer’s ‘wound culture’ and eroticised traumas, as well as to that also raised by the iDTR, Sturken pertinently mentions the associative role of souvenirs as a form of ‘commodity fetishism’

(2007, p.41) in relation to specifically historical traumas,<sup>26</sup> a topic which – as the forthcoming discussion reveals – recurs within the texts selected for this study. Celeste Olalquiaga reflects upon the souvenir as a Victorian phenomenon itself, and states that ‘the nineteenth century glorified memories, commodifying them as souvenirs and replacing the earlier rites with a culture of objects’ (1998, p.284). The desire to acquire souvenirs of the existence of alternative cultures who were perceived as fast approaching extinction became ‘a process of commodification highly marked by death’ as ‘the souvenir never places any claim on history – it is content with precariously reliving its loss’ (Olalquiaga, 1998, p.292). Sturken expands upon this in relation to thanatourism specifically and states that, as objects which ‘convey [...] a connection or attachment to a place’, souvenirs and artefacts removed from the site of a traumatic historical event become ‘[endowed] [...] with meanings that are disconnected from their production’ (2007, p.12; p.41). While this pertinent charge recalls Jameson’s criticism (discussed previously in this chapter) regarding the disappearance of the historical referent in relation to the historical novel, it also recalls Freud’s essay on the subject of ‘Fetishism’ (originally published 1927). Freud finds that the fetish embodies both ‘the disavowal and the affirmation of [...] castration [the reality of loss]’ and the subsequent introduction of a substitute which ‘becomes a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it’ (Freud, 1961, p.156).<sup>27</sup> David Hume proclaims that, ‘rest[ing] somewhere in a void between the anthropological artefact, valued for the information it contains about the culture of origin, and the work of art, with its formalist and aesthetic properties’ (2013, p.xv), the souvenir shares many similarities with the fetish object (2013, p.xvi) which works to ‘sustain the experience’ through its operation as ‘a substitute for that which is no longer available’ (2013, p.7). Hume summarises that ‘Fetish objects, like souvenirs, are fragments of an experience from which the whole subject of [an] experience is imaginatively reconstructed’ (2013, p.7).

It is within a Freudian context that Eric Santner situates the idea of ‘narrative fetishism’, which he describes as ‘the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that

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<sup>26</sup> Sturken has also discussed the idea of the contemporary ‘souvenir’ of trauma (or, rather, of visits to sites of trauma), using the example of ‘memorial’ teddy-bears and snowglobes from Ground Zero in New York and the site of the Oklahoma City Bombing as examples which exemplify ‘the complex relationship of mourning and consumerism and the economic networks that emerge around historical events, including events of trauma’ (2007, p.4).

<sup>27</sup> Freud allocates the ‘fetish’ as ‘a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and [...] does not want to give up’, for if the mother’s penis has been castrated, ‘then his own possession of a penis [is] in danger’ (1961, pp.152-3).

called that narrative into being in the first place' (1992, p.144). For Santner, 'both narrative fetishism and mourning are responses to loss', although narrative fetishism is specifically 'the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. Narrative fetishism releases one from the burdens of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under "posttraumatic" conditions. In narrative fetishism, the "post" is indefinitely postponed' (1992, p.144).

The implications of this in relation to the neo-Victorian novel specifically is made evident by Huggan who, in his discussion regarding the modes through which 'other' cultures are commodified for consumption, proposes that books which detail alternative cultures can themselves 'acquire an almost totemic value' as they 'are wrapped in the exotic aura of the cultural commodity fetish' (1994, p.27). The neo-Victorian novel – which functions (albeit vicariously) to (appear to) relive what has been lost, pertinently including 'the period's nightmares and traumas' (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2012, p.4) – might well take on the mantle of a cultural commodity fetish which seemingly facilitates the consumption of historical traumas for the 'tourist' of history.

As discussed earlier in this Introduction, the reader's desire to seek out trauma can itself operate to undermine this process. Recalling Kristeva's notion of abjection as a disturbing negation of boundaries, Berger pertinently asserts that the intersection of trauma with 'other critical vocabularies' (such as 'discourses of the sublime, the sacred, the apocalyptic, and the Other in all its guises') reveals how, 'In troubling ways, these discourses often blur into each other', and that this 'blurring' itself can resultantly serve to 'problematize representation and attempt to define its limits' (1997, p.573). Indeed, as 'Trauma theory is another such discourse of the unrepresentable [sic], of the event or object that destabilizes language and demands a vocabulary and syntax in some sense incommensurable with what went before' (Berger, 1997, p.573). Consequently, the commingling of discourses of 'unrepresentability' contribute to what Berger terms a 'traumatic-sacred-sublime alterity' in which 'historical complexity and historical pain are effaced or "redeemed"' (1997, p.573): indeed, these comments recall Kristeva's recognition that 'the object is edged with the sublime' (1982, p.11). In consequence, for Berger, 'theories of trauma can help to demystify all sorts of "narrative fetishes" (to use Eric Santner's term) and ideologies. For traumatic symptoms are not only somatic, nonlinguistic phenomena; they occur also in language' (1997, p.573).

At this juncture, this discussion seems to reach a ‘full circle’, returning again to the account which commenced this discussion regarding the symptomology of the ‘unrepresentable’ trauma which manifests itself through language and narrative: a somewhat fitting ‘return’, it appears that the form of this introductory discussion could indeed begin to mirror the traumatic nature of its subject-matter. However, rather than continue in a mode reminiscent of an aporetic repetition compulsion which ‘mimics the effects of trauma’ due to the ‘insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression’ (Whitehead, 2006, p.86), I will instead introduce the primary texts which will constitute the analytical focus of this thesis.

### **Locating the perverse fascinations of neo-Victorianism: A chapter overview**

The texts selected for use in evidencing the concerns and ideas outlined thus far within this Introduction manifest a preoccupation with similar themes and concerns (i.e. the [frustration of] the exotic, erotic, and traumatic, as well as the idea of vicarious travel, exploration, consumerism, fetishism, and exploitation), but in markedly different ways and in different geographic locations – ‘local’ and ‘distant’, colonial and non-colonial. This thesis is structured in such a way as to take the reader on a type of ‘journey’ themselves, an analogy which operates, at its most basic level, in relation to the geographic ‘movement’ of the texts discussed. Analysis begins in London, the one-time ‘heart’ of British Imperialism, before travelling on to the geographic site of one of Britain’s foremost lingering cultural traumas in the Canadian Arctic, then finally pressing forward to two of England’s former colonies and the sites of major cultural traumas in Australia and Africa. In acknowledgement of Ho’s claim that ‘neo-Victorianism faces, as one of its drawbacks, the continued maintenance of Britain as its center [sic]’ (2013, p.12), the texts chosen for this study offer consideration to a range of historical locations and associated cultural and personal traumas. Consequently, these texts facilitate a diverse means of gaining insight into the ways in which the neo-Victorian ‘imports’ present day traumas, anxieties, and preoccupations, and then ‘exports’ them to temporally, as well as geographically different ‘locations’, and how this can enable a greater understanding of them on the part of the reader.

Chapter One introduces and contextualises the relevance of the re-appropriation and intersection of the interests of science, anatomy, ethnography, and pornography in relation to what I have interpreted as the eroticised ‘anatomisation’ of trauma (both

figuratively, in terms of the ‘dissection’ and re-examination of the Victorian text by the reader, as well as allegorically, in terms of figuring the ‘embodiment’ and, most fundamentally, the ‘*exploration*’ of a corporeal, lived experience) in relation to the idea of perverse nostalgia in Belinda Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*. This chapter reveals the parallels which can be drawn between the novel’s subject matter and contemporary eroticised modes of exploitation, and how the reader might become implicated within them by virtue of their voyeuristic ‘gaze’. Focussing on Starling’s representations of physical wounding, scarring, involuntary tattooing and dissection (or the threat thereof) against the protagonist, this chapter explores how representations of corporeal subjection can offer a timely and germane approach to considering the ways in which eroticised physical suffering is re-appropriated as a form of (textual) gratification, while also promoting reflection upon distinctly coetaneous social anxieties regarding how we might become implicated in contemporary modes of exploitation.

Chapter Two continues to examine the intersection of exploration, pseudo-scientific practices relating to ethnographic spectacle, and the corporeally traumatic in Andrea Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal*,<sup>28</sup> focussing specifically upon how the novel implements the idea of vicarious travel set against the lingering cultural trauma of the Franklin mythos. Described by Shane McCristine as ‘one of the most traumatic disasters of the Victorian period’ (2013, p.60), Barrett’s novel returns specifically to the historical moment after Franklin and his crew had failed to return to England as its point of departure, a pertinent cultural moment which facilitates reflection upon the way in which neo-Victorian returns to culturally traumatic moments in history, and what this can tell us about our present desires for exploration and adventure: indeed, the very recent and exciting discovery of one of Franklin’s long-lost ships in the Canadian Arctic<sup>29</sup> lends this discussion a particular sense of ‘timeliness’ in this regard. Barrett’s text also enables an exploration of the significance of visuality in relation to how the Arctic was represented and imagined in the Victorian imagination via the proliferation of new visual technologies

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<sup>28</sup> Barrett has also published several other texts pertaining to the correlation between adventure and science, but in ways which oscillate between a nineteenth-century and present-day context. Barrett’s novel *Archangel* (2013), in addition to both of her collections of short stories - *Ship Fever* (1996) and *Servants of the Map* (2002) – all confront the intersection between science, travel, and exploration. *The Voyage of the Narwhal* was selected for the purposes of this study because it remains firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century, enabling a more comprehensive consideration of how the neo-Victorian novel fosters the idea of vicarious travel and transports present-day issues and preoccupations in to the past.

<sup>29</sup> Franklin’s lost ships were called the HMS Terror and the HMS Erebus, although at the time of writing this thesis, and according to the BBC News coverage on the subject, it is unknown exactly which of the two ships were discovered (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-29131757>). The recent discovery is offered further consideration in Chapter Two, as well as in the Conclusion of, this thesis.

such as the moving panorama, and how and why this Victorian engagement with ‘visuality’ has been re-appropriated in the neo-Victorian novel.

Barrett’s focus upon exploitative ethnographic practices and the ‘consumption’ of alternative cultures constitutes a point of connection with the issues examined in Chapter Three, which looks at the hybridisation of satire and violence against the backdrop of cultural dispossession and decimation in Australia in Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers*.<sup>30</sup> Despite seeming something of a ‘tangent’ in relation to the prominent concerns already outlined in this thesis, the idea of humour in relation to colonial traumas and dispossession sits somewhat uneasily together, and might plausibly be considered as an extra ‘dimension’ in the configuration of a perverse nostalgia. This chapter, however, examines Kneale’s distinctive commingling of both abject and redemptive humour and traumatic representations in consideration of how these seemingly disparate elements of the text can usefully be explored in tandem, or as ‘hybridised’ concepts, which work to reveal the incongruous and unsettling desires of the reader. Employing Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity as expounded in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994), this chapter also explores the ‘ambivalence’ of otherness in the neo-Victorian while simultaneously short-circuiting any sense of immediacy to the very attempt at representational modes of identification due to the ‘problematic process of access to an image of totality’ (1994, p.50). Indeed, for Bhabha, ‘in the world of double inscriptions’ – i.e., in the ‘space of *writing*’, it follows that ‘there can be no such immediacy of a visualist perspective, no such face-to-face epiphanies in the mirror of nature’ as ‘what confronts you is [...] the ambivalence of your desire for the Other’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.50, original emphasis). ‘Otherness’ is thereby revealed as an ‘illusion of presence’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.51) which serves to collapse of categories of ‘self’ and other’. This chapter also explores how Kneale’s text reflects upon present-day concerns regarding the ‘ethics of display’ in relation to cultural memory.

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew Kneale’s neo-Victorian novel *Sweet Thames* (1992) employs the idea of ‘exploration’ in a somewhat more unusual and unexpected way than *English Passengers*. The novel, which charts one man’s attempt to improve Victorian London’s sewer system, is interestingly described on the Amazon website as featuring a ‘netherworld of slum-dwellers, pickpockets and scavengers of the sewers’, in which the protagonist discovers ‘a world that holds unexpected answers to the mysteries that surround him’ (see [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sweet-Thames-Matthew-Kneale/dp/0140296638/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1410509398&sr=8-1&keywords=sweet+thames](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sweet-Thames-Matthew-Kneale/dp/0140296638/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1410509398&sr=8-1&keywords=sweet+thames)). The interesting allusion to the sewers as a ‘world’ reflects the novel’s appropriation of the sewers themselves as an alternative location to be ‘explored’, highlighting again the propensity for the neo-Victorian novel to focus on alternative ‘worlds’ in relation to the degraded and squalid.

Chapter Four expands upon the consideration of collapsing the subjectivities of ‘Other’ and ‘self’ in relation to Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen*.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most graphically violent and abjectly unsettling text explored within this thesis, Edric’s novel operates as a markedly perverse and unsatisfying neo-adventure novel, entirely short-circuiting its inferred promise of historical escapism. Functioning in (a somewhat paradoxical) critical and self-aware ‘homage’ of its literary predecessor and late-Victorian adventure novel, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Edric’s text undermines the substituted promise of historical (rather than geographical) exoticism within the neo-Victorian novel on a textual level by mirroring the effects of trauma itself. Employing a non-chronological and fragmented plot, the persistent interruptions of unsettling nightmares and hallucinations, as well as narrative gaps and silences, these unsettling textual features are further compounded by the inclusion of relentless descriptions of human affliction and torture which concomitantly summon and eschew the reader’s desire to ‘witness’ corporeal suffering in a way which mirrors Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Again in such a way that could arguably be considered reflective of traumatic ‘return’ itself, this chapter returns again to examine the eroticisation and fetishisation of trauma explored initially in Chapter One as a potential reflection of the nightmarish potential ‘logical conclusion’ of the contemporary fascination with trauma, and the extent to which we are willing to ‘push’ its limits. This chapter concludes that Edric’s graphic and disturbing representations ultimately prompt readers to engage in the unexpected process of confronting drives and desires which may seem ‘other’ to themselves.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Edric’s oeuvre, which features numerous historical novels set primarily in the Victorian period and during the two World Wars, includes his neo-Victorian novel *The London Satyr* (2011) which, like Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*, also focusses on the murky underground pornography circuit of Victorian London. As mentioned previously, he has also authored *The Broken Lands: A Novel of Arctic Disaster* which, like Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, focusses its attentions upon Franklin’s Arctic expedition. Unlike Barrett’s novel however, Edric’s text features Franklin himself as the protagonist, fictionally charting the first three years of the expedition. Drawing parallels with Kneale’s *English Passengers*, Edric’s novel *Elysium* (1995) charts an encounter between an English Scientist and a Tasmanian native in the year 1869. It is quite interesting to note that many of Edric’s novels seem to explore the same moments in history as the other authors discussed in this text, perhaps reflecting their pertinence as specific moments of return in the neo-Victorian novel.

## Chapter One

### **‘Like a tattoo, on dead skin’: Corporeality, False Flesh and the Eroticisation of Somatic Traumas in Belinda Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage***

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*Books appear to have a material presence, without which anchoring that such materiality provides, our lives would assume a ghostly condition of impermanence [...] thus the book, as one finite identity for textuality, seems to keep us in the here and now by remaining with us from some past, from our pasts, from the past in general.*  
(Wolfreys, 2002, p.xi)

As discussed in the Introduction, one of the aims of this thesis is to demonstrate a distinct neo-Victorian engagement with corporeally-focussed traumatic representation as a means of facilitating and/or frustrating the reader’s engagement with the temporally-distant Victorian past. Covering a spectrum of taboo subjects centred upon somatic experience including fetishism, ritualised murder, pornography, and mutilation, Belinda Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) comprises an often painful assault on the reader’s senses and sensibilities through the pervasive threat of an array of physical violations towards the titular protagonist. Focussing on the increasingly traumatic experiences of Dora,<sup>32</sup> a female book-binder who finds herself steadily drawn into the Victorian underworld of ‘specialist’ pornography, the novel seems to invite – and indeed demand – readerly complicity in her subjection as they engage in similarly scopophilic pleasures to those who seek to maintain her subjugation. Just as Dora herself becomes complicit in the objectification of others, the

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<sup>32</sup> This particularly distinctive name was once ascribed to one of Freud’s most notable patients and case-studies, described by Mahony as ‘one of the remarkable psychoanalytic failures’ (1996, p.2). Dora shared with Freud her traumatic, sexually-motivated experiences as a girl, only then to be betrayed by those who should have protected and nurtured her. For Mahony, ‘Dora has emerged as a paradigmatic example of how patriarchal forces in the nineteenth-century – political, social, and medical – oppressed a Jewish girl who had to write out her pain in her body’ (Mahony, 1996, p.2). Like her fictional namesake, Dora was noted by Freud as having read Paulo Mantegazza’s *Physiology of Love* (1896), and enjoyed engaging in discussions about ‘forbidden topics’ (Mahony, 1996, p.12); additionally, like Starling’s Dora, she was also plied with expensive gifts by the protagonist of her trauma, an older man named Hans (i.e. Sir Jocelyn Knightley, in Starling’s novel). Freud was notably ‘struck by her qualities and attitudes: independent judgement, an active interest in women’s rights, [and] mockery of physicians’ (Mahony, 1996, pp.13-14), qualities also mirrored in Starling’s rendering of Dora. Yet perhaps most importantly of all is the etymology of the name itself, which Mahony notes to mean ‘gifts’ in Greek – indeed, Freud’s Dora was seemingly ‘fated to be an object of exchange’ (1996, p.2) as ‘On all sides they boxed her in, a commodified object – worse still, damaged goods’ (Mahony, 1996, p.12). And yet significantly, Dora’s case is also Freud’s most notably unsuccessful, as she persistently ‘resisted Freud, confronted him, frustrated him’ (Mahony, 1996, p.144); consequently, ‘The elusive Dora was [...] an allegorical Every-woman, the eternal woman who engaged Freud for a lifetime in a changing configuration of desire, knowledge, and power’ (Mahony, 1996, p.145).

reader also becomes integral to her subjection, a situation which creates a heady combination of empathy, voyeuristic titillation and, at times, repugnance.

Julian Wolfreys' views expressed in the epigraph of this chapter proffer an appropriate primer for commencing a discussion regarding the lexicon of corporeality, materiality and visuality in Starling's neo-Victorian novel. Reflecting upon the tangible materiality of the book itself, Wolfreys acknowledges the physicality of the text as an entity that transgresses both past and present as it is simultaneously constituent of both, rendering the immaterial and impermanent past at least partly perennial. Starling's amalgamation of the materiality of the book with the physicality of the female body in *The Journal of Dora Damage* arguably facilitates a similar function to that proffered by Wolfreys, as it representationally asserts the idea of a lived, corporeal reality.

As this chapter demonstrates, the specific *mode* of Starling's narrative engagement with the body's material corporeality renders her representation culturally and (con)temporally specific through the re-appropriation and eroticisation of the nineteenth century's interests in the corporeally-focussed enterprise, including science, anatomy, and dissection. Helena Michie attests that Victorian texts popularly perpetuated the image of the female as 'a straw woman, a wispy, insubstantial outline' (1987, p.127) whose flimsy, almost spectral quality necessarily denies her material agency through her perceived transience and insubstantiality; yet by contrast, Starling's representation substantiates Dora by emphasising her overt corporeality which renders her vulnerable to somatic affliction and bodily exploitation, a contemporary divergence from the Victorian mode of representation and as a reflection of contemporary fascination with the wounded or 'damaged' body.

Elizabeth Grosz recognises the contemporary emphasis upon 'refiguring the body so that it moves from the periphery to the center [sic] of analysis, so that it can be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity' (1994, p.ix); in this way, 'The subject, recognized as corporeal being, can no longer readily succumb to the neutralization and neutering of its specificity which has occurred to women as a consequence of women's submersion under male definition' (Grosz, 1994, p.ix). Indeed, Grosz outlines the perception posited by several critics – including Hélène Cixous, Gayatri Spivak, Monique Wittig, and Judith Butler – as she states that 'the body is crucial to understanding women's psychological and social existence, but the body is no longer understood as an ahistorical, biologically given, acultural object' (Grosz, 1994, pp.17-18). Rather, such critics are concerned with the idea of 'the lived body, the body insofar as it is represented and used in

specific ways in particular cultures’ and for whom ‘the body is neither brute nor passive but is interwoven with and constitutive of *systems of meaning, signification, and representation*’ as ‘On the one hand it is a *signifying and signified* body; on the other hand, it is an object of systems of social coercion, legal *inscription*, and sexual and economic exchange’ (Grosz, 1994, p.18, my emphasis).

The added emphasis upon the terms relating to ‘signification’, ‘representation’ and ‘inscription’ in Grosz’s previous quotation are intended to highlight the idea of the body as a site of inscription itself, what Brooks terms a ‘body entered into narrative’ (1993, p.3) and what Michie describes as ‘the most literal ground of female experience and a metaphor for its very literalness’ (1987, p.128). Grosz perceives the body as a site of cultural production: ‘The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product’ (Grosz, 1994, p.23). Starling’s conflation of the female body with the materiality of the book recalls Kaplan’s assertion of the necessity of ‘fighting [...] against those dominant forms of cultural interpretation that find and prefer universal, transhistorical and essentialist meanings in the literary text, rendering them all, in the end, expressive of a single “human condition”’ (1986, p.177).

This sentiment highlights the pertinence of an individuated and culturally-specific approach to ‘interpreting’ representations of the female body, but also to the contemporaneity of the neo-Victorian text itself. Indeed, the following discussion argues that representations of the body in Starling’s text serve as a reflection of distinctly contemporary interests and preoccupations with eroticised modes of corporeal suffering and subjugation, facilitated through the re-engagement with, and simultaneous exploration of, Victorian scientific practices as well as the pornography trade. The amalgamation of these two seemingly disparate concepts – both of which constitute privileged and prohibited forms of knowledge – ultimately engenders a ‘perverse nostalgia’ which results in the corruption of the protagonist’s ‘innocence’.

On this point, Kohlke has recognised Starling’s unification of text and body while also noting the role of the reader in Dora’s corporal and sexual subjugation:

The book’s cover, depicting a make-believe business signage with a woman’s laced-up corset, subtitled “Bindings of Any Kind”, hints at risqué sexual practices with sadomasochistic overtones, implicitly conflating the body of the book with the female body of the titular heroine. Both prove objects of desire, manipulation, and potentially dangerous consumption, implicating the reader in the ‘damage’ already inscribed in the narrator’s name long before Dora risks becoming, in more ways than one, ‘damaged goods’ through complicity in the Victorian pornography trade.

(2008, p.196)

Kohlke's reference to 'damaged goods' in relation to the 'sodomasochistic overtones' of the text highlights the novel's emphasis upon bodily corporeality and somatic affliction and the implicit configurations of 'pain' and 'pleasure' inherent within such representations which, as this thesis demonstrates, simultaneously work to compel and repel the reader; the reader experiences an oscillation between the 'painful' traumatic subjects listed at the beginning of this chapter with the 'pleasurable', overtly titillating representations of Dora's sexual discovery and subjection.

In light of this configuration of sexual subject-matter in Starling's text itself, it seems appropriate to consider this textual dynamic in terms of fulfilling a metaphorically 'sodomasochistic' sentiment on the part of the reader due to the fact that, in such practices, 'pain comes close to being the essence of pleasure' (Airaksinen, 2002, p.89). Kohlke suggests that representations of this nature facilitate a very specific readerly desire as 'we extract politically incorrect pleasure from what has become inadmissible or ethically *unimaginable* as a focus of desire in our own time. We thus enjoy neo-Victorian fiction at least in part to feel debased or outraged, to revel in degradation, *reading for defilement*' (2006, p.2, original emphasis); however, implementing an interpretation of such a dynamic as 'sado-masochistic' usefully acknowledges an integral relationship with modes of 'power' which also play out within such representations.

In her research on sadomasochism in relation to the 'erotics of form' in Victorian narrative, Mary Davis proffers sadomasochism as a 'unique relational dynamic for clarifying *legacies of power* that weave together texts, histories, and ideologies into a painful pleasure that marks that very discipline established to study nineteenth-century Victorian literature' (2012, pp.2-3, my emphasis). Davis goes on to explain that 'How stories are told determines the sort of pleasure we take, and the telling contains potential to render those pleasures as dangerous'; however, this is '[not] the only way to understand a text sadomasochistically', as this is also possible by seeking to 'understand how a text plays with forms of social power, how its pleasures depend upon *closely tracking these forms of power*' (2012, p.224). Fittingly, the sadomasochistic 'erotics of form' are relatable to the function of traumatic representations in the text which, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, work to summon and eschew – to enthrall and perpetually delay or prohibit – the reader's understanding or engagement.

In Starling's text, the most prominent form of power is fostered via the implementation of the gaze, a pertinent point in light of Laura Hinton's assertion that 'The vicissitudes of sadomasochism are embedded within the mechanics of voyeurism', a

practice which derives itself from scopophilia (1999, p.131). Scopophilia as a specific mode of voyeurism inherently incorporates a mode of power-play and reveals itself to be a pertinent facet of *The Journal of Dora Damage*, both at the level of narrative (i.e. through Dora's subjection via Knightley's scopophilic gaze, as well as in the later appropriation of her own gaze) as well as in relation to the reader's position (i.e. through the appropriation of the readerly 'gaze'). The concept of the scopophilic gaze is discussed at length by Laura Mulvey who endorses and extends the Freudian use of the term<sup>33</sup> in relation to contemporary visual media. Mulvey defines scopophilia as a 'narcissistic act' which both 'implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object' as well as demanding 'identification of the ego with the object' (1999, p.837); in these terms, scopophilia becomes constitutive of 'a combination of acts of identification and separation' (Hinton, 1999, p.131). Mulvey also describes how 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. [...] In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease [...] she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire' (1999, p.837). Dora is revealed as both facilitating and subverting this idea in Starling's text, as discussed in the forthcoming chapter.

For Davis, the concept of a textual 'somasochism' offers evidence in support of 'a methodological move away from sexual identities and towards an understanding not only of a way to categorize erotic *types* that function through binary relationships – pain/pleasure, dominance/submission, fantasy/reality – but also around a relational eroticization of *forms*' (2012, p.3, original emphasis). In Starling's text, the proximity between readerly pleasure and displeasure brought about through eroticised corporeal traumas in conjunction with 'titillating' narrative techniques (for example, the linguistic creation of anticipation, the withholding of information, and listing sexual perversions) reveal the neo-Victorian novel as a vehicle for textual erotics and for an exploration of the 'often contentious relationship between sexual and textual pleasure' (Davis, 2012, p.vi). This chapter explores this point, focussing particularly upon the problems inherent to this dynamic in relation to eroticised representations of trauma. This exploration will demonstrate that modes of 'looking' and 'viewing' represented within the text are integral

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<sup>33</sup> Mulvey contextualises her own use of the concept in relation to Freud's theorisation of the scopophilic gaze as 'one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones', and that he 'associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze' (1999, p.835).

to understanding Starling's text as an exploration of the implications of temporal 'otherness' in the neo-Victorian, and the reader's role in relation to the potentially exploitative literary commodification of somatic suffering and historical traumas. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla have asserted that 'at a time when the discrete object called the body is being theoretically deconstructed, technologically fragmented, and politically re-territorialized, it has become an object of intense intellectual fascination' and 'a grounding point of profound social anxiety' (1995, p.3); ergo, it is appropriate to infer that the examination of neo-Victorian representations of the body can additionally further our understanding of the cultural and contemporary significance of, and motivations for, imagining specifically corporeal traumas explored in a historical setting. By focussing on Starling's representations of physical wounding, scarring, involuntary tattooing and dissection (or the threat thereof) as a means of placing emphasis on the somatic suffering of the protagonist, I argue that Starling's approach to rewriting corporeal subjection offers a particularly timely and germane approach to considering the ways in which historical subjection and physical suffering are exploitatively textualised (in resoundingly literal terms) and eroticised in the neo-Victorian novel.

The short prologue of Starling's text aptly introduces three of the key areas of consideration in this chapter. In these opening pages of the novel, Dora reflects upon her first project, a self-bound diary, which she feels 'is likely to jump out of my hand, waggle its finger at me and tease me about the events I am trying to make sense of, and I shall have to stuff it into a bottom drawer amongst my stockings and smalls in an attempt to stifle its mocking' (Starling, 2007, p.2). Firstly, Dora's humanisation of the diary – her animation of the inanimate – playfully highlights the attempt of neo-Victorian literature to textually mediate and 'enliven' a Victorian history which is intrinsically inaccessible and 'unknowable'; incidentally, the reference to 'stockings' and 'smalls' subtly broaches the subject matter of Starling's text, simultaneously conflating the proximity of the diary and the undergarments with the eroticisation of the neo-Victorian text.

Secondly, in close connection with the first point and in reflection of the function of the neo-Victorian with regards to navigating historical record, Dora continues to suggest that, alternatively, her diary 'may have a greater sense of responsibility, and less of a sense of humour, and reveal within it some approximation of the truth' (Starling, 2007, p.2). A form of personal memory discourse, Dora's journal and her sentiments towards it highlighting Caroline Rody's sentiments regarding how the 'historiographic project enacts a relationship of *desire*, an emotional implication of present and past' (Rody, 1995, p.94),

simultaneously calling to mind DeGroot's theorisation regarding the function of the 'historical imaginary' (discussed previously in the Introduction to this thesis) which – as a form of 'non-academic history' – operates to 'disrupt a hierarchical approach that privileges history and marginalises historical fiction' (Mitchell, 2010a, p.182; p.4). Thirdly (and finally), Dora's reflections regarding her diary also introduce the idea of the allegorical 'anatomisation' of the Victorian past (both symbolically in relation to the neo-Victorian's re-appropriation and eroticisation of the Victorian's interest in science and dissection, as well as allegorically, in terms of figuring and emphasising the 'embodiment' of a corporeal, lived experience) in her concluding sentiments to the prologue that 'For whatever one makes of its curious binding, [the diary] conceals the contents of my heart, as clearly *as if I had cut it open with a scalpel for the anatomists to read*' (Starling, 2007, p.2, my emphasis).

Compounding this symbolic anatomical conflation, Dora and her young daughter Lucinda are both notably likened to books themselves throughout the course of Starling's text: further compounding the connection between body and text, Sir Jocelyn Knightley (a wealthy gentleman who employs Dora to bind erotic texts on his behalf) likens Dora to a book during his first visit to her book-bindery, comparing her beauty with those of her bindings which are described as being 'as beautiful, as sensual, as arousing, as full of vigour as ... well ... as *you* are, Mrs Damage' (Starling, 2007, p.142, original emphasis). Dora is also later threatened with the removal of her skin towards the end of the novel with the intention of re-appropriating it as the covering for an erotic book,<sup>34</sup> while Lucinda's body is also imperilled in distinctly 'literary' terms by Charles Diprose – a book seller and intermediary between Dora and Knightley – who disturbingly reflects that 'there's no pleasure like the ploughing of a first edition' (Starling, 2007, p.412).

Kohlke states that 'Starling's novel [...] contains little in the way of *implicit* engagement with present-day issues' (2008, p.200, my emphasis); however, I argue that the specific nature of the representations of the body itself in the text do in fact reflect

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, a recent news story regarding a text titled 'Des destinées de l'âme' (which translates as 'Destinies of the Soul') that was discovered at Harvard University, gained some sustained attention due to the fact that it appears to have been bound in human skin. The BBC report states that the text was gifted to one Dr Ludovic Bouland in the mid-1880s, who is thought to have 'bound the book with skin from the body of an unclaimed female mental patient who had died of natural causes', as 'a book about the human soul deserved to have a human covering' ('Harvard University book bound in human skin' (2014), retrieved 5 June, 2014, from [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-27721571](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-27721571)). Evidently, the macabre discovery is of contemporary interest to the public, as wittily reflected by NBC News who suggested that the unusual discovery would provide 'food for thought for [...] literary cannibals' ('Book at Harvard Library Is Bound in Human Skin' (2014), retrieved 5 June, 2014, from [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news-book-harvard-library-bound-human-skin-n123291](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news-book-harvard-library-bound-human-skin-n123291)), as well as by Alison Flood for *The Guardian* who reflects upon the 'long, dark history' of this practice in an online 'books blog' titled 'Flesh-crawling page-turners: the books bound in human skin' (2014).

distinctly coetaneous social anxieties regarding contemporary modes of exploitation, but in a specifically *historical* setting, a distance which (as this chapter will demonstrate) manifests important implications regarding how the reader engages with the explicit issues that are raised. The representations described previously in which Dora and Lucinda are threatened both sexually and somatically, for example, seems particularly pertinent at present when popular depictions of female bodies problematically eroticise violence against women: indeed, Dora's treatment at the hands of her tormentors arguably recall contemporary anxieties regarding the simultaneous sexual objectification<sup>35</sup> of, and representations of violence against, women in modern media which have become commonplace today, particularly in visual media and film.<sup>36</sup>

For Bartky, this situation is resultant of the fact that women remain 'alienated from cultural production' as 'most avenues of cultural expression – high culture, popular culture, even to some extent language – are instruments of male supremacy', and consequently, women 'have little control over the cultural apparatus itself' (1990, p.35). However, although this is an unquestionably valid statement, the recent surge of interest in E.L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy (the first instalment of which was published initially as an eBook in 2011), which has been widely criticised for glamorising sexual and emotional violence against its female protagonist,<sup>37</sup> exemplifies the problematic fact that even when women *do* have access to this 'cultural apparatus', such representations nonetheless seem to be a pervasive aspect of contemporary culture, with women somewhat confoundingly revealed as complicit in perpetuating representations of female (and male) subjection.

In similar terms, and as the forthcoming discussion of this chapter both reveals and explores, Dora's unassuming complicity in the exploitation of others tempers the importance of gender (over other factors) as a source of oppression and frustrates any

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<sup>35</sup> Fredrickson and Roberts, for example, have argued that 'The common thread running through **all** forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated **as a body** (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others' (1997, p.174, original emphasis). This point also takes on greater significance later in this chapter in a discussion of Dora's dream in which a 'bite' is taken out of her heart, which has been removed – and subsequently consumed – by Knightley.

<sup>36</sup> Natasha Walter has discussed the rise of media representations of violence against women in an article which considers 'why it is that our entertainment seems to rely so much on the fascinated depiction of women's scarred and bruised bodies' (2010, para 3), while *The Daily Mail*'s Christopher Stevens has also considered this question in relation to the eroticisation of such violence in his article, 'Why does the BBC think violence against women is sexy?' (2013). Both articles highlight a burgeoning contemporary awareness of the contemporary rise and eroticisation of representations of violence against women.

<sup>37</sup> Articles which testify to this interpretation of James's text include Alison Flood's online article for *The Guardian*, titled 'Fifty Shades of Grey condemned as "manual for sexual torture"' (2012); Emma Innes article for the *Daily Mail* online, titled 'Sadomasochism found in Fifty Shades of Grey "perpetuates the problem of violence against women", claims expert' (2013); and Ben Childs' article for *The Guardian* online, titled 'Fifty Shades of Grey trailer provokes attack from US moral watchdogs' (2014).

straight-forward allegiance with the heroine's plight. Caterina Novák notes this complication as she finds that Starling's text can be read both 'as a straightforward example of neo-Victorian feminist fiction and as a parody of the genre, in the sense of exaggerating and commenting on many of its key characteristics and offering an important contribution to the debate surrounding its feminist political credentials' (2013, p.115). Fundamentally, Novák's interpretation makes sense of the fact that Dora's own exploitative actions towards Din, a black slave under her employ – although in some ways a source of personal liberation – serves primarily to highlight that the acquisition of her own female agency necessarily replicates and reinforces traditionally 'masculine' (by which I mean, 'patriarchal' or dominant) modes of subjection and exploitation employed towards her (i.e. that which manifests itself through the scopophilic gaze and through her sexual objectification of Din, as explored later in this chapter).

Such a dynamic can be correlated with Davis's previous consideration of the importance of tracing the dynamics of power which 'play out' within (at the level of narrative and plot) and through (at the level of form and genre) the text: it can also be related to present-day feminist thought which takes into account the broader and inclusive implications of oppression and highlights the fact that 'The similarities of oppression are all around us; if you're not being oppressed for one aspect of your humanity then you'll be oppressed for another' (Quartey, 1994, p.26). Arguably, Starling's configuration of the 'oppressed exploiting the oppressed' within the text works not only as a reminder 'that (patriarchal) oppression need not occur in a male form' (Muller, 2009/10, p.125), but also seems to echo Heywood and Drake's recognition that 'what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and what oppresses me may be something you participate in' (1997, p.3).

In this chapter I argue that this dynamic is made prescient through the reader's 'complicity' in the various modes of eroticised subjection that are explored within Starling's text, which works to highlight the nature of such an engagement as a form of (textual) gratification rendered more 'acceptable' by virtue of historical distance: as one reviewer terms it, *The Journal of Dora Damage* 'is a romp' as it 'takes the dark side of Victorian sexuality and makes it silly, sexy and safe' (Flint, 2008, para.9). (Indeed, it seems arguable that despite the veritable tapestry of outrageous sexual perversions and afflictions described – or at least alluded to – in Starling's text, historical distance might be responsible for the absence of critical outrage as per that recently received by the *Fifty Shades* franchise).

In light of this fact, this chapter finds Starling's novel as indicative of a 'perverse nostalgia' as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, which highlights and explores a retrospective desire for historically-situated suffering, but with a subversive 'edge' which facilitates the exploration of our own contemporary drives and desires. In this way, Starling's text highlights the fact that 'Neo-Victorian fiction's project of the retrospective sexual liberation of the nineteenth century becomes disturbingly infused with preferred ignorance – or deliberate denial – of our own culture's complicity in free market systems that enable continuing sexual exploitation and oppression' (Kohlke, 2006, pp.2-3). Maria Ruiz also offers an explanation in relation to the genesis of this dynamic as she explains that 'The market economy in the nineteenth century thrived with sexual difference and depended on the production of desire, the same as nowadays'; indeed, 'Sexuality is culturally mediated and dependent upon specific historical and social processes and, as a consequence, there is a correlation between commodities, consuming desires and sexual practices' (2013, p.146). Evincing such a correlation between the Victorian past and the present fundamentally demonstrates that we have not progressed as far from the Victorians – nor are we as enlightened or impeccably 'virtuous' – as we may perceive ourselves to be, and that indeed, 'Coming to "know" the secret sex-lives of the Victorians may thus become a means of "un-knowing" our own' (Kohlke, 2006, p.3).

### **Perverse nostalgia, neo-Victorian pornography and eroticised 'otherness'**

Facilitating an analogous connection between the Victorian and contemporary apposition of the body respectively, Starling offers her readers a passage into the shady but fascinating underworld of Victorian pornography and the various forms of subordination inherent within it.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary motivations for literary returns to this controversial underground industry are explored in Steven Marcus's landmark text *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (1971) which examines the significance of the manufacture of Victorian erotica and obscene materials. Marcus pertinently states that 'Pornography, like every other creation of the mind, is by definition historical; it is the product of a particular time and place' (1971,

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<sup>38</sup> The subject of pornography is a topic which seems to have gathered notable interest within neo-Victorian literature as revealed through the inclusion of pornography as a key trope in texts including Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) and, as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Robert Edric's *The London Satyr: A Novel* (2011). Faye Booth's *Trades of the Flesh* (2009) is particularly notable for its combination of the topics of sexuality, science, and medicine as it charts the relationship between a prostitute (Lydia) and a surgeon (Henry) who is eventually revealed to be complicit in the trades of pornographic photography and body-snatching.

p.44). Further elaborating as to how the re-examination of this pornographic subculture can provide useful contemporary insight, Marcus explains that:

[Pornography's] governing tendency in fact is toward the elimination of external or social reality. And although on first inspection pornography seems to be the most concrete kind of writing – concerned as it is with organs, positions, events – it is in reality very abstract. It regularly moves toward independence of time, space, history, and even language itself.

(1971, pp.44-45)

The potential for temporal independence perhaps goes some way towards explaining the neo-Victorian re-investment in pornography as it is at once historically specific as a product of a particular time and place, but also temporally ubiquitous in its subject matter. In this respect, the neo-Victorian reinvestment in pornography facilitates a recognition of temporal and cultural similarities and differences, as well as a shared interest in forms of 'Otherness' which were once of interest to the Victorians themselves but also '[remain] of interest to us as we try to understand the past and ourselves in relation to the past' (Marcus, 1971, p.xviii). Marcus explains that pornography fulfilled this very function for the Victorians themselves, precisely because it was perceived to be "foreign," distinct, exotic' (Marcus, 1971, p.xx).

The nature of this erotic engagement in the neo-Victorian text also facilitates an observation of the re-investment in pornography as a form of entertainment: in Starling's text, Dora herself reflects upon this function through an admission of how the content of the books that she binds arouses her interest. 'Sometimes I was repelled', Dora admits, 'sometimes charmed, but always arrested, never bored' (Starling, 2007, p.162). It seems that Dora's sentiments mirror the function of Starling's text itself as the focus upon certain taboos and sexual acts – often listed and described by Dora in great detail – serve simultaneously to fascinate and repel, to entertain and to shock, a configuration somewhat at odds with the professed scientific rationale behind the texts which Dora binds which are described as 'neither [for] the prurient and perfidious, nor the ignorant and innocent, but rather for 'The artist of discernment, who professes the pursuit of truth, the liberation from taboos, and the continued supremacy of Britannia, as the higher motives behind his representations' who 'will be best served by its contents' (Starling, 2007, p.204). To this end, 'The nature of such an endeavour compels the reproduction of extreme imagery' (Starling, 2007, p.204), a justification which reverberates in relation to the vindications offered for 'extreme' neo-Victorian representations of historical subjugation, suffering, and

traumatic experience. It is possible to suggest that our increasing temporal distance from the Victorian past perhaps necessitates the use of repeated and often graphic emphasis upon the *physicality* of historical subjection: as Sturken explains, the past ‘is an experience once or twice removed’ (2007, p.9), and consequently the sense of remoteness fostered by virtue of the temporal gap ‘enables a sense of innocence and detachment’ (2007, p.12) which might negate a sense of ethical or moral responsibility on the part of the reader towards eroticised traumas which take place at a temporal remove. Indeed, Dora’s sentiments regarding the ‘arresting’ qualities of the texts that she binds highlight this point, recalling the broader significance of the neo-Victorian engagement with pornography which, by virtue of its temporal remove, also renders the Victorian past similarly fascinating, as Kohlke suggests:

Neo-Victorianism as a literary genre and aesthetic technique has become the new Orientalism, a significant mode of imagining sexuality in our hedonistic, consumerist, sex-surfeited age. [...] In an ironic inversion, the Victorian age that once imagined the Orient as seductive free zone of libidinous excess in its literature, architecture, and arts, itself becomes Western culture’s mysterious eroticised and exotic other. (2006, p.12)<sup>39</sup>

In this way, Starling’s eroticisation of the Victorian past facilitates a self-reflexive commentary upon the function of the neo-Victorian itself which, as discussed in the Introduction, seemingly becomes an alternative kind of exotic ‘location’ for the reader to ‘explore’. As this thesis evidences, many neo-Victorian novels facilitate a re-engagement with Victorian imperialist rhetoric as a means of refiguring the idea of exploration from the geographic to the temporally distant, rendering the reader of the neo-Victorian novel a textual ‘explorer’ in their own right. Such neo-Victorian re-figurations cannot be said to operate in ‘homage’ to their textual precursors,<sup>40</sup> but rather function as a critical ‘lens’ through which to reflect upon - and indeed, undermine - their own re-appropriation of the ‘exotic’ past in the neo-Victorian novel. As Kohlke notes with seeming incredulity, ‘for

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<sup>39</sup> As mentioned previously in the Introduction chapter, Orientalism should not be confused with Exoticism. Kohlke acknowledges that ‘Orientalism as a means of appropriation, of asserting discursive, symbolic, and political power over the Other, as first defined by Edward Said, has [...] become politically incorrect and thence untenable, so that alternatives must be sought to fill its place’; in consequence, Kohlke contends that ‘The substitute Orientalism of neo-Victorian fiction is signalled by a striking repression or relegation of Orientalist tropes to the textual unconscious of the genre [...] Exotic settings or individuals themselves hardly ever figure, though logically such a prominent aspect of the nineteenth century imaginary should feature conspicuously in literary revisions of the period’ (2008, p13). In consequence, by way of reconfiguring Orientalism, the neo-Victorian novel ‘replaces the seraglio with nineteenth century brothels and bedrooms (Kohlke, 2008, p.13)

<sup>40</sup> McLaughlin (2000, pp.2-4) lists Robert Louis Stevenson’s *More New Arabian Nights* (1885), Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890) as examples in support of this assertion, among others.

products of a “permissive” society, neo-Victorian fantasies repeatedly take on curiously antiquated overtones of imperialist adventures by would-be conquerors of exotic female “others” (2006, p.6); in Starling’s text, this eroticised pastime is fostered by the wealthy members of ‘Les Sauvages Nobles’ (or the Noble Savages).<sup>41</sup> Described by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn as ‘an upper-class gentlemen’s club which commissions book covers for obscene and sadistic materials and conceals its toxic fantasies’ (2010, p.131), their exploratory preoccupations – localised to the London slums, situated in the once-geographic ‘seat’ of Victorianism itself as ‘the vital, crowded and boisterous capital of the British Empire’ (Ciocia, 2007, para.18), as opposed to an alternative, geographically remote location as ‘Imperialist rhetoric transformed the unexplored territory of the London poor into an *alien* place, both *exciting* and *dangerous*’ (Walkowitz, 1992, p.18, my emphasis) – work to feed their essentially epistemophilic fascinations with alterity and difference, chiefly as a means of sexual gratification. Walkowitz tells us that from ‘As early as the 1840s’, cosmopolitan, middle-class ‘urban explorers’ would roam the streets of London in the self-employed capacity of ‘urban investigators’, exercising their voyeuristic interest in seeking out unusual sights and sometimes exercising their intentions of documenting and resolving social issues that they may encounter (1992, p.18); in Starling’s text, this venture is mirrored on a textual level by the reader who arguably experiences a similar type of engagement via the neo-Victorian novel.

Gutleben relates this similarly epistemophilic focus of the reader onto the idea of ‘otherness’ which is driven by ‘The exploration on the part of the writer and the discovery on the part of the reader of the infinite alterity of the Victorian other and of the infinite others of Victoria [sic] alterity’ (2009/10, p.151). It is this idea of ‘exploration’ which facilitates an understanding of how *The Journal of Dora Damage* might arguably be understood as relevant to the concept of the neo-adventure novel, which ‘imports’ and ‘localises’ the idea of exploration (on the part of the Noble Savages and the neo-Victorian

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<sup>41</sup> It is likely that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s myth of the ‘noble savage’ informs Starling’s choice of title for Starling’s depraved group. In his work *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755), Rousseau considers the concept of a once-existent ‘pure state of nature’ (1984, p.78) in which the true ‘savage’ once existed solely according to instinct and primate desires and drives. According to Rousseau, ‘the whole progress of the human species removes man constantly farther and farther from his primitive state; the more we acquire new knowledge, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all; and, in a sense, it is through studying man that we have rendered ourselves incapable of knowing him’ (1984, p.67). Rousseau further speculates as to ‘what the human race might have become if it had been abandoned to itself’ (1984, p.78), as ‘in instinct alone man had all he needed for living in a state of nature’, while ‘in cultivated reason’ (acquired through the course of human civilisation) man has ‘what is necessary only for living in society’ (1984, p.97); in short, ‘reason has succeeded in suffocating nature’ (1984, p.70). Naming the group after Rousseau’s concept becomes a dubious mode of ‘justification’ for the Noble Savages to indulge their desires and sordid whims, as the ‘savage’ purportedly remains more content in his/her state of ‘pure nature’ than the ‘civilized’ man.

novel itself) while simultaneously implying difference by virtue of (temporal) distance (on the part of the reader). For Marcus, the temporal continuation of the fascination with, and investment in, ‘otherness’ maintains and facilitates a bond with our Victorian precursors, and consequently, ‘Their otherness connects them to us’ (1971, p.xviii). This interpretation seems to fuel the more unusual, grotesque, aberrant and startling representations which manifest themselves within the neo-Victorian novel;<sup>42</sup> indeed, for Rosemarie Thomson, the contemporary fascination with ‘difference’ developed from distinctly nineteenth-century ‘choreographies of embodied otherness’ (1996, p.16). Focussing specifically upon the historical context of the ‘freak’ show, Thomson explains that in the Victorian period – which she describes as ‘a turbulent era of social and material change’ – the ‘spectacle of the extraordinary body stimulated curiosity, ignited speculation, provoked titillation, furnished novelty, filled coffers, confirmed commonality, and certified national identity’ in a way that ‘bonded a sundering polity together in the collective act of *looking*’ (1996, p.4, my emphasis). Thompson’s allusion to ‘looking’ is of relevance for its acknowledgement of the role of visuality and spectacle within this configuration, as is her contention that, contemporarily, this discourse has undergone a ‘dispersal [...] into an array of *other representational modes*, some of which [...] may not be recognizable today at first glance’, but that nonetheless propagate the same ‘message’: that ‘difference is deviance’ (1996, p.13, my emphasis), and that the display of ‘corporeal otherness’ and ‘ostensible human aberrance’ (1996, p.10; p.16) are, nonetheless, both fascinating and alluring. This thesis figures the neo-Victorian as one of the contemporary ‘representational modes’ to which Thompson alludes, a literary medium which, like the ‘freak show’ discussed earlier, exploits and seemingly validates the spectacle of the ‘other’ for a contemporary ‘audience’.

*The Journal of Dora Damage* serves to highlight this point through the diversion of the interests of the Noble Savages from geographically-specific notions of ‘difference’ to those more locally available: as a working-class woman, Dora’s residence in the ‘unexplored’ territories of working-class London, as well as her transgressive femininity (which incorporates multiple personas as self-professed ‘Mistress Bindress in the obscene underworld of the book trade’ (Starling, 2007, p.163), housewife, and mother), results in her subsequent figuration as a local embodiment of ‘difference’ by the Noble Savages, her

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<sup>42</sup> A comprehensive discussion of the various specific ‘types’ of ‘otherness’ reflected within the neo-Victorian oeuvre is beyond the remit of this thesis; however, by means of example, Helen Davies has noted the ‘regular appearances of characters with extraordinary bodies in neo-Victorian texts’, citing Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and Rosie Garland’s *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) as examples of how both ‘fictional [and nonfictional] “freaks” have populated our (re)imagined terrain of Victorian culture’ (2013, n.p.).

‘Otherness’ marked on her body by the visible signifiers of her working-class status and unconventional occupation. These marks become a point of increasing fascination for Knightley who becomes particularly enamoured of those which manifest themselves through the skin on her hands, as Dora notes: ‘[h]e slid his palms down my arms, took hold of both my hands, and started to stroke my cracked, calloused palms. ‘Look at these beautiful hands [...] You, Mrs Damage, are my *magnum opus*.<sup>43</sup> What a woman we have made of you!’ (Starling, 2007, p.235). Another example occurs when Lord Glidewell sends Dora a Christmas gift of a new dress, the finery of which reportedly ‘threw up my imperfections as my smock never would’ (Starling, 2007, p.304). These ‘imperfections’ serve to draw attention to the physical nature of Dora’s occupation, as well as the effect that it has on her body: ‘Mama, look at the blisters on your hands’, Lucinda comments, followed by ‘Your shoulders are hunched’ (Starling, 2007, p.304).

Knightley’s fascination with the physical signifiers of Dora’s poverty – marked on her body as attestations to her essential ‘difference’ in relation to class, gender, and transgressive occupation, and which become synonymous with alterity and ‘otherness’ – signify a displacement of his desires which recalls the subject of Freud’s essay on the subject of ‘Fetishism’, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis; his displacement supposes and infers ‘otherness’ via the fetishised abstraction of class-based visibility. Knightley’s fetishistic interests are, in this way, also relatable to Thomson’s point regarding the ‘dispersal’ of choreographies of ‘Otherness’ to a contemporary phenomenon which is being popularly branded as ‘poverty porn’. Described by *The Guardian*’s Tanya Gold as ‘reality television [...] that *pretends to analyse and report on austerity*, but actually exists to monetise and degrade it’ (2014, para.1, my emphasis), this trend focusses on the physical effects of poverty upon the body – ‘hunger, malnutrition, the glut of sugar in cheap food; [...] ill-health and an early death’, a focus which prompts Gold (aptly, in light of the somatic and anatomical focus of the forthcoming discussion) to describe the phenomenon as having ‘the fascinated morbidity of a visit to an ancient anatomical theatre’.<sup>44</sup>

The implicitly voyeuristic element of such an engagement recalls the ‘literature of urban exploration [which] emulated the privileged gaze of anthropology in constituting the poor as a race apart, outside the national community’ (Walkowitz, 1992, p.19). In addition,

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<sup>43</sup> The phrase *magnum opus* translates from the Latin as ‘great work’, a surreptitious hint towards Dora’s intended fate.

<sup>44</sup> Extending this connection to its logical conclusion, such exploratory urges are also somewhat reminiscent of a comparable contemporary phenomenon dubbed ‘poverty tourism’,<sup>44</sup> an enterprise which seems relatable to the exoticisation of the Victorian past in relation to Sturken’s previously discussed concept of the ‘tourist of history’.

the avowed motivation of documenting and addressing social issues via ‘reporting’ the impact of austerity through such programming (of which Gold is overtly cynical) recall not only the previously-discussed self-imbued function of the nineteenth century urban explorer who sought to ‘resolve’ the social issues that they encountered, but also the professed function of the neo-Victorian as culturally-specific product and social commentary which often finds itself ‘contributing to a critique – of capitalism, nationalism, gender roles, for example – that had its counterpart, if not origins, in Victorian cultural criticism’ (Krueger, 2002, p.xii). Indeed, the position of the reader in relation to Starling’s representations of Dora’s ‘otherness’ (both in relation to her working-class existence and her temporal abstraction) arguably renders them neo-Victorian ‘explorers’ and implicit ‘voyeurs’, recalling Kohlke’s admonishment that neo-Victorian fiction should not only be read as a means to ‘conveniently reassert our own supposedly enlightened stance towards sexuality and social progress’ (2006, p.2). In fact, the ability of the neo-Victorian text to reflect the reader’s own role within such potentially exploitative practices impresses upon us ‘the need to address our role as heirs of continuous historical processes’ (Krueger, 2002, p.xi).

In extension of this correlation, Starling highlights the lineage of our somewhat perverse ‘inheritance’ through the incorporation and re-configuration of some of the Victorian era’s more debauched and depraved historical figures. This thesis finds that the re-emergence of these nefarious characters and their egregious fascinations and ‘fetishes’ constitutes a means of observing the true-life ‘roots’ and (somewhat retrograde) ‘evolution’ of the prominent contemporary interest in ‘morbid eroticism’ (Sawday, 1995, p.5), as well as a means of ‘experiencing’ their taboo fascinations from a distance which seemingly validates and vindicates their interests. In *The Journal of Dora Damage*, this engagement manifests an awareness of a cultural ‘turn’ towards the taboo, the prohibited, and the censured as a notable alternative to the types of nostalgia typically associated with the Victorians which Mitchell describes as ‘a rather condescending attitude toward the era as quaint and charming’ (2010a, p.43).

The fascination with, and eroticisation of, the physical signifiers of manual occupation in relation to the female body, for example, is perhaps most commonly associated with the Victorian gentleman Arthur Munby<sup>45</sup> in relation to his maid, Hannah Cullwick. Ellen Rosenman describes Munby as ‘a combination of urban sociologist and

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<sup>45</sup> Hudson’s observations regarding the diaries also proffer – somewhat uncannily, in terms of the parallels that can be drawn between both Hudson’s and Starling’s characterisation of Knightley - that Munby notably ‘lingers [...] over ‘two tanned human skins, male and female’, which he discovers at an ‘Institute of Anatomy’ later in the year’ (1972, p.19).

flâneur' (2003, p.72) – characteristics which seemingly inform Starling's characterisation of Knightley and his similarly erotic interest in Dora - while Derek Hudson notes that Munby's diaries disclose 'a somewhat morbid fascination with the female anatomy, especially the skin, the hands and their tactile sensations and any disfigurements or abnormalities' (1972, p.19). Heilmann and Llewellyn also notice prominent similarities between Knightley's character and Henry Spencer Ashbee,<sup>46</sup> real-life Victorian pornography collector and author of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* ('Index of Forbidden Books', 1877), who allegedly 'combined the Victorian love of collecting with the interests of the sexologists' (Lutz, 2011, p.274) and is also noted as having been affiliated with the infamous 'Cannibal Club', 'an offshoot of the Anthropological Society of London with close links to the Royal Geographic Society' on which the Noble Savages seem to be based (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2010, p.131). This group – founded by Richard Burton in 1863 – indulged their interests in the combination of sexuality and scientific enquiry, particularly with regards to sexual and racial difference (Sigel, 2002, p.50).

Out of necessity, Ashbee created a pseudonym under which to author his volumes and to communicate with other members of the literary underworld: 'As a lover of puns and bawdy jokes', Lutz explains, 'Ashbee made up a pseudonym with a fittingly scatological ring to it: Pisanus Fraxi. With this name, he could include not only "piss" and "anus" but also a play on his last name: "fraxinus" means "ash tree" in Latin' (2011, p.276). Ashbee's duplicity is described by Ian Gibson as his 'Jekyll & Hyde quality', being 'perfectly expressed in the pseudonym with which he chose to present himself to the world, at once the thinnest of disguises, a scholarly hoax, a dangerous flaunting of Victorian convention and *an admission of acute personal fascination with the affairs of the flesh*' (2001, p.26, my emphasis), a characteristic which is of considerable relevance to the corporeal focus of this thesis.

Both Ashbee's and Munby's duality seems a fitting concern for the neo-Victorian novel which is of itself inherently 'double', looking backwards to the temporally distant Victorian past while remaining a literary product of the present and offering insight into the cultural processes which inform our interpretation (and subsequent representations) of the Victorians today. Their 'doubleness' may go some way towards explaining their contemporary revival within Starling's novel: precisely how their unorthodox enterprises

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<sup>46</sup> Heilmann & Llewellyn note that 'Like Sir Jocelyn Knightley in Starling's novel, Ashbee donated his collection to the British Library', and his 'rebellious family is recreated in Dora and her entourage [as] one of Ashbee's estranged daughters became a bookbinder' (2010, p.131). Ashbee came from the upper middle-class and was, to all appearances, 'a successful City merchant and [...] a pillar of society' (Gibson, 2001, p.xi), his respectable appearance masking his underground industry and interests. As a result, for Gibson, 'Ashbee emerges as the archetypal Victorian with a secret' (2001, p.xi).

and fascinations are interpreted and re-presented in the neo-Victorian novel is of additional significance to this consideration, with similarities and discrepancies manifesting as to the ‘truth’ or extent of their deviances. Like the historical Ashbee, Knightley harbours a somewhat disturbing proclivity towards debauchery; yet where Ashbee was believed to have a penchant for flagellation (Gibson, 2001, p.61), Knightley instead harbours unusual proclivities towards perverse and deviant sexual behaviours, relishing titillating tales of sexual avarice (which he frequently discloses to Dora, and to the reader by proxy), as well as engaging in somewhat disturbing pass-times and fantasies which illuminate the historical character’s ominous interests in combining sexuality and science. ‘Have you not seen Sir Jocelyn’s treasures?’ asks one of the characters within the text: ‘He has an entire collection of clitorises pickled in glass jars, along with the renowned “Hottentot Apron”’ (Starling, 2007, p.238).<sup>47</sup> Knightley’s wife, Sylvia, later comments upon his desire to ‘rescue a brave and beautiful widow from *sati* – from her husband’s funeral pyre – and immortalise her for ever in the greatest scientific and literary work of the century’ (Starling, 2007, pp.388-389). Frederick Hankey – a friend of Ashbee – also possessed a similar array of sado-masochistic desires to those of Knightley, which pertinently included an ‘extreme desire to see a girl hanged and have the skin of her backside tanned to bind his “Justine” with’ (Milnes cited in Gibson, 2001, p.31), a desire which is actualised in Starling’s text, even if not in reality.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sander Gilman explains that ‘In the course of the nineteenth century, the female Hottentot comes to represent the black female *in nuce*’ as ‘the antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is embodied in the black [woman], and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot. The physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed, the central nineteenth-century icon for sexual difference between the European [woman] and the black [woman]’ (1985, p.206; p.212, original emphasis). This difference is located primarily in the physiognomy, particularly relating to ‘the form of her genitalia’ which ‘label[ed] her as inherently different’ (Gilman, 1985, p.213). According to Gilman, ‘In the nineteenth century, the black female was widely perceived as possessing not only a “primitive” sexual appetite but also the external signs of this temperament-“primitive” genitalia’: such a perception arose from the phenomenon labelled by travellers to Africa - such as Francois Le Vaillant and John Barrow – as the so-called ‘Hottentot apron’, a term which described ‘a hypertrophy of the labia and nymphae caused by the manipulation of the genitalia and serving as a sign of beauty among certain tribes’ (1985, p.213). The ‘steatopygia’, or ‘protruding buttocks’, also constituted ‘another physical characteristic of the Hottentot female which captured the eye of early European travelers [sic]’ (Gilman, 1985, p.213). To Gilman’s mind, ‘this reflects the general nineteenth-century understanding of female sexuality as pathological: the female genitalia were of interest partly as examples of the various pathologies which could befall them but also because the female genitalia came to define the female for the nineteenth century’ (1985, p.216). Also mentioned briefly in the Introduction to this thesis, Chase-Riboud’s *Hottentot Venus: A Novel* (2003) is a neo-Victorian text which explores the life of Saartjie Baartman - also called Sarah Bartmann or Saat-Jee – who was exhibited in London in 1810 under the title of the ‘Hottentot Venus’, which ‘caused a public scandal in a London inflamed by the issue of the abolition of slavery’: indeed, according to Gilman, ‘the state’s objection was as much to her lewdness as to her status as an indentured black’ (1985, p.213). Chase-Riboud’s novel demonstrates that the correlation between ‘sexuality’ and the idea of ‘otherness’ evidently remains a pertinent topic within contemporary and neo-Victorian literature.

<sup>48</sup> Gibson reports that Sir Richard Burton once promised to bring Frederick Hankey ‘the skin stripped from a sacrificial victim’ from his trip to Africa, but that ‘the famous explorer and linguist failed to produce’ such an item, writing in a letter that ‘Poor Hankey must wait for his *peau de femme*’ (Gibson, 2001, p.31), a phrase

Despite reflecting upon cliterodectomy as a harrowing practice which has its roots in the Victorian period,<sup>49</sup> Starling's specific mode of representation reveals an unmistakable contemporaneity due to the combination of the sexual with the suffering or 'damaged' body. I wish to suggest that Knightley constitutes a neo-Victorian hybridisation of the aforementioned historical figures, embodying elements of their individual idiosyncratic qualities to create a historically-informed (yet historically inaccurate) and comprehensively deviant identity. Such a mode of hybridisation arguably serves several important functions, one of which can be explored in relation to the intertextual 'nexus' forming around figures such as Ashbee in the neo-Victorian text. Kohlke notes Ashbee's significance in relation to neo-Victorian intertextuality as she claims that 'Henry Spencer Ashbee [...] also modelled for Maud's uncle, Christopher Lilly, in *Fingersmith*', which 'indicate[s] a significant but still germinal neo-Victorian literary trend to engage intertextually with contemporaneous neo-Victorian works as well as nineteenth century texts' (2008, p.201).

This point seems particularly pertinent in light of the fact that contemporary perceptions of the historical Ashbee are somewhat 'at odds' with each other, with scholars seeming to struggle to agree upon his character: where Gibson sees a man impassioned by both collecting and working against Victorian perceptions of sexuality and with a sense of provocative charm intact, reviewer Harry Cocks finds instead a character who is 'peevish, irascible and obsessive' (2011, para.9). Our reliance upon historical documents and accounts necessarily results in a process of interpretation; as we interpret, we engage in a process of re-imagining, as demonstrated by the interesting fact that Waters offers a representation of a cruel and reclusive man, consumed by his obsession, while Starling posits Ashbee's hybridised revenant as a powerful, charming, eccentric, yet unnerving individual. These differing neo-Victorian representations of Ashbee arguably reveal the

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specifically re-appropriated towards the conclusion of Starling's text in genuflection of the reality of Knightley's desires.

<sup>49</sup> According to Elizabeth Helsinger, cliterodectomy appeared in England in the 1860s and persisted until the 1890s, its primary purpose a cure for inappropriate or abnormal behaviours in women – for example, those whose behaviours fell outside of social acceptability, such as 'masturbating, or becoming frigid or nymphomaniacal, or failing in other domestic duties, or advocating suffrage or birth control, or suffering from hysteria, or simply feeling sick in suspect ways'; in these instances, 'the health of the patient and of the race required drastic physical measures' (1983, p.73). Helsinger explains that 'Medial logic here is brutally simple: [...] excise the clitoris and restore normalcy' (1983, p.73). Emma Donoghue's short story 'Cured' (from her collection of fictional tales titled *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, 2002) offers a neo-Victorian return to one such case of cliterodectomy involving the eminent but controversial Victorian gynaecologist and surgeon Isaac Baker Brown. For Claire O'Callaghan, Donoghue's writings 'contribute to the project of rewriting feminist histories and specifically those concerned with exposing the abuse of women' through the recreation of 'the harrowing experience of women who underwent cliterodectomy surgery in the nineteenth century' (2013, p.68). Cliterodectomy – often referred to as Female Circumcision or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – is controversially practiced today in some cultures and is currently an issue of major contention as a practice in violation of women's human rights.

neo-Victorian's ability not only to manipulate historical record, a vital function which both renders the neo-Victorian a distinctly contemporary 'product' through its specific mode of return which reflects present-day concerns, but also to exploit certain characteristics and facts for the purpose of inciting and fulfilling a prurient interest in Victorian perversities. Indeed, Starling's re-appropriations of these historical characters are seemingly crafted to titillate and arouse excitement through the inclusion of numerous accounts of sensationalised sexuality, taboo practices, bodily threat and physical harm, corporeal manifestations which speak to the reader's own perverse nostalgia.

In relation to *The Journal of Dora Damage* specifically, this is achieved through the re-appropriation of genuine, traumatic modes of Victorian subjection – such as the scopophilic gaze, the threat of physical mutilation via cliterodectomy, as well as scientific and anatomical bodily scrutiny – which not only highlight the historical 'roots' and 'justifications' of such exploitative practices, but also bring to mind contemporary manifestations of these practices which could be considered contemporary 'equivalents' or continuations (i.e. 'poverty porn') of those employed by our Victorian precursors. Precisely how and why these contemporary manifestations return to and re-appropriate such modes of exploitation are significant considerations in relation to Starling's text.

In the forthcoming discussion, this point is considered in relation to Starling's representation of a relatively 'untraumatic', commonplace event by contemporary standards – a confrontation with the workings of the inner body – as a means of considering the significance of re-presenting a specifically Victorian trauma which captures the fascinating and disturbing 'newness' of something that the contemporary reader is arguably already familiar with and desensitised towards. This argument explores this narrative 'scene' as a manifestation of a perverse nostalgia which re-appropriates the exploitative nature of Victorian scientific enquiry for contemporary titillation.

### **'False Flesh': 'Anatomising' the neo-Victorian body**

Starling's representations of Dora often focus upon her somatic, corporeal experience of, and relationship with, her own body. Despite Knightley's attestations to her attractiveness, Dora is often represented as feeling 'uncomfortable in her own skin' (so to speak); she keeps her body hidden from sight, barely acknowledging its drives and desires, and never deigns to regard herself in the mirror, her description of various parts of her body as being as 'unfamiliar [...] as far-off parts of the globe' (Starling, 2007, p.161) reinforcing

Kohlke's assertion discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the figuration of the Victorian female body in neo-Victorian literature as an exotic 'location' to be 'explored' and 'conquered'.

Dora's naivety and disconnection from her body is eventually brought into realisation when she is confronted – somewhat forcibly – with an anatomical waxwork of a female body which seems to initiate her into an enhanced awareness of her own body. In what Brooks would term 'a privileged visual moment' of realisation (1993, p.14), Dora describes the moment that this confrontation takes place in Knightley's home, which is markedly decorated with anthropomorphic and ethnographic souvenirs of his travels abroad: 'I spied the most disturbing item in the room, out of that cursed female corner of my eye. It fascinated and repulsed me, and I could not work out what I was looking at, and eventually I found myself looking at it head-on' (Starling, 2007, p.103).

Dora's reference to the 'cursed female corner of [her] eye' constitutes an allusion to the contextual impropriety of fixing her own gaze on a representation of the inner body, which in a Victorian context was 'not usually considered a suitable object for women to peruse' (Starling, 2007, p.105), as well as the fact that expectations relating to feminine propriety compelled women to look obliquely while men could appropriate their gaze fully and without challenge, as Dora reflects: 'Women are excellent at the cross-gaze; why do men have to look directly?' (Starling, 2007, p.53).<sup>50</sup> Dora continues to describe the waxwork and her initial revulsion:

It was like a grotesque sculpture of a human torso, like the marble classical sculptures of old, with truncated arms and legs [...] *The surface had been painted to resemble flesh, but in places the meat was missing.* It had one beautiful, perfect breast, with a *shockingly* real nipple, but where the other one should have been was an orange, pitted cavity. *Every separate hair on my own flesh stirred in horror,* as I realised that what I was beholding permitted a vision of the interior of the body.

(Starling, 2007, p.104, my emphasis)

The anatomical waxwork model in Starling's novel embodies (in the most literal sense) far greater significance than may initially be apparent. Dora's reflection of her initiatory encounter with the inner body can, on one level, be related to Davis' idea of a textual erotics, the reference to the 'shockingly real nipple' emphasising Dora's awe at the spectacle, while her admission of the sensory impact of the sight imparts this sensation to

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<sup>50</sup> As discussed later in this chapter, there is a marked empowerment in employing the female gaze at will, although in Dora's case this act is rendered problematic as a mode of perpetuating the subjection of the 'other'.

the reader through the use of the first person, who thereby ‘share’ in the shock and sensation.

On another level, the model can be interpreted as an ‘embodied’ reflection of the operation and function of the neo-Victorian novel itself. It is logical to imply that the model is a re-appropriation of the nineteenth century phenomenon of the ‘anatomical Venus’,<sup>51</sup> a term used to describe dissected anatomical statues of life-like, often reclining, women. Interestingly, Roberta Ballestriero asserts that ‘In certain cases the scientific purposes of the anatomical waxes were just an excuse for depicting a beautiful, sensual dying woman’ (2010, p.230), constituting ‘the synthesis of art and pleasure, entertainment with the excuse of education’ (2010, p.231), somewhat in keeping with the seemingly didactic function of the neo-Victorian as both entertaining and educational in its revisionism.<sup>52</sup> A significant point in genuflection of the relativity of the statue to the neo-Victorian is Warner’s claim that the waxwork body ‘cheats death; it simulates life; it proves true and false’ (2006, p.23); that the surface of the waxwork model had been ‘painted to resemble flesh’ highlights its notable artificiality, while the fact that ‘in places some of the meat was missing’ implies a lack of wholeness or completeness, or something distinctly ‘lacking’. Arguably, this combination could be said to epitomise the nature of the neo-Victorian novel which is itself often aestheticized in style and content to appear as a Victorian text (as mentioned previously in Kohlke’s interpretation of the novel’s front cover), but nonetheless draws attention to the fact that the ‘meat’ – what might be interpreted as the essence, the Victorian itself – is in fact missing. Marina Warner offers a pertinent observation which compounds this interpretation, with an additional commentary upon the significance of the malleability of wax, as she notes that:

Wax casting allows for copies: intrinsically a reproductive process, it can continue *ad infinitum* [...] they process from an original to a sequence of replicas, each of which partakes of the essence of the progenitor or model. That original contact with the subject’s vanished physical being intensifies the hallucinatory effect of presence in absence, of ubiquity and deathlessness in the waxwork – as process and artefact.

(2006, p.38, original emphasis)

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<sup>51</sup> Ballestriero notes that despite the fact that wax sculptures of women had been used for scientific purposes in the previous centuries, it was ‘During the 19th century [that] the dissected anatomical statues of reclining women came to be known as ‘Venuses’, referring to the Venus de Medici created by an unknown Greek sculptor at the beginning of the 3rd century BC’ (2010, p.230).

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Stetz, for example, has noted that many neo-Victorian authors ‘have been appropriating Victorian settings, situations, and characters for reasons bound up with their own moral imperatives, and who have done so in the service of political education and advocacy’ (2013, p.143).

Warner's observation highlights the alleged nature of the neo-Victorian novel for some critics which at once 'partakes of the essence' of the Victorian novel while also highlighting a Victorian reality itself as an uncanny 'presence in absence'. Such a dynamic is summarised by Llewellyn's conceptualisation of the neo-Victorian (as discussed in the Introduction) as a 'mediator into the experience of reading the 'real' thing' (2008, p.168), a problematic sentiment which 'establishes a hierarchy that privileges the Victorian novel as more primary and original than the neo-Victorian novel, which is reduced to a secondary and derivative artefact' (Carroll, 2010, p.179). Warner expounds that 'While these serve as eerie reminders that all flesh is grass (unless it be wax), and that even the most accurate and lifelike simulacra can never possess vitality itself, [the wax model] promises immortality as the *suspension of time*' (Warner, 2006, p.51, my emphasis). However, as Carroll explains, the 'persistent reduction of the neo-Victorian novel to Victorian simulacra goes hand in hand with the primacy attributed to the nineteenth century over the present' (2010, pp.179-180).

Carroll's sentiments recall Jean Baudrillard's theorisation of 'Simulacra and Simulations', in which he explains his contention that, in postmodern culture, the 'copy' supersedes the original as 'simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum' (1998, p.368). According to Baudrillard's logic, the fear of the loss of the 'original' (or the 'real') results in a 'strategy of deterrence', as 'When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning' (1998, p.369; p.369). Warner's statement – which stresses the effect of 'presence in absence' and of 'ubiquity' manifested within the 'copy' – also initially recalls Baudrillard's sentiments; however, Warner's sentiments fundamentally *departs* from Baudrillard to counter any charge of reductionism by highlighting the status of the waxwork – like the neo-Victorian – as both a 'process' of literary reinterpretation and a distinctly contemporary 'artefact', the anatomical model's 'false flesh' operating as 'a lens [...] through which to look at the waxworks to come' (Warner, 2006, p.51).

It is also helpful to consider Warner's description of the waxwork body as a 'lens' through which to examine what Jonathan Sawday describes as 'the union of sexual desire and anatomisation' (1995, p.50) evidenced in this novelistic scene when Knightley is described as reaching into the anatomical statue's 'cold flesh' and retrieving 'pink cushions and tubes and curiously shaped lumps', before asking Dora (with a somewhat unsophisticated inferred erotic subtext) if she 'wanted to touch it' (Starling, 2007, p.105). Knightley's physical manipulation of these organs is reflective not only of exploitative

Victorian sexual and scientific interests in female anatomy, but is also symbolically representative of his eroticisation and manipulation of Dora's body and the control that he is able to exert over it; indeed, the model itself becomes an inanimate 'double' of Dora, who, when watching Knightley's manipulation of the organs, 'felt [her] insides turn right over several times in sympathy' (Starling, 2007, p.105), suggesting an unsettling interchangeability between the animate Dora and the inanimate wax-model which works to proffer an essential uncanniness. The model comes to represent what Cixous has described as 'the uncanny stranger on display', a symbolic warning for Dora to 'return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her' (1976, p.880) by Knightley's control over her. Such a 'return' can only be achieved by Dora's reclamation of her own agency and self-representation, a recovery which Dora seemingly achieves towards the end of the novel, not least through her adaptation of a tattoo forcibly inscribed onto her skin by the Noble Savages (although this act of self-presentation and reclamation itself might also be considered problematic, as discussed further towards the end of this chapter).

Given the erotic subtext of Knightley's manipulation of the model's organs, it is interesting to consider Michie's connection between Victorian modes of female representation and popular visual depictions incorporated into contemporary pornographic magazines, with publications such as *Playboy* and *Hustler* reducing the female body to a host of saporific components which similarly constitutes a reductive fragmentation of the female body to deny 'wholeness' or 'completeness': 'Twentieth-century sexual culture, the sexual "revolution," has produced an *inversion* of Victorian representational tropes, where the historically unnameable parts of the female body come to stand for the rest of it. [...] The "breast men" and "leg men" of contemporary culture reduce women, like chickens, to nameable palatable parts' (Michie, 1987, p.141, my emphasis). Michie's allusion to 'chickens' as analogous to the fragmentation of women into 'palatable' parts concomitantly raises the issue of the 'consumption' of the female body, a concept explored in Starling's text through a traumatic series of nightmares experienced by Dora in which she imagines that parts of her body have been removed:

First, I was roaming along a row of female body parts suspended in spirits of wine in glass jars, trying to find my own heart. When I found it, I discovered a bite had been taken out of it, and next to it, on either side, were the two castrated organs<sup>53</sup> of the Dey in *The Lustful Turk*.

(Starling, 2007, p.349, original emphasis)

The removal of Dora's heart – perhaps the most symbolically fundamental organ – and the fact that Dora notices that it has had a 'bite' taken out of it -relates to the climax of the dream, in which she is confronted by Knightley, who orders Dora to 'put [her] heart into his mouth' (Starling, 2007, p.349). The inference that Dora's heart is to be removed and subsequently consumed by Knightley reflects Dora's own status as a 'consumable': her body (like those of the women described in the texts that she binds), as well as the potentially empowering appropriation of her own gaze, have been commandeered specifically for the erotic pleasure of her subjectors (which arguably incorporates, to some extent, the reader due to their own position as a 'spectator').

Significantly, Dora later describes a dream in which an 'animated, malevolent anatomy model' chases her around her workshop, 'its pink open throat cackling at me and issuing threats' (Starling, 2007, p.112); yet eventually Dora confronts the model as she 'turned and stood [her] ground, after which the model 'became still and calm too, and let [her] stroke its painted skin' (Starling, 2007, p.112). Dora subsequently describes placing her own hands inside the dream-model, 'onto the organs, which were not cold and hard, but soft, warm and wet', at which the model 'giggled as I fingered them, weighed them in my hands, held them up to the light' (Starling, 2007, p.112). In Dora's dream, she is able not only to look – employing the full extent of her own gaze at her will – but also to *touch*, and in doing so to reclaim the physicality and sensuality of her body for herself, the words 'soft, warm and wet' in relation to her new-found awareness of the materiality of her body exuding overtly sexualised significance.

Dora's dream facilitates reflection upon the empowering role of her own gaze as she admits that 'To know the inner workings, to understand the inside, *to see within*: I would put up with the cigar smoke, and the men who looked, and the animal heads, and the back alley-ways, for that' (Starling, 2007, p.112, my emphasis); and yet at the same time, this empowerment is also rendered problematic, as in this dream-scenario Dora is also partaking in the exploitative sexualisation and exploration of the female anatomy which

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<sup>53</sup> The two castrated organs situated next to the jar could be interpreted as a symbolic allusion to the fact a male has been responsible for the removal of Dora's heart, or alternatively as a subtle foresight into her eventual retribution towards Diprose (one of her tormentors at the end of the text) through the act of castration.

has been used as a vehicle for her own subjection. Dora's empowerment is revealed to be somewhat short-circuited through her re-investment in oppressive and exploitative practices which serve to problematize and compound, rather than appease or subvert, the modes of oppression which are operational within the text.

### **Visuality, the 'gaze', and seeking the traumatic corruption of 'innocence'**

Dora's desire to 'see within' emphasises the significance of visuality, both in terms of her own enlightenment as well as within the neo-Victorian novel itself. Her combination of revulsion and fascination when confronted with the intriguing display of the inner-body enthral Knightley, who finds her bewildered and discomfited response somewhat erotic in itself: "See how she looks so," Knightley whispered' (Starling, 2007, p.104), an invitation for readerly complicity in witnessing Dora's 'corruption'. Knightley delights in witnessing Dora's responses to sights that make her uncomfortable or that she considers proprietarily 'inappropriate'; for example, when Knightley entreats Dora to look at a scar and tattoo positioned around his navel, Dora reacts with horror as she 'covered my face with the hand that was not holding Lucinda, and whimpered' (Starling, 2007, p.146). Despite this, Knightley compels Dora to look by reassuring her that 'you may look, and still be virtuous. You, why, you have a scrutinizing gaze that *believes your inner wisdom*. Look, I entreat you, so you may better understand me' (Starling, 2007, p.146, my emphasis). Forcing Dora to engage her own 'gaze' arguably constitutes his most insidious mode of exhibiting control over her: as Dora does not *choose* to employ her gaze, but is instead *compelled* to by Knightley, the act of looking arguably becomes a traumatic act of submission rather than an empowering or enlightening personal choice on Dora's part.

Knightley's delight at Dora's shock, together with his reassurance that she can remain virtuous in looking at such shocking material, constitutes a representational manifestation of how a once prurient Victorian fascination with anatomy has been reconfigured instead to reflect what can arguably be described as the contemporary reader's fascination with a seemingly naïve Victorian woman's horrified reaction to the interior body. Seemingly, an element of the fascination for Knightley is to witness another individual (in this instance, Dora) experiencing – for the first time – a sight which is commonplace today (i.e. the inside of the human body), and which would not typically elicit any particular reactions. The perceived naivety and 'innocence' of Dora as a Victorian woman seems a fundamental element of attraction and fascination for both

Knightley and the reader. Louisa Hadley has asserted a popular contemporary perception of the Victorians as ‘prudish’ and ‘repressed’ (2010, p.46), a belief that has resultantly contributed to a lingering fascination ‘prurient curiosity about the period’ (Kaplan, 2007, p.86). However, I wish to argue that Kohlke offers what can be reconfigured as a useful analogy through her focus upon the significance of perceived innocence and ‘purity’ in relation to the representation of the child in neo-Victorian literature to highlight ‘a dialectic through which innocence and corruption/corruptibility (including the *desire* for corruption) reciprocally constitute, produce, and perpetuate each other’ to argue that ‘they do so first in the [...] observer’s mind, responsible for producing and projecting that very dialectic’ (2011b, p.143, original emphasis). In support of this recognition, Kohlke cites James Kincaid who stresses that ‘insisting so loudly upon the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a *subversive echo*: experience, corruption, eroticism’ (1992, p.4, my emphasis). It is plausible to argue for a correlation between the perception of the child and the Victorian woman due to the notion that both were historically perceived as subjects of an innate ‘feminised innocence’ (Knoepflmacher, 1998, p.xii); consequently, the narrative focus upon Dora’s naivety ostensibly seems to reflect a something akin to a nostalgia for innocence, or the ‘uncorrupted’. Rousseau’s forewarning to his readers at the beginning of his *Discourse on Inequality* seems a pertinent reflection of this desire as he prophesizes: ‘you are going to search for the age at which you wish your whole species had stood still [...] you will wish perhaps that you could go back in time’ (1984, p.79), a time when – according to Rousseau’s idealised notion of the ‘noble savage’ who – because ‘uncivilized’ – once existed in a state of pure innocence.

Such a retrospective drive, however, cannot be considered unproblematic or straightforwardly nostalgic in Starling’s text due to the evident and inevitable degradation of this perceived innocence which manifests a perverse desire towards – and, arguably, some level of readerly complicity in – the *corruption* of innocence. This point is symbolically epitomised through Knightley’s seemingly innocuous gifting of a doll to Lucinda. Dora reports that Knightley ‘held [the doll] closer to her, and I could see the sweetest porcelain face looking at her, with rosebud lips and feathery eyelashes, and yellow curls painted over the smooth scalp’ (Starling, 2007, p.139). The appearance of the doll perpetuates the idea of a perfect model of Victorian femininity with its ‘golden curls’ and ‘rosebud lips’, an aesthetic interestingly at odds with Dora’s contextually ‘unfeminine’ appearance as she describes herself as having a ‘snub nose and lank hair [that] gave no beauty to my face, only my chin was round and stuck out like a bun put on the wrong side

of a cottage loaf'; her body is equally as unconventional, being described by Dora as 'all sinewy arms and bony shoulders, with no breasts of hips to speak of, and I knew I lacked femininity because of my muscles' (Starling, 2007, p.15). The reality of Dora's appearance in comparison with the perfect qualities exhibited by the doll serves to undermine popular perceptions and representations of a 'stereotypical' Victorian femininity. The description of the doll's body is also of particular interest: 'if this really were a doll', Dora states, 'I could not fathom why its body was not stiff, not all one with the head' (Starling, 2007, p.139). The doll's unusual constitution becomes a point of fascination for Dora who comments that she had 'never seen a doll that was pretending to be a baby', which unusually had 'jointed limbs and a flexible chest that seemed to be made from India-rubber' (Starling, 2007, p.139). The description of the unconventional structure of the doll – diverging somewhat from the traditionally fragile china dolls prevalent during the Victorian period – proffers an uncanny,<sup>54</sup> 'life-like' softness which enables a certain amount of pliability to be imposed onto its body, rendering it – much like the features of the anatomical model - manipulable.

I would like to suggest that Starling 'embodies' the novel's self-conscious textual engagement with the corruption of innocence within the anomalous and seemingly diseased body of the doll itself, as evidenced by the description of how Knightley 'held it upright, both hands encircling its chest, and squeezed. A noise like the in-breath of a victim with pulmonary disease ensued, followed by the sound of a goat bleating: a high-pitched, 'Maaa-maaa' (Starling, 2007, p.139). The aesthetic perfection of the doll – its intrinsic 'innocence' as a child's toy in conjunction with Dora's initial belief that it is in fact a real infant, as it 'looked remarkably like a tiny baby' (Starling, 2007, p.139) – is undermined by its implied pathos and corruption, as well as Dora's horrified reaction to the doll itself: '[Knightley] held it by the head, and its body hung limply from it, its limbs dangling independently, so I surmised it could not be a doll. *I gasped in shock, and Lucinda screamed*' (Starling, 2007, p.139, my emphasis). Dora's response to the strangeness of the doll mirrors the previous discussion regarding the reader's interest in the novelty of Dora's

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<sup>54</sup> In his work on 'The Uncanny', Freud quotes Ernst Jentsch who expounded upon the uncanny or 'unheimlich' qualities inherent to the doll as an object, which arise from a doubt 'whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate' (Freud, 1955a, p.226). Noting a correlation between the uncanny and neo-Victorian novel which seems pertinent in relation to Dora's response to the doll, Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham have listed Freud's 'psychological triggers for uncanny sensations', which include 'the double; repetition; *the animation of the seemingly dead or, conversely the death-like nature of the seemingly animate*; ghosts or spirits; and the familiar made strange' (2010, p.xv). From this list, they ascertain that 'If we consider these in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, its uncanny nature proves clear: it often represents a 'double' of the Victorian text, mimicking its language, style and plot; [...] it reanimates Victorian genres; [...] and, in doing so, seemingly calls the contemporary novel's "life" into question' (Arias & Pulham, 2010, p.xv, my emphasis).

*shock* at the spectacle of the inner body, which seemingly enables them to experience anew that which was once unfamiliar, recalling Lévi-Strauss's previously-explored sentiments incorporated within the introductory discussion regarding how the familiar and commonplace can come to be rendered strange and 'miraculously transmuted into revelations' (1973, p.18).

The erotic element of the neo-Victorian configuration of corrupted innocence is more aptly captured through Dora's initiation into the unfamiliar underworld of Victorian pornography. Dora's experience of the 'strangeness' of Victorian sexuality is manifested via antiquated terminology such as '*gamahuching, firkytoodling, bagpiping, lallygagging, or minetting*', all words which she confessedly comes to speak 'as if they were my mother tongue' (Starling, 2007, p.163, original emphasis). The novelty of these unfamiliar terms is not only new for Dora, but also for the reader, conflating Dora's initial innocence and subsequent journey into 'experience' (i.e. discovery and familiarity) with their own. Dora's likening of this sexual terminology to the language employed in 'the whimsical poems filled with nonce words that I read to Lucinda at night, only a bit wetter' (Starling, 2007, p.163) functions as a testament to their seemingly innocuous innocence due to their abstraction from the reality of their pornographic significance; additionally, the fact that these terms operate separately from their original referent also recalls a similar charge levied by Jameson at the neo-Victorian itself (as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis). This detachment results in Dora's admission that her 'world became *tinged with unreality*; such literature placated with its tone, written with such levity, good humour, civility and incoherence. It came to be endearing, childish, and meaningless' (Starling, 2007, p.163, my emphasis).

However, this perceived 'childishness' is later usurped by the material, visual 'proof' of the extreme perversions intrinsic to the trade in which she has become embroiled. In an example which highlights the function of visuality in relation to the neo-Victorian, Dora is charged with the task of binding a collection of obscene photographs which depict various deviant sexual behaviours and scenarios. The preface to the text serves as a warning to the reader as well as a justification for its contents as it expounds that:

This volume is for neither the prurient and perfidious, nor the ignorant and innocent. The artist of discernment, who professes the pursuit of truth, the liberation from taboos, and the continued supremacy of Britannia, as the *higher motives* behind his representations, will be best served by its contents. *The nature of such an endeavour compels the reproduction of extreme imagery*, which is a triumph of the technology of our age.

(Starling, 2007, p.204, my emphasis)

The somewhat titillatingly vague preface invites curiosity under the guise of the ‘higher motives’ of scientific and socially-motivated endeavour, which purportedly justifies the extreme images incorporated within the volume.

The disturbing titles of the photographs reveal to the reader the exact nature of the images that Dora is forced to view during the process of binding them: ‘I flicked through. Here, on page 21 entitled ‘The Negro’s Revenge. Young wife violated by Negro in revenge for cruelties by master’. Then, on page 45: Untitled. Stupration of mulatto daughters by father.’ Later on, on page 63: ‘African maid circumcises female word [sic]’ (Starling, 2007, p.204). Although the reader is not able to view the actual images for themselves, the detail in the titles reveals enough graphic information to summon to mind the deviant and disturbing nature of the sexual acts being committed. In this way, the summoning of the reader’s curiosity and prurient interest in the preface is concurrently and swiftly undermined, both by repellent nature of the sexual acts depicted in the photographs, and due to the fact of the impossibility of ‘seeing’ what Dora sees herself. Dora admits that ‘The precious reader, artist or not, was not sufficiently warned by the preface. For these were by no means the worst’ (Starling, 2007, p.204), a sentiment which frustrates the reader through the concealment of information regarding the exact extent and nature of the images which were somehow *worse*, or more horrifying, than these: the reader can be assured that they are suitably shocking, however, due to Dora’s revelation that she subsequently ‘ran into the house and out to the privy where [she] vomited savagely’ (Starling, 2007, p.204).

Arguably, Dora’s admissions signal the reader’s distance from Victorian ‘reality’. Starling’s textual scenarios are constituent of a ‘subversive echo’ described previously by Kincaid, highlighting both contemporary perceptions of an intrinsically feminised Victorian ‘innocence’ while simultaneously evidencing the understated ‘truth’ of nineteenth century society as being characterised by ‘blatant and fragmented perversion’ (Foucault, 2004, p.898), and one which pre-empted our contemporary fascinations as the ‘genesis’ of sexual and epistemophilic profligacy. Indeed, Foucault asserts that ‘It is possible that the west has not been capable of inventing any new pleasures, and it has

doubtless not discovered any original vices' (2004, p.898); recalling Mitchell's acknowledgement of an erroneous contemporary perception of the Victorians as 'quaint' and 'charming', Starling's novel highlights that this perceived Victorian innocence never truly 'existed', a realisation that serves to frustrate the reader's expectations and allegiance with the seemingly subjected, innocent Victorian woman through her evident complicity in the exploitation and objectification of others.

### **'I kiss his neck wound, which has almost gone': The fetishisation, eroticisation, and exploitation of historical wounds and scars**

Dora's contextually controversial sexual relationship with Din, a black slave under her employ, illuminates the extent to which corporeal traumas are eroticised within the neo-Victorian novel and subsequently 'consumed' by the reader. Indeed, Dora herself daydreams about Din's wounds 'consuming' her prior to their sexual encounter and after he returns from a fight with cuts and bruises: 'I catch close his round brown eyes, and the old scars like fossils in the solid rock of his face, but warm, so warm, and alive, and the fresh wound open and gaping like his mouth in to which I am now falling, falling, but I hold on to his teeth, his jagged teeth which are eating my lips' (Starling, 2007, p.341). This instance in the text reveals how the reader themselves consumes – and can plausibly become 'consumed' by – representations of suffering. Dora's sexual relationship with Din also enables her to choose to engage the power of her own gaze for her own sexual pleasure, an act which seemingly constitutes an empowering reclamation of the manipulation of her own gaze from Knightley's control. Fundamentally, Starling's description of her initial sexual encounter with Din also works to highlight the neo-Victorian eroticisation and fetishisation of specifically *historical* wounds and traumas, as well as their overt representational visuality on the body as scars:

I kiss his neck wound, which has almost gone, although I can see fresh scars on his arms and on one shoulder. I press my body towards him, and slip my hands round to his back. They feel something, and feel it again. A groove. It has me caught; I cannot move my fingers from it. Silky and smooth, a long groove, along which my fingers cannot help but trace. And then I lift my head, and I stare at him. I turn him round, but he twists his head back to look at me. On his back are deep, old welt marks, like carriage wheels on mud, the entire length and breadth of his back, and the backs of his legs[.]

(Starling, 2007, p.360)

Dora's eroticisation of the wounds that Din received during his time as a slave is reflective of a distinctly contemporary fascination with genuine forms of historical subjection and suffering, as well as the very nature of the neo-Victorian re-appropriation of historical traumas. Starling's text arguably re-inscribes Din's neo-Victorian body with the corporeal signifiers of his subjection; just as Dora chooses to physically trace Din's scar with her hands, the neo-Victorian itself re-examines and, arguably, eroticises the 'groove' that remains from his suffering – a corporeal trace of a historical trauma – for its significance. Dora's subtle reference to the scars as 'like carriage wheels on mud' also implies an outdated mode of 'travelling' and 'tracing' the scars simultaneously, a process which – as I will now go on to demonstrate – becomes complicated by the personal involvement of Dora (an object of subjugation herself) in Din's subjection.

The interpretation of the neo-Victorian novel's fetishisation of historical 'wounds' is compounded by the sensational combination of traumatic description and erotic suggestion as Din chooses the moments following the consummation of his sexual relationship with Dora to describe to her the barbarity of slavery from his own perspective. Din does this in abjectly horrifying terms, and in doing so emphasises the significance of visuality in his description:

I have seen countless livin' bodies, bodies of my friends, semi-strangled, their backs laid open, every limb mutilated, with veins drainin' and arteries pumpin' out into the soil, and thrashed to within an inch of their life

(Starling, 2007, p.367)

Starling's conflation of erotically-charged circumstances with the horrifying descriptions of corporeal violence is further explored self-reflexively within the novel when Dora and Din discuss the fetishistic fascination proffered by the books they have bound; the erotic and often violent subject-matter they contain; and the readership who buy and 'consume' them. Noting the correlation between historical traumas (specifically that related to the slave trade)<sup>55</sup> and the erotic in nineteenth-century print culture, Colette Colligan asserts that 'the preoccupation with racialized sexual violence around slavery was not simply a Romantic secret or a Victorian peccadillo. The appropriation of slavery imagery was not only part of an emerging commodification of sexuality but also part of a growing underground obscene print culture that fed off cultural fantasies and thrived on their

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<sup>55</sup> The 'neo-slave' narrative has been appropriated as a sub-genre of the neo-Victorian oeuvre, highlighting the significance of the re-appropriation of slavery as a historical (and indeed contemporary) trauma in present-day historical metafiction. Kohlke and Gutleben (2010, p.12) cite Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Valerie Martin's *Property* (2003) as examples of neo-Victorian texts which belong to this sub-set.

repetition and expansion' (2005, p.67). Consequently, 'sentimental portraits of suffering and tortured animals, women, and slaves satisfied a sadistic spectatorship that helped shape the new erotics of cruelty in the late eighteenth century [...] graphic violence and corrupt sexuality of the slave system produced sympathy and disgust amongst many British citizens, but for some it also solicited sexual arousal and fantasy' (Colligan, 2005, p.68).

Reflecting this function in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, Dora pertinently presents Din with the rhetorical question: 'Are you saying they seek out sensation? They want the thrill of possibility?' (Starling, 2007, p.365). Dora's statement not only recalls Victorian sensation fiction as a genre which 'aimed to stimulate readers' nerves, not their moral faculties' (Palmer, 2009, p.87), but also effectively epitomises the neo-Victorian reader's own desires to 'seek out' and consume the sensational, the lurid, and the abject in neo-Victorian fiction. Beth Palmer<sup>56</sup> has noted the relevance of sensation fiction and material culture in relation to neo-Victorian eroticisation of the body to argue that 'sensation fiction's most significant and lasting legacy is a self-consciousness about how the contemporary moment is constructed in and by print culture<sup>57</sup> as it mediates the past' (2009, p.87); for Palmer, this legacy is 'transformed' in the neo-Victorian novel specifically through the pivotal theme of sex (2009, p.92).

That Dora mentions the presence of 'fresh scars' on Din's body after their sexual encounter arguably infers the symbolic perpetuation – and, *in extremis*, the exploitation – of the eroticisation of historical suffering brought about through the conscious re-examination and 'exacerbation' of historical wounds within the neo-Victorian text. This interpretation is compounded by the fact that Dora's specific interest in Din's scars and wounds demonstrates a pertinent fascination with Din's 'otherness' as a racialized subject of perceived exotic 'difference', manifesting as a form of symbolic or figurative 'violence' at the level of the neo-Victorian itself as Starling's representation arguably dismisses Din's individuality in favour of his (racial) representational potential. Sylvia Knightley (Sir Jocelyn Knightley's wife) and her entourage of female friends also share this fascination with Din's 'otherness', evidenced by their requests that he pose for them as a tribal warrior equipped with 'animal skins and spears' (Starling, 2007, p.334), forcing him to act out role-play scenarios for their satisfaction, as Din himself reports:

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<sup>56</sup> Palmer cites examples from Michel Faber's novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), using Agnes Rackham's diaries as an example of 'the consequences of the over- and underexposure to sexual knowledge', as well as from Sarah Waters' novel *Affinity* (1999) in which 'the physical process of writing itself becomes strangely sexualized' (2009, p.92), in support of her discussion; arguably, *The Journal of Dora Damage* constitutes another example of Palmer's discussion.

<sup>57</sup> An extended discussion of Victorian print culture in relation to Victorian Arctic exploration narratives is incorporated within Chapter Two of this thesis.

She would get so cross with me, an' order me, "You stand there, above me, an' hold that spear so, and point it at me, an' make out like you're killin' me!" An' I didn't want to do it. Felt like such a fool. But I did it. "oh, no, no, no, the Negro is killin' me! Help! Help!"

(Starling, 2007, p.332)

Dora's reaction to learning of Din's subjection by Sylvia Knightley seems to reflect the Victorian reality of black racialized sexuality while simultaneously highlighting the contemporary fascination with the very nature of the neo-Victorian readership's engagement with historical narratives and traumas; far from being outraged, Dora is instead astonished and thrilled at the thought of Din's subjection: "The indignity!' I gasped. 'It's outrageous! It's – it's thrilling, and scandalous!" (Starling, 2007, p.332).

Somewhat confoundingly, in this way Dora becomes complicit in Din's subjection in a markedly similar way to Knightley's subjection of her due to the fact that she manipulates Din's racial 'otherness' for her own epistemophilic interests and erotic enjoyment. It is plausible to infer that Starling's appropriation of Dora's sexual relationship in this manner serves a two-fold purpose, one aspect of which is to reflect the propensity of a contemporary phenomenon that Peter McDonald and Mikki Coleman have termed 'hierarchies of oppression' (1999, p.19). Din acknowledges the existence of such a phenomenon through his imposition of a pertinent rhetorical question regarding the pornographic mediation of racialised sexuality: 'Why is it they think they're bein' dangerous lookin' at a black man with a white woman? [...] Cos it's seen to be the wrong way round; the wrong balance of power. White over black, man over woman, that's the right way, ain't it? Black man, white woman, though, stirs it all up, causes bother' (Starling, 2007, p.365). Yet despite their sexual relationship seemingly 'stirring up' this 'balance of power', Dora is revealed as the one who is ultimately empowered, as noted by Novák who notices that 'Din is [...] the only man who does not possess the male gaze that conveys power over women. Hence when Dora, on their first meeting, forces herself to look him squarely in the eye in order to assert her authority in the workshop, she finds that he cannot reciprocate because of a permanent injury to his left eye' (2013, p.125). Novák also draws attention to the subtle wording employed by Starling in the context of the characters' sexual relationship to indicate the impossibility of an autonomy achieved through their sexual relationship due to Din's historical and racial 'otherness' as 'Din "looks back into [Dora's] eyes *as if he could* transfer the image to [her] that way" [...] In other words, this passage already contains an implicit admission of the impossibility of such a reversal'

(2013, p.125; quoting Starling, 2006, p.373, added emphasis). This scenario necessarily reifies Din's subordination in relation to Dora.

Through Dora's scopophilic gaze, Din becomes an eroticised equivalent of the commonplace display of people from alternative cultures and geographies who were considered curiosities. The notion of human exhibition is, in fact, a particularly timely subject: on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the BBC released a news story regarding the cancellation of a 'controversial art performance featuring black actors in a recreation of a "human zoo"' due to 'protests at its opening night' at The Barbican, London.<sup>58</sup> The exhibition – called Exhibit B – was intended as 'a modern response to the "human zoo", in which Africans were put on show for the curiosity of the 19th and early 20th Century Westerners', and purportedly involved 'actors in chains and cages', leading protestors to label the show 'an outrageous act of complicit racism'. The exhibition would have enabled visitors to 'walk through a room in which black actors portray both historical human exhibits as well as modern-day asylum-seekers' with the aim of 'confront[ing] the objectification of human beings and the abhorrent historical attitudes to race during the colonial era, and to question how far society has moved on'. The contemporary reverberations of the issues that the exhibition was intended to confront can be related to Starling's representations of racially-motivated voyeurism, highlighting their evident contemporary significance, as can the allegation of complicity in the very mode of exploitation that the exhibition was intended to denounce, an issue which is implicitly explored in Starling's text.

The parallels which can be rendered between this failed exhibition and Din's subjection to Dora's voyeuristic gaze in *The Journal of Dora Damage* also highlights the problematic role of the reader/viewer who – like Dora – may remain ignorant of their unintentional and unknowing investment or implication in perpetuating exploitative forms of 'consumption'. Starling seems to offer closeted insights into this function of the text throughout the novel which hint at the reader's lurid expectations with regards to discovering the details of Din's subjection, mirrored through Dora's probing questions and enthrallment in response to his confession:

'What else did they do?' But he would not answer. He simply sat and smiled. So I moved slightly closer to him. A question burnt my lips; I did not know if I dared ask, until it spoke itself for me. 'Do they touch you, Din?' I said quietly. He paused, and held my gaze, still grinning. 'Oh, Lord' do they touch me!' He whistled through his teeth.

(Starling, 2007, p.210)

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<sup>58</sup> Retrieved 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2014, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-29341361>

The anticipation built around Din's revelation – the silence, the detail of Dora shuffling closer to him, and the dramatic pause – seem constitutive of the very way that an 'erotics of form' would function, as Davis explains: 'While plots, by their very nature, demand a certain amount of delay and anticipation – marking all texts, to some extent, with the dynamic of pleasure and pain – excessively plotted forms of delay [...] perpetuate pleasure in the movement of delay itself, rather than in the moment of discovery' (2012, p.40). Yet the exploitative nature of Din's experience might arguably render this 'erotics of form' instead as an eroticised traumatic silence which reveals his inability to effectively reflect the extent of his subjugation. The 'confessional'<sup>59</sup> approach seems to imply complicity and proximity between Din and the reader, an invitation to share in the experience of discovering the shocking 'truth' of his defilement: and yet, as with the established function of traumatic memory, this seeming collusion is ultimately frustrated as Din fails to reveal any details or specific examples of his exploitative debasement. As explored later in this thesis, withholding detail in this way serves to deliberately forestall the reader's expectations and desires for a detailed narrative of eroticised subjugation, the absence of which arguably serves to promote self-reflection in relation to their own readerly expectations, desires, and motivations when approaching such narratives.

### ***'de humanis corporis fabrica': The somatic focus of the neo-Victorian re-inscriptive impulse***

Dora's unknowing complicity in the subjection of others is further explored and compounded through her role in the process of creating a literal 'body made into writing', both in terms of the pornographic literature which she is commissioned to bind by the Noble Savages, as well as through the 'mystery' material – which Dora eventually discovers to be human skin – that she is provided with for use on their consummate commission, ironically titled '*de humanis corporis fabrica*'.<sup>60</sup> Diprose refuses to reveal the type of material presented to Dora for the purpose specifically, describing it with gleeful relish as 'imperial leather' (Starling, 2007, p.342); consequently, the nature of the material remains a mystery to Dora until she experiences a dreadful moment of clarity in which the clues offered as to the true nature of the material suddenly come together after an unwitting prompt from Sylvia Knightley:

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<sup>59</sup> The 'confessional' approach is also appropriated by some examples of 'misery lit', discussed previously in the Introduction.

<sup>60</sup> This is an allusion to Vesalius's anatomical text of the same name which was published in 1543. The phrase literally and fittingly translates as 'On the fabric of the human body'.

My shoulders, Dora. I was telling you. Jossie used to kiss them and tell me that no woman had finer skin. My skin was the nonpareil of everything. He even corresponded with Valentine about the smoothness of my skin: this Dutch paper, he would write, is smoother than the *peau de ma femme*<sup>61</sup> [...] oh, he would say, that he wanted to bind a volume of the finest love poetry in the skin from my shoulders after my death, so he would never have to be parted from their smoothness

(Starling, 2007, p.385, original emphasis)

Dora's physical reaction to her realisation that her latest commission was in fact bound in human skin is notably visceral as her own body responds to the horror of the situation that she finds herself in: 'I felt my supper rise in my throat, my body revolting at myself, and at the world to which I was so inescapably chained. [...] I strode up and down, grasping my hair, and wrenched my face from side to side as if searching for a way out' (Starling, 2007, p.386). Dora's frenzied disgust interestingly demonstrates a desire to escape her *own* skin: 'I wanted to bathe myself, to scrub myself with the toughest brush from head to foot, but [...] even then I knew I would never feel clean again, not until I had ripped every inch of skin off my sinful flesh' (Starling, 2007, p.386). Dora seems to recognise that her skin – her material, corporeal self – renders her vulnerable to a very literal form of objectification, as per the fate of the 'Hindoo widow' (Starling, 2007, p.388) whose skin forms the binding of the *Noble Savages*' text. Despite Dora's disgust at this sudden unwelcome revelation, the 'real' nature of the material has been available – although subtly hidden – throughout the text; for example, when Knightley states prior to this episode in the text (and as referenced in this chapter's title) that it is 'Strange to think we find such beauty in the posthumous scarification and gilding of an animal's hide. Like a tattoo, on dead skin' (Starling, 2007, p.141).

The threat of creating a textualised 'body of writing' is again made literal towards the end of the novel when Dora is drugged by the fumes from an opium den occupied by Diprose and Knightley and, while unconscious, forcibly and unwillingly inscribed with the logotype of the *Noble Savages*. In her drugged state before slipping into unconsciousness Dora recalls seeing the instrument which will be used to tattoo her skin, which she describes as a 'long stick of bamboo, with a fan of thin needles stuck into the end like a fantastical bookbinding tool' (Starling, 2007, p.404), the likeness serving to correlate Dora's body with a book itself, her skin the leather which is to be inscribed. Upon regaining consciousness, Dora discovers this inscription upon her body (specifically, upon her left buttock):

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<sup>61</sup> Another phrase attributed to Hankey which compounds the likelihood that he informs Starling's characterisation of Sir Knightley; see Gibson (2001), p.31.

On the left cheek it seemed as if someone had painted an ivy wreath, in the centre of which was a portrait of a young woman with a snub nose and an indoor cap and ribbons. She looked not unlike me. On the right cheek, someone had painted the insignia of the Noble Savages, and the word *Nocturnus* underneath.

(Starling, 2007, p.408)

Dora's tattoo is symbolic not only of the branding, and subsequent symbolic 'possession', of Dora; it also acts as a permanent reminder of her complicit role in the world of the 'nocturnus', the metaphorical commodification of 'skin' through the pornography that she has helped to publish. Knightley asserts possession of Dora as his own textualised 'product', going so far as to joke with Diprose that Dora 'shall be our perfect pocket book', as the skin from her behind would 'cover little more than an octavo' (Starling, 2007, p.412). Dora physically struggles against this fate as represented through the irremovable finality of her branding during which Dora experiences a physical collision with the anatomical model discussed previously in this chapter:

as I kicked backwards again, he intercepted my ankle with his foot, and I fell forwards. He would not relinquish his grip on my hands, so he stumbled on top of me, and we collided with the anatomy model, which crashed to the floor too, and we were a mess of limbs and organs, chipped paint and bruised bones

(Starling, 2007, pp.410-411)

Dora's collision with the anatomical model lends itself to several pertinent interpretations with regards to the previously-discussed idea of 'collapse'. Seltzer finds that the essence of 'wound culture' can be characterised by the breaking down of binary distinctions surrounding materiality, i.e. 'the collapse of the distinction between inner and outer, observer and scene, representation and perception, as the failure of the subject's proper distance with respect to representation' (1998, p.269). Dora's own position in relation to representation – i.e., to the anatomical model as an object of scientifically-eroticised aesthetic pleasure which, as discussed previously, Dora feels to be 'interchangeable' with her own body – is compromised by the blurring of boundaries between the model and her own body when they collide. At this moment in the text, Dora becomes aware of the very real threat which faces her: of her potential and intended status as a piece of art herself. On one hand, this realisation recalls Baudrillard's idea of the simulacra, which supplants the original: on the other, it also summons to mind the Greek myth of Pygmalion's statue which came to life (albeit in 'reverse', as Dora is to be turned into an inanimate object through the removal of her skin), Knightley reflects upon Dora's intended status as he

dryly states to Diprose, 'I see that you are struggling to unveil your Galatea to me' (Starling, 2007, p.410). Bronfen explains that as the heroine's body is 'gazed at, deciphered, imitated, and ultimately replaced by something else, as physical inscription passes into metaphorical inscription or vice versa, the troping involved either engenders the protagonist's death or results from it' (1992, p.226).

However, death does not result from this collision: instead, where previously Dora experienced the manipulation of the wax models' organs sympathetically, she manages to establish her own agency, a symbolic empowerment which arguably champions the role of the neo-Victorian itself as a far cry from a 'nostalgic' re-engagement, but instead imbued with its own literary 'agency'. In a statement which epitomises this point when 'translated' in relation to the neo-Victorian, Grosz champions the relevance and necessity of 'dissolving oppositional categories' as a means of '[upsetting] the frameworks by which [...] binary pairs are considered' (p.24), as she asserts that:

The body is neither – while also being both – the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined. In the face of social constructionism, the body's tangibility, its matter, its (quasi) nature may be invoked; but in opposition to essentialism, biologism, and naturalism, *it is the body as cultural product that must be stressed.*

(1994, p.24, my emphasis)

In effectively appropriating the collapse of the distinction between the inner and outer body, Starling's representation of the literal collapse of the anatomical model seems also to reflect the 'collision' of the (historical) subject and (neo-Victorian) object. Such a conflation reinforces the fact that the body, much like neo-Victorian returns to nineteenth century pornography and sadistic practices, is a cultural product of the present, and as such reflects contemporary preoccupations which, in Starling's text, include the pervasiveness of contemporary vehicles for the exploitation of 'Otherness' via the manifestation of a 'perverse' nostalgia.

Despite reclaiming her own agency, Dora ultimately remains branded by the irremovable tattoo, a permanent reminder of the traumatic ordeal that she was subjected to; however, in a way reflective of the neo-Victorian novel's re-inscriptive impulse, she chooses to take 'ownership' of her tattoo by transforming it from a stigmatizing 'brand' into her own piece of art with the help of Pansy (a 'fallen woman' hired as a maid by Dora in sympathy of her circumstances):

A bit at a time, she inked roses (true love), hyacinths (forgiveness), daffodils (respect), lily (to ward against unwanted visitors), nasturtiums (a mother's love) and of course, pansies (merriment) over my right buttock, until the insignia of the Noble Savages was completely overgrown and invisible beneath the flora.

(Starling, 2007, p.429)

Dora's voluntary re-inscription of her body enables her to take possession of it once again by creating something beautiful and seemingly empowering out of a mark designed to irremovably symbolise control and possession, an act which Dora advocates: 'Author your own body. Walk your own text. Is it not constantly being read anyway, each time you walk up the street?' (Starling, 2007, p.392). Her adaptation of the initial tattoo not only repositions Dora as the 'author' of her own body, but can also be interpreted in light of the neo-Victorian re-inscriptive impulse; building upon what is already present, the neo-Victorian adapts, transforms and reinvigorates what we think we know about – and indeed, *how* we think about – the Victorians themselves.

Yet, an alternative interpretation questions the extent to which her adaptation of the tattoo can truly be considered an empowering mode of self-representation, or rather whether it might be a means of 'covering up' – or of negating – her own role in the exploitation of otherness. As this thesis demonstrates, the neo-Victorian often complicates any seemingly 'straightforward' interpretation by its intrinsic – and often barbed – duplicity; the fact that Dora facilitates the empowerment of other women through the creation of her own publishing house constitutes a redeeming act, but, perceptively, cannot negate the reality of her previous implication in the exploitation of others. Arguably, this dynamic reaches the very heart of the conundrum at the centre of consideration within this thesis: that the neo-Victorian can purport to operate 'redemptively' to highlight the exploitative nature of eroticised historical traumas for contemporary consumption, while necessarily participating in the very mode(s) of exploitation that they seek to denounce.

### **Conclusion: or, 'Hyperion to a satyr; antidote to a poison'**

Knightley's self-professed vindication for his complicity in the exploitation of others seems a fitting point through which to summarise the conclusions reached within this discussion of Starling's text. As the novel draws to a close and Knightley meets with Dora for the final time, he proudly states that he has always fought for liberty through his pornographic publications: indeed, he chastises Dora for questioning his motivations: 'How dare you accuse me of not fighting for freedom. It is all I have ever worked for'

(Starling, 2007, p.439), a question which Dora, in turn, counters with the overtly pertinent riposte that ‘It is a peculiar freedom [...] which depends on the subjugation of others for its existence’ (Starling, 2007, p.439). If through voicing her poignant sentiment Dora implicitly speaks *against* the re-appropriation of historical traumas and corporeal suffering as a mode of subjugation of the suffering historical subject, this message is perhaps undermined somewhat by Starling’s *own* appropriation of suffering within her novel itself. Such a paradoxical situation seems to reflect the neo-Victorian as being somewhat short-circuited, or stuck in a ‘vicious circle’, whereby revisiting and re-dressing historical trauma and corporeal subjection necessitates its literary re-appropriation; yet in doing so, such instances are endlessly revived and perpetuated in a way which reveals more about our own ominous attitudes and desires than about the Victorians themselves. As Dora herself exclaims, ‘Hyperion to a satyr; antidote to a poison; this contrary world threw up to us a clash of perspectives, and Damage’s was the point of collision’ (Starling, 1997, p.205).<sup>62</sup>

In Chapter Two I explore how an alternative type of ‘contrary world’ is evoked in Barrett’s novel *The Voyage of the Narwhal*. An underexplored text in neo-Victorian criticism, Barrett’s novel re-presents the neo-Victorian revival of what was once a dynamic and exciting Victorian preoccupation with arctic exploration. Set against the culturally-traumatic backdrop of the failed Franklin expedition, and focussing predominantly upon the lexicon of visuality, corporeality, and materiality in the text, the forthcoming discussion expands upon the idea of the textual ‘explorer’ discussed towards the beginning of Chapter One to consider the concept of the vicarious ‘traveller’ of traumatic history, and the not unproblematic implications of such a textual mode of peregrination.

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<sup>62</sup> The phrase ‘Hyperion to a satyr’ is a reference to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (published 1603), in which the protagonist Hamlet soliloquises that his Father was:

‘So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother,  
That he might not beitem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly’

(1982, Act I, Scene ii: lines 141-144).

Hamlet’s allusion to his father, the late King, as Hyperion (a Titan God in Greek mythology) in comparison to Claudius as a satyr (a drunken, lustful mythological woodland creature characterised as being half-goat and half-man) reflects the contrasting perceptions of Dora’s enterprise, and its simultaneously liberating and exploitative implications.

## Chapter Two

### **‘As if the stories would heal the crew’s wounds and furies’: ‘Urgent Flesh’, Visuality, and Traumatic Representation in**

#### **Andrea Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal***

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*It is a delightful characteristic of these times, that new and cheap means are continually being devised, for conveying the results of actual experience, to those who are unable to obtain such experiences for themselves; [...] New worlds open out to them, beyond their little worlds, and widen their range of reflection, information, sympathy, and interest.*  
(Dickens, 1850, p.77)

*“The Voyage of the Narwhal – aping the famous works of exploration, I suppose.”*  
(Barrett, 2000, p.331)

As exemplified by Dickens’ sentiments contained in the epigraph to this chapter, the nineteenth century saw a distinct rise in visual modes of representation such as the ‘moving panorama’ which – as discussed in greater detail shortly – better facilitated for their audience the ‘experience’ of Arctic travel and a sense of enhanced proximity to alternative geographic locations. It is partly for this reason that, in 1856, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins jointly produced and staged a theatrical piece which they called ‘The Frozen Deep: A Drama’. The play – which has been described as ‘a rather conventional melodrama’ – involved ‘the rivalry of two men for one woman, and the subsequent embarkation of both on a fictionalized Arctic expedition’ during which ‘a parlorful of women’ are left ‘pining away for their absent loves’ (Potter, 2007, p.138). For Russell Potter, the play was ‘another, and perhaps the greatest, of the Arctic shows through which the middle classes of Britain stanchd their anxieties over the continuing mystery and fear that surrounded the Franklin expedition’ (2007, p.138), as discussed further in a moment; also pertinent is the fact that the plot of this Victorian play also noticeably parallels the basis of Barrett’s neo-adventure novel *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, which mediates similar themes and anxieties.

As this chapter demonstrates, Barrett’s text works in a mode of self-conscious recognition and reappropriation of the legacy of nineteenth-century visuality in relation to traumatic Arctic representation. Along a similar vein to the sea-voyage depicted in Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers* (discussed later in Chapter Three), Barrett’s text charts the traumatic voyage of Erasmus – a naturalist and scholar – on the *Narwhal*’s voyage across the Canadian Arctic Ocean under the command of Captain Zeke Voorhees.

The *Narwhal* sets sail from Philadelphia in 1855 with the purpose of discovering what became of the real-life English explorer Sir John Franklin and his crew of 129 men,<sup>63</sup> all of whom famously disappeared during a quest to discover the North-West Passage which set sail from England in the year 1845. The tragic fate that befell the crew has been gradually unearthed as time has passed, although the location of the ship and of the bodily remains of the captain and many of the crew have only very recently been discovered, their whereabouts having prevailed as a mystery for over one hundred and fifty years.<sup>64</sup>

The disappearance of Franklin and his crew was considered by many Victorians to be ‘the greatest mystery of its age’, and became ‘a powerful force for sympathy between the United States and Great Britain as both countries vied to solve the enigma of his final fate’ (Potter, 2007, p.4). With the passing of time the mystery and uncertainty surrounding the ships’ disappearance fostered a lingering, haunting sense of unease amongst the Victorian public that was eventually compounded by the revelation of horrifying evidence that the crew had ‘met with a fate as melancholy and dreadful as it is possible to imagine’ (Rae, 1855, p.12) and had in fact been forced to resort to cannibalism, as first reported in a letter sent by Dr John Rae after his own quest to search for the remains<sup>65</sup> in 1854:

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<sup>63</sup> According to the National Maritime Museum’s official website: [http://www.rmg.co.uk/explore/sea-and-ships/facts/explorers-and-leaders/sir-john-franklin-\(1786-1847\)](http://www.rmg.co.uk/explore/sea-and-ships/facts/explorers-and-leaders/sir-john-franklin-(1786-1847)) (Information retrieved 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> On the 9<sup>th</sup> September of this year (2014), the BBC News reported that Franklin’s ‘fabled Arctic ship’ had in fact been discovered in ‘the waters of Victoria Strait, just off King William Island’, in which sonar images ‘clearly show the wreckage of a ship on the ocean floor’ (para. 5). The report describes the find as ‘the biggest archaeological discovery the world has seen since the opening of Tutankhamun’s tomb almost 100 years ago’ (2014, para.9) and notes that, from the sonar images, it appears that ‘a huge amount of evidence will be preserved from the expedition, possibly even including the remains of the men’ before repeating the belief that the crew had ‘resorted to cannibalism before they died’ (2014, para. 13). It is interesting that this recent news report, like the reports from the time of the ship’s disappearance, also focusses in on the same kinds of titillating details and taboo concept of potential cannibalism (See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-29131757>). Indeed, the discovery has also already engendered renewed interest in the ‘haunting’ qualities of the tragic myth, as revealed in a BBC News article by Tom Heyden titled ‘The painting reputed to make students fail exams’, which outlines a lingering ‘urban legend’ that sitting in front of Edwin Landseer’s painting ‘Man Proposes, God Disposes’ (1864) which hangs in Royal Holloway and which depicts two polar bears devouring what might conceivably be human remains from a shipwreck, will bring bad luck, or even drive the person unfortunate enough to be in proximity to it insane. ‘In the 1970s, fear of the curse reached fever pitch’, the article explains, ‘and a student point blank refused to be seated near it’, resulting in the registrar covering it in ‘a massive union jack flag’: ever since, the article states, ‘the same flag has adorned the painting every year during exams’ (Heyden, 2014, para.3). Reportedly, this tradition has been ongoing for four decades, but the urban myth itself has evolved to purport that one student had stared directly into one of the polar bears’ eyes, and had subsequently fallen into a trance-like state before committing suicide, although not before inscribing the words “The polar bears made me do it” onto his/her exam paper (Heyden, 2014, para.3). Of course, the article reassuringly states, this incident never occurred, and ‘No evidence exists to the contrary in the university’s archives’ (Heyden, 2014, para.4). It will be of interest to follow the development of this discovery in the popular imagination to see whether the revival of Franklin’s legacy will elicit a new ‘wave’ of narratives and engagements – and especially neo-Victorian accounts - on the subject.

<sup>65</sup> This information was first communicated in a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1854 and sent to Governor George Simpson of the Hudson’s Bay Company. According to Potter (2007, pp.98-99), Rae had been engaged in a surveying expedition to the coast of the Boothia Peninsula following Franklin’s expedition in 1854, during which he discovered compelling evidence that Franklin and his men had died of starvation. The letter was

From the mutilated state of many of the bodies and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched Countrymen had been driven to the last dread alternative – cannibalism – as a means of prolonging existence.

(Rae, 1855, p.16)

Dickens justified his inclusion of the entirety of the letter with an editorial intervention in which he states that ‘The preoccupation of the public mind has dismissed this subject easily for the present; but, we assume its great interest, and the serious doubts we hold of its having been convincingly set at rest, to be absolutely certain to revive’ (Preamble to Rae, 1855, p.12). Dickens was proven to be absolutely correct: Rae’s disturbing report proved to be of profound significance to the Victorian public, and ‘would finally give shape to the long-repressed fears of the British public, and forever alter the psychic as much as the physical landscape of the Arctic’ (Potter, 2007, p.99).

With this assertion in mind, this chapter will explore how the lingering trauma of the Franklin mythos has been used as a mode of return to the Arctic within the neo-Victorian novel. Barrett’s novel returns specifically to the historical moment after Franklin and his crew had failed to return to England as its point of departure, combining factual documents – such as excerpts from Victorian expedition narratives, as well as anthropological and ethnological texts. It also includes inter-textual references to historical ballads (such as ‘Lady Franklin’s Lament’) and allusions to sensational Victorian fiction to offer a self-conscious reflection not only upon the nature of the neo-Victorian novel’s return to Victorian exploration narratives themselves, but to what Shane McCorristine has described as ‘one of the most traumatic disasters of the Victorian period’ (2013, p.60). In consideration of the essential sublimity of the arctic and Kristeva’s recognition that ‘the abject is edged with the sublime’ (1982, p.11), this chapter will also explore Barrett’s representations of the physical body to explore the propensity for the neo-Victorian novel to ‘focus on redefinitions of the limits between mind and body, matter and life, and hence on the traumatic understanding of the unclear boundaries of the human’ (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.13). In consideration of Kohlke’s proposal that ‘in the experience of trauma and the sublime, the living self encounters its potential unbecoming, its utter self-alterity’ (2011a, p.14), this chapter will conclude with a consideration of Barrett’s apparent

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later printed in full in *Household Words* - a journal edited by Charles Dickens - in 1855, who explained its incorporating in full with the sceptical statement, ‘we do not feel justified in omitting any part of it; believing, as we do, that it is a very unsatisfactory document on which to found such strong conclusions as it takes for granted’ (Rae, 1855, p.12).

privileging of spiritual transcendence over bodily corporeality in the face of traumatic modes of exploitation.

### **Contextualising Victorian Arctic Exploration Narratives**

Arctic exploration held a privileged and important place in the imagination of the Victorian public, a fascination which became more immediate after the embarkation of the Franklin expedition – which ‘departed in May 1845 amid much fanfare and optimism’ (McCorristine, 2013, p.61) – captured the public imagination on an international scale. Potter contextualises the significance of Arctic exploration as he asserts that, ‘Imagined yet unseen, the Arctic functioned for the nineteenth century much as the moon and outer space did for the twentieth: a place where, against a backdrop of nameless coastlines and unfamiliar seas, the human drama was enacted in its most condensed and absolute form’ (2007, p.3). Despite being relatively removed from the far-reaching tendrils of English imperialism, the Arctic space had potential as a shipping route which would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, opening new avenues for trade and commerce. Lisa Bloom passes comment upon this fact in reference to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in her opening discussion of polar discourse, noting that ‘Marlow, while writing about Africa, brings in an unexpected reference to the North Pole’ in which he comments upon the ‘blank spaces on the earth’ which ‘looked particularly inviting on a map’ (1993, p 1). Bloom posits that ‘As long as the North Pole remained imperfectly charted and still remote from the knowledge of the West it had a romantic appeal, by the very fact of its blankness on a map’ (1993, p.1). Interestingly, Jen Hill also makes reference to Conrad’s novel in relation to the Arctic setting to highlight the fact that Franklin’s legacy has contemporarily been somewhat relegated to the side-lines:

In the opening pages of *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator names two of the great “Knights” of British exploration, Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin. Readers can still place Drake, but most modern editions describe Franklin in a brief footnote as a nineteenth-century explorer who commanded an ill-fated expedition in search of the Northwest Passage.

(2008, p.1)

What both Bloom and Hill have perceived through these references to Conrad’s text is the significance of the Arctic as a space which ‘accompanies Britain’s expansion into Africa and its recognition that its imperial pre-eminence would not last’ (Hill, 2008, p.4). Felix

Driver queries whether the Arctic might provide a means of considering empire, as he states: ‘Maybe the “myths” surrounding ice and the English imagination were not quite so powerful or coherent as they pretended to be; [...] maybe there was something about the material realities of polar environments that always exceeded or escaped the gaze of empire’ (2010, p.626).

Nonetheless, the plight and experiences of arctic explorers – and in particular, of Franklin and his men – who attempted to discover the Northwest Passage emerged as increasingly common themes in both literary and visual culture of the time, as the polar space came to represent ‘the limit of both empire and human experience’ (Hill, 2008, p.3). The Arctic was also a thrilling space due to its essential sublimity; consequently, according to Chauncey Loomis, the reading public ‘created in their minds ‘an Arctic that was at least partly imaginary in its sublimity’ as ‘Their imagined Arctic was a place of terror, but even in its terror it was beautiful in the sublime way that immense mountains or the vast reaches of space are beautiful’ (1977, p.110). Loomis also stresses that ‘the sublimity of the Arctic depended on its imagined emptiness as well as its vastness and coldness’, as these features specifically fostered a perception amongst the public of the Arctic as ‘a space in which a cosmic romance could be acted out: man facing the great cold forces of Nature and surviving if not prevailing over them’ (1977, p.110).

Such perceptions of the Arctic space were fostered primarily through literary representations which often worked to compound culturally specific perceptions; as Driver proclaims, ‘the imaginative power of tales of heroism and disaster in frozen climes often has been treated as an essential ingredient in the making of potent myths of Englishness, empire, and masculinity’ (2010, pp.625-626). Potter, who primarily explores the prominence of the Arctic within visual representations specifically, notes that ‘Nineteenth-century encounters with the Arctic in print were at once more varied and more embedded in the rhythms and routines of daily life than those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries’ (2008, pp.3-4). Janice Cavell has also explored the emergence of the nineteenth-century fascination with Arctic exploration in relation to print-culture at the time, charting ‘the vast amount of nineteenth-century print devoted to Franklin’ (2008, p.4) and ‘the reading experience of the nineteenth-century audiences who followed the Arctic story with fascinated attention over the years from 1818-1860’ (2008, p.3). Various regarded within public perception as an on-going ‘epic’ tale, and even characteristic of a romance, the Arctic and its narratives of survival and failure came to be understood ‘not merely as a series of intensely interesting events, but as a story which had naturally and of its own

accord taken on a literary form' (Cavell, 2008, p.28). Resultantly, the Victorian reading public kept track of the Arctic story primarily through serialisations and periodicals, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Eventually, and in testament to the immense popularity of these serialisations, various fictional works were also produced in reflection of the public's sustained interest in Arctic exploration. The publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*<sup>66</sup> in 1818, for example, begins and ends in this mysterious 'country of eternal light' (1992, p.15), a fictional insight into what was perceived as 'the inestimable benefit [...] [of] discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite' (1992, p.16). In the same year, Eleanor Anne Porden – who was the first wife of John Franklin – published her nationalist poem *The Arctic Expeditions* (1818). In her review of Hill's *White Horizon* (2009), Alexandra Neel stipulates that Porden's poem appropriates the Arctic setting 'to assert women's powerful role in empire building' (2009, p.499). Indeed, Hill herself contends that Porden's two hundred line poem 'makes clear that the act of making arctic geography legible is male, but for Porden, even if women are physically excluded from legible nation-making projects, they are essential to them' as 'the British male identity that coalesces in those projects is an expression of domestic values and female virtues,' and therefore 'British femininity is necessary to an imperialism that justifies itself as extending those values and virtues to wild or uncivilized places' (2008, p.69). As a result, Porden used arctic exploration as a means to 'write women into male-only heroic narratives of Arctic exploration not only by revealing their centrality to it, but by claiming women's authorship for the production of Arctic narratives and thus in its larger project of national identity building' (Hill, 2008, p.69).

### **Neo-Victorian returns to Victorian Arctic Exploration**

Such comments are resoundingly significant when considering how – and, integrally, why – the Arctic setting has been re-appropriated within neo-Victorian literature. Contemporary author Margaret Atwood has specifically noted the implications and potential which manifests itself 'when *women* enter the northern landscape, either as authors, or as female or male protagonists created by women authors' (2004a, p.108). Atwood asks, 'What new

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<sup>66</sup> The constitution of the 'Monster' (constructed from various individual body parts of the deceased) in Shelley's novel is also of some inter-textual significance to the end of the novel in light of Tom's creation of the Tupilaq, a creature which – according to Inuit mythology – is created from the various bones and remains of other animals to create a form a 'nightmare' creature. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

possibilities are there, for outrage, treachery, salvation, and refuge, or merely harmless play, when women get their paws on those mainly manly Northern icons?’ (2004a, p.108). Indeed, Barrett – as a female author like Shelley and Porden before her – similarly re-appropriates the arctic as a discursive space for the reflection and consideration of Victorian gender dynamics, particularly in relation to scientific discourses (as discussed previously in relation to *The Journal of Dora Damage* in Chapter One). Heilmann, for one, has noted the gendered implications of *The Voyage of the Narwhal*’s ‘titular echo of The Voyage of the Beagle’ – the title of Darwin’s journal of research, published originally in 1839 – which she describes as implicitly ‘[retracing] a Darwinesque scenario, offering an alternative vision of the Darwinian naturalist equipped with a feminine sensibility’ (2009, p.4). Heilmann describes the protagonist’s essentially ‘feminine’ sensibility as ‘a quality conducive to an empathetic response to the ethnic and sexual Other, which also allows for a female contribution to the naturalist project’ (2009, p.4): although I do not ascribe to this particular assertion, I do find Barrett’s narrative oscillation between the men’s exploration in the Arctic setting and the women left at ‘home’ in Philadelphia a pertinent one with regards to re-imagining Victorian gender dynamics, working to highlight the absence of women from the space of exploration and the implications of this, as well as to the ways that this oscillation interrupts and frustrates the reader’s sense of vicarious ‘travelling’. Nonetheless, the neo-Victorian investment in fostering an empathetic response to those who would be categorised as ‘Other’ remains of vital importance to the focus of this thesis, as explained in the introductory discussion; as the forthcoming chapter demonstrates, visuality is integral to this purpose.

Arguably, the lexicon of visuality and traumatic representation in relation to the Arctic was originally established in the nineteenth century. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century – and after a substantial amount of time had passed since Franklin’s ship had been lost, and the crew were deemed less and less likely to be discovered alive – a significant and telling ‘shift’ occurred in the public’s engagement with mediations of the Arctic. The reading public initially diverted their interest towards the macabre and sensational accounts as proffered by scandal sheets and ‘penny dreadfuls’ before turning their attention to visual representations such as the moving panorama. For Dickens – whose delight at this shift is captured in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter – these new forms of visual representation ‘derive their worth from their ability to provide the masses with an imaginative means of travel, a kind of vicarious tourism without the cumbersome material problems involved in travel’ (Buckland, 2007, p.682).

From his contemporary perspective, however, and perhaps given the notable interest that the Victorian public had for visual representations of catastrophe, Potter characterises this shift from literary to visual media as ‘more fervid, more corporeal visions of the Arctic, visions that moved and flickered. Visions that broke through the static wall of the panoramic circle with a far more immediate terror’ (2007, p.85). As Buckland expounds, ‘size, spectacle, and the pleasures of fear in the face of calamitous disasters [...] turned nature into performance, familiarizing their crowds with exaggerated versions of popular science’ (2007, p.683). Visual encounters thereby proffered a ‘sense of immediacy and reality’ to the viewer’s experience of the arctic (Potter, 2007, p.85), and one which offered greater proximity to the sublime magnificence and fear of polar spaces.

It is around this time – and due to their recognition of this shift towards visual mediation and representation of the Arctic specifically – that Collins and Dickens jointly produced their arctic-based show ‘The Frozen Deep’, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is plausible to infer that what Potter seems to have recognised and revealed via his sentiments about Dickens’ and Collins’ play as one of the primary means of mediating the public’s anxieties concerning the Franklin expedition is the essential *visuality* of trauma which ultimately connects both past and present imaginative representations of Arctic exploration. Ann Kaplan, for one, has stated that ‘visuality is central to trauma precisely because of the absence or delay of symbolization’ (2005, p.126), while Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg have similarly commented upon ‘the simultaneous presence and absence of trauma as a structuring subject of representation’ (2006, p.x), noting that:

The formulation of trauma as discourse is predicated upon metaphors of visuality and image as unavoidable carrier of the unrepresentable. From primal scene to flashback to screen memory to the dream, much of the language deployed to speak trauma’s character is emphatically, if not exclusively, visual. It may even be argued that the very form taken by trauma as a phenomenon is only, however asymptotically or not, understood as or when pictured.

(2006, pp.xi-xii)

Potter himself associates this move towards material visual displays and mediations with the essential *immateriality* of Franklin and his crew, which ‘cloaked a rising gorge of materiality, a corporeal dread that vague allusions to “the contents of kettles” only fed and festered’ (2007, p.109). This is certainly an interesting and pertinent concept in relation to what Amy Montz describes as ‘neo-Victorian’s fascination with – indeed, its obsession with – the materiality of the Victorian era’ (2011, p.102).

Arguably, the Victorian's social anxieties identified by Potter were never truly 'staunched'. The mystery of the fate that befell the ship and its crew and the location of their final resting place went unsolved, becoming the stuff of myth and legend. This perhaps accounts to some degree for the 'sudden eruption of novels in the 1990s dealing with the demise of the [Franklin] expedition' (McCorristine, 2013, p.60). Slatzman and Rosenberg offer a potential explanation of this as they find an inherent connection between the visual and the verbal: 'a potential space of trauma is that very domain that exists between the visual and the verbal, between that which is seen and that which is said' (2006, p.xii). Of additional consideration are Caruth's assertions regarding the 'belatedness' of trauma which can only be approached and understood after a period of 'latency' (1996, p.17), as well as Kaplan's assertion that a certain period of time 'must lapse before a culture or an individual finds the right time to return to trauma' (2005, p.86). Atwood's perception of the longevity of the Franklin myth seems to operate within this motif of 'return', as she reasons: 'As we know from other stories of mysterious vanishings at sea, those vanished have an odd quality of continued existence. Because Franklin was never really "found", he continues to live on as a haunting presence' (2004a, p.19). This point seems perfectly exemplified in *The Voyage of the Narwhal* which does not focus upon Franklin specifically, but instead posits his disappearance as one of the primary reasons for which the Narwhal is commandeered; Franklin himself, and his ill-fated ship, indirectly 'haunt' the Narwhal's journey as a liminal presence and simultaneously intimates its fate.

Figuring Franklin as an immaterial 'spectre' is certainly helpful when considering neo-Victorian approaches to mediating cultural traumas, as Letissier explains: 'Because the spectre eludes temporal boundaries and because its comings and goings may not be neatly ordered along a linear axis clearly divided between a before and an after, or between real time and deferred time, it entails a specific relation to the historical past which is structurally traumatic' (2013, p.36). To expand upon this, and to return again to Kaplan's concept of traumatic 'returns', LaCapra explains that this collapse of distinction between present and past 'prevail[s] in trauma [...] in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught in a melancholic feedback loop' (2001, p.21). As a result, 'Any duality (or double inscription) of time (past and present or future) is experientially collapsed' (LaCapra, 2001, p.21), resulting in a kind of temporal stasis.

Perhaps uncannily and literally appropriate in relation to the concept of temporal stasis and uncanny ‘returns’ – and directly opposed to the afore-mentioned spectre of the Franklin expedition which hung over the Victorian public – was the discovery of the bodily remains of one of Franklin’s crew, John Torrington, by Canadian archaeologists in 1984. Described by Ho as ‘probably the most dramatic neo-Victorian moment ever’ (2012, p.172), reports of the discovery generated widespread interest among the general public, not least because Torrington’s body – having been well-preserved in ice – ‘looked neither fully dead nor entirely alive’ (Atwood, 2004b, p.2). Describing images of the body released to the newspapers as ‘mesmerising’, Atwood observes that ‘Every time we find the well-preserved body of someone who died long ago [...] there’s a similar fascination. Here is someone who has defied the general ashes-to-ashes, dust-to-dust rule, and who has remained recognizable as an individual human being long after most have turned to bone and earth’ (2004b, p.2). The discovery unquestionably revived the Franklin story, imbuing it with a new materiality which literally embodied for a new generation the sensational mythology and terror of the lost expedition.

While Ho has suggested that the image of the ship ‘terrifyingly trapped in ice associated with nineteenth-century Arctic exploration’ might ‘reflect the current “frozen” state of the archive neo-Victorian studies has, for better or for worse, canonized’ (2012, p.173),<sup>67</sup> it seems that the re-emergence and ‘zombie-esque’ aesthetic of Torrington’s body is a more apt (and literal) embodiment of the status of neo-Victorian fiction. Described by Atwood as ‘neither fully dead nor fully alive’ (2004b, p.2), the neo-Victorian similarly exists within – and subsequently mediates – a ‘limbo’ state of ‘death’ (the Victorian past) and ‘life’ (the contemporary). As McCorristine notes, the discovery ‘dramatically opened up the horrors of the expedition for speculative fiction – creating, in effect, the groundwork for a Franklin *mythos*’ (2013, p.63, original emphasis).

Contemporary authors have certainly embraced this newly-revealed mythos. Atwood was among the first to signpost this revival, making direct reference to the legacy

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<sup>67</sup> Ho somewhat paradoxically states that Barrett’s text ‘implicitly stages this neo-Victorian dilemma’, despite a pre-established reluctance to include the text within the ‘paradigm of neo-Victorian fiction’ due to the fact that the events of the text ‘[unfold] in nineteenth-century Philadelphia and an unspecified icy North’ (2012, p.173). I contest this view due to the limitations placed upon neo-Victorian literature if it must be confined solely to a specifically British geographic locale. Heilmann and Llewellyn have noted that the focus of neo-Victorian literature currently ‘remains largely on Anglophone engagements with Anglophone histories, stories and adaptations’ (2013, p.26); indeed, the lurking spectre and reason for the Narwhal’s journey is an English expedition, and as Heilmann & Llewellyn also point out, ‘there is no global history but rather international perspectives on a shared series of historical narratives’ (2013, p.29). I therefore agree with the conclusion reached by Heilmann & Llewellyn that ‘neo-Victorian studies can draw particular strength for the future exploration of the field from thinking much more diversely and much less homogenistically about the spaces it inhabits as part of a wider cultural memory’ (2013, p.29).

of the Franklin expedition and the exhumation of Torrington's body in her short story 'The Age of Lead'<sup>68</sup> as a 'subtext and extended metaphor' (Atwood, 2004b, p.1). The following year, and pre-dating his publication of *The Book of the Heathen*, Edric published *The Broken Lands: A Novel of Arctic Disaster* which, as mentioned in the Introduction to this project, constitutes an historical novel which is also based around Franklin's expedition. Following suit in adopting the Franklin tale as their subject matter are Dan Simmons's *The Terror: A Novel*, which was published in 2007; Dominique Fortier's *Du bon usage des étoiles*, published in 2008; and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, also published in 2008.<sup>69</sup> Following this was the publication of Arabella Edge's novel *Fields of Ice* in 2011; in the same year, another text – this time a graphic novel in the 'steampunk' style called *The Arctic Marauder* (2011) by Jacques Tardi – was also published, and is interestingly defined generically on Amazon's webpage as 'icepunk'.<sup>70</sup> Admittedly this final text does not focus on Franklin specifically, but it certainly seems to highlight the scope and variance of neo-Victorian re-imaginings of the Victorian's engagement with the Arctic.

### **'Vicarious travellers [...] conjuring up a generic exotic land': Neo-Victorian vicarious experience**

Significantly, contemporary authors have also notably embraced the 'horrors' of the Franklin expedition as a means of facilitating an engagement with this specifically traumatic moment of the Victorian past. In 1995 Atwood published a text titled *Strange Things* consisting of four lectures that she had previously delivered at Oxford University in 1991, all of which centred around the subject of the 'malevolent North' in Canadian literature. In her preamble to the collection, Atwood expresses some initial concern that her

<sup>68</sup> Featured in her collection of short stories titled *Wilderness Tips* (1991).

<sup>69</sup> Flanagan's *Wanting* is particularly interesting for its simultaneous treatment of locations and traumas which are examined in this thesis, namely the decimation of the Tasmanian Aborigines and the traumatic aftermath of the failed Franklin expedition. The concurrent exploration of these seemingly unrelated historical 'events' reveal the resonances and interconnectedness between geographically-distinct historical traumas.

<sup>70</sup> See [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Arctic-Marauder-Jacques-Tardi/dp/1606994352/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1383844856&sr=1-3&keywords=arctic+fiction](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Arctic-Marauder-Jacques-Tardi/dp/1606994352/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1383844856&sr=1-3&keywords=arctic+fiction). Icepunk can be housed under the 'umbrella' genre of 'Steampunk', a concrete definition of which is hard to pin down (see Jess Nevins (2011), 'Prescriptivists vs. Descriptivists: Defining Steampunk' for a thorough discussion upon the implications of this debate). Despite this, Sara Jackson offers what seems to be a fairly comprehensive and workable definition, describing it as a 'subgenre of science fiction and fantasy novels featuring advanced machines and other forms of fictional technology-based on the steam power of the 19th century', and adds that 'The stories take place in a recognizable, historical period or a fantasy world but they are based on the industrial revolution of that earlier century' (2012, p.45). 'Icepunk' – as an offshoot of Steampunk - maps the afore-mentioned definition on to the Victorian Arctic setting specifically.

discussion of the Canadian arctic landscape might not be particularly alluring or inviting, being largely considered by the ‘English literary mind’ as an ‘unexplored and uninteresting wasteland’ (2004a, p.2). For this reason, Atwood argues, ‘Canada – lacking the exoticism of Africa, the strange fauna of Australia, or the romance of India – still tends to occupy the bottom rung on the status ladder of ex-British colonies’ (2004a, p.2). Interestingly, shortly after this confession, Atwood describes a moment of ‘inspiration’ as she states: ‘The English, I knew, were very fond of cannibalism. If I could put some of that in, I was off on the right foot. And so it turned out; at the sherry party after the first lecture, I was treated to the spectacle of a number of Oxford academics nibbling hors-d’oeuvres and delicately discussing the question of who they would be prepared to eat’ (2004a, pp.2-3). What Atwood had astutely observed was an essential proclivity towards, and fascination with, the taboo and the traumatic, of being pushed to the very boundaries of human experience. Interestingly – and of great importance to the purpose of this discussion – not only were these ‘Oxford academics’ demonstrating a fascination with the cannibal-content of Atwood’s discussion, but they were theoretically positioning themselves *within* the scenario faced by Franklin’s crew, making vicariously speculative decisions about whom they would eat in order to survive.

Indeed, the concept of vicarious experience is a particularly pertinent one in relation to *The Voyage of the Narwhal* as a neo-adventure novel. Barrett’s text initially highlights this significance through an indirect reflection upon the reader as ‘Vicarious travellers, sleeping while [Erasmus] could not and conjuring up a generic exotic land’ (Barrett, 2000, p.25). Barrett has broached this motivation herself as a primary reason for the imaginary ‘invention’ of the Narwhal’s journey, as she states:

You might wonder why I’d want to invent yet another expedition, when the late 1840s and 1850s were so rich with actual expeditions. One reason is that no single expedition encompassed all I wanted to say about the nature of exploring in that time and place. Another, perhaps more important reason is that only by inventing an expedition, and following where that led me, could I share in *the process of discovery those real explorers experienced*. It was a strange, secret pleasure to take material so far removed from my own quiet life, and to remake the traditional matter of a quest narrative in my own way.

(‘Reading Group Guide’, 2014, para.4, my emphasis)

Potter similarly advances that the ‘persistent attraction’ to the arctic regions ‘has been shaped by the fact that the Arctic is a place that very few people will ever see for themselves’ (2007, p.3); arguably, the ‘average’ reader is likely to fall under this umbrella.

Resultantly, the ‘truth’ of representations of the arctic once depended – and continues to depend – ‘not on any substantive basis in reality, but rather on their resemblance to an already-established visual vocabulary of Arctic imagery’ (2007, p.209).<sup>71</sup> In this way it becomes possible to draw a parallel with the neo-Victorian novel, as Potter explains: ‘The far North has remained, despite its ostensible “discovery,” a largely *unseen* country, more vividly alive in its absence from actual sight than it ever would have been if, like other regions of the “New” world, it had been colonized and developed in the early centuries of European expansion’ (2007, p.3). Like the Victorian past itself, the arctic is accessible for the vast majority of people only through the imagination and through visual and narrative representations; resultantly, as Lévi-Strauss explains, ‘Intentionally or unintentionally, these modern seasonings are falsified’ as ‘For us to be willing to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted; through a degree of manipulation [...] actual experience is replaced by stereotypes’ (1973, p.39).

Erasmus acknowledges this to be an issue as he notes the existence of people ‘for whom Darwin’s Tierra del Fuego and Cook’s Tahiti had merged with Parry’s Igloodik and d’Urville’s Antartica until a place arose in which ice cliffs coexisted with acres of pampas, through which Tongan savages chased ostriches chasing camels. [They] couldn’t keep north and south straight in their minds, placing penguins and Esquimaux in the same confused ice and pleating a continent into a frozen sea’ (Barrett, 2000, pp.25-26). There is a danger of failing to acknowledge the specificity and reality of the arctic setting, as well as the perils and individual physical trials of arctic exploration voyages themselves, as Erasmus reflects (and somewhat uncannily accurately – to an extent - predicts):

None of them grasped the drudgery of such a voyage. Not just the planning and buying and stowing but the months of sitting idly on the decks of a ship, the long stretches when nothing happened [...] No one knew how frightened he was, or the mental lists he made of all he dreaded. Ridiculous things, ignoble things. His bunk would be too short or too narrow or damp and drafty; his comrades would snore or twitch or moan; he’d be overcome by longing for women; he’d never sleep. [...] The coarse food would upset his stomach and dyspepsia would upset his brain; what if he forgot how to think? His hands would be cold, they were always cold; he’d slice a specimen or stab himself. His joints would ache. His back would hurt, they’d run out of coffee, on which he relied; a storm would snap the masts in half, a whale would ram the ship. They’d get lost, they’d find nothing, they’d fail.

(Barrett, 2000, p.26)

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<sup>71</sup> Potter maintains that documentaries and films which depict the Arctic demonstrate this lingering desire contemporarily as, even now, ‘We want to see lonely snow houses, hear howling winds, flee from ravenous polar bears, and shudder as explorers collapse meaningfully into the snow’ (2007, p.209).

Lévi-Strauss comments upon the seemingly ‘trivial circumstances and insignificant happenings’ – the essential (if unglamorous) realities – which go unmentioned within many exploration narratives, listing ‘the hours of exhaustion, sickness perhaps; and always the thousand and one dreary tasks which eat away the days to no purpose’ (1973, p.17). Which details are selected and subsequently incorporated into such narratives necessarily raises questions regarding the selectivity of both memory and of what is deemed as relevant to be incorporated; ‘is it worth my while’, Lévi-Strauss ponders, ‘taking up my pen to perpetuate [...] a useless shred of memory or pitiable recollection[?]’ (1973, p.17).

Interestingly, and of no small significance to this point made by Erasmus which highlights the harsh personal realities of such an expedition (a point which will be explored further later in this chapter), a relatively new type of tourist experience – termed ‘frontier tourism’ – is becoming increasingly prevalent as a phenomenon which enables the tourist to push the physical boundaries of their travel experiences. According to Geoffrey Crouch and Jennifer Laing, this specific branch of tourism involves travelling to ‘remote and risky locations as the geographic as well as cultural peripheries of our world, including trekking to the poles’ (2011, p.1516). Mary Shelley’s narrator in *Frankenstein* describes the ‘enticements’ of this ‘part of the world never visited, and [...] a land never before imprinted by the foot of man’ (1992, p.16); it is interesting to consider, then, that the epigraph preceding the first chapter of *The Voyage of the Narwhal* quotes directly from *Frankenstein*, foregrounding the attraction of the Arctic to the reader as ‘a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe’ (1992, p.15). Godfrey Baldacchino for one recognises the correlation between *The Voyage of the Narwhal* and Arctic tourism, noting that ‘Personal and territorial exploration, along with their hazards and tribulations, are deftly intertwined’ within the novel (2006, pp.7-8); certainly this idea can be related to the discussion included within this thesis pertaining to the introspective exploration of psychological, rather than solely physical, terrain. McCorristine highlights the neo-Victorian significance of such travelling as he notes that ‘tourists can now arrange to cruise along part of the Northwest Passage, stopping off to view relics and burial sites associated with the quest’ (2013, p.61). Of relevance to Sturken’s concept of the ‘tourist of history’ (as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis), and recalling the concept of the ‘urban explorer’ discussed in Chapter One, Crouch and Laing posit that ‘the frontier tourist generally seeks to follow in the *footsteps* of earlier explorers and adventurers’ (Crouch & Laing, 2011, p.1517, original emphasis). Baldacchino also similarly states that:

The travails of visitors to the white island expanses of the north and south today could be felt to recreate the journeys of [...] intrepid explorers. The personal audacity of these pioneers, their awe and wonder at the marvels of nature they stumbled upon, and their encounters with natives, seem to capture the imagination of those contemporary tourists who wish, and could afford, to reach beyond the typical vacation and travel periphery[.] (2006, p.8)

Like Crouch and Laing, Baldacchino significantly acknowledges that this specific branch of tourism aptly evidences a ‘postmodern fixation with novelty’ (2011, p.1518); for Myra Shackley, however, this also manifests a lingering nostalgia through the visiting of unspoilt places ‘that seem to exist *outside* of history’ (2001, p.190, my emphasis). Certainly this statement can be related to the idea of a nostalgia ‘insofar as postmodernity is committed to living with loss and uncertainty as a permanent condition’ (Craps, 2005, p.19); indeed, as explained in the Introduction to this project, the charge against the neo-Victorian of proffering a nostalgic engagement with the Victorian past is a somewhat problematic point of contention in the field of neo-Victorian studies, particularly given the charge that the neo-Victorian novel ‘seems to have substituted exotic locales as an imaginary realm that is to compensate us for this supposed lack of heart-felt experience’ (Wesseling, 2010, p.313). This point recalls Carroll’s explanation of the problematic charge of a nostalgic – and consequently ‘retrograde’ – engagement with the Victorian past. It seems beneficial at this point to re-assert the self-aware and distinctly *critical* engagement with the Victorian past as a ‘living process’ (Krueger, 2002, p.xx) which is proffered by the neo-Victorian novel, which results in the negation of typically nostalgic returns through the implicit rendering of this ‘compensatory substitution for exotic locales’ as problematically frustrated (at best) or, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four of this thesis, entirely short-circuited.

As mentioned in the epigraph to *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, which comprises a section of text from Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* (the key elements of which have been explored in the Introduction to this thesis), travel books work to foster exoticist illusions of new, unexplored places which no longer exist, but which are nonetheless desired. As discussed in Chapter Four in relation to Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen*, such exoticist fantasies were already ‘lost’ to the Victorians themselves, a sentiment expressed in a letter from Erasmus to his brother, Copernicus:

*Do you ever feel this in your travels out west? That all the unexplored parts of the world are closing their doors; that so many of us, travelling so far, cannot avoid crossing each other's paths and repeating each other's discoveries? [...] I wish I could pretend to be another Meriwether Lewis, but those days are half a century behind us.*

(Barrett, 2000, pp.148-149, original emphasis)

Erasmus's words aptly capture a 'cross-over' between Victorian and contemporary culture which demonstrate profoundly – and perhaps surprisingly – similar sentiments with regards to travel and exploration, exhibiting the very nature of the 'double infirmity' of the cycle of perpetual longing described by Lévi-Strauss in the Introduction.

Indeed, the seeming ahistoricity of the arctic setting, in conjunction with its 'simultaneous sparseness and richness' (Barrett, 2000, p.165), arguably constitutes a near-perfect space in which to stage these concerns within the neo-Victorian novel. Where Ho posits the 'vastness of the sea' in the neo-Victorian novel as indicative of 'attention to space as well as time' (2012, p.171), it is arguably more appropriate to reflect upon the suitability of the arctic setting in relation to this purpose as it facilitates unhindered connections between the Victorian and the present through a *seemingly* consistent, unchanging landscape which (despite this initial perception) is nonetheless shifting and evolving in much the same way as the giant ice floes described in the text, simultaneously invoking the seeming 'fixity' of the Victorian era and, in challenging nostalgic returns to this historical moment, re-shaping it as it does so.

Linda Hutcheon has argued that this is primarily achieved through a 'de-totalized history'; in other words, negating any singular overarching historical narrative in acceptance of the fact that 'knowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording' (2002, p.70). This primarily occurs by challenging claims to historical 'truth' and acknowledging that 'both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity' (Hutcheon, 1988, p.93). Such texts '[...] juxtapose what we think we know of the past (from official archival sources and personal memory) with an alternate representation that foregrounds the epistemological questioning of the nature of historical knowledge', revealing perhaps the key question: 'Which 'facts' make it into history? And *whose* facts?' (Hutcheon, 2002, p.68). What we ultimately discover is that 'what actually becomes fact depends as much as anything else on the social and cultural context of the historian' (Hutcheon, 2002, p. 72); consequently, and by means of addressing this situation, the neo-Victorian novel invokes 'different, and sometimes contradictory, visions and versions of the facts' and 'an advocacy of plural visions, various

truths and relativity' by means of signalling 'an essentially contingent and possibly unattainable conception of historical knowledge' (Gutleben, 2001, p.140).

LaCapra has supplemented this assertion through his own perception that the 'dream of a "total history" corroborating the historian's own desire for mastery of a documentary repertoire and furnishing the reader with a vicarious sense of – or perhaps a project for – control in a world out of joint has of course been a lodestar of historiography' (1985, p.25). Certainly this idea of 'documentary repertoire' in relation to the controvertible veracity of historical record is thrown into question within Barrett's novel both in relation to form and content, and not least through the epigraph taken from Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* which opens with:

I hate travelling and explorers... Amazonia, Tibet and Africa fill the bookshops in the form of travelogues, accounts of expeditions and collections of photographs, in all of which the desire to impress is so dominant as to make it impossible for the reader to assess the value of the evidence put before him. Instead of having his critical faculties stimulated, he asks for more such pabulum and swallows prodigious quantities of it.

(Barrett, 2000, p.11; quoting Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p.17)

This epigraph seems to reflect upon the reader critically as the consumers of such 'pabulum', although they will certainly have their critical faculties stimulated as the novel progresses, not least through the evident disparity between historical reality and the subsequent (and usually contradictory) 'official' records which are shown to omit the essentially unglamorous – and often, horrifying - physical realities of the crew's journey. Erasmus summarises this issue by championing the benefits of multiple perspectives as he expounds in his journal: '*one thing follows another and everything's shaped by my single pair of eyes, my single voice. I wish I could show it as if through a fan of eyes. Widening out from my single perspective to several viewpoints, then many, so the whole picture might appear and not just my version of it*' (Barrett, 2000, pp.26-27, original emphasis). Erasmus further acknowledges the implicit subjectivity of individual personal testimonies as his journal entry is followed by his realisation that 'even in these pages meant only for his own eyes, he wasn't honest [...] He *did* want his own point of view to count, even as he also wanted to be invisible. Such a liar, he thought' (Barrett, 2000, p.27, original emphasis).

Erasmus's desire for his own voice to count within a multitude of others is effectively reflective of neo-Victorian fiction as offering 'something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known

it' (Hutcheon, 2002, p.63). For example – and somewhat self-referentially – Barrett's text contains multiple references to the usefulness of stories (as opposed to documented 'facts') as a means of developing an understanding not only of history and science, but also of humanity itself. To compound this point, Erasmus reflects upon the usefulness of stories narrated to him by his father and based upon Pliny's *Natural History* (1848); 'some true, some false – but even the false still useful [...] for what they said about the ways man conceived of each other, and of the world' (Barrett, 2000, p.23).

In its multifarious patchwork parody<sup>72</sup> of genuine exploration narratives, Victorian literature, stories, and use of multiple character perspectives (which are mediated in different forms including lists and diary entries, among others), Barrett's novel itself subsequently becomes a supplementary historical 'artefact' which addresses the potential 'totalization' of history by highlighting 'the existence of many possible narratives for any given set of historical facts' (Shiller, 1997, p.541). Surpassing Jameson's figuration of the postmodern historical 'artifact' [sic] as 'a monument to the waning of content and the primacy of the image' (Shiller, 1997, p.539), I contend that Barrett's novel instead reflects the ability of neo-Victorian fiction to present 'a historicity that is concerned with recuperating the substance of bygone eras, and not merely their styles', offering instead a 'revisionist approach to the past' (Shiller, 1997, p.540) through the novel's parodic engagement with its Victorian intertexts.

### **'Urgent flesh': 'Embodying' traumatic memories**

Erasmus's sentiments regarding the usefulness of stories for cognizing how men conceive of each other and of the world is particularly pertinent within Barrett's text, particularly in relation to the text's multiple representations of traumatic experiences. An element of the Victorian interest in Arctic exploration was undoubtedly connected with the interest in the physical limits of the body or of the body's endurance when pushed to extremes,

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<sup>72</sup> Jameson has contended that 'Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language' (1998, p.5), and indeed, that pastiche in fact 'eclipses' parody as it renders the original referent 'one more idiolect among many' (Jameson, 1991, p.17) through the reduction of history to 'a collection of glossy images sundered from their real-life roots' (Shiller, 1997, p.539); indeed, for Jameson, 'the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts' (1991, p.18). Hutcheon, on the other hand, offers a rigorous discussion of the distinction between parody and pastiche to conclude that while 'both are acknowledged borrowings', parody is 'transformational in its relationship with other texts', while pastiche is purely an 'imitative' rendering or amalgam of different styles and/or sources (2000, p.38). Hutcheon also contests Jameson's assertion regarding the 'sundering' of the original referent within the contemporary historical novel using the example of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), which she proposes 'requires the historical context in order to interrogate the present (as well as the past) through its critical irony' (Hutcheon, 1988, p.45).

particularly in relation to Victorian perceptions of masculinity. As Donald Hall has discussed, for the Victorians ‘manliness was synonymous with strength, both physical and moral’ (1994, p.7); therefore, the male body required ‘a physical armour-plating to withstand various potential threats (1994, p.9). Hill, for example, has noted the link between the ‘Arctic landscape and the limits both of knowledge and the human body’ (2008, p.82), while Crouch and Laing highlight that ‘Challenges, both physical and mental, attract some to engage in a recreation of a historical expedition’ (2011, p.1526). In light of the descriptions of physical suffering experienced by the Narwhal’s crew, these sentiments take on significance in terms of considering narrative re-presentations of how Victorian explorers might have suffered during their journey. Pertinent to this concept is Hartman’s assertion that ‘We are drawn into a species of belief by the recovery of certain visceral sensations; extremes of heat, cold and thirst, glare of color [sic], horror of the void, loss of speech. Perhaps the only way to overcome a traumatic severance of body and mind is to come back to mind through the body’ (1995, p.541).

It certainly seems that such visceral sensations are foregrounded in Barrett’s text. For example, upon running aground within an immovable patch of ice, during which Erasmus describes the torturously slow passing of time as ‘like a single long nightmare, in which time passed too quickly and then, especially when they were bent to the capstan bars, refused to pass at all’ (Barrett, 2000, p.64), a multitude of physical injuries and ailments sustained by the crew are described. Initially, they are catalogued as a series of relatively insignificant misdemeanours as ‘Fingers were caught between railings and lines, ribs were banged against capstan bars, skin was torn from palms and toes were broken by falling chisels’ (Barrett, 2000, p.66). But as their journey progresses and the list of ailments grows, Dr. Boerhaave notably begins to compile ‘daily sick lists; for example:

*Seaman Bond: abrasions to distal phalanges, left*

*Seaman Carey: two cracked ribs*

*Seaman DeSouza: asthma, aggravated by excessive labor*

*Seaman Hruska: bronchitis after immersion*

*Seaman Jensen: avulsed tip of right forefinger*

*Seaman Lamb: complaints of abdominal pain (earlier blow to liver?)*

*Seaman Hamilton: suppurating dermatitis, inner aspect of both thighs*

(Barrett, 2000, p.66, original emphasis)

Erasmus notes these afflictions as ‘Unromantic ailments, never mentioned in Zeke’s tales’ (Barrett, 2000, p.66); that they have been re-appropriated in detail in the neo-Victorian novel is significant as they simultaneously address the ‘gaps’ to be found within traditional

exploration narratives. Such gaps within traditional exploration narratives may well be attributable to the global but culturally-specific Victorian ‘projects’ to bolster positive perceptions of national identity by focussing predominantly upon heroic successes; Erasmus’s comment serves to highlight the selectivity inherent to the formulation of such narratives.

In addition to this, and returning to the previously-discussed consideration of ‘frontier tourism’ as a phenomenon which is currently gaining public interest, Tristan Semple suggests that ‘Hardship and discomfort, pushing the limits of human endurance, isolation, weathering the elemental forces of nature’ constitute the physical aspects of authentically ‘performing adventure’. Semple also suggests that seeking out physical hardships has ‘deeper-rooted significance’ as ‘acts of escapism or remonstrance against the luxuries and materialistic excess of Western culture’, which physical hardship somewhat ‘counterbalances’ by ‘steering towards an ascetic kind of spiritual salvation or self-transcendence’ (2013, p.73). The idea of spiritual ‘transcendence’ is pertinent to Barrett’s text, as discussed later in this chapter; the actual significance of outlining the physical hardships and suffering of the *Narwhal*’s crew seems indicative of a contemporary desire for authentic experience as opposed to the ‘manufactured’ luxury of typical tourist experience. Even then, ‘While risk may be pursued as part of the adventure “package” for many tourists, the reality is that usually ‘there is a high level of planning and risk management that would limit the real level of risk and also the levels of uncertainty’, and ‘With the significance of the planning it is questionable whether, from the provider’s perspective, it is really an adventure, however from the consumer’s perspective there may still be a *perception* of adventure’ (Dickson & Dolnicar, 2004, p.2, my emphasis). The idea of perceived adventure is pertinent to the discussion in this thesis, particularly in relation to the idea of vicarious travel and experience, while the fascination with, and desire for, physical hardship such as those reported in relation to the crew of the *Narwhal* constitutes a commentary on present-day anxieties regarding ‘inauthentic’, mediated experiences and pervasive consumer culture.

In terms of Barrett’s text specifically, the relentless onslaught of descriptions of human suffering troubles any ‘domestication’ of the Victorian past both literally, in terms of creating an unsettling experience for the reader, and conceptually, as the intervention of graphic representations themselves emphasises a specifically contemporary fascination with suffering. Indeed, descriptions become increasingly graphic and gruesome as the journey becomes more chaotic and unpredictable; eventually, they come to delineate a

litany of extreme physical suffering and physical degeneration. For example, ‘Fletcher Lamb, who was stropping his razor when they crashed into one of the monstrous bergs, jolted his hand and cut off the tip of his left ring finger’, after which ‘Two of the dogs, knocked to their feet, turned on each other and filled the air with chunks of fur and a spray of blood’ (Barrett, 2000, p.92); Erasmus experiences blood blisters as the effects of frostbite on his fingers, which eventually ‘ruptured [...] rendering his cracked and bloody hands useless for more than a week’ (Barrett, 2000, p.156); and the effects of scurvy become increasingly problematic, as documented by Dr. Boerhaave:

*These signs of scurvy so far –*

*Captain Tyler: abdominal pains, swollen liver, gout in right foot. Mr. Francis: tubercles on three finger joints, accompanied by pain and stiffness. Mr. Tagliabeau: right premolar lost, other teeth loose, bleeding gums. Seaman Bond: purpurae on forearms. Seaman Carey: left knee grossly swollen; reports a sprain there as a child. Seaman Forbes: bleeding gums. Seaman Hruska: serous discharge from old lance wound. Ned Kynd: excoriated tongue, bruises on both arms.*

*Mr. Wells has those bruises on his side; now I have a few myself.*

(Barrett, 2000, p.166, original emphasis)

Certainly these descriptions exist at odds with Zeke’s accounts of the Franklin expedition, recited – according to Erasmus – by way of ‘motivating the men’ (Barrett, 2000, p.64). Erasmus comments that ‘Zeke spoke as if he were transmitting the great tradition of arctic exploration, of which they were now a part. As if the stories would heal the crew’s wounds and furies’ (Barrett, 2000, p.65). However, denying the essential realities and individual hardships and suffering experienced during such extreme journeys only serves to perpetuate the myth of glorious Arctic expedition; lacking the essential realities, such ‘stories’ – instead of benefiting the crew – seem to prohibit their wounds from healing. Emphasis is increasingly placed upon wounds that will not heal, and the gradual breaking down of bodies; Dr. Boerhaave states that ‘Ivan’s old harpoon scar is beginning to ooze’ (Barrett, 2000, p.163); later, Erasmus notes that ‘Mr. Francis fell down [a] ladder, tearing a chunk of flesh from his knee, the wound refused to heal and he too was confined to bed’ (Barrett, 2000, p.180), after which ‘Erasmus, moving among the sick as Dr. Boerhaave’s chief assistant, was shocked at how quickly Mr. Francis deteriorated. The wound bled, suppurated, refused to close, deepened; in a week the bone was exposed’ (Barrett, 2000, p.180).

The traumatic imagery of wounds that refuse to heal is a useful means of considering the function of traumatic representations themselves within the neo-Victorian novel. While it is arguable that re-imagining historical suffering – particularly if such re-

presentations are based upon historical (f)actuality – only serves to perpetuate historical suffering, it is also equally as justifiable to suggest that the exposure of physical historical wounds that representationally refuse to ‘heal’ (and, as discussed previously, the likes of which have not been acknowledged in existing historical narrative accounts) prohibits the neo-Victorian from ‘repeating the offence’ of ‘sidelining [historical] trauma or consigning it to outright historical oblivion’ (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.20). Just as Jenny Edkins asserts that ‘Trauma is that which refuses to take its place in history as done and finished with’ (2003, p.59), so these physical wounds refuse to heal, or to remain consigned without acknowledgement to the annals of history. There might also be something to be said for equating Barrett’s representations with LaCapra’s notion of empathic unsettlement as fundamental for achieving any form of understanding of historical traumas: references to, and descriptions of, physical suffering arguably become a point of corporeal ‘relatability’ which in turn facilitates a level of empathy.

While these accounts of physical suffering arguably work to counter existing narratives which reinforce perceptions of glorious arctic exploration and the concept of a ‘totalised’ or exhaustive account of historical experience, I would like to argue that they simultaneously serve the purpose of bringing to light the nature of bodily memory by way of countering ‘official’ narratives and situating such experience directly within the body of the historical subject. Such a dichotomy is aptly represented by Ned’s memory of ‘the mock sun that appeared in the sky [...] a perfect parhelion [...] with a point of light on either side’ (Barrett, 2000, p.232). The parhelion – two bright spots which appear on either side of the sun, formed by the refraction and subsequent reflection of sunlight through ice crystals – perhaps best symbolises the discordance between what is *perceived* to be truth, and what *is* truth. Reading Barrett’s fictional insights into the under-represented elements of arctic expedition (such as those ‘unromantic ailments’ discussed previously in this chapter) alongside genuine exploration narratives serves to highlight not only the intrinsic subjectivity of the original narratives, but also the types of realities which were *neglected* or overlooked within the original narratives themselves, thus positing the neo-Victorian text itself as an ‘epistemological tool’ (Onega & Gutleben, 2004, p.14) in its own right.

This point also speaks to the text’s mediation of gender dynamics and the absence of women from the history of Arctic exploration. In an interview with Elizabeth Gaffney, Barrett explains that, for her, ‘there was no point in doing a novel that simply replicated the shape of an expedition. What seemed really interesting was that other half of the story. I wanted to tell a story that contained both the journey and the critique of the journey, the

journey and the shadow side of the journey, the men going out and the women back home' (in Gaffney, 2003, n.p.). The women in Barrett's novel – and particularly Alexandra – are explorers primarily in imagination, as well as of the 'self', seemingly in parallel with the type of 'exploration' undertaken by the reader. Initially, Alexandra states, '*I read secretly in the journal of Parry's second voyage [...] I lie in the dark and dream about that place and those people. I'd give anything to be with Zeke and Erasmus [...] sometimes I feel so confined – why can't my life be larger?*' (Barrett, 2000, p.86, original emphasis). However, defying pre-existing representations of women left passively 'pining away at home' in the previously-discussed play 'The Frozen Deep', Alexandra chooses to occupy herself in painting and engraving plates for books relating to exploration and discovery, pertinently commenting that 'In a way I didn't expect it's much more than copying; more like re-making, re-creating' (Barrett, 2000, p.146), arguably constituting a reflection of the neo-Victorian itself. Of additional significance, Alexandra comments that when engaged in her artistic enterprise, 'everything else drops away and I enter the scene I'm engraving. As if I've entered a larger life' (Barrett, 2000, p.146). For Alexandra, active *creation* facilitates escapism, rather than passive reading, perhaps constituting a subtle indictment of the reader's passivity or perception that the neo-Victorian novel might facilitate an imaginative or unproblematic mode of 'escapism'. The additional fact that the novel oscillates between the Arctic setting and Philadelphia 'interrupts' the exploration elements of the text, collapsing the reader's immersion or engagement. Barrett herself seems to recognize this effect in relation to her novel, as she comments that: 'For people who don't like the book, that's the main thing they complain about [...] [those] who were drawn to the book because of its subject really didn't like the part of the story that takes place back home. They [...] wished I'd left out all the stuff about the women' (Gaffney, 2003, n.p.).

### **'The thing I've hated most is being *looked at*': Transcending exploitative embodiment**

Another mode of frustration in Barrett's text is created by the revelation that accounts of the Narwhal's voyage, and the crew's experiences themselves, are revealed to be deeply flawed and unreliable, with the surviving crew becoming increasingly reliant upon their physical, 'embodied' memories of their subjective experiences. Upon their eventual escape from the ice floe which had them trapped for so long, physical suffering becomes absolutely integral to memory in the absence of reliable memories of what had occurred, or of diary entries to supplement their memories:

What happened when? What happened in fact, and what was only imagined, or misremembered? Erasmus made no diary entries, nor did Ned or the other men [...] nothing remained but a blur of impressions. [...] Their shoulders and hands were rubbed raw by the ropes, and Ivan would remember the acid burn of vomit on his lips; [...] Sean would remember how his ankles ballooned, forcing him to slit his boots and finally cut them off entirely [...] Robert would remember his persistent, burning diarrhea, and the humiliation of soiling his pants when he strained against the weight of the sledge.

(Barrett, 2000, p.229)

Physical suffering is also connected to memory for Erasmus, who ‘would remember this because it was here that he lost the evidence of their search for Franklin’s remains, and also because, although he could never be sure, he suspected that here began the process of freezing and constriction and infection that would later cause him to lose his toes’ (Barrett, 2000, p.231). Similarly, Robert ‘would remember this more sharply than the other accidents, because it was here that he dislocated his shoulder (Barrett, 2000, p.234). Ned, too, ‘would remember this place for the weather and the onset of his fever, which caused this journey to be jumbled forever after in his mind’ (Barrett, 2000, p.232), and because later, ‘Ned’s fever, or frostbite, or something putrid he ate, had caused his own nose to erupt in pustule that leaked yellow fluid and then crusted over and cracked and bled. He would remember dreading his whole nose might disappear. And then thinking it *should* disappear – along with his face, his entire body’ (Barrett, 2000, p.233, original emphasis).

This emphasis upon physical ‘disappearance’ becomes noticeably persistent as the text progresses, which takes on no small significance in light of the locus of ‘looking’ and ‘performing’ as discussed previously in this chapter. It seems that where once there was an emphasis upon the visual as a mode of engaging with the past – and with past traumas – the text eventually reconfigures the physical body to disappear to escape the neo-Victorian ‘gaze’, as I intend to demonstrate through the provision of analysis and commentary upon the final stage of the novel whereupon Zeke has returned to Philadelphia with Annie and Tom who become the subject of a series of sensational ‘arctic shows’ created and performed by Zeke, and which aptly emphasises the lexis of ‘seeing’ and ‘witnessing’.

The series of shows devised by Zeke recall the true-life exhibition of an Inuit family by Charles Francis Hall upon his own return to America after his own Arctic exploration in 1862. Potter explains that Hall ‘became the purveyor of his own series of Arctic shows – shows that for the first time brought the public exhibition of “Esquimaux” to America, tracing a long and problematic line between the then rather loosely conceived notions of “entertainment” and “education”’ (2007, p.169). Like Annie and Tom, the Inuit

family exhibited by Hall – Ebierbing and Tookoolito, and their young son Tokerliktu - are given English names by Hall, namely ‘Joe’ and ‘Hannah’ for the two adults (Potter, 2007, p.169), and the Inuktitut translation for their son, which is ‘butterfly’ (Potter, 2007, p.170). Potter describes the Inuit couple’s ‘grueling’ schedule, highlighting the relevance of their ‘seven hours daily of exhibition in an indoor room where the sheer mass of humanity rendered the air hot and uncomfortable, even in November – particularly as all three Inuit were obliged to appear in their “native costume”’ (2007, p.171). Potter’s point recalls Sylvia Knightley’s sexual exploitation of Din’s ‘otherness’ as discussed in Chapter One, highlighting the neo-Victorian investment in illuminating forms of exploitation relating to the idea of ‘otherness’ not only as a means of revealing contemporary parallels, but also by way of drawing attention to the essential performativity – and, implicitly, the fundamental *inauthenticity* – of such constructions.

Erasmus, who eventually reluctantly decides to attend one of Zeke’s shows with Alexandra (a friend of Erasmus’s sister, Lavinia), emphasises the scopophilic and essentially escapist desires of the show’s audience as he comments that ‘The theatre was full of people desperate for distraction’ (Barrett, 2000, p.337). Alexandra confesses her own ‘shameful pleasure [...] in regarding Annie and Tom’ upon the stage. She longed to draw them’ (Barrett, 2000, p.342), while Erasmus notably counters her enjoyment through his subsequent comment to Alexandra: “‘I hate this. All my life the thing I’ve hated most is being *looked at*. I can’t bear it when people stare at me. *I know just how she feels*, all of us peering down at her. It’s disgusting. It’s worse than disgusting”’ (Barrett, 2000, p.341, my emphasis).

In a way reminiscent of the position of the reader as discussed in relation to Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Barrett implies a complicit readerly ‘spectatorship’ as an indulgence of scopophilic and epistemological desires, as well as a form of implication in perpetuating Annie’s subjugation. Alexandra’s and Erasmus’s acknowledgement of their ‘shameful’ participation in looking seems to constitute a moralistic intrusion which – albeit indirectly - both highlights and compounds the reader-viewer’s implication in the exploitative ‘performance’ proffered by historical re-summonings. Erasmus’s admittance that he knows how Annie ‘feels’ implies his own experience of empathic unsettlement on Annie’s behalf, putting himself in her position as a means of better reflecting upon the exploitative and discomfiting reality of Annie’s subjection. This very scenario mirrors the function of the neo-Victorian’s own attempts at achieving empathic unsettlement through representations of bodily suffering.

Additionally, Zeke's reference to Annie and Tom as 'mannequins' – again recalling the discussion on this topic in *The Journal of Dora Damage* – works to highlight the lack of agency of Annie and Tom themselves, emphasising their function in terms of the show (and, I argue, to the neo-Victorian novel) as props with only limited agency which can potentially be commandeered and manipulated for the 'edutainment' of the viewer/reader. Nonetheless, in posing a hypothetical question to himself, Erasmus appears to directly challenge the reader to reflect upon the ethical consideration of such exhibitionism: 'Was it worse', he asks, 'to capture a Feejee [sic] chief and let him die in a strange land than to tear an Esquimau [sic] woman from her home and exhibit her to curious strangers'? (Barrett, 2000, p.352). The fact that Zeke refuses to use his much-loved pets in the show further compounds the essential inhumanity of the performance: 'There was a rattling backstage, and the crack of a whip. Two dogs appeared – not his huge black hunting dogs but beagles, ludicrous in their harnesses, gamely trotting side by side. Apparently Zeke would not subject his own pets to this' (Barrett, 2000, p.338).

Interestingly, it is within the context of Zeke's sensational visual performance that the reader is first privileged with insight into Annie's own perception of events, shifting the focus from Annie purely as a 'spectacle' to a thinking, feeling, human subject, a marked shift from the previous narrative which focussed solely on the perceptions and experiences of the American characters. The reader is given access to Annie's sensory perceptions and feelings as she reportedly imagines that she 'felt the warm liver of the freshly killed seal, she tasted sweet blood in her mouth' (Barrett, 2000, p.344), although these descriptions serve only to further distance the reader who is of course unable to relate to her sensations or experiences: 'Alexandra tried to see a creature in the loops and whorls, not knowing that, for Annie, it was as if the stage had suddenly filled with beautiful animals. Not knowing that for Annie this evening moved as if the *angekok* who'd brought Zeke to them had bewitched her, putting her into a trance in which she both was and was not on his stage' (Barrett, 2000, p.342, original emphasis).

This shift in perspective interrupts the purely 'visual' elements of this section of the text (in which the reader, like Zeke's audience, is 'watching' the events unfold upon the stage) and, in doing so, reformulates her position as one in which she can simultaneously be present and absent from the stage, as described above. Such a predicament is perhaps a fitting analogy for the historical neo-Victorian subject itself as a historical (Victorian) reality re-summoned to the pages of the neo-Victorian novel; a presence-in-absence, straddling two realities between the Victorian and neo-Victorian. Such a conclusion is

supported by Annie's own realisation after 'she'd seen herself reflected in the watching people's eyes' that 'She'd been sent here like a shard of splintered mirror [...] to capture an image of the world beyond her home' (Barrett, 2000, p.358). As a neo-Victorian subject, Annie is confronted with the gaze of the neo-Victorian reader and realises her singular subjectivity as merely a single 'shard' of mirror, a singular subject with singularly subjective experience, just as one small splinter (in real terms) constitutes merely a fragment of the 'whole' mirror. Just as the postmodern novel – and the neo-Victorian novel – champion micro-narratives as a mode of countering the concept of a 'totalized' history (as discussed by Hutcheon and discussed previously), each subjective 'shard' of experience and subjective perception – when placed back together to reconstruct the 'mirror' in its entirety – create a more comprehensive and informed 'reflection' of the Victorian, and one which – in this case - takes in to account previously marginalised or under-considered subjects. Additionally however, and to extend the metaphor to its logical conclusion, the mirror remains imperfect, serving as a reminder that the neo-Victorian reflection is an imperfect, 'patchwork' *re-construction* of this Victorian past, but a reflection none the less.

However, the implications of Annie's realisation of her function as a 'reflection' are perhaps effectively mirrored as her epiphany had occurred 'before she's stumbled and fallen and been unable to rise' (Barrett, 2000, p.358), marking the beginning of Annie's physical decline which arguably results from Zeke's exploitation of her and her son. Somewhat in keeping with the previous references to the physicality of the body within the text, Annie's physical suffering and endurance becomes the focus at this stage during the novel: 'Annie was someplace hot and dark, streaked with red, filled with noise and the smell of blood. She was a seal who'd come up for a breath of air and met a bear; the bear had been waiting and she was caught by surprise; there was a blow and then burning. She tried to heave herself back in the cool water but she was being dragged across the ice' (Barrett, 2000, p.357). Reminiscent of Dora's experience in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Annie sees her own exploitation in terms of somatic consumption in which 'She was being bitten. She was being eaten' (Barrett, 2000, pp.357-358). This emphasis on Annie's corporeality summons to mind Elaine Scarry's concept of 'intense embodiment' as indicative of powerlessness:

In discussions of power, it is conventionally the case that those with power are said to be “represented” whereas those without power are “without representation.” It may therefore seem contradictory to discover that the scriptures systematically ensure that the Omnipotent will be materially unrepresented and that the comparatively powerless humanity will be materially represented by their own deep embodiment. But to have no body is to have no limits on one’s extension out into the world; conversely, to have a body, a body made emphatic by being continually altered through various forms of creation, instruction (e.g., bodily cleansing), and wounding, is to have one’s sphere of extension contracted down to the small circle of one’s immediate physical presence. Consequently, *to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and (here as in many secular contexts) is almost always the condition of those without power.*

(1985, p.207, my emphasis)

According to Scarry’s logic, Annie’s physical suffering renders her intensely embodied and, therefore, disempowered. Interestingly, however, it is at this point in Barrett’s narrative that Annie begins to ‘will’ her body to become less and less substantial. ‘The worst thing about what was happening to her body’, she reflects, ‘was the way it kept her from protecting [Tom]’ (Barrett, 2000, p.358). Her sense that her physical self is responsible for hindering her from protecting her young son results in a conscious effort to dematerialise herself:

By the strength of her thought alone, she must strip her body of flesh and blood and be able to see herself as a skeleton. Each bone, each tiny bone, clear before her eyes. Then the sacred language would descend, allowing her to name the parts of her body that would endure. When she named the last bone she’d be free; her spirit could travel and she could watch over her son. She burrowed under the white cloth and squeezed shut her eyes, beginning the terrible process of shedding her flesh. Let me be bone, she thought. Like the long narwhal spines at home, the walrus skulls, the delicate ribs of seals. White bone.

(Barrett, 2000, p.363)

This resoundingly traumatic and ‘terrible’ process of stripping her body of flesh and blood to facilitate instead a *spiritual* transcendence evokes Gutleben and Wolfrey’s perception that ‘the effects of the loss of a unified self mirror those of the more conventional senses of trauma, which likewise produce a radical disjuncture in selfhood, between the self before and after’ (2010, p.42), as well as recalling the previous discussion in this chapter regarding the disparity between adventure tourism and authentic experience, which Semple suggested might promote a desire for ‘transcendence’ from the pervasive luxuries of consumer culture in favour of genuine, tangible, corporeal ‘experience’.

It is also possible to infer that such bodily transcendentalism in Barrett's novel might facilitate a shift from Annie as an 'object' to an essentially Cartesian 'subject', as signified through Annie's perception that her spirit and body can exist separately from one another. As Richard Francks summarises, Cartesian dualism as expounded in Descartes *Meditations* (1641)<sup>73</sup> proffers that 'A living person is not one thing, but two: physical and nonphysical, lower and higher, earthly and divine' (Francks, 2008, p.74); indeed, *Meditations* 'is a book about Objectivity', and specifically about questioning 'whether, when, how and why we can escape from the limitations necessarily imposed on us by factors like our humanity' (Francks, 2008, p.5). Focussing upon the spiritual as opposed to the material returns us once again to a consideration of the 'interconnectedness of trauma and the sublime', a connection which, according to Kohlke, exists because both concepts constitute '*states of extraordinariness*' (2011a, p.139, original emphasis) which 'confront us with, on the one hand, the self's finitude, its dwindling to irrelevance and nothingness, and, on the other, with a spiritual self-elevation or aggrandising "transport" in contemplation of/identification with some absolute power beyond ourselves and human comprehension' (Kohlke, 2011a, p.140).

However, perhaps the most pertinent interpretation is that Annie's willing spiritual transcendence not only enables her to escape from her traumatic physical reality and the scopophilic scrutiny of the audience, but also *liberates* her from her body which remains subject to the essentially exploitative gaze as Zeke later puts her skeleton on display in the museum. Barrett essentially short-circuits the 'spectacle' of Annie's exploitation in the neo-Victorian novel by rendering her immaterial; like Ned's desire to disappear, Annie's willing *rejection* of her own corporeality indicates that transcendence of the phenomenal world is in fact deeply imbricated with Barrett's attention to corporeality; to materiality; and, ultimately, to *visuality*. Focussing upon historical context, Moira Simpson explains that 'Non-European peoples were of particular interest to nineteenth-century researchers seeking evidence of cultural evolution and theories of racial variation' (2001, p.176), while Heilmann and Llewellyn note that 'The exhibition of [...] exotic peoples [served] as emblems of imperial conquest and proved a particularly lucrative form of public amusement [...] Their entertainment value was closely connected to the popularity of freak shows exhibiting human "curiosities"' (2010, p.123). Arguably, Barrett's novel serves to highlight the individual human cost of this inherently exploitative and ethically questionable Victorian 'culture of display' (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2010, p.123), as well

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<sup>73</sup> Francks cites Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch's (1984) edition as the standard modern English version of Descartes' *Meditations*.

as those modes of ‘display’ which constitute contemporary parallels of this Victorian interest, the ‘spectacle’ evoked within the neo-Victorian constituting perhaps the most direct example. The present-day interest in ‘poverty porn’ as discussed in Chapter One, and the practice of exhibiting human remains in museums (which is also further discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Aboriginal ethnographic displays and the future of the museum itself), also spring to mind as examples, both of which constitute subjects of contemporary ethical debate.

Debates rage over the extent to which it is appropriate or morally acceptable to perpetuate the commodification of such artefacts and body-parts, both for the viewing and paying public in the context of museum collections as well as in relation to the neo-Victorian novel. Criticism on the subject reveals that there are arguments to be made in favour of both perspectives, particularly in relation to the important responsibilities inherent to cultural memory work and the correlation between remembrance and commodification of indigenous artefacts and body parts, which is a very pertinent but contentious subject within this debate. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, for example, notes the collapsing boundaries between culture, commerce and commodification in his allegation that ‘museums are experiencing a crisis of identity as they compete with other attractions within a tourism economy that privileges experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure’ (1998, p.7). Indeed, the idea that such displays must be intrinsically ‘exciting’ and ‘adventurous’ recalls historical charges against the ‘othering’ of alternative cultures which was spawned by ‘earlier collectors’ preoccupations and preconceptions about the world, and their place in it’ (Stanton, 2011, p.2).

Speaking to this contemporary debate via literary representation seems to offer what Kohlke describes as ‘an ethical *third way of care* for textualised and imagined bodily remains, which balances compassion with the recognition of violation (and the further symbolic violence enacted by representation as a re-presentation of violence)’, and which ‘never lets us forget the physicality of *lived* suffering, nor its radical, un-shareable individuation – the “who” attached to the “what” of the flesh’ (Kohlke, 2011a, p.148). Such representations, for Kohlke and Gutleben, also provide a means through which the neo-Victorian novel can ‘focus on redefinitions of the limits between mind and body, matter and life, and hence on the traumatic understanding of the unclear boundaries of the human’ (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.13). Hailed by Ernest Smith as ‘capturing with authenticity the heroic endurance of the individual spirit (2002, p.25), and being indicative of facilitating a retrieval of her subjective autonomy, Barrett figures Annie’s spiritual

liberation from her physical body as an empowering and liberating decision: ‘She’d abandoned her body so that she might watch over [Tom]; those men who came later, to take what was left, had only made visible the process she’d begun’ (Barrett, 2000, p.372). Also relevant to this restoration of subjectivity as well as to the consideration of mediating the scientific subject-matter of Barrett’s text are Descartes’ pronouncements regarding science and objective knowledge, two concepts which have been aptly summarised by Francks: ‘scientific thinking is limited at best; it is not an objective path to The Truth, but just one voice among many, one particular point of view on the question, to be set against those of various competing religions, creeds, attitudes or lifestyles’ (2008, p.7). Barrett’s novel seems to champion this point towards the end of her novel through a marked shift from the focus upon Victorian scientific discourses and exploitative practices surrounding ethnography to a prevailing Inuit mythology. According to Roland Barthes, ‘the very principle of myth [is that] it transforms history into nature’ (1972, p.128). Indeed, it is in that way that revenge is wrought upon Zeke in the form of the vengeful ‘tupilaq’:<sup>74</sup>

He had plans for Zeke. Tucked into his jacket were bones he’d stolen from the place where Zeke had caged him: a bird’s curved ribs, a serpent’s spine, a mouse’s foot. He needed more. When he had enough he would make a *tupilaq*, a nightmare skeleton built from bones of all kinds of creatures, wrapped in a skin. By the edge of some water he would set it down and say the secret words; then the *tupilaq* would come alive and swim across any form of water, no matter how far. Blank-eyed it would swim up to Zeke, disguised as a familiar animal; sleek fur, smooth ears. Perhaps it would travel as a deer before allowing itself to be killed. After Zeke slit it down the belly and parted the flesh he’d find all the wrong bones, connected in all the wrong ways. Then he’d die.

(Barrett, 2000, p.371)

This shift constitutes perhaps the ultimate challenge not only to the perceived objective ‘rationality’ prescribed by scientific and exploration narratives, but also to historical

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<sup>74</sup> Inuit mythology was of some considerable interest to the Victorians, as illuminated in the work of Dr Henry Rink, a Victorian explorer and ethnographer who published his work *Tales and traditions of the Eskimo, with a sketch of their habits, religion, language and other peculiarities* in 1875. Rink himself mentions the significance of the ‘tupilak’ [sic] within Inuit culture, describing it as an ‘artificial animal’ which was ‘sent out for the purpose of destroying enemies’ and ‘could certainly also be used with evil designs’ (1875, p.53). Rink explains that ‘common belief in the tupilak, composed of various parts of different animals, and enabled to act in the shape of any of those animals which was wished. The tupilak differed from the amulet in being the work of its own user, and being secretly fashioned by himself. It might therefore seem to belong to witchcraft [...] It must always be remembered that its secret origin and traditional teaching, and not the immediate intention of it in every single case, constituted the evil of witchcraft’ (1875, p.53). Interestingly, it seems that Rink may well have pre-empted the contemporary fascination with revisiting culturally-specific mythologies as he asserts that ‘the time will certainly come when any relics of spiritual life brought down to us from pre-historic mankind, which may still be found in the folklore of the of the more isolated and primitive nations, will be valued as highly as those material remains’ (1875, p.vi).

record. Although Barthes cannot find any useful purpose for myth, his discussion of the subject is helpful for exploring this point. Barthes explains that:

myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences. A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature [...] The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence[.]

(1972, p.142)

If we apply Barthes ideas to the ‘world’ of the text, Barrett’s incorporation of the mythology of the tupilaq might arguably constitute a ‘haemorrhage’ within the reader’s perception of the historical ‘reality’ of the novel, a means of frustrating their engagement by ‘[replacing] history with fanciful and fascinating fictions’ (Ndalianis & Henry, 2002, p.150), negating its historical ‘quality’. Mitchell – in describing the function of mythology in relation to Tom Swift’s *Waterland* (1983) specifically – counters Barthes’ supposition of the lack of value inherent to myth as she reasons that ‘the explanations offered by myths are as crucial for comprehending experience as those offered by discourses conventionally considered factual’ (2010a, p.84). The ‘reality’ of Tom’s mythological tupilaq and its vindicatory function are validated, demonstrating a decided refusal to privilege scientific over mythological discourse and, in doing so, championing the merits of less factually verifiable interpretations of historical understanding.

The constitution of the tupilaq itself is also of significance to this point: crafted from a combination of body parts of several different animals, the tupilaq is, characteristically, a pastiche (i.e. a ‘patchwork’) of materials which, when worked together, take on a transformational new parodic ‘life’, much like Barrett’s neo-Victorian novel itself. That this mythological hybrid creature ultimately wreaks vengeance upon Zeke for his exploitative and uncompassionate treatment of both Annie and Tom is perhaps reflective of the potentially redeeming or redemptive qualities of neo-Victorian fiction as a ‘hybrid’ assemblage in itself, insofar as Barrett’s own compilation of narratives can perhaps offer some vindication for historical exploitation by addressing gaps in historical narratives and highlighting the usefulness of mythological and literary approaches to historical understanding.

## **Conclusion: or, being ‘drawn by the chaos, drawn by the wounds’**

The conclusion of Barrett’s novel in which the tupilaq is deployed by Tom once he has been returned by Erasmus and Alexandra to his Arctic home is worthy of some focussed consideration as it not only implies the connectedness of traumatic historical events, but also – for the final time – returns the reader to a consideration of the (re)viewing of traumatic historical events. The narrator implies that the tupilaq eventually locates its intended victim as they comment that ‘A few years later, as Zeke floated in the Rappahannock River, his face and chest above the blood-ribboned water, his shoulders bumping the hundreds of men who struggled, like him, to cross to the other side, something like a muskrat would brush his hands’ (Barrett, 2000, p.394). Here the narrator implies that the perceived muskrat is in fact the tupilaq; yet also of significant interest is the implicit reference to a traumatic event in America’s own history, the American Civil War.<sup>75</sup> It is perhaps with some resounding aptitude that the battles fought in the American Civil War are often referred to technically as ‘theaters’ of battle, particularly as civilian spectatorship at such events became increasingly common;<sup>76</sup> Kohlke and Gutleben, for example, have noted the burgeoning activity of ‘battlefield tourism’ during the middle of the nineteenth century, in which ‘civilians, including army wives, [took] outings to the best vantage points along the front, equipped with telescopes and opera glasses to watch the death and dying up close and personal’ (2010, p.10). Both critics interpret this as perhaps the genus of contemporary trauma tourism through their statement that ‘In light of such vicarious spectatorship of horrific events, Miller and Tougaw’s “suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion” can hardly be termed a particularly modern phenomenon’ (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.10; citing Miller & Tougaw, 2002, p.2).

Copernicus appears to embody a combination of touristic spectator and war artist at the end of the novel,<sup>77</sup> being described as being ‘drawn by the chaos, drawn by the wounds, always in movement but that day painting furiously on that bank’ (Barrett, 2000, p.394). In this way Copernicus himself becomes the author of a visual medium which

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<sup>75</sup> Rather than offering an explicit explanation as to the historical context of this scene, Barrett instead offers ‘clues to direct the reader to the significance of the Rappahannock River as ‘arguably the most important stream in the Eastern Theater of the American Civil War’ (Winters, 1998, p.276), which commenced in 1861 and concluded in 1865.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Jim Burgess, a museum specialist at the Manassas National Battlefield Museum, has conceded that ‘It is a popular, almost legendary, story that innumerable civilians armed with picnic baskets followed the Union Army out from Washington in July 1861 to watch what everyone thought would be the climactic battle of a short rebellion’ (2011, para.1).

<sup>77</sup> Kohlke and Gutleben have identified the Crimean War as the event which saw ‘the first war artists and photographers’ in attendance at such battles (2010, p.10).

captures this specific traumatic moment in the Civil War, while being ‘drawn by the wounds’ perhaps aptly reflects the contemporary fascination with mediating – or re-presenting – specifically *historical* wounds in a mode characteristic of Seltzer’s previously discussed idea of a contemporary ‘wound culture’. The narrator’s following comment that ‘A war would have started by then, obscuring the arctic in people’s minds as if it were no more than legend’ (Barrett, 2000, p.394) emphasises the inevitable forward-movement of history as ceaselessly shifting from one ‘traumatic’ event to the next – reflecting what Frank Kermode would term as the ‘simple chronicity’ (2000, p.46) of time – before reverting once again to the moment on the bank in which Tom releases the hybrid tupilaq in to the arctic waters. In this way, the ‘mere successiveness’ of narrative linearity ‘is purged by the establishment of a significant relation between the moment and a remote origin and end, a concord of past, present, and future’ (Kermode, 2000, p.50) within the narrative frame of the text which arguably evokes ‘a sense of repetition and both active and involuntary remembering, as the reader responds to perceived convergences, resonances, and interconnections between [...] historically distinct traumas’ (Wallhead & Kohlke, 2010, p.222): between traumas past and present, and which occur on both an individual and cultural scale.

In Chapter Three I consider an alternative variety of hybridisation in consideration of the potential motivations for, and implications of, the amalgamation of traumatic representation and satirical humour in Kneale’s *English Passengers*. A seemingly incompatible combination, the following chapter reveals the subversive potential of the commingling of comedy and traumatic representation in relation to the pre-established idea of ‘perverse nostalgia’, and explores these concepts at both a temporal and geographic remove and against the backdrop of another culturally-traumatic moment in Australian history: namely, the moment of the dispossession and extermination of the indigenous Australian Aborigines.

## Chapter Three

### ‘Painfully funny’: Exploring the Hybridization of Satire and Violence in Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers*

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*‘It is simply outside my nature to remain unmoved by tales of the wretched of this world [...] In consequence it was no doubt inevitable that, upon coming to this distant colony of Tasmania, I would find myself drawn to the lamentable story of that island’s aboriginal natives.’*

*- Mrs Gerald Denton, Wife of the Governor of Tasmania*  
(Kneale, 2000, p.311, my emphasis)

*But we know that the history of literature is the history of laughter and pain. The imperatives from which there is no escape are: ‘Laugh till it hurts, and hurt till you laugh!’*  
(Durrell, 1960, p.138, original emphasis)

Described by Michael Ross<sup>78</sup> as a ‘work of comic subversion’ (2006, p.248), Matthew Kneale’s novel *English Passengers* employs satirical language, dark humour, and irony to effectively explore the complexity of individual suffering and perseverance against the backdrop of a culturally traumatic moment in history: the displacement and destruction of Australian Aboriginal culture by Victorian settlers, and the subsequent extermination of the Aborigines themselves. This chapter explores a narrative reimagining of traumatic historical events in a colonial setting: in this case, the plot of the story focusses upon the dispossession of thousands of Aborigines from their homeland in Van Diemen’s Land (now known as Tasmania), and their subsequent systematic obliteration by the English colonisers.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ross’s analysis of Kneale’s text centres upon the fact that the novel ‘consistently draws on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1954; originally published 1611] as an intertext’ to assert that the novel ‘enacts a tour de force of historical revisionism by turning inside-out colonialist assumptions embedded in *The Tempest* and handed down to modernity in the form of humorous literary and pictorial treatments of “primitives” (Ross, 2006, p.248; p.267).

<sup>79</sup> Approaching the topic of the destruction of the Aboriginal people contemporarily is made problematic due to ongoing debates regarding the most appropriate terminology to use. The term ‘genocide’ seems to raise perhaps the most objections from critics such as Keith Windschuttle (2002) and Wolfgang Funk (2011), although these specific critics occupy polar positions within of the ‘spectrum’ of this argument. Windschuttle claims that historians ‘have created a picture of widespread mass killings’ and that the use of ‘terms such as ‘genocide’, ‘extermination’ and ‘extirpation’ are essentially inaccurate and misleading (2002, p.3), and professes instead that ‘[t]he notion of sustained ‘frontier warfare’ is fictional’ (2002, p.3) as the ‘colonial authorities wanted to civilize and modernize the Aborigines, not exterminate them’ (2002, p.9). Interestingly, Windschuttle believes that the motivation for using such terminology is because ‘there have been so many people throughout history who have *wanted* so badly to believe the worst possible story’ (2002, p.9, original emphasis), and that by doing so these individuals ‘have believed they were taking the Aboriginal side in a great national debate’ (2002, p.9). On the other hand, Funk suggests (somewhat more reservedly) that ‘it is [...] not justified to categorize the extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines as genocide,’ (2011, p.63), and

In an interview conducted by Sean McDonald, Kneale explains how he became inspired to write about this specific historical moment in English and Australian history: ‘I had written about Victorians being disastrously wrong-headed at home (in London) and so it seemed only right to look at them being disastrously wrong-headed overseas. Their record in Tasmania seemed especially atrocious, so that seemed the right place to start’ (n.d., para.1). Significantly, Kneale is not the only author concerned with re-summoning the plight of the Aborigines to their pages: other novels in this vein include Robert Drewe’s *The Savage Crows* (1976), Colin Johnson’s *Dr Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the End of the World* (1983), Robert Edric’s *Elysium* (1995), Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* (2005), and Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* (2001) and – as mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to the novel’s simultaneous consideration of both the Franklin expedition and the decimation of the Aborigines – his novel, *Wanting* (2008).<sup>80</sup>

Clearly an interest in the fate of the Aborigines still holds some relevance for both indigenous and non-native authors today, although what motivates this literary return remains open to interpretation. Mark McKenna suggests that ‘More than two centuries after the first contact between European and indigenous people took place, the colonisers are finally looking over their shoulder in an attempt to understand the indigenous culture they dispossessed’ (2002, p.16), while critics such as Lisanne Gibson and John Pendlebury affirm that ‘discursive spaces are gradually being made for alternative versions of Australian stories’ (2009, p.82). Robert Foster, Rick Hosking and Amanda Nettelbeck perceive this creation of discursive spaces as a means of ‘challenging the foundational narratives that generations of Australians have taken for granted’ as ‘A feature of national histories written in the era of ‘White Australia’, from the turn of the century to the 1960s, is the almost total exclusion of Indigenous people from the story’ (2001, p.140; p.9).

However, such re-writings of historical violence are necessarily accompanied by issues pertaining to effective representation, as well as of readerly motivation to re-engage with traumatic historical events. As discussed in Chapter One in relation to the ‘urban

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instead endorses Chalk and Jonassohn’s use of the term ‘ethnocide’, being defined as ‘cases in which a group disappears without mass killing’ (1990, p.23).

<sup>80</sup> Robert Drewe, Kate Grenville and Richard Flanagan are Australian authors, while Colin Johnson is an Australian aboriginal author who officially changed his name to ‘Mudrooroo Naragin’ in 1988. (There is some controversy as to Mudrooroo’s genuine ethnic identity: Johnston (2009) recommends Annalisa Oboe’s (Ed.), *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (2003) and Maureen Clark’s *Mudrooroo: A Likely Story: Identity and Belonging in Postcolonial Australia* (2007) as book-length studies of this issue; to this reading list I wish to add Gerhard Fischer’s essay titled ‘Mis-Taken Identity: Mudrooroo and Gordon Matthews’ (2000). The exception to this list of authors who can lay claim to some form of Australian identity is Robert Edric, who – like Kneale – is a British novelist, and thereby approaches the issue of Australia’s past from a British perspective. The issue of eurocentrism is raised more fully in the conclusion to this thesis, while Edric’s engagement with issues pertaining to Victorian colonialism is also explored in Chapter Four.

explorer', the temporal distance proffered by the neo-Victorian novel seemingly renders the Victorian past an alternative kind of exotic 'location' for the reader to 'explore' in pursuit of an understanding of the ultimate 'alterity' of the historical 'other'; however, the discussion so far in relation to both *The Journal of Dora Damage* and *The Voyage of the Narwhal* have demonstrated that this engagement is not, in fact, as straight-forward as it might initially seem. Kneale's *English Passengers*, which charts the trials and tribulations of a Victorian sea-voyage from England to Van Diemen's Land, seemingly also proffers such a vehicle for readerly exploration.

Briefly touching upon Foucault's concept of 'heterotopic sites' (1986, p.26),<sup>81</sup> Ho posits Kneale's novel within the sub-genre of the 'neo-Victorian-at-Sea', a literary trend which 'establishes the ocean, rather than Britain, as the liquid site of Empire [...] forcing us to rethink even further the usual structures of center [sic] and periphery that mark most postcolonial fiction' (2012, p.174). Victoria Burrows recognises the term 'heterotopia' as a Latin term which literally translates as a 'place of otherness' (2008, p.165), while Ho (in a brief allusion to the concept) describes the heterotopic space as one in which 'otherness is constructed and flourishes' (2012, p.176). Pertinently, Foucault himself stipulates that heterotopias 'are most often linked to slices in time' which he terms 'heterochronies' (1986, p.26), rendering the correlation of this concept with the neo-Victorian all the more pertinent, particularly in light of Kevin Hetherington's assertion that heterotopias can be 'textual sites as much as geographical ones' (1997, p.43). The heterotopic site espouses the 'curious property of being in relation with [...] other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect' (Foucault, 1986 p.24). While proffering a space of 'otherness', then, the heterotopia actually implicitly works to reflect upon and 'neutralize' its *own* existence as a site of 'otherness'. As Laura Hengehold further clarifies, heterotopias 'alert participants to the fact that even at moments of apparent continuity, their attention is claimed by a plurality of temporalities and levels of historical analysis' (2007, p.22); in Foucault's terms:

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<sup>81</sup> Foucault lists a number of examples of what he perceives to be heterotopic spaces which include museums; libraries; cemeteries; fairgrounds; and prisons, to name just a few. Given the corporeal and anatomical focus of this thesis, it seems particularly fitting that the term 'heterotopia' 'originates within the study of anatomy' as a term which is 'used to refer to parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or [...] 'alien'' (Hetherington, 1997, p.42); in this sense, the dual meanings of 'heterotopia' seem to all intents and purposes to 'intersect', as the neo-Victorian as a heterotopic 'space' is simultaneously correlated with the representational displacement of body parts, as explored in previous chapters One and Two, as well as in this chapter.

There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite*; and that word should be taken in its most literal, etymological sense: in such a state, things are ‘laid’, ‘placed’, ‘arranged’ in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common* locus beneath them all. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy syntax in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax, which causes words and things... to ‘hold together’.

(Foucault, 1970, p.xviii, original emphasis)

In explanation of Foucault’s complex point, Beth Lord explains that ‘the heterotopia undermines the ‘syntax’ of representation: it “loosens the embrace” of words and things’ as ‘The systems of representation that bridge the gap between words and things, the bodies of rules that order the way words and things hold together, are not allowed to stand in the heterotopia’ (2006, p.84). In sum, ‘The heterotopia undermines systems of representation not in order to replace them with other systems, but rather to show up those systems of representation as being contingent and discontinuous’ (Lord, 2006, p.84).

Foucault defines the ship specifically as a ‘heterotopia *par excellence*’ as ‘a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea’ (1986, p.27): accordingly, ‘In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates’ (1986, p.27, my emphasis). By Foucault’s logic, Kneale’s re-appropriation of the ship – dubbed ‘the greatest reserve of the imagination’ (Foucault, 1986, p.27) – arguably constitutes a particularly appropriate vehicle ‘vessel’ on which to navigate the reader’s desire for exoticised Victorian experiences and vicarious ‘travel’ and exploration, as the heterotopia itself serves to reflect upon (and in doing so, neutralise) its own existence as a space of ‘Otherness’.

However, the idea of readerly ‘travel’ raises several pertinent questions regarding the extent to which it is appropriate to facilitate the re-visitation of turbulent and traumatic cultural historical events. Does this specific mode of return to Australian historical and cultural atrocities in Kneale’s text, for example, exploit the historical decimation of an entire people for the reader’s ‘enjoyment’? Are such representations – which are interweaved with humorous asides and inferences – indicative of a ‘perverse nostalgia’, and one which humour works to further problematize? Does the inclusion of graphic representations of the violence intrinsic to such cultural traumas indemnify or supplement

the potentially exploitative nature of a ‘touristic’ re-engagement with such histories? And does this return constitute a problematic commodification of historical violence and perceived ‘otherness’, or a contribution to what William Stanner has termed ‘the remarkable market for all things aboriginal’ (1991, p.38)?

Sara Ahmed might well perceive this to be the case as she argues that ‘The flow of cultural images and objects which play with “otherness” and “difference” may serve to reproduce *as well as* threaten the imaginary boundaries between social or racial groups’ (2000, p.116, original emphasis); similarly, Hiller finds that the West has ‘an unconscious and ambivalent involvement with the colonial transaction of defining Europe’s ‘others’ as *primitives*, which, reciprocally, maintains an equally mythical ‘western’ ethnic identity’ (1991, p.1, original emphasis). Stanner’s own suspicion of the motivation for the ‘marketization’ of Aboriginal history and artefacts certainly implies a form of nostalgia, as he asserts that:

[...] the market only wants traditional things. It smacks of a *romantic cult of the past*, a cult that could end as rapidly as it began. Exactly where the market came from I do not know, but I question whether we would be right in reading from the fact of its existence to a proof of any deep-seated change of heart or mind towards the living aborigines. I see it rather as the sign of an affluent society enjoying the afterglow of an imagined past and as a reaching out for symbols and values that are not authentically its own but will do because it has none of its own that are equivalent.

(1991, p.39, my emphasis)

Stanner’s perception of this ‘romantic cult of the past’ is indicative of a nostalgic re-engagement which seeks to *exclude* the traumatic reality of the fate of the Aborigines; by this logic, Kneale’s narrative *inclusion* of the traumatic elements of this ‘imagined past’, then, might logically seem to constitute a distinctly perverse nostalgia for past suffering, violence, and desecration, while considering this in relation to the previously-discussed heterotopic capabilities attributed to the ship voyage might well position the reader as a literary ‘trauma tourist’.

Hiller, however, provides an alternative perspective on this issue which might temper this conclusion as she approaches the question of the commodification from a slightly different angle to reflect upon concerns regarding the deliberate *exclusion* of more ‘disturbing’ Aborigine ‘artefacts’ and items – including scalps, fingers, and various other bodily ‘specimens’ – from modern-day museum collections:<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pertinently, as mentioned briefly in the Introduction to this thesis, Foucault also determines the museum as a heterotopic space: a fuller discussion of the relevance of this point is offered later in this chapter.

Over the years, ethnographic collections have been edited to exclude items shocking to contemporary sensibilities [...]. The more aesthetically acceptable items are considered worthy of display, but what becomes of the others? At what point do they disappear from history? And what are the implications of this drastic pruning of the content of ethnographic collections?

(1991, p.188)

Hiller's interrogation of what is included or neglected from ethnographic collections, and why certain more 'disturbing' items are excised from display, can arguably be correlated with the alleged revisionist impulses of the neo-Victorian novel which might arguably seek to confront such absences within their narratives. Recalling Sir Jocelyn Knightley's pseudo-ethnographic interests in *The Journal of Dora Damage* (discussed in Chapter One), Kneale's novel mediates the extreme, disturbing and exploitative lengths that Victorian ethnographers would go to in order to prove theories of ethnic superiority through his depiction of the gruesome theft of the remains of the deceased Aboriginal woman Walyeric by Dr Thomas Potter (an obsessive English racial theorist and surgeon).<sup>83</sup> In this way, Kneale arguably brings to light a shamefully popular and gruesome Victorian practice once rationalised as being of benefit to scientific understanding, as well as the less desirable truths and traumatic realities of Victorian colonial traumas, and the Victorian – and, most pertinently, the *contemporary* – fetishisation of 'otherness'.

The forthcoming discussion explores Kneale's representations of corporeal and symbolic violence and representations pertaining to the commodification of Aborigine 'bodies' in consideration of their function, purpose, and effect upon the reader. The fact that the novel is 'framed' by references to the body and fragmentation arguably indicates the significance of corporeal representations in the novel (the narrative opens with the question, 'Say a man catches a bullet through his skull in somebody's war, so where's the beginning of that?' (Kneale, 2000, p.1), and ends with the account of the mis-categorisation of Dr Potter's physical remains). Wolfgang Funk has also acknowledged the significance of corporeality to the novel, having conducted a study of *English Passengers* which proffers an approach based upon the 'fragmentation and [...] re-assemblage of bodies as a recurrent symbol' (2011, p.64): however, my analysis departs from Funk's to explore Kneale's seemingly heterotopic implementation of humour alongside narrative accounts of somatic, symbolic and cultural violence. In doing so, the forthcoming

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<sup>83</sup> Potter is a re-imagining of the historical figure Robert Knox, author of *The Races of Men, A Fragment* (1850), which is re-appropriated and renamed in Kneale's text as *The Destiny of Nations: being a consideration upon the different strengths and characteristics of the many races and types of man, and the likely consequences of their future struggle* (Kneale, 2000, p.206).

discussion reveals the combination of humour and trauma (which could arguably be considered as adding an extra dimension to the idea of a ‘perverse nostalgia’) as an effective means of revealing incongruities and discontinuities in perception, recalling Lyotard’s sentiments regarding how trauma undermines systems of representation not to replace them with other systems, but rather to show up those systems of representation as being *discontinuous*.

A short snippet from a review by *The Guardian* newspaper included in the ‘blurb’ on the back of Kneale’s novel heralds *English Passengers* for ‘interleaving [...] high comedy with dramatic terror’, a statement which initially seems somewhat contradictory but effectively captures Kneale’s narrative approach. These seemingly disparate elements of the text might initially be considered problematic: for example, as an indication of a perverse or exploitative engagement with the violent past. Freud’s idea that humour can facilitate a lifting of inhibitions, facilitating the release of ‘hostile impulses’ is a useful consideration in relation to this: as Freud explains, ‘A joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, *bring forward openly or consciously* [...] the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible’ (1976, p.147). Freud’s sentiments certainly raises the question of whether the combined incorporation of humour and trauma at a temporal remove further displaces that which is socially unacceptable in a way which enables such topics to ‘evade’ contemporary ‘restrictions’ of acceptability, or even, potentially, of legality, rendering the reader’s engagement with historical traumas and taboos more ‘permissible’.

However, this chapter finds that trauma and humour can be usefully explored in tandem as ‘hybridised’ concepts. Charles Baudelaire clarifies this possibility through his stipulation that laughter – as an ‘essentially human’ phenomena – is also ‘essentially contradictory, that is, it is at the same time a sign of infinite grandeur and infinite misery’, and that it is ‘from out of the perpetual shock of these two infinities that laughter emanates’ (1964, p.532). This chapter argues that the commingling of humour and violence in the text might be understood in relation to what has been termed as ‘incongruity theories’ of humour.<sup>84</sup> As Noël Carroll summarises, ‘incongruity in a comic situation may involve transgressions in logic [...] incongruity may also be secured by means of merely inappropriate transgressions of norms or of commonplace expectations, or through the

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<sup>84</sup> Incongruity theories are a long-established element of humour theory and have been discussed by several prominent humour theorists including James Beattie (1776), who is widely perceived as first establishing the concept, as well as Arthur Schopenhauer (1907) and Søren Kierkegaard (1941).

exploration of the outer limits of our concepts, norms, and commonplace expectations' (1999, p.154). Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have also found that the 'possibility of a comic turn in the presence of horror or terror' relies on the idea of the 'juxtaposition of incongruous textual effects' (2005, p.3) which arguably undermines an unproblematic engagement on the part of the reader due to 'the contrast between the feeling of pleasure and displeasure' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.305), and also – arguably – due to the oscillation between comical and traumatic representations.

Kneale's commingling of these two seemingly disparate constituents thereby undermines the novel as a space in which to indulge the 'perverse pleasure' of an exploration of Otherness at a historical remove by promoting a readerly self-awareness through the revelation of unsettling incongruities and attitudes, or what is and isn't acceptable to 'laugh' at. Recalling Kristeva's previously-outlined concept of abjection as that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982, p.4), Caitlin Charman's assertion that 'The insertion of humorous elements into an otherwise gruesome tale [...] exemplifies the collapse of categories' (2006, p.14) illuminates the effectiveness of humour as a mode of destabilising the reader's engagement with traumatic representation. In consequence of the commingling of trauma and humour, 'the familiar becomes unfamiliar' and unsettling (Charman, 2006, p.14). In this way, Kneale's text fulfils the criteria of the neo-adventure novel in the sense that *English Passengers* seemingly chronicles exploration of alternative places, but in fact undermines this possibility by frustrating the reader's engagement.

It is logical to suggest, therefore, that there may not be an integral disparity between representations of historical traumas – which are inherently 'unknowable' as they defy, even as they claim, our understanding (Caruth, 1996, p.5) – and humorous interjection within the text as the two operate not only concurrently, but *integrally*, with each other. This constitutes an effectual hybridisation<sup>85</sup> of two seemingly disparate concepts which work in such a way as to collapse categories of authority within the novel and to promote self-reflexivity in the reader.

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<sup>85</sup> Gutleben has similarly considered the hybridisation of humour in relation to the neo-Victorian Gothic to assert that the combination of the two mainly has 'a function of regeneration [...] and can be considered as an illustration of the concept of heterosis' (2012, p.322); however, the discussion proffered in this thesis departs from Gutleben's in looking specifically at how humour operates in relation to traumatic representation specifically, and the implications of this in relation to unsettling the reader's sense of narrative 'travelling'.

## **Taking laughter seriously: A (brief) introduction to the relationship between postcolonial literature, humour and (re)presenting Aboriginal history**

In a review for *The Guardian*, David Taylor somewhat contradictorily decrys ‘Instant categorization’ as ‘one of the cardinal sins’ before nonetheless professing that Kneale’s novel ‘summons up the adjective “post-colonial” just as surely as chicken summons up bread sauce’ (2001, para.1). Somewhat humorously, this reviewer is mistaken: *English Passengers* is not (technically) a postcolonial novel, as Kneale has no claim to Australian heritage – or any colonial heritage, for that matter – which could justify formally categorizing his text thusly. It is justifiable, however, to propose that Kneale’s novel engages with issues and themes pertinent to much postcolonial literature and to the postcolonial author from an English perspective, and as a resident of a country which contributed greatly to the Western colonizing project.

In this respect, Kneale’s novel – as well as speaking to the idea of neo-adventure – also belongs within the contemporary trend of the ‘cosmopolitan novel’, a type of text which manifests ‘a cosmopolitan vision that is made possible by the era of globalization, but that simultaneously possesses the aesthetic resources to resist and challenge its homogenizing effects’ (Ho, 2011, p.358). In his comprehensive study of this relatively new literary phenomenon, Berthold Schoene alleges that ‘Contemporary Britain finds itself in a unique cultural and political position as a post-imperial and increasingly devolved nation sandwiched between neo-Imperial US America and supranational “Old” Europe’ (2009, pp.6-7), and yet ‘Despite its apparent diversity and worldliness English literature still fundamentally serves a ‘mosaic’ of nations’: indeed, ‘The simple fact that so many different national perspectives cluster and converge within its imaginative realm renders English literature international, but not necessarily also cosmopolitan. Global circulation and popularity do not guarantee a cosmopolitan outlook; neither does an author’s choice of the world as their central topic, or their targeting of a world readership, even though this is certainly important’ (2009, p.16). Fundamentally for Schoene, ‘What matters in the end is a particular stance towards the world, which must come to be shared by author and reader’ (2009, p.16), a stance which acknowledges ‘literature’s propensity for world-creation rather than simple rendition or representation’ (2009, p.16), achieved through the refusal of such literature to ‘circumscribe community into a fixed identity or to subject it to a totalizing telos’ (Ho, 2011, p.358).

Additionally, it is accurate to say that Kneale's text mirrors certain narrative techniques used within postcolonial literature, fundamentally including – as Heinz Antor recognises – satire and 'dark' humour. 'Postcolonial studies', Antor remarks, '[...] seem to be an utterly humourless affair, as a brief glance at some of the current anthologies and surveys of the field quickly shows' (2005, p.89), a statement which initially, perhaps, comes as no great surprise considering that much postcolonial literature focusses upon historical traumas, oppression, and misdeeds, with topics such as war, colonisation, genocide, death, suffering, and subjugation constituting primary topics of consideration.

Yet Antor points out that 'a look at concrete examples of postcolonial literature and more detailed reflection on the concepts of the postcolonial and of humour and laughter will make the absence noted above appear to be quite a curious one' (2005, p.89).<sup>86</sup> Antor is not alone in this allegation; Susan Reichl and Mark Stein (2005), as well as Manfred Pfister (2002) and Hammu Salmi (2011) have also recognized that much post-colonial literature – or, as with *English Passengers*, literature that deals with specifically post-colonial themes and concerns - can in fact be quite notably humorous *despite* a primary focus upon historical wrong-doing, and that the subsequent absence of the categories of 'humour' and laughter' within the remit of most Postcolonial Anthologies is '[...] based on the erroneous assumption that laughter is something that cannot be taken seriously' (Antor, 2005, p.89).

Kneale's interesting collaboration of narrative techniques and their similarity with those employed within 'concrete examples' of postcolonial literature (including multiple perspectives and use of alternative linguistic 'dialects', etc.), alongside his manipulation of language and incorporation of satirical humour, raises the question – effectively summarised by Reichl and Stein – as to 'whether laughter in postcolonial cultural production lends agency or whether it, in fact, prevents opposition and dissent by relieving some of the tension', prompting the ponderous question, 'Does the laughter in or induced by postcolonial fiction gesture towards a new world order? Or does postcolonial laughter uphold the order of the day?' (2005, p.11).

This question renders the issue of what exactly constitutes appropriate modes of representation all the more pertinent, as stated plainly by Stanner who cogently summarises the problem: 'Depreciating [the Aborigines] is a way of justifying having injured them in the past and an excuse for short-changing them in the present and future.

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<sup>86</sup> Some examples of humorous contemporary postcolonial novels include Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2000), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), to name only a small, indicative selection.

Sentimentalizing them is to go too far in the other direction. We can neither undo the past nor compensate for it. The most we can do is give the living their due' (1991, p.44).

While Stanner is, in this instance, making reference to debates currently taking place regarding indigenous artefacts, cultural memory and responsibility, and land-rights,<sup>87</sup> it seems dismissive to suggest that re-writing the historical existence and experiences of the Aborigines under colonisation is without merit; after all, 'while these stories of frontier violence may have been mythologized, the violence of the frontier was no myth' (Foster, Hosking & Nettelbeck, 2001, p.1), and as such are befitting of contemporary observance. McKenna stresses that 'It was not until the last three decades of the twentieth century, with the emergence of a new school of critical history which exposed the violence of the Australian frontier, together with an increasingly politicised Aboriginal resistance, that Australians were confronted with the story of Aboriginal 'decay, decimation and death'' (2002, p.30); indeed, McKenna even contends that 'there are areas in Australia where the culture of silence and forgetting has not been broken' (2002, p.32), further emphasising the importance of appropriating modes of return to this turbulent period in Australian history.

Elleke Boehmer champions the compilation of fictional narrative accounts as a means of 'rekindling' memory: 'For a people shipwrecked by history, a story of the past, even if wholly or in part a fiction, [...] offers a kind of restitution' through the forging of 'imaginary connections between the reduced present and the legendary past' (2005, p.189). As Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck have asserted, 'Violence by settlers against Aboriginal people often went unreported' (2001, p.7); as such, fictional accounts which acknowledge that such acts of violence occurred become all the more pertinent. By way of illuminating the multiplicity of subjective perspectives and approaches to re-presenting the historical events under discussion, Kneale's text incorporates a veritable tapestry of perspectives and narrative testimonials from a variety of characters including (among others) an Aboriginal native (Peevay); a scientist (Dr Potter); a Christian pastor (the Reverend Geoffrey Wilson); various Governors and officials who live upon the island (such as George Alder) and their

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<sup>87</sup> Simpson addresses the issue of the possession of cultural artefacts and bodily remains, stating that 'In recent years, [these items] have become the subject of strenuous efforts to facilitate repatriation to the cultures of origin; indigenous peoples, particularly Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians, have been mounting campaigns in efforts to obtain the bones of their ancestors [...]' as a means of 'discard[ing] the assumptions of dominant cultures [...]and develop new codes of practice which accept and respect alternative world views and the wishes of indigenous peoples with regard to the treatment of their dead' (2001, p.185). The issue of securing land-rights for indigenous Australians is an on-going concern, described by BBC reported Red Harrison as 'the most politically divisive issue Australians have faced for many years' (1997, Para.1).

wives (such as Mrs Gerald Denton); a crew of Manxmen<sup>88</sup> sailors (including Captain Illiam Quillian Kewley); and a criminal deportee (Jack Harp). Through this diverse collection of voices and perspectives, Kneale's novel pays close attention to re-presenting both literal and symbolic violence inflicted upon the native Aborigines, focussing particularly on how physical trauma is inflicted upon the body of the 'savage other'.

### **Global colonial traumas and the problematic relationship between proximity and responsibility**

Despite focussing on the plight of the Australian Aborigine, Kneale situates the plot of his narrative within the broader context of global historical colonial violence. Before embarking formally upon their journey in search of Eden, Jonah Childs – the patron of the voyage, without whose 'extraordinary kindness the whole expedition would have been impossible' (Kneale, 2000, p.16) – informs the Reverend Wilson of the latest news from the British colonies in India as he states, 'There's been a terrible rebellion by the Bengal Army. Delhi has fallen and hundreds of poor women and children are feared brutally murdered' (Kneale, 2000, p.29). Wilson comments directly upon the effect that distance has upon such reports of 'foreign' violence, while still professing his sympathies for the English victims: 'There is news and news. Most of it catches your sympathies only modestly, and though it may cause in us brief joy or sorrow, its *distant protagonists soon fade from thought*. This, however, was different. Here, surely, was catastrophe on a monstrous scale' (Kneale, 2000, p.29, my emphasis).

Wilson's early sentiments not only epitomize a self-conscious reflection of contemporary responses to violence which occur at a geographical remove (the extent of global suffering and violence made manifest primarily via the medium of newspapers, television and the internet), but also seem pertinent in relation to Kneale's re-evocation of historical violence in the neo-Victorian novel which necessarily also exists at a *temporal* remove. That Wilson acknowledges the fact that most news of this nature 'catches your sympathies only modestly' due to the *distance* of the protagonists can be correlated with Sontag's criticism of images and photographs of global suffering, in which she professes

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<sup>88</sup> 'Manxman' is a term used to describe natives or inhabitants of the Isle of Man. Captain Kewley's narrative is written in an Anglo-Manx dialect, described by Kneale in an epilogue as 'a Celtic language, closely related to Irish and Scottish Gaelic' (2000, p.459). Kneale explains that the Manx dialect 'declined during the nineteenth century' and that today 'the Anglo-Manx dialect has, like the old Gaelic language before it, largely vanished now' (2000, p.459). Much like the motivation for the creation of Peevay's unique language, Kneale describes the Manx dialect as reflective of 'a people who delighted in playing games with language' (2000, p.460).

that 'Wherever people feel safe [...] they will be indifferent' (2003, p.100), with the explanation that:

These sights carry a double message. They show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place. The ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world.

(2003, p.71)

That Wilson goes on to profess his sympathy for the 'innocents' (i.e. the English, implicitly implying an inherent non-innocence and barbarity in relation to the native inhabitants of these 'cruel and dusty plains') implies his sense of removal from the situation as per Sontag's assertion that, 'So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence' (2003, p.102). Wilson professes: 'I recalled those angry, anxious faces outside Horse Guards' Parade – well did I understand them now – and for a moment it was *almost as if I could hear the terrified cries of innocents, carried magically across the miles*, from those cruel and dusty plains' (Kneale, 2000, p.29, my emphasis). His imaginary evocation of these 'terrible cries' from 'across the miles' initially seems to render a sense of proximity to their suffering, before undermining it again through the following statement which itself puts the news of the Mutiny at a temporal remove as Jonah Childs explains that 'The news takes a month to arrive' (Kneale, 2000, p.29). This serves to reassert Wilson's sense of distance – and hence also of safety – which comes from 'the possible satisfaction of knowing, This is not happening to *me*' (Sontag, 2003, p.99). Terry Eagleton similarly describes sympathy and pity as a 'species of *schadenfreude*, agreeably reminding us of our own freedom from harm in contrast to another's misery' (2003, p.156, original emphasis), a description which might parallel the reader's potential response to traumatic events reported to them via present-day media.

Ironically, despite his protestation that this news is 'different' and of a 'monstrous scale', Wilson's interest in the suffering of English 'innocents' proves to be short-lived, as demonstrated during his discovery that the ship he had commissioned to transport him in his search for the Garden of Eden (which he believes to be located in Tasmania) has been urgently re-commissioned by the English military as a means of sending munitions to Delhi along with the ship's proposed captain, Major Stanford, who is to be sent to Calcutta with his regiment. His sense of injustice at this set of circumstances is palpably humorous:

Only two days more and we would have been already at sea, safe from any such misfortune. I felt the greatest sympathy, naturally, for the military in this, their hour of grave crisis, and yet still I could not help but wish they had found another vessel to requisition, and another major. *Was not our venture, after its own fashion, every bit as important as their campaigns against murderous rebels?* If they were attempting to defend the rule of civilization, we were endeavouring to defend the very rock upon which was built that civilization: the scriptures themselves.

(Kneale, 2000, p.40)

Wilson's suggestion that his quest to locate the holy scriptures is as important – if not more important – than the humanitarian crisis taking place in India resounds as humorous to the reader as it highlights an incongruous self-serving selfishness which sits 'at odds' with his role as a Christian Pastor. Recalling Charman's previously-mentioned assertion regarding the ability of humour to 'collapse' categories and modes of authority, Wilson's callous sentiments operate to undermine the many 'moral' diatribes and challenges that afflict him throughout the novel. The imposition of a rhetorical question works as a subconscious prompt for the reader his/herself to reflect upon the discordant and impious immorality of such a sentiment.

Captain Kewley, on the other hand, offers a different perspective on the reported violence taking place in India. At the beginning of the text, Kewley's ship – ironically named the *Sincerity*, despite its multiple concealed holds and hidden storage areas – is searched by customs officials, who believe (correctly, as it happens) that Kewley is smuggling undeclared goods on-board, examining the ship relentlessly for three days and nights without any success in locating the hidden 'jink' (the Manx term for 'money'). The name of the ship recalls the apparent 'sincerity' with which the neo-Victorian mediates the Victorian past, reading stylistically as a 'genuine' Victorian account while also thinly concealing its reality as a contemporary text mediating present-day concerns. Kewley describes the arrival of the customs officials in terms of his ship being physically 'colonised' by the English customs men:

If you happen to come from a small country of the world, like Mann Island, you can't go expecting too many victories over foreigners – Waterloos and Bannockburns and such – but this seemed not so far off in its way. There we'd been, *invaded, occupied* and staring disaster in the nose[.]

(Kneale, 2000, p.12, my emphasis)

In likening the search of the ship to being ‘invaded’ and ‘occupied’, the Manxmen’s experience recalls the other marginalised and colonised subjects recognised within the novel, including the Indian mutineers, a connection compounded by Kewley’s darkly humorous statement: ‘Forget all their talk, there’s no bad losers like Englishmen, especially Englishmen in uniforms. No wonder all those Indian Hindoos had mutinied against them with the likes of this going on. I wished them good luck’ (Kneale, 2000, p.31). Ross also proposes that parallels can be drawn between the Manxmen and the Aborigines who are bound by an ‘unstated affinity’ as ‘The Manxmen [...] are island people, who treasure their own history, customs and language and who resent English “scuts” as bitterly as Peevay. Their language and nationality also have been put at risk by the scythe of imperial expansion’ (2006, p.262).

Humour, however, enables Kneale to undermine Wilson as one of the novel’s oppressors. For example, later in the text Wilson creates a scene when he believes that he has been bitten by a poisonous snake which in fact turns out to be nothing more serious than a bite from a mouse. This incident in the text is humorous in its over-dramatization, demonstrated through Dr Renshaw’s somewhat scathing and incredulous reports of his incessant ‘wailings and cries for pillows’ (Kneale, 2000, p.291) and exaggerated protestations that ‘his life is slipping from him’ (Kneale, 2000, p.292). The disruption of the English colonisers’ sense of authority is emphasised by the revelation that ‘Someone among the ship’s crew let out a faint cackle’ (Kneale, 2000, p.291) at Wilson’s behaviour, recalling Charles Baudelaire’s theorisation of the ‘shock’ of laughter as one which, as discussed previously and summarised by Kevin Newmark, ‘involves a loss of balance or equilibrium’ (1995, pp.243-244). This perspective is shared by other humour theorists including Reichl and Stein who note that ‘laughter has always been seen as arising out of some kind of incompatibility or some incongruity’ (2005, p.10). In this way, laughter is rendered redemptive and unifying, a means of uniting the dispossessed and undermining the oppressors.

It must be noted, however, that humour is not solely used to demonstrate the power of redemptive laughter in the text, and is occasionally employed instead to demonstrate that laughter can in fact also be considered ‘double-edged’ (Ross, 2006, p.267). As the following discussion demonstrates, the incorporation of *abject* humour – that is, laughter

that is directed *towards* those in a position of subalternity<sup>89</sup> or which is debased or degraded in its content – into the novel works as a discomfiting and unsettling narrative technique.

The reader's discovery of the physical atrocities that are inflicted upon the Aborigines serves to highlight the unjust behaviour and moral ineptitude of the English colonisers, as George Baines (an employee of the New World Land Company) reflects upon in a letter to his father. In his letter Baines describes how Mr Pierce, a resident Englishman, had advocated punishment for other Englishmen who took advantage of their apparent position of 'authority' over the Aborigines, often with terrible consequences:

Mr Pierce, quite stuttering with anger, claimed that he had found the bodies of two aborigines, both of them buried – though poorly – within fifty yards of the stock-keepers' hut. Examining these he had found them both to have been shot to death. What was more, he claimed on several previous occasions to have seen the two stock-keepers trying to tempt native women into their hut in a way that he claimed would provoke their menfolk. 'They're murderers, nothing less,' he exclaimed, 'and they must be taken to Hobart as murderers and hanged'.

(Kneale, 2000, pp.63-64)

Mr Pierce is shown to stand alone in his moral righteousness, as George Baines continues to state in his letter: 'While I felt sympathy for Mr Pierce I am afraid his wild talk of hanging hardly added to his case. The two wanted teaching a good lesson, certainly, but they were men we all knew' (Kneale, 2000, p.64). The suggestion that usual methods of law enforcement are disregarded in this instance highlights the subjectivity of the English penal code and the unjust allocation of punishments, even amongst the purportedly more 'civilized' Englishmen, as expounded through Kneale's re-summoning of contrasting historical perceptions of the inherent brutality of the Aborigine natives:

Hardly had we begun to retrace our steps towards the settlement, however, when there rang through the air an unmistakable sound: gunshots. They seemed to be coming from the north-west, from the direction of the sea, and, *judging from their faintness, were some distance away*. Their regularity indicated nothing less than a battle, and *as I listened there came into my mind an awful vision*, of men fighting for their lives against a gang of murderous natives, hurling clouds of those light, needle-sharp spears [...]

(Kneale, 2000, p.67, my emphasis)

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<sup>89</sup> The term 'subaltern' is coined by Spivak in her seminal essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1999). Spivak explains that the Subaltern necessarily exists outside of social, political, and geographic hegemonic power structures and without access to lines of social mobility, and that the voice of the Subaltern can only be heard when mediated (and therefore 'legitimised') by an authoritative Western 'voice', which only serves to further compound the individual's status as subaltern.

In this excerpt Kneale implies distance from the events that are taking place, both for the characters in the text and for the reader, and highlights the subsequent requirement of both parties to imaginatively ‘fill in the gaps’, frustrating any perception of proximity. However, in this example, Baines’s imagining of the ‘murderous natives’ hurling spears markedly misinterprets the reality of the situation in which the colonisers are eventually revealed to be the aggressors. In the bloody aftermath of the gun-battle shortly afterwards, Baines relates his discoveries to the reader:

I was quite wondering if the gunshots might, after all, have some quite innocent explanation, when Pierce, who had reached a cluster of rocks near the edge, gave a shout, ‘Over here.’ As I drew near I saw that on one of the stones, looking strangely neat, was what looked like the painted outline of a human hand, shining red. *It wasn’t yet dry.*

(Kneale, 2000, p.67, my emphasis)

The detail of the hand – its uncanny ‘neatness’, and the fact that it is described as still being wet rather than dry – becomes a visual signifier which markedly highlights the absence of a description of what had actually taken place, and to whom the handprint belongs (one of the colonisers, or one of the Aborigine natives). Invoking the universality of the human hand specifically arguably constitutes a symbolical acknowledgement of the neo-Victorian novel’s attempt to facilitate representational proximity (or of a metaphorical ‘tangibility’) to the historical events and traumas that it portrays, while also inevitably simultaneously eschewing the reader’s sense of proximity through the lack of description and subsequent denial of an explanation. This lack of explanation – a silence which constitutes a gap in the reader’s understanding of what has taken place – recalls LaCapra’s theorisation that ‘structural trauma (like absence) is not an event but an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization’ (2001, p.82); the possibility of what befell the Aborigines becomes an aporetic absence within the text.

Compounding this interpretation is the subsequent overtly visceral description of the scene that confronts Baines, as he recalls: ‘suddenly all about me was blood. It glistened on leaves and blades of grass. It lay collected in scarlet rockpools. In a moment I was quite covered with the stuff, sticky on my hands and clothes’ (Kneale, 2000, p.67). A sensory reference which infers proximity, Baines’s reference to the blood ‘sticky’ on his hands and clothes constitutes a symbolic ‘stain’ of his own (indirect) involvement in the catastrophic gun-fight through his failure to support Pierce in seeing that the men responsible for the previous murder of two Aborigine men were duly punished for their

actions. The narrative of the discovery of the bodies themselves is also particularly gruesome in its detail, and although initially Baines does not disclose whether they are the bodies of Aborigine men and not Englishmen, his reference to ‘they’ seems to indicate a sense of ‘otherness’ and detachment which implies that the bodies belong to the Aborigines:

There, far below at the bottom of the precipice *they* lay, lapped and tugged by the waves. I had never seen such a sight. *Smashed limbs. Smashed heads. Insides spilled.* All was brightest redness, as if from some scarlet spring bubbling up from beneath.  
(Kneale, 2000, pp.67-68, my emphasis)

While the visceral references to ‘smashed’ bones and ‘spilled’ insides evoke terrible images of brutal mass-murder, they also de-personalise each of the victims. Yet Baines’s discovery of this scene – and, in turn, the subjection of the reader to such detailed horror of the discovery – becomes an act of witness-bearing, with emphasis being placed upon ‘seeing’ the full horror of the scene: ‘Every one of them was a native. Together they must have formed half the tribe. *I had seen*’ (Kneale, 2000, p.68, my emphasis).

This emphasis on visuality summons to mind Bhabha’s statement that ‘[the] disturbance of your voyeuristic look enacts the complexity and contradictions of your desire to see, to fix cultural difference in a containable, *visible* object’ (1994, p.72). Baines reflects this sentiment in his subsequent confession that ‘apart from the very horror of the discovery, *my first feeling was a kind of weak relief that they were not, after all, men I knew.* It may seem callous, but in a remote place such as this a man does feel strong loyalty to his fellows’ (Kneale, 2000, p.68, my emphasis). Interestingly, however, Baines subsequently challenges his own implied privileging of English bodies, stressing that his feelings of relief were ‘short-lived [...] quickly turning to greatest disgust, as [he] began to contemplate what had been done’ (Kneale, 2000, p.68). His subsequent sentiments seem to reflect Roy Boyne’s assertion that ‘there is no pure other, that ontological difference is a chimera’ (1990, p.170)<sup>90</sup> due to his recognition of the familiarity of the human body itself:

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<sup>90</sup> Boyne makes this assertion in relation to his exploration of the philosophical dispute between Foucault and Derrida. Focussing upon Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) and Derrida’s seeming ‘[complicity] with the exclusion of madness from the developing civilisation of the West’ (Boyne, 1990, p.3) as expounded in his work *Writing and Difference* (originally published in 1963 as *L’Écriture et la différence*), Boyne traces the development of their discussion on the subject to demonstrate how the ‘underlying assumptions’ of the two critics ‘began to converge’, resulting in their arrival at the ‘intersection of politics and ethics’ (1990, p.3). Boyne looks specifically at Derrida’s construct of ‘undecidability’ – characterised as the ‘violent difficulty of the transference of a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme’ (Derrida, 1972, p.72), in relation to Foucault’s idea of ‘exteriority’ (that discourses of ‘otherness’ are unintentional, or unmotivated, rather than purposefully or rationally ‘created’) - to highlight the ambiguities and contradictions of such discourses pertaining to ‘othered’ identities.

I felt ashamed. Why, at that moment I do believe I felt almost as strongly as [Pierce]. In a curious way the *sight* of the poor creatures bleeding and *broken* made them seem all the more pitifully familiar. *Smash a man to pieces and he will look much the same, regardless of his skin or manner of speech.*

(Kneale, 2000, p.68, my emphasis)

The sight of the ‘broken’ Aborigines not only reasserts that the reader cannot actually ‘see’ what Baines sees, but also initially recalls Bhabha’s sentiments regarding the ‘ambivalence’ of the reader’s desire for the Other, as well as the disruptive interplay between the ‘disavowal’ and ‘designation’ of ‘Otherness’ as discussed initially in the Introduction to this thesis. Baines’s response to the sight of the bodies of the Aborigines appears reflective of his realisation of the ubiquitousness of human corporeality which problematizes binary distinctions of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, highlighting the relevance of visuality to this configuration and reflecting at the same time the very process of the designation and disavowal of which Bhabha speaks.

Yet despite his epiphany that all men are ‘pitifully familiar’ in their somatic vulnerability, Baines’ language seems simultaneously to reaffirm the ‘otherness’ of the Aborigines through his reference to the ‘poor creatures’ which, by implicitly reducing the Aborigines to ‘creatures’ rather than ‘humans’, again reasserts the superiority of white ‘bodies’. Baines later signs ‘a short statement of lies’ (Kneale, 2000, p.73) testifying falsely to the events he has witnessed, and the men responsible for the murder of the Aborigines are able to walk free. He subsequently reports Sutton (one of the Company’s stock-keepers who is revealed as complicit in the murder of the Aborigines) as stating: “‘Off for a little bird-hunting, we were. Shooting crows and such’”, explaining afterwards that ‘Crows was a slang term for aborigines, and this evoked a foul laugh from the rest’ (Kneale, 2000, p.69).

Abject laughter such as this serves to highlight the extent and scope of the injustice which ‘typifies the dehumanising force of British dealings with the natives whose territorial rights have been laughingly usurped’ (Ross, 2006, pp.266-267). Other examples of this type of humour are employed intermittently throughout the text; for example, Peevay perceives Wilson as treating Walyeric ‘as if she was just some humour to amuse’ and making her ‘his joke’ (Kneale, 2000, p.324), while Julius Crane, a visiting inspector of the Australian prison system from London, describes how a fellow Englishman ‘lost himself in laughter’ (Kneale, 2000, p.198) at the plight of the imprisoned English convicts who, only pages before, are discussed in terms of the ‘physical discomfort’ that they had to

endure on the vessel which transported them to the prison. Crane describes how ‘there drifted up through the hatches faint cries and moans, together with a most dreadful odour. It was the smell of humanity that has been reduced almost to the animal’ (Kneale, 2000, p.192). Abject laughter such as this – that is, laughter that is directed *towards* those in a position of subalternity - is described in the novel by Julius Crane, who comments that ‘There is, sadly, little so poisonous to logical debate as laughter’ (Kneale, 2000, p.199) due to its negation of humane reflection.

I suggest that such examples of abject humour in the text serve deliberately to discomfit the reader and promote a self-awareness which prompts reflection upon their position in relation to the narrative re-staging of this genuine historical traumatic event in Aboriginal history and of the ways in which historical suffering might be re-visited and, potentially, trivialised. When employed in relation to corporeal suffering and trauma, humour and laughter reveal incongruous attitudes and unsettling, uncomfortable modes of representing suffering which necessarily promote consideration on the part of the reader as to their appropriateness, as well as to the representation of ‘otherness’.

### **Hybridity, authenticity, and ‘postcolonial celebrity’**

Baines expresses lingering guilt as the result of his decision not to report what he had seen, which he reflects upon in a letter to his father in which he states, ‘It is a trifling thing, I dare say. Try as I may, though, I simply have not been able to rid it from my thoughts’ (Kneale, 2000, p.76). Yet for such a ‘trifling thing’, Baines finally ends his letter with the conclusion that: ‘I have written it all, every part. It is for that very reason, I know, that this letter will never be sent’ (Kneale, 2000, p.76). Consequently, the truth of the fate of the murdered Australian natives – despite being imparted to the reader - is never revealed in the context of the narrative itself, and the murderous men seemingly escape punishment. Baines’s decision not to impart his knowledge to his father reflects the inevitability of gaps in historical record, as well as the inescapably biased nature of current historical information and data regarding the fate of the Australian Aborigines. Windschuttle illuminates this point: a critic who questions current figures relating to the numbers of Aborigines killed at the hands of the colonisers, he claims that:

Over the entire period from 1803 to 1831 [the figures] average just four deaths a year, which, in the history of imperialism, must surely rank as just about the lowest rate of violent death ever meted out to indigenous inhabitants anywhere. Yet Tasmania is supposed to have been the site of one of the world's worst examples of genocide, the home to the greatest internal struggle Australia has ever faced, a killing field of guerrilla warfare that lasted seven long years. There must be a mistake somewhere.

(2002, p.362)

Integrally, Kneale's text reveals that the mistake is not within the 'data', as such, but rather that – as Windschuttle somewhat contrarily proposes – that 'the truth is [...] there never was any 'hard evidence' about Aboriginal numbers at all' (2002, p.353).<sup>91</sup> The issue is not the 'truth' or 'untruth' of the numbers involved, but rather – as summed up by Windschuttle, who exhibits incredulity towards this statement – that 'the great majority of black deaths went unrecorded because they took place in remote regions on the edge of the frontier, and that those whites responsible covered up their deeds for fear of incriminating themselves' (2002, p.358). Kneale's inclusion of Baines's letter as a testimonial trace which goes unsent (and is therefore lost to formal historical record) signifies that so much of what is perceived as historical 'fact' is still open to questioning, and the subsequent necessity of taking in to account 'the self-conscious inscription within history of the existing, but usually concealed, attitude of historians toward their material' (Hutcheon, 2002, p.74).

Just as Starling lays some claim to historical 'truth' through the evocation and re-appropriation of genuine historical figures in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Kneale's text incorporates an epilogue testifying to his endeavour for historical veracity insofar as 'All the major events of the Tasmanian strand of the novel follow real occurrences' and that he 'tried to represent this era as truthfully and precisely as possible' (2000, p.455). Shiller finds that 'although historical rigor may take on new meaning' in the neo-Victorian text, 'it continues to have value, and remains compatible with approaches to history that accept the existence of many possible narratives for any given set of historical facts' (1997, p.541), and therefore many subjective experiences and interpretations which defy 'totalisation' within one 'grand' historical narrative. As discussed previously in this chapter, Kneale's text incorporates a variety of narrative perspectives. When narrating individual characters Kneale pays particular attention to the unique specificity of language and dialect (often with comical effect), particularly in relation to the narratives belonging to traditionally marginalised characters such as Peevay and Captain Kewley, for instance, possibly to

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<sup>91</sup> Incidentally, this statement raises the question of how Windschuttle himself is able to claim accurate knowledge of the true scale of Aboriginal decimation.

reflect the oral (rather than ‘formal’ or documented) histories of their particular minority-cultures.<sup>92</sup>

This diverse collection of fictional testimonies narrated in their various dialects, as well as the multiple modes of ‘documenting’ them (for example, in the form of diary, newspaper, letter, etc.), constitutes a form of homage to Victorian narrative models<sup>93</sup> by mirroring its ‘dispersed structure’ and ‘multicentredness’ (Ross, 2006, p.249), while the use of multiple voices also provides a thorough and balanced representation of the historical moment under discussion, enabling traditionally marginalised characters to speak without the valorisation of English over non-English accounts of events. Ross suggests that ‘the distributing of narration among a troupe of monologuists speaking diverse idiolects rules out any [...] consistent limelighting’, a technique which also ‘enables a comedy deriving from each characters solipsistic tendency to misinterpret the ego systems of the other’ (2006, p.249), somewhat undermining Windschuttle’s proposition that language and representation are often manipulated to reflect how the individual is prompted to ‘[take] the Aborigine’s side’. Of additional significance to this point is Kneale’s ability to imbue all of his characters with a flawed humanity, which arguably enables the reader to relate to them without necessitating a moralistic allegiance with any one character or ‘side’. Kneale’s representation of Walyeric and her poor treatment of her son (Peevay), for example, counters assertions by critics such as Johnston who decry ‘an eagerness to align oneself with the angels in these rancorous public discourses’ (2009, p.166), as if characters on both ‘sides’ of the colonising venture are represented as equally and recognisably ‘flawed’, conceptualisations of which characters are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are rendered somewhat hard to define, denying totalising interpretations of either party.

Susan Lever posits satire as essential for this purpose: as a mode of communicating, satire is ‘not bound to report history as a set of chronological facts, not to offer sympathy with individual characters, but can observe, quite coldly and even inconsistently, a multitude of aspects of the world’ (2005, p.109). Despite this, Ross maintains that there are in fact ‘presiding, credible voices’, which belong primarily to the “eccentric” speakers, above all Peevay and [...] Kewley’, noting also the significance of the fact that both of these characters are ‘bilingual, and thus capable of a heteroglossia not channelled by the single conceptual groove of “standard” English’ (2006, p.249); indeed, it certainly seems

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<sup>92</sup> Caroline Lusin asserts that ‘In granting [the] Manxmen the status of heroes, Kneale gives voice to characters that would in view of the conventions of classical adventure fiction seem entirely unsuitable for this position’ (2009, p.78).

<sup>93</sup> Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) is perhaps one of the best examples to illuminate this point as it too incorporates an array of character perspectives.

that these two characters are more successful in their individual endeavours than any of the other less ‘eccentric’ speakers. The frequent disparity that arises between the characters’ perception and interpretation of events not only highlights what Funk has termed the novel’s ‘highly critical’ approach towards the possibility of ‘concourse between different ethnic groups’ (2011, p.65), but also the impossibility of accessing any one ‘truth’ of the past - even in the face of factual documentation and evidence supplied, reinterpreted, or re-imagined by, the author – and, concomitantly, our contemporary inability to fully realise or reimagine the extent of the traumatic occurrences that took place.

Kneale’s subsequent explanation that ‘some of the characters are closely based on people of the time’ (2000, p.455), alongside the inclusion of ‘a factual document from that time’ (2000, p.465) – a letter from the teacher charged with the education of young George VanDiemen upon his arrival in England – also heightens the sense of the novel’s historical credibility, while simultaneously ‘[staging] its artefactual condition in order to challenge our desire for getting at the ‘truth’ about the Victorians, dramatising the essential constructedness of history and historiography’ (Heilmann, 2009/10, p.18). Arguably, this ‘staging’ of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ works to reassert the status of the novel as a *contemporary* text which is informed by present-day concerns, ‘[drawing] attention to the dubiousness of the positivist, empiricist hierarchy implied in the binary opposing of the real to the fictive [...] by suggesting that the non-fictional is as constructed and as narratively known as is fiction’ (Hutcheon, 2002, p.76).

Perhaps the most thinly-disguised of these historical revenants is George Augustus Robinson, who fronted the missionary effort to civilize the Aborigines under the orders of Governor George Arthur, and is re-summoned within Kneale’s novel under the shorter name, ‘Robson’.<sup>94</sup> Historically termed the ‘Great Conciliator’, Robinson was appointed as Chief Protector of the Aborigines in 1838 (Ryan, 2008, p.150); however, as Reynolds concisely explains, ‘Opinions of Robinson fluctuate widely [...]. He has been both revered and reviled, viewed as a saviour and as a destroyer and agent of genocide’ (2008, p.162). Robinson’s re-summoning to the pages of the neo-Victorian novel is particularly interesting in light of Reynold’s pronouncement that ‘many twentieth-century writers have rushed to judgement with little attempt to place him in his cultural milieu, to see him as a man of his time’ (2008, p.162). Johnston similarly emphasises the significance of his inclusion within contemporary re-writings of this historical moment: describing him as a ‘postcolonial celebrity’ (2009, p.162). In much the same way as the historical figures

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<sup>94</sup> Robinson’s mission is commonly referred to as the ‘Friendly Mission’ in accordance with the self-appropriated title of his endeavours as well as of the journal accounts documenting his experiences.

deployed by Starling in *The Journal of Dora Damage* and discussed previously in Chapter One, Johnston notes that ‘Robinson provides contemporary writers with a lens through which to refract colonial history and postcolonial anxieties’, although in consequence ‘the original figure and [his] contemporary avatars are subject to thin readings that fail to take account of the agency of the historical actor’ (2009, p.153; p.154).

Johnston and Rolls have also noted that ‘Robinson and the Tasmanian Aborigines were envisioned by popular newspapers, pamphleteers and writers in the Victorian economy’s commodification of empire’ (2008, p.17), despite being ‘ridiculed and disliked by many in the Australian colonies’ (Johnston, 2009, p.155). This is a pertinent observation which brings to light both the Victorian literary heritage of both Robinson and the Aborigines themselves, as well as the fact that both are now being re-appropriated as the subjects of literary forms of commodification. Kneale also alludes to Robinsons’s ‘canny manipulation of print culture’ which ‘secured his celebrity’ (Johnston, 2009, pp.155-156) through a comment made by one of the wives on Flinders Island that Robson’s efforts ‘even won the praise of the Colonial Times in Hobart – Mr Robson having written to the newspaper to tell of our efforts to bring advancement to the natives – which printed a most favourable account of all his innovations’ (Kneale, 2000, p.245).

Kneale effectively draws attention to the multifarious historical and contemporary perceptions of Robinson through reference to his ‘admirers and detractors’ (2000, p.242), an acknowledgement which signifies not only how he was perceived historically, but also reflects the scope of subjective interpretation when ‘re-writing’ such a conflicted historical figure who some critics consider to have been unfairly demonised, while others have stressed the resoundingly negative impact of his role in the demise of the Aborigines. However, I wish to suggest that Kneale’s re-presentation of this figure does constitute a sophisticated and also significant rendering, not only as it draws parallels between the historically documented figure of Robinson and highlights his somewhat troubled historical celebrity, but also as it facilitates insight into forms of *symbolic* violence (as opposed to overt or physical violence, a concept introduced previously in relation to Starling’s representation of Din in *The Journal of Dora Damage*) which were once inflicted upon the Aborigines. In Kneale’s text, one such form of symbolic violence include the dismissal of Aboriginal culture and identity, as Johnston relays from one of Robinson’s journals:

at a time when the Aboriginal population was being decimated by disease and depression, Robinson mentions that the 'only drawback on the establishment, was the great mortality amongst them, but those who did survive were now happy, contented, and useful members of society'. Flinders Island is presented as a model Christian village: neat stone cottages with vegetable gardens, where the Aborigines 'conformed in every respect to European habits, and were particularly careful in copying every domestic arrangement which they observed with the Europeans'.

(Johnston, 2009, p.162)

These specific sentiments are mirrored directly by Robson in *English Passengers*: Robson's stated aim is to ensure that 'the blacks should be both housed and led in worship entirely in buildings made of brick', and that each of the resident Aborigines should be allotted a craft, ranging in variety from 'from shoe-making to animal husbandry' to 'digging potatoes, or graves for their less fortunate fellows', all in pursuit of the goal of 'transform[ing] them into something like a happy band of English villagers' (Kneale, 2000, p.244).

In order to achieve this goal, Robson takes it upon himself to rename each of the natives in a ceremony which is described as taking place 'in the manner of a general awarding medals to his soldiers', imagery quite at odds with the wife of the Storekeeper's – Mrs Catherine Price – understanding that this act of re-naming would enable the Aborigines to be 'begun afresh, and reborn as civilized, Christian beings' (Kneale, 2000, p.247); as Ross proclaims, the military overtones of this reflection 'opens up to view the subtext of the ceremony', which is the assertion of his 'supremacy over his subalterns' (2006, p.252). Ross describes this process as 'far from a benign act of "improvement"', and rather as a 'technique of invasive reshaping' (2006, p.252) through the negation of individual identities.

The insensitivity of the act is heightened further by the testament from Catherine Price - that 'Mr Robson sometimes indulged himself in delightful artifice as – unbeknownst to the blacks themselves – he made playful reference to some aspect of their character', and often the new appellations bestowed upon each individual 'concealed some clever sting in its tail' (Kneale, 2000, p.247; p.248). We are told by Catherine Price that Walyeric, for example, 'became Mary, and while this might seem innocent enough, I had little doubt as to which murderous monarch was in Mr Robson's mind', while 'her half-cast son, Peevay, who had such a curious mop of blond hair above his little black face, and who insisted on regarding one with such disconcerting seriousness, was now Cromwell, that most sombre of rulers' (Kneale, 2000, p.248). Adding 'insult to injury' (as it were), these names hark back to a specifically English history, implying not only a denial of each

individual's identity but also of their specific cultural history, a denial which arguably constitutes an act of symbolic violence in itself, as well as and a negation of their individual human agency.

The fate of Tayaleah – Peevay's half-brother – becomes demonstrative of the full extent of the traumatic effects wrought upon the individual's sense of identity and cultural belonging by the English colonisers.<sup>95</sup> Fully anglicised by his stay in England, Tayaleah is stripped of his Aboriginal identity and even his name in the process as John Harris (the English gentleman who takes 'ownership' of Tayaleah) states, 'I decided the creature had better have a name. Lucy said he called himself Tayaley or some such nonsense, *which was no name at all*, so I gave him George, after the King, and then Vandiemmen, from his place of birth, making George Vandiemmen, which I thought rather clever' (Kneale, 2000, p.133, my emphasis).

Tayaleah's immersion in English culture can be considered in light of Bhabha's theorisation regarding the 'challenge of conceiving of a "reformed" colonial subject' (1994, p.124), or what has been conceptually termed the theory of the 'mimic man'. Bhabha explains this in terms of 'a desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (1994, p.122, original emphasis) which serves to stabilise one's own identity by securely 'fixing' the identity of the 'Other'. In consequence, for Bhabha, the mimic man 'is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicised is *emphatically* not to be English' (1994, p.125, original emphasis). Consequently, upon his return to Tasmania, Tayaleah is unable to reclaim his Aboriginal identity and is rejected by his tribe and his family: 'As he raced towards [Walyeric], calling out, she simply rose to her feet, then delivered him a mighty slap to his face – though he was her own child, lost to her all these years – and cruelly strode away' (Kneale, 2000, p.243). Peevay discusses the crushing consequences of cultural dispossession through explaining his half-brother's tragic fate, which makes use of the symbolism of being 'broken' in a similar mode to Baines's narrative (as discussed previously):

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<sup>95</sup> Kneale reveals to the reader in his epilogue that Tayaleah is another 'revenant' from the historical past. Although there is no record of the 'true life' Tayaleah's Aboriginal name, he was allegedly separated from his family in the Tasmanian bush as a small child before being discovered by an English settler and sent to England to be educated under the name of George Vandiemmen. Seven years later, after thriving in his studies, he was sent back to Tasmania where he fell sick and died soon after (Kneale, 2000, p.455).

That day after the governor went away, soldiers found Tayaleah on the ground beneath his tree, *broken* by falling. Fat Scut Robson was woeful about this, though he was lying again, even now. When he saw Tayaleah's secret place in the branches he said he fell from just mischance, but I knew it never was so. I knew he jumped wilfully. Ever since he came to Flinders Island on Robson's boat I saw Tayaleah was like some fellow who is snared between his awake and his dreamings, and is pulled by both, stronger and stronger, never knowing what is true, *till he is torn like paper. Tear got too big*, so he jumped.

(Kneale, 2000, p.274, my emphasis)

Kneale's persistent references to the Aborigine body as 'broken' arguably constitutes a mode of commentary upon the devastating and traumatic effects of dispossession and the traumatic and tragic consequences of forceful immersion into English culture, a reflection compounded through Tayaleah's inferred suicide. Peevay's sentiments recall Seltzer's previously-discussed notion of traumatic 'collapse' in relation to the reader, whose self-conscious mediation between 'awake' (reality) and 'dreaming' (the historical 'reality' of the text), and the intrinsic ambiguity of what is and isn't historical 'fact' in the text, highlights the temporal rupture between the two which inevitably collapses the reader's connection. Kneale's focus upon 'broken' bodies reflects an awareness of 'The popular notion of trauma [as] premised on a failure of distinction between the figurative and the literal' (Seltzer, 1997, p.12); arguably, Tayaleah literally embodies the figurative traumatic 'fracturing' and collapse of the integrity of the Aborigines as a 'body' of people as well as of the identity of the individual, as the 'contemporary understanding of the subject of violence makes visible a traumatic yielding to representation' (Seltzer, 1997, p.12).

However, Kneale also offers a counter-force to this symbolic violence through the innate hybridisation of certain prominent characters, and most particularly through Peevay, who is initially presented to the reader during the traumatic moment of discovering his racial hybridity, of which he is unaware:

Just there in the water, you see, all at once there was a stranger, and this stranger was like a monster. His face was almost ordinary but that just made him worse because his hair was so wrong. This was not the colour of hair at all, no, but pale like grass goes after hot days. His eyes stared at me. When I gave a start, the monster's face rippled.

(Kneale, 2000, p.48)

Peevay's initial perception of his appearance as 'monstrous' is compounded by his eventual realisation that his father was an Englishman, or 'ghost' (Kneale, 2000, p.54). The English 'ghosts' are also described in terms of their monstrosity, being 'the shape of men, but only this. Their skin was not like skin at all but was the colour of stone, and loose, so it

flapped. Even their feet were ugly, big and with no toes. Worst, though, were their faces. These were coloured like raw meat, with no alive look in them' (Kneale, 2000, p.54). Peevay's somewhat amusing description of the English 'ghosts' enables him to exemplify the strangeness of the English and his essential difference from them, his humorous comment that 'at least [his] skin was human colour' (Kneale, 2000, p.59) rendering them sub-human and subverting the traditional Victorian perception of the Aborigines as a sub-species. An alternative interpretation might proffer Kneale's 'ghosts' as indicative of the reader's perception of such historical subjects, rendered immaterial or seemingly 'intangible' rather than corporeally substantial. However, the corporeal reality of these 'ghosts' is emphasised when Peevay later describes chancing upon the bodies of these three English men who had tried to steal some meat from his tribe: 'looking through leaves, I saw a big crowd of birds, pecking and tugging. It was those three ghosts they were eating' (Kneale, 2000, p.59).

Peevay's description recalls Horner and Zlosnik's previously-discussed assertion regarding the possibility of a 'comic turn' which manifests through the 'juxtaposition of incongruous textual effects': while the humorously-described 'ghosts' somewhat fittingly have their own desire to 'consume' at the expense of the Aborigines inflicted back upon themselves, the nauseating description of the birds 'pecking and tugging' at their skin renders their human corporeality all the more prominent. This narrative scenario epitomises the novel's hybridisation of humour and traumatic representation; it also seems to embody (as it were) the way in which the neo-Victorian can utilise somatic bodily affliction to emphasise the idea of a lived, corporeal experience despite the fact of the Victorian's 'pastness', within a somewhat uncanny figuration of simultaneous 'aliveness' and 'deadness'.

Peevay's hybridity is also emphasised later in a description of how he could be seen 'strutting about town in an ill-fitting frock coat and a top hat, though his face was black as coals' (Kneale, 2000, p.312), a humorous interpretation and appropriation of English dress that renders his appearance almost carnivalesque (in the sense of a knowing and subversive 'ritual spectacle' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.5)) in his attempt to transgress the limitations placed upon him by the colonisers, who perceive his aim to be to 'lead a life of aristocratic leisure, and to this end [he] was forever sending whining letters to officers of the government demanding he be given tracts of land, and even convicts to act as his servants' (Kneale, 2000, pp.312-313). Boehm-Schnitker has professed the usefulness of Bhabha's theory as a tool through which 'it becomes possible not only to question whether neo-Victorian

cultural products are predominantly immersive or self-reflexive and thus to ascertain their political drift, but also to shed light on their function for subject formations and the degree to which they cater to the contemporary vogue of identity politics' (2014, p.94). Tayaleah's fate might arguably reflect the short-circuitedness of an 'uncritical' immersion within English culture, while Peevay's critical engagement and 'mimicry' of English culture underscores the subversive potential of a self-reflexive engagement: vitally, such a commentary might also constitute a useful reflection of the subversive potential of the self-reflexive neo-Victorian text itself.

As opposed to Tayaleah's uncritical acceptance and immersion within English culture, Peevay's mimicry is 'not the familiar exercise of *dependent* colonial relations through narcissistic identification' (Bhabha, 1984, p.126), but rather reflects Bhabha's reflection that:

When they make these intercultural, hybrid demands, the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of power/knowledge. And they do this under the eye of authority, through the production of "partial" knowledges and positionalities in keeping with my earlier, more general explanation of hybridity. Such objects of knowledges make the signifiers of authority enigmatic in a way that is "less than one and double." They change their conditions of recognition while maintaining their visibility; they introduce a lack that is then represented as a doubling or mimicry.

(Bhabha, 1985, pp.160-161)

A 'discursive disturbance' (Bhabha, 1985, p.161), Peevay's actions undermine the authority of the colonisers, a process compounded by his humorous appearance (in the minds of the colonisers) which causes them to underestimate him and his capability to undermine them 'in plain sight', as per Lacan's perception of mimicry cited by Bhabha: 'The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of being mottled - exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare' (Lacan, 1978, p.99; cited in Bhabha, 1984, p.125). In this regard, mimicry becomes 'at once [a] resemblance and menace' (Bhabha, 1994, p.123), as Bhabha further explains:

The metonymic strategy produces the signifier of colonial *mimicry* as the affect of hybridity - at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance, from the disciplined to the desiring. As the discriminated object, the metonym of presence becomes the support of an authoritarian voyeurism, all the better to exhibit the eye of power. Then, as discrimination turns into the assertion of the hybrid, the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery.

(1985, p.162)

This effect is compounded by the fact that Peevay is also afforded a unique language which comprises multiple combinations of formal and informal English words and phrases, as well as various 'swear-words' and obscenities. This counters pre-Victorian perceptions endorsed by travel writing by historical figures such as Captain Cook and Joseph Banks who described the aborigines as an 'inoffensive' people characterised by an 'innate docility or submissiveness or weakness of temperament of character' (Stanner, 1991, p.42). In this way Peevay is able to reclaim his own agency through the symbolic and humorous act of re-naming 'Robson, whose name was now FAT SCUT ROBSON' (Kneale, 2000, p.230, original formatting). Kneale's (re)presentation of symbolic violence differs from Starling's somewhat more subtle and paradoxically problematic appropriation by providing a counter-voice which can comment directly upon the insidious forms of violence which pervade the narrative, humorously working to undermine the colonisers' authority in the face of even the most insidious forms of violence.

Another example which illuminates the vital role of humour in undermining the symbolic violence on the part of the colonisers can be found later in the text during an exchange between Walyeric and Wilson, who attempts to convince the Aborigines of the existence of the Christian god:

'God is in the sky and deepest places of the sea. He is in mountains and trees. He is in birds and animals and fishes too. Most of all, he is in us.  
Mother lit her pipe. 'Then he is in you?'  
This he liked very much. 'Of course. And he is in every one of you, too.'  
Mother gave her dangerous look. I suppose I divined she must do something heinous soon. 'And he is everywhere inside you?'  
Wilson nodded. 'Most certainly.'  
'So he must be in your dirty stinking arse, Vicar? Poor old bugger God, isn't he, stuck inside there?'

(Kneale, 2000, p.325)

Bakhtin proposes that to degrade is to concern oneself primarily with 'the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs' (1984, p.21), which characterises what Walyeric does in this instance. Ross clarifies the significance of her abasing statement, explaining that 'Walyeric's words are of course an outrage to social decency, but they do the necessary job of switching attention from the vicar's vapid Victorian pieties to the smelly but incontrovertible facts of bodily life' (2006, p.256). In consequence of Walyeric's witty repost to the vicar, her damaged mother-son relationship with Peevay is ameliorated through what is shown to be the simultaneously disruptive and

restorative power of mutual amusement at both the flaws of Wilson's religious rhetoric and his temporary degradation:

So a strange thing happened. Mother heard my laughing and now she looked at me, which was the first time that day. Then she smiled. This was sudden, almost as if it was just some mishap she never did intend, but still it was interesting to me, because it was the first smile I got from her in all those many years. [...] I was so surprised that I smiled too. So it was I felt as if some hateful ache stopped, at long last.  
(Kneale, 2000, pp.325-326)

Laughter, then, is appropriated as a redemptive 'tool' which empowers and unifies through its reflection of the 'struggle for agency [...] and a need, a desire, for release' (Reichl and Stein, 2005, p.10). It is also a physical relief, relieving the 'hateful ache' – a markedly physical affliction – of what has passed. Such a reading is pertinent in terms of Bakhtin's concept of 'redemptive laughter' as posited in his study of Rabelais, in which he reasons that 'The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes [sic] a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it' (1984, p.12). Accordingly, as Rachel Pollard summarises, 'the human body is defined not by its separateness from others but [...] by its *collective togetherness*. It is a body that is [...] in a collective sense, spiritual that through its laughter overcomes the division between nature and culture' (2008, p.169, original emphasis). In Kneale's novel, the collective spiritual 'body' of the oppressed Aborigine people is symbolically made 'whole' again through Peevay and Walyeric's unitary laughter.

### **'Cutting and playing' with the neo-Victorian body: 'Marketing' the Aborigines, consuming the 'Other'**

The infliction of Western culture and modes of operating as a form of symbolic violence is compounded by the introduction of an economic system of commodity exchange in the text, and which can facilitate a vital consideration of the exploitative resonances of this practice within contemporary culture. It is Robson who decides to implement the market as a place 'where the poor creatures might spend their new wealth on some useful item, such as tobacco, or a new straw hat' (Kneale, 2000, p.244). The implementation of the market reflects that while Robson (and his genuine historical precursor) were motivated to

continue the ‘civilization’ of the Aborigines in favour of capital gain – as scathingly and somewhat hypocritically revealed by Dr Potter, who mentions that Robson’s ‘rescuing’ of the Aborigines is priced at ‘five pounds per head’ (Kneale, 2000, p.253) – there also existed a desire that the natives themselves should invest in this system of value and exchange, described by Catherine Price as ‘that most essential pillar of the civilized world, commerce’ (Kneale, 2000, p.244).

The implementation and privileging of Western systems of commodity exchange is described by Anne McClintock as once being commonplace in colonial settings as it became a means of disavowing the legitimacy of other cultures’ economic systems of exchange as “irrational” and “fetishistic” (1995, p.228). And yet the charge of ‘fetishism’ (the meaning of which has been outlined previously in the Introduction to this thesis) in relation to the Aborigines’ traditional system of exchange seems resoundingly disingenuous in light of the well-documented fact of the fetishisation of Aboriginal commodities and products on the part of the English colonisers. Indeed, the market for Aboriginal artefacts in England became significantly more prevalent in light of the perception that they were a race on the brink of extinction; consequently, accumulating evidence of their existence – as well as of their alterity – became a markedly popular enterprise. The disparity of these perceptions of the Aborigines’ mode of exchange in relation to their own ‘fetishistic’ forms of consumption undermines the colonisers’ by exposing the hypocrisy of their ‘civilising’ endeavours.

This fact is demonstrated by Mrs Gerald Denton, the wife of one of the Governors, whose narrative acknowledges this desire to accumulate Aboriginal artefacts by inviting ‘the poor aborigines’ (Kneale, 2000, p.312) to their Christmas party:

I added a further request to Mr Eldridge, that he might ask his blacks to bring with them objects of their own manufacture, such as bead necklaces, wooden figures or spears, which they might be willing to part with in exchange for simple gifts. My hope, I should explain, was to assemble a small, yet perhaps not unimportant collection of memorabilia of this vanishing race. I could quite imagine the sitting room of our London house in some future time, its walls displaying spears and throwing sticks, and a crowd of savage figurines hunched upon the mantelpiece, forming a delightful and also most touching reminder of our time spent upon this faraway shore.

(Kneale, 2000, p.313)

In this passage Mrs Denton reveals that she desires the possession of such artefacts not only for the sake of posterity, but also for their aesthetic function as material ‘souvenirs’ of their experience in Van Diemen’s Land. The notion of historical ‘souvenirs’ – as discussed

in the Introduction to this thesis – is of significance not only in relation to Kneale’s text, but also to the novels discussed in the remainder of this thesis in relation to the potential fetishisation and commodification of the Victorian, and particularly of Victorian traumas. Mrs Denton’s attitude towards her ‘souvenirs’ recall Hume’s reflection upon the contemporary role of the souvenir as part aesthetic or ‘art’ object, and part anthropological artefact which serves to defer the act of mourning what has been lost.

Along with these fetishised artefacts, Mrs Denton pertinently arranges to photograph individual members of Peevay’s tribe with the excuse that ‘as full a memorial as possible be preserved’ (Kneale, 2000, p.329):

I could arrange to have their likeness taken. It was a notion, I realized at once, as pleasing as it was valuable, for the preservation – at least in memory – of this most unhappy of races. *If the results were satisfactory* they would certainly earn a prominent place in our London house.

(Kneale, 2000, p.314, my emphasis)

Mrs Denton’s preoccupation with the aesthetic quality of her ‘memento mori’ is revealed to be of the utmost importance, a fact somewhat at odds with their alleged moral and scientific purpose as a crucial record of a fast-vanishing culture, highlighting Hume’s previously-disclosed understanding of the contemporary souvenir as existing betwixt both anthropological and aesthetic realms. Recalling Knightley’s possession of the anatomical statue for its aesthetic (and erotic) purpose in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, the exposure of Mrs Denton’s motivations to photograph the Aborigine women serve as a reminder of the dubious and ethically apocryphal activities committed in the name of scientific posterity.

Mrs Denton is adamant that her pictures should appear ‘authentic’, a discreet reference to her desire that the Aborigines should display the full extent of their ‘alterity’ within the photographs: ‘I confess I found it disappointing that they were not wearing some splendid tribal costume (I had presumed they would) as their clothes were dreary indeed, being the sort of garments any poor whites might wear’ (Kneale, 2000, p.328). Her disappointment is short-lived, however, as ‘Their long clay pipes added novelty to the scene – one could hardly have imagined a less ladylike habit - and as they took their places I encouraged them to hold these prominently upon their laps’ (Kneale, 2000, pp.328-329). For Mrs Denton, the inclusion of the clay pipes serve to immortalise the exotic ‘otherness’ of the Aborigine women, recalling Sturken’s discussion in the Introduction to this thesis in which she describes the ‘inauthenticity’ of native rituals which are ‘staged’ for tourists .

This scene is markedly reminiscent of Sylvia Knightley's staging of Din's racial 'authenticity' discussed in Chapter One; however: while Starling's representation highlights the *eroticisation* of Victorian traumas, Kneale's instead highlights the potential disparity between memorialisation and exploitation. Indeed, both representations emphasise the potentially exploitative solecism of such an engagement, as well as their marked *inauthenticity*, promoting reflection upon the short-circuited 're-staging' of 'authenticity' for present-day 'consumption' within the neo-Victorian itself.

Various modes of 'consuming' of the Aborigines become a recurring trope throughout Kneale's text, often in resoundingly literal terms; for example, in one instance Peevay reflects upon how 'soldiers stared at our women like they were just fresh new food for tasting' (Kneale, 2000, p.230). bell hooks has noted the correlation between contemporary consumer culture and this literal concept of 'Eating the other' in relation to racial difference specifically, as she reasons that 'Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (1992, p.21). It seems that in drawing comparisons between the Aborigines and 'consumables', Kneale's text not only reflects upon current debates regarding (re)presenting racial and historical 'difference', but also upon how the neo-Victorian text might become complicit in the contemporary 'commodification of Otherness' which hooks explains 'is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling' (1992, p.21), again recalling Starling's representation of Dora's body as 'consumable' as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. The following discussion also picks up the previously discussed idea of 'anatomisation' from Chapter One in consideration of Kneale's narrative mediation of a more overtly sinister form of historical commodification: namely, the underground market for Aboriginal body-parts.

Helen MacDonald is one critic to have assessed the history of anatomical research and pertinently notes the relevance of this scientific enterprise in both England and Tasmania as she stipulates that 'These two places were closely related in the British colonial world, and exploring past uses of human remains in them enriches our understanding of twenty-first century dealings with the dead' (2006, p.9).<sup>96</sup> this thesis argues that self-reflexive narrative representations and mediations of such an enterprise such as those incorporated within the neo-Victorian novel are of particular relevance to establishing such an understanding. MacDonald tells us that 'In the political economy of

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<sup>96</sup> MacDonald also links this historical fascination with anatomy to Gunter von Hagen's contemporary dissection displays (2006, p.40): for a discussion of this subject in relation to the neo-Victorian specifically, see Heilmann and Llewellyn (2010), pp. 141-142.

bone collecting, Tasmanian skeletal material was highly prized' (2006, p.108) as the understanding that their race was on the brink of extinction 'had the effect of turning their bodies into rare collectibles' (2006, p.10). Letissier also expounds upon the significance of Darwin's evolutionary theory in relation to Kneale's novel to disclose that 'the Victorians often reinterpreted the evolutionary scale thesis to support warped notions of racial superiority' (2010, p.87). Funk refers to this historical enterprise as a 'truly unholy alliance of scientific interest and cultural negligence' (2011, p.64), while Simpson compounds this with his assertion that 'No respect was shown to the dead and little thought was given to the families or the descendants of those whose remains were obtained, often by theft and deception' (2001, p.176).

The character Walyeric, who is subject to this terrible fate, was according to Kneale, 'inspired by a formidable woman named Walyer, who fought the whites and was greatly feared by them. She knew how to use firearms, was reputed to have cut a new path through the bush to facilitate her campaigns, and would swear fluently in English as she launched her attacks. She was eventually captured by the British in late 1831, and at once began trying to organize fellow aboriginals in a rebellion. She died not long afterwards' (Kneale, 2000, p.455). Walyeric is equally as formidable in her re-appropriation within *English Passengers*, being described by Catherine Price as 'that monster of a creature, undeserving of the title female, about whom such dreadful stories are told, and who answers the kindest smile with a glower of insolence' (Kneale, 2000, p.243). In Kneale's re-presentation – and reminiscent of Starling's re-summoning of Henry Spencer Ashbee and Arthur Munby within her fictional character, Knightley, in *The Journal of Dora Damage* - Walyer's fate seems to have been combined with that of Truganini, the woman who was 'celebrated by scientists as 'the last Tasmanian'' (Ryan, 2008, p.150). The desecration of Truganini's remains is well-documented and is termed by Funk as being 'the logical consequence of [...] the scientific commodification of the colonial encounter' (2011, p.69). Ryan summarises the fate of Truganini's remains in the following terms:

Refusing her deathbed wish for cremation in 1876, [scientists] exhumed her body two years later and articulated her skeleton for public display as the 'last of her race' [...] We now know that parts of her body found their way into museums all over the world, particularly in the United Kingdom, where they were considered the most primitive link in the human evolutionary chain.

(2008, pp.150-151)

Raising a pertinent criticism regarding Kneale's hybridized characterisation of Walyeric which is worthy of some consideration, Funk considers the possibility that 'we could accuse Kneale of his very own version of desecration of bodies, albeit only on a literary level' (2011, p.71), as the merging of these historical characters demonstrates a similar 'disregard for personal identity that [Kneale] so sternly denounces in his novel' (2011, p.71). As suggested previously in relation to Starling's and Barrett's texts, it is possible also to extend this accusation to the reader of the neo-Victorian novel as well in terms of Rothberg's concept of the 'implication', as outlined initially in the Introduction to this thesis.

Pauline Wakeham also makes a similar argument to that asserted by Funk regarding 'colonial discourse's propensity for reincarnation' (2008, p.203): using the concept of taxidermic reconstruction, Wakeham assesses the measure of 'the intense manipulation often involved in resuscitating the bodies of colonial texts, films, and even literal human remains to forms of second life' (2008, p.204). As a result of these 'often well intentioned efforts to remember (and, thus, to refuse to forget) colonial history', Wakeham warns that we risk revivifying 'the preoccupations of ethnographic salvage: the fetishization [sic] and preservation of the lost object of native otherness for the posterity of the white nation', as well as committing 'perpetual temporal genocide' (2008, p.204; p.203) upon the indigenous peoples whom we seek not to 'forget'.<sup>97</sup> Funk questions the effectiveness of such attempts at historical 'atonement', engaging in a discussion of the fact that Truganini's final request to be cremated was eventually carried out in 1976, yet the sheer *belatedness* of this final act (as well as the eruption of persistent questions regarding whether all of the remains used during the ceremony did in fact belong to Truganini) renders the effectiveness of the gesture somewhat dubitable (2011, p.70).

These are pertinent and valid arguments which aptly highlight the implicit ethical considerations of re-imagining corporeal traumas based on historical events. However, the forthcoming discussion aims to demonstrate that sophisticated and self-aware re-imaginings – as I perceive Kneale's to be – can beneficially prompt a *dialogue* with contemporary concerns regarding ways of mediating cultural and traumatic memory, and the treatment and display of historical artefacts. As mentioned in Chapter One, the revival of historical persons and traumas – whether as a means of asserting historical accuracy, revivifying cultural memory or recovering individual traumas which might have been

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<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, Hiller also notes the paradoxical state of attempting to examine subjects such as Walyer and Truganini in this way, acknowledging that her own text *The Myth of Primitivism* 'arises out of the same cultural situation it examines' (1991, p.3); such is the esoteric nature of this kind of analysis, as evidenced by this thesis itself.

overlooked – is inherently problematic as such a process necessitates their literary re-appropriation, and therefore the perpetuation and potential commodification, of a *literal* violence. As the following discussion demonstrates, Kneale’s specific mode of re-appropriation ultimately works to draw attention to the problematic processes which engender sensational returns.

Kneale employs the form of a report within the (fictional) newspaper *The Colonial Times* to describe the theft of Walyeric’s body after her death, and in doing so reflects upon a long history of media sensationalism driven by the public’s desire for, and consumption of, lurid tales. Kneale’s journalistic recital of the horror of what was discovered at the site of the theft compounds the sensationalism of colonial ‘body horror’ self-reflectively, as the newspaper reports that the police officer searching the scene ‘found a most awful *spectacle*, with skin and bodily remains lying in profusion upon the ground, suggesting some terrible murderous struggle had taken place’ (Kneale, 2000, p.339, my emphasis). Further details included in the newspaper regarding the ‘ghastly discoveries’ of this ‘bizarre and gruesome theft’ also smack of sensationalism as they describe how one of the window’s surrounds had been ‘stained with blood’, eventually leading to the grisly conclusion that the thieves ‘had mutilated the corpse’ (Kneale, 2000, p.339). Peevay’s response to learning of the probable mutilation of his mother’s body captures the traumatic nature of how her remains had been treated in terms of cultural memory:

So it was that everything in the world got changed. All those shootings and chasings and babies dropped in the fire, all that waiting on death islands with sand blowing in your eyes, and getting cheated with God, none of this was so bad, you see, as what they did to Mother. Killing was better, yes, as that is being hateful and afraid, which is some esteem, while this cutting and playing was just a scornful thing, odious as can be. *That was making her small, into nothing at all, not even dirt.*

(Kneale, 2000, p.341-342, my emphasis)

Peevay’s description of his mother’s desecrated, dismembered body recalls Scarry’s recognition that representations of powerlessness are often characterised by ‘intense embodiment’, as explored in relation to Annie’s experiences outlined in Chapter Two. Using Scarry’s lexicon of a ‘powerless’ but embodied humanity against an ‘omnipotent’ and unembodied deity, it is possible to suggest that even the representational infliction of suffering upon the body in the text in fact suggests a *lack* of representation and, subsequently, a fundamental disempowerment. Walyeric is ‘intensely embodied’ through her reduction into nothing more than fragmented parts of her body; her experiences and essential humanity are discarded through the process of her ethnographic objectification

and commodification, reflecting Peevay's assertion that she had been 'made small' and reduced to nothing.

From Peevay's description, it is possible to glean an implicit commentary on the nature of the constitution of the neo-Victorian novel itself in this description, which can also be characterised as a form which engages in 'cutting and playing' with historical facts, characters, and even bodies. In relation to this point, Boehmer posits 'historical narrative [...] as a process of *form-giving*' (2005, p.189, original emphasis) which gives structure to an amorphous past, thereby imparting 'coherence to a fragmented history' (2005, p.189). Yet Kneale's narrative – which, in accordance with Boehmer's logic, assigns 'form' to the specific history being re-written – is also fragmented through the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives. The process of re-writing – of piecing together 'fragmented' histories and 'facts' – is aptly reflected in the 'amalgamated skeletons of Truganini and Dr Potter' (Funk, 2011, p.73), as discussed more fully towards the end of this chapter. Arguably, in this way the neo-Victorian novel symbolically manifests how form mirrors content via the manipulation of the 'body' of the neo-Victorian text in conjunction with the fragmentation and desecration of the neo-Victorian 'body' (i.e. Walyeric's corporeal body) itself.

This figurative association simultaneously raises the seemingly disparate concerns of the problematic memory of violence (literal and symbolic, individual and cultural) against the 'body' of the Aborigines, and the potential for narrative re-imaginings to 'make small' or diminish historical suffering through its re-appropriation within the neo-Victorian novel itself. Despite this problematic dynamic, however, I intend to demonstrate that implementing humour and the re-appropriation of corporeal fragmentation on to the oppressor rather than the oppressed constitutes a '[strategy] of subversion that turn[s] the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power' (Bhabha, 1985, p.154).

Peevay attempts to reclaim his mother's remains in order to return them to their rightful place by giving her an appropriate burial in accordance with her cultural beliefs, as well as to deny Dr Potter the possibility of once re-gaining possession of her. While attempting to locate her remains (which have been stowed away on the *Sincerity*) he describes the extraordinary scale of the theft of Aboriginal remains which, like those of his mother, have been 'broken' or disassembled:

Everywhere was dead fellows, you see, just lying *broken* hither and thither all around. They were so many, even enough for some tribe. So I stepped among, so sad and surprised, and angry. Who were these, I pondered. Why, they might be ones I knew, I could surmise.

Dray, Mongana, Heedeek, are you here?

(Kneale, 2000, p.399, my emphasis)

Peevay's vocalisation of the names of the 'dead fellows' simultaneously re-asserts their individual identities and reaffirms their humanity in contrast to the objective and impersonal scientific language used to categorize Walyeric's remains, which he discovers shortly after:

BLACK TYPE TASMANIAN ABORIGINE FEMALE (COMPLETE)

(SPECIMEN: M.)

VALUABLE: HANDLE WITH CARE

PROPERTY OF DR T. POTTER

LONDON COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

(Kneale, 2000, p.400, original formatting)

The description of Walyeric as a 'specimen' strips her of her essential humanity which is reflected through her corporeal 'lightness', as recognised by Peevay who reflects, 'Bag was just quite light, yes, which was some sad strange thing, as Mother never should be made light, she was too fine' (Kneale, 2000, p.400). Peevay's desire to give his mother a proper burial and the 'fine goodbye' (Kneale, 2000, p.400) that she deserves through cremating her remains functions as a reconciliatory act: 'here in the world, which was hers, Mother finally got her correct dignity', a moment which is paradoxically described by Peevay as 'some kind of sorrowful jubilation' (Kneale, 2000, p.401). Recalling the bloody handprint discussed earlier in this chapter, Peevay describes the smoke from the funeral pyre as '[rushing] up like a big hand reaching' (Kneale, 2000, p.401), again inferring the idea of a corporeal tangibility rendered decidedly *intangible*, much like smoke itself.

Walyeric's fate recalls Annie's physical transcendence in *The Voyage of the Narwhal* as discussed in the previous chapter. Both Walyeric and Annie meet similar fates brought about by the self-interested ethnographic interests of their subjugators; however, while Annie demonstrates a personal understanding that her corporeal self renders her subject to continuous exploitation – which she counters by separating her mind from her body as a mode of self-empowerment – Walyeric's remains are instead reclaimed and rendered 'immaterial' by Peevay as a means of giving her a culturally-appropriate burial, and of atoning for her mistreatment and exploitation by the English. In this way, Peevay ensures that Walyeric's remains are excluded from the possibility of future exploitation.

Albeit a seemingly small-scale victory for Peevay, his symbolically significant act summons to mind contemporary debates regarding the possession and display of cultural artefacts – including bodily remains – and historical reconciliation. Ryan tells us that in 1976 (the bicentenary of Truganini's death) the Aboriginal community in Tasmania 'reached an agreement with the Tasmanian government for the return of her remains', yet while some saw this as 'the beginning of the long road to reconciliation, others were clearly disturbed by the rupture of the known past' (2008, p.151), recalling Seltzer's notion of the traumatic collapse of boundaries (as discussed initially in the Introduction to this thesis) and which, in this instance, are both corporeal and temporal.

Philip Jones speculates that 'museums and collections worldwide may hold as many as 250,000 Aboriginal artefacts dating from the colonial period', and that 'For many decades these objects served one main function in museums – to mark the culture of the Other' (2007, p.5). Stanton attests that this 'remains a fundamental issue for today's curators, especially in considering the impact classification has had on effectively distancing one culture from another – even, indeed, creating the very notion of 'the other'' (2011, p.2). Simpson contributes to the debate by addressing both indigenous and moral sensitivities towards such collections of artefacts, stating that 'The methods of acquisition of human remains and the reasons for their collection anger indigenous peoples and others who feel that they are evidence of colonial and racist attitudes, reminders of nineteenth century European attempts to prove the superiority of the white race over others' (2001, p.175). An elucidation of this point can be found in *English Passengers* when Walyeric – refusing to take part in Mrs Denton's memorialising activities – deliberately destroys the camera used by Mrs Denton to photograph the Aborigine women as she dies, constituting a final prohibition to any further overt exploitation of her people. In another symbolic act of violence, and despite her protestations of sadness at the demise of 'poor dear Mary' (Kneale, 2000, p.332), Mrs Denton still defies Walyeric's wishes not to be photographed through subsequent attempts to capture her image after her death, acknowledging the morbidity of the act as 'a remembrance all the more sadly pertinent, seeing as death was creeping ever closer to each last member of her most unhappy race' (Kneale, 2000, pp.331-332).

Funk comments upon this textual scenario to propose that 'even if the reason behind commodifying [...] human remains might have changed from proving racialist theories to conserving the remnants of an extinct culture, the results are the same and the dismemberment of Truganini – irredeemable as it is – serves as a poignant illustration of

the barbarous role science played in the ideological rationalization and actual implementation of the extirpation of Tasmanian natives and their way of life' (2011, p.70). Stanton formulates a similar argument in relation to ethnographic museum displays specifically to reach a conclusion regarding the necessity and future of such displays, and initially admits that 'The origins of the European museum clearly lie with the 'cabinets of curiosities', and that there are still a few museums around the world that echo this approach to the 'mysterious'' (2011, p.2). This perspective arguably summarises the charges which might be levied against the re-appropriation and narrative 'display' (an appropriate term in relation to the 'visuality' attributed to traumatic representations within the novel) of cultural actors and traumas in the neo-Victorian novel. However, Stanton emphasises the fact that 'Anthropology and ethnography have moved an enormous distance from the early collecting environment, where 'crude' oddities became peculiar obsessions' despite the seemingly inescapable 'enduring influence of perceived exoticism because many Australian museums have ethnographic collections (or least ethnographic components of their collections) that were collected in a different era, in rather different contexts to those that prevail in the twenty-first century' (2011, p.2). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill similarly asserts that 'The great collecting phase of museums is over', and that the museums of the future – or as she terms it, the 'post-museum' - will instead focus upon 'intangible heritage', such as 'the memories, songs and cultural traditions that embody that culture's past and future' (2000, p.152).

Integrally in relation to the discussion of neo-Victorian re-presentations of cultural memory and historical trauma, Stanton concludes that 'The memory and the voice of the ethnographic item are enhanced by historical recordings and present-day affirmations and interpretations' (2011, para.27). Arguably, like the neo-Victorian novel itself, contemporary collections constitute 'a concrete validation of the cultures they express; they are witnesses to cultural diversity and social change' as they 'provide a prime means through which multiple social expressions can achieve a public presence and, through this engagement, recruit potential supporters and advocates into the highly politicised arena of cross-cultural engagement' (Stanton, 2011, para.30). For Stanton, 'This is the stuff of ethnographic collections, a shared journey through which the objects *speak to us in many tongues*' (2011, para.30, my emphasis), a metaphor which recalls Kneale's multi-vocal approach to comprehensively re-presenting the Victorian past. Hooper-Greenhill reaches a similar conclusion in her affirmation that contemporary museum displays enable 'the incorporation into the museum of many voices and many perspectives', and that

‘Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multi-vocal. There is no necessary unified perspective; rather a *cacophony of voices* may be heard that present *a range of views, experiences, and values*’ (2000, p.152, my emphasis).

I have emphasised what I perceive to be key words and phrases used in Stanton’s and Hooper-Greenhill’s research as they resound quite pertinently with the status of the neo-Victorian novel as a simultaneously historical and contemporary ‘artefact’. A *distinctly critical* and self-aware ‘engagement’ with historical (arte)facts and events (which take in to account multiple dialogues and interpretations in recognition of the subjectivity inherent to all experience, as per the multiple ‘voices’ incorporated into *English Passengers*) arguably offers the most effective means of mediating and engaging with traumatic historical events. As Lord explains in relation to Foucault’s conceptualisation of heterotopia, ‘As spaces of representation, museums are also spaces of difference. That is, museums are spaces of the difference between concepts and things, spaces that maintain and represent that gap between conceptual schemes and objects, denying that any conceptual scheme could be perfectly adequate to things’ (2006, p.84). In fact, ‘Since [...] the museum puts systems of representation on display and allows those systems to be contested, the museum at least has potential to reveal the contingency and discontinuity of the order of things. Museums are spaces of the difference of words and things. It is within this space of difference that systems of representation can be revealed and contested’ (Lord, 2006, p.85).

Kneale’s text similarly ‘displays’ difference due to his overtly visual representations, but in such a way as to promote reflection as to the *appropriateness* of sensational returns to traumatic historical events. Such historical moments need to be acknowledged and remembered (as a result of cultural and ethical responsibility), and, in this way, memorialized, lest they become histories (both individual and communal) dismissively relegated to the annals of discounted history, but in sophisticated and self-conscious ways which promote an ethical, rather than sensational or fetishistic approach. As explored in the forthcoming discussion, the incorporation of carefully mediated representations of the body can also be used to highlight the problematic pitfalls of such modes of narrative engagement.

## Fixing 'broken fellows': Corporeal confrontations with historical injustice

The remainder of this discussion demonstrates that *English Passengers* works to address the issues raised above, as well as the questions posed towards the beginning of this chapter, in two prominent ways. The first of these constitutes the implementation of a narrative mode of troubling Scarry's traditional dichotomy of the display of the fragmented native body as representative of intense embodiment and therefore powerlessness (as discussed previously) which, I argue, is achieved through the *reversal* of such representations to focus upon the fragmentation, consumption and even scientific commodification of the oppressor's body, and in turn to render them equally as 'embodied' and as somatically 'vulnerable' as the Aborigine characters. Whereas Dr Potter and Reverend Wilson are able to inflict various forms of fragmentation and violence upon the oppressed natives, both Peevay and Walyeric are shown to be equally as desirous of, and adept at, inflicting similar punishments upon those responsible for their suffering. Walyeric, for example, talks 'of killing num white scuts and feeding their arms and legs to dogs' (Kneale, 2000, p.234); similarly, Peevay's motivation in reclaiming his mother's remains is to 'try to *dash to pieces* all those hateful things that got done to her before' (Kneale, 2000, p.400, my emphasis).

An early example of how the text emphasises the embodiment of the oppressors in the text occurs after the convict Jack Harp abducts Walyeric from her tribe. Harp initially dehumanises her by describing her in animalistic terms, stating that 'she was trouble, that piece, yelling and biting like some raw animal' (Kneale, 2000, p.46), and later how he 'fixed her with a chain outside, and even then she'd bite and scratch when I worked her' (Kneale, 2000, p.47). But ultimately his accomplice, Ned, pays the price for his physical violation of Walyeric as recounted through Harp's narrative testimonial that he one day discovered Ned 'with his trousers round his ankles and his *head stove in like a bust pumpkin*, the stone that had done it sat just nearby *all stained*' (Kneale, 2000, p.47, my emphasis). It is interesting that the gruesome imagery conjured forth from Harp's description of the 'bust pumpkin' is a food-based metaphor, particularly in light of his following statement that 'He must have been there a time as *the birds had had themselves a good feed, especially his belly and face*' (Kneale, 2000, p.47); aptly, after 'consuming' Walyeric sexually, Ned himself is consumed by the birds and we (as readers) are presented with the narrative 'display' of the corporeal susceptibility of the oppressor, a direct reversal of the traditional politics of consumption which largely focus upon the oppressed.

Walyeric's revenge upon Ned is compounded by Harp's statement that 'When I was putting him in the ground I saw his tackle had been got at nasty, which I reckoned was her rather than the birds' (Kneale, 2000, p.47). Recalling Bakhtin's assertion that the comic is born of the feeling between pleasure and displeasure, this narrative 'scene' highlights the vindictory commingling of the inferred mutilation of Ned's genitals – arguably no less disturbing for the lack of graphic detail – and the seeming candidness with which it is reported; Jack Harp's reflection upon Walyeric's destruction of the small rowboat required to transport him from the island is similarly humorous as he reports, 'Three days I spent searching along the coast where she must have landed but there was never so much as a splinter. I reckoned she must've stove her in. Well, that did strike me as an unnecessary sort of act, and mean too' (Kneale, 2000, pp.47-48). Harp's statement regarding Walyeric's 'unnecessary' destruction of the boat as retribution for her capture and rape resounds as a preposterous sentiment to the reader, serving to undermine Harp's predicament while serving to compound and reinforce the extent of her horrifying treatment at the hands of the two men.

Kneale's final reflection upon how fragmentation is inflicted specifically upon the body of the oppressor in favour of the oppressed occurs at the conclusion of the novel. Several months after the sinking of the *Sincerity*, Captain Kewley describes chancing upon what are implied to be the physical remains of Dr Potter – whose body had been on-board the ship - in an exhibition consisting of purportedly Aboriginal skeletal relics upon his return to England:

On the frame was a little brass plate, all carved with neatest writing.

*Unknown male presumed Tasmanian aborigine*

*Possible victim of human sacrifice*

Just nearby was a little glass case, and in it was a little scran of what looked like skin.

*Aboriginal witchcraft charm*

There was no mistaking the hairs, which were short, just right for someone's beard, and a fine shade of red.

(Kneale, 2000, p.454, original emphasis)

The darkly humorous irony of Dr Potter's remains becoming confused with those of an Aboriginal native renders his scientific investigation, as well as his revered notes on the subject of racial difference - described by Jonah Childs moments before his discovery as 'a work of greatness' (Kneale, 2000, p.453) - entirely inconsequential and invalid, as Kewley reflects: 'There I'd been, dragging it off the vessel like my life depended on it, and when I opened it up all I found was paper. Where was the use in that? From what I could see it

was the purest gibberish too, being about types and characteristics and other nonsense. I couldn't think why Potter had been hanging on to it' (Kneale, 2000, p.442). Although Kewley's somewhat nauseating suggestion that 'Four months would have been long enough for sea creatures to have themselves a fine little feed' (Kneale, 2000, p.454), Dr Potter's fate seems an appropriate punishment for a man who cared so little about the treatment of the bodies of his scientific 'specimens'. It is also interesting to note that Dr Potter – like Ned, whose fate was discussed previously – is the victim of a form of 'consumption', both physically (as he is initially literally consumed by the fish) and visually (as his skeletal remains are appropriated as an artefact within the exhibition). The abruptness of Kneale's final statement in the novel compounds the inconsequentiality of Dr Potter's scientific endeavours, as well as of his gruesome fate: that 'Nobody seemed very interested' (Kneale, 2000, p.454).

That Walyeric's intended fate as a feature in an ethnographic display should instead be meted out against Doctor Potter – and compounded by mis-categorisation – recalls the amalgamation of the skeletal material attributed to Walyeric discussed previously in this chapter, a reflection which perhaps indicates that Potter's fate constitutes a form of textually satisfying revenge which demonstrates that 'Eventually, all that remains of both colonizer and colonized are hybrid traces in narratives, with narrative authority and any claims to cultural identity torn to bits by history's powerful fortuitousness' (Funk, 2011, p.72). Such representation offers a humorous and ironic glimpse into the subversive power of the neo-Victorian hybridisation of historical traces and persons to undermine the idea of historical authority or certainty.

### **Conclusion: or, 'liberating laughter'**

The darkly humorous irony of Dr Potter's fate epitomises the way in which satirical humour is used throughout the text to undermine the historical authority and power of both colonisers and oppressors. This – Kneale's sophisticated use of humour in combination with traumatic representation – constitutes what I perceive as Kneale's primary approach to addressing historical injustice. For Ross, laughter 'remains a potent, inalienable weapon in the arsenal of the dispossessed' (2006, p.267), in accordance with Bakhtin's sentiments on the subject:

[...] laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it. Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.123)

Pollard summarises Bakhtin's perception of the importance of laughter as 'liberating people from not only external authority but internal censorship, from the fears of breaking sacred and official prohibitions' (2008, p.171). Both critics demonstrate that promoting laughter and humour in the face of historical suffering can be both radical and redemptive, subversive and empowering.

In conclusion, I have argued that the hybridisation of humour and trauma in Kneale's neo-Victorian text works to '[reveal] the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion' (Bhabha, 1985, p.35). Kneale's humorous dialogue with the traumatic Australian past constitutes essential 'noise' within the ongoing Australian struggle of the Australian indigenes to counter what Stanner has termed 'the great Australian silence' (1991, p.25); indeed, laughter would constitute an appropriate and apt response for Stanner, who maintains that 'aboriginal humour [...] comes in part from a wonderful gift, one they did not get from us, of taking us gravely but not seriously' (1991, p.55). *English Passengers* is particularly timely in its reflection of, and emphasis on, the materiality of the body, enacting justice upon the characters whose sense of morality proves to have fallen short with both restorative humour and subversive hubris. Recalling Foucault's notion of the constitution of the heterotopia, Kneale's use of trauma and satirical humour undermines the novel as a space in which to indulge a desire for 'otherness' by highlighting for the reader the incongruities and exploitative implications of such an engagement.

In the following and final chapter I return again to the idea of a 'perverse nostalgia' to explore the nightmarish possibilities of the extent of 'trauma tourism' and spectatorship which, as I will demonstrate, ultimately works to frustrate the reader's sense of proximity to the historically suffering 'Other' through a sustained focus on corporeal abjection. A particularly 'dark' and subversive example of the neo-adventure novel, Edric's text proffers a prophetic forewarning pertaining to the implications of 'seeking out' suffering, and a forceful prompt for readerly introspection.

## Chapter Four

### **‘We were again on the trail of cannibals’: Consuming Trauma and Frustrating Exoticism in Robert Edric’s *The Book of the Heathen***

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*‘What man comes here without the expectation of suffering?’*  
(Edric, 2000, p.208)

As discussed in Chapter Three in relation to the decimation of the Australian Aborigine population, one of the primary functions attributed to the neo-Victorian novel is to retrieve and reconstruct ‘neglected or unheard-of stories of stifled suffering’ (Kohlke & Gutleben, 2010, p.20). This thesis has also evidenced that for the reader, the neo-Victorian novel holds out the additional promise of an imaginative escape into a new and unfamiliar exotic space and time, posited outside of everyday experience, which might render them a vicarious traveller or ‘trauma tourist’. Edric’s disturbing neo-Victorian novel *The Book of the Heathen* (2000) initially seems to promise to fulfil both of these functions, charting a descent into depravity and chaos against the historical backdrop of the widespread humanitarian injustices that took place in the context of King Leopold’s Congo in the 1890s. Leopold’s rule saw thousands of Congolese men, women and children exploited as forced labour, the devastating effects of which included extensive maltreatment and ‘decimation on an apocalyptic scale’ (Samolsky, 2011, p.67).

However, this wide-spread historical suffering is overshadowed by the deportation and trial awaiting Frere, a resident Englishman from the Ukassa Falls Concessionary Station situated in the Congo Free State who stands accused of participating in the torture and murder of a young Congolese girl. The narrative culminates in a lengthy and graphic description of the mutilation and suffering inflicted upon the young girl and her subsequent murder, apparently instigated by members of a resident tribe who reportedly engage in ritualistic cannibalism. Frere regularly leaves the Station in the weeks leading up to this tragic event in the hope of stumbling across an authentic ritual of this variety taking place. Eventually – to his horror, delight and ruination – he finds exactly what he is looking for.

Frere’s motivation for embarking upon his morbid search recalls the decline of the Victorian exoticist project towards the end of the nineteenth century which augured the advent of ‘a world [...] essentially lacking in mystery, out of which nothing new [could] arise’ (Bongie, 1991, p.3). The legacy of this sense of ‘decline’ continues into our contemporary experience as the expanse of the world grows ever ‘smaller’ thanks to the

ease, affordability and speed of global travel, among other factors. This parallel enables consideration of Frere's exoticist motivations in tandem with those of the reader of neo-Victorian fiction.

However, the argument put forth in this chapter demonstrates that despite this implied promise of historical escapism, *The Book of the Heathen* operates instead as a perverse and unsatisfying neo-adventure novel which, as explained in the Introduction to this thesis, functions in a mode of critical 'genuflection' to its literary predecessor, the late-Victorian adventure novel.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, Frasier himself reflects this sentiment in relation to the gift of a Bible offered to him by his mother – who had once worked for 'various missionary societies' – before his departure, on which Frasier reflects 'how much of her own thwarted ambition [he] now embodied' (Edric, 2000, p.135).

Peter Firchow professes that for precursory Victorian European authors such as Joseph Conrad, Gustave Flaubert and Henry Rider Haggard, 'envisioning Africa in fiction became an analogue for the exploration of the hidden, dark regions of their inner selves' (2000, p.20): in this chapter I argue that Edric consciously re-summons this late-Victorian literary trope for a similar purpose, this being to facilitate an exploration into a distinctly contemporary inner 'darkness': the fascination with corporal violence and the wounded, fragmented body. Recalling the discussion in the previous chapter regarding the seemingly conflicting commingling of humorous and traumatic representations, this chapter focusses upon re-considering the traditional conceptualisation of the exotic as purely relevant to a geographical or temporal space to reveal a more transcendent interpretation of the term which instead configures the *psyche* as 'a chaotic and confused territory' in which *conflicting impulses* exist simultaneously (Kilgour, 1998, p.249). A quote from Bronfen effectively summarises the importance of this consideration, specifically in relation to morbid or disturbing visual and verbal representations, as she questions, 'How can we delight at, be fascinated, morally educated, emotionally elevated and psychologically reassured in our sense of self by virtue of the depiction of a horrible event in the life of another, which we would not have inflicted on ourselves?' (1992, p.x). Greenblatt also raises a similar set of pertinent questions in this regard: 'why do we read the sentences at all? Might we be better off quietly forgetting about them? [...] Is there not some hidden pleasure, some imaginative provocation, in this spectacle of torture? Is there something indecent about using such sentences to illustrate a point about historicism? [...] if we turn our eyes away, are we not collaborating with [the perpetrator] and with all the others like

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<sup>98</sup> See the previous discussion regarding the terminological distinctions between the Adventure- and Late-Victorian Adventure novel in the Introduction to this thesis.

him?’ (1990, p.18).<sup>99</sup> Confronted with the characters’ dark impulses through their not unproblematic or stable position as an empathic witness, the reader is prompted to engage in the process of exploring their own psychological terrain as a means of confronting the Other *within* the self, which can encompass, for instance, the individual’s instincts to seek out the taboo, the shocking, or the disturbing.

Where Wesseling suggests that such extreme representations may be incorporated as ‘rather extreme measures’ for prompting a disaffected readership ‘feel at least *something*, whether good or bad’ (2010, p.313), I argue that the suffering body in Edric’s text takes on greater significance in light of the previously-discussed phenomenas of ‘body horror’ and ‘wound culture’. That the sensationalised, wounded body ‘on display’ is unquestionably of contemporary interest facilitates a reading of Edric’s text in which the exotic is reconceptualised within ‘the territory of the barbaric Id’, the exploration of which becomes a process of ‘internal imperialism’ (Kilgour, 1998, p.249) which will be shown to further compound the reader’s isolation from the Victorian past.

### **Neo-Victorian returns to the traumatic history of the Congo Free State**

Much like the neo-Victorian authors discussed thus far in this thesis, Edric draws closely upon historical sources and events to ground his narrative within historical reality.

According to Jason Stearns, the Congo Free State (in which Edric’s narrative is set) was a private enterprise founded on the use of forced labour, and was set up by King Leopold II during the ‘rubber boom’ of the 1890s when the area became ‘a key source of latex for car and bicycle tyres’ (2011, p.7). Samolsky asserts that ‘the enforced collection of wild rubber led to decimation on an apocalyptic scale’ (2011, p.67), recalling Kneale’s similar focus upon the annihilation of the Australian Aborigines.

Interestingly, however, neo-Victorian literary returns to the specific history of African colonial violence seem remarkably ‘thin on the ground’. It seems that it is only in the past year (or so) that neo-Victorian authors have commenced an engagement with the

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<sup>99</sup> The questions posed by Greenblatt arise from, and are directly related to his analysis of, Edmund Scott’s *Exact Discourse of the Subtleties, Fashions, Pollicies, Religion and Ceremonies of the East Indians* (1606); however, they do seem particularly pertinent to this discussion given that Scott’s narrative also details graphic descriptions of torture and mutilation against ‘racial as well as religious others’ (Greenblatt, 1990, p.18), with the added important consideration that it is impossible to know if the torture detailed in Scott’s narrative actually took place. This raises an interesting parallel between ‘genuine’ historical narratives and fictional accounts, both of which are able to elicit similar responses from the reader. As a result, violent representations such as those incorporated within Edric’s novel necessarily require consideration of the ethical implications of incorporating such sensational and provocative representations of (f)actual historical trauma within a neo-Victorian text, and ultimately to consider why these specific representations are pertinent today as a topic for re-writing, as explored more fully later in this chapter.

traumatic history of Victorian colonial Africa. Jennifer McVeigh's *The Fever Tree* (2012) and John Wilcox's *Fire Across the Veldt* (2013) seemingly constitute the only two neo-Victorian literary returns to this period in African history, demonstrating a surprising dearth of engagement with the subject given that war and violence in the Congo has been an ongoing reality for decades – indeed, since Leopold's rule itself – leaving the country in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. The BBC News website reports that 'despite a peace deal and the formation of a transitional government in 2003, people in the east of the country remain in terror of marauding militias and the army',<sup>100</sup> pervasive sexual violence also remains endemic, and consequently became the focus of the most recent Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which took place in London in June of this year.<sup>101</sup> It is plausible to infer that the continuing and extreme stories of violence and trauma taking place within the Democratic Republic of the Congo render its traumatic history not quite 'past' enough to engage with as a neo-Victorian setting, or as a suitable 'space' in which to situate exploratory 'returns', as Edric's novel somewhat paradoxically manages to demonstrate in his own return.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of several epigraphs at the very beginning in Edric's text serve to ground the tale in terms of historical 'fact' through the inclusion of references to genuine historical figures and events. One such example is Edric's use of an epigraph allegedly taken from a personal Bible belonging to the 'true-life' N.E.S. Frere,<sup>102</sup> and which purportedly resides today in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. This initial allusion to the potential factuality of Frere's existence within reality arguably lends Edric's narrative a sense of authenticity and veracity; however, Kohlke argues that the neo-Victorian trauma novel addresses a 'retrospective yearning not for imagined certainties of the past but for the past's crises of violent extremity' (2009, p.27). Accordingly, representations of the gross maltreatment and violence inflicted upon thousands of Congolese men, women and children are made explicit within Edric's text, as such instances were rife within Congolese concessions which became areas of 'death, starvation, wife abduction, "hostage houses", mutilation and sexual abuse' (Hunt, 2008, p.221); indeed, most of the varieties of trauma mentioned in the preceding list are, to a greater or lesser extent, alluded to within Edric's

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<sup>100</sup> 'Democratic Republic of Congo profile' (2014). Retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2014, from the BBC News website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13283212>

<sup>101</sup> Information retrieved 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2014, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chairs-summary-global-summit-to-end-sexual-violence-in-conflict/chairs-summary-global-summit-to-end-sexual-violence-in-conflict>

<sup>102</sup> These initials correlate with the full name of Edric's protagonist, 'Nicholas Edwin Stephen Frere' (Edric, 2000, p.81).

novel, summoning inevitable parallels with the on-going present-day violence taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Edric's text also draws upon its Victorian literary heritage, most prominently recalling Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to which Edric's narrative pays an apparently perverse 'homage'. Conrad's text followed in the literary footsteps of the early-Victorian adventure novel, departing from pre-existent imperial ideologies to reveal instead the anxieties of modernism; the instability of the dreams of the imperialists; and the futility of the escapist fantasies inherent to exoticism. Adam Hochschild pertinently acknowledges the inter-temporal application of Conrad's novel as he proclaims that contemporary readers perceive his text 'as a parable for all times and places, not as a book about one time and place' (1998, p.143), while Owen Knowles has similarly commented upon the 'contemporary reverberations' (2007, p.xiii) of Conrad's tale, additionally noting how the text has 'had a powerful generative effect upon twentieth-century writers and film-makers, inspiring emulations, adaptations and counter-versions' (2007, p.xiv). Cedric Watts (1984) and Hochschild (1998) both name Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) as an example of how Conrad's text has been revisited with a distinctly contemporary twist, offering a sardonic commentary on the Vietnam War by positing the infamous Kurtz as a disturbed renegade army operative.

Edric's text writes back to the concerns of Conrad's precursory and somewhat inauspicious novel which prophetically tapped into 'areas of experience that gained new prominence in light of historical events in the twentieth century' (Watts, 1984, p.50) with seeming 'apocalyptic foreknowledge' (Samolsky, 2011, p.72). Schell describes Conrad's text as 'clairvoyant in its specificity of the moral landscape of the twentieth century' (2003, p.13): by way of explanation, Samolsky suggests that Conrad 'witnessed the European experiment in Africa and was thus able to foresee that the new century was about to open on the manifold potentialities for evil' (2011, p.73). Brooks also acknowledges the suitability of Marlow's text in relation to repetition and re-writing, stating that as 'Marlow must repeat Kurtz's story, and presumably his listeners will have to repeat Marlow's story of Kurtz's story. Indeed, the very start of Marlow's narrative suggests an infinite possibility of repetition when he reaches back nineteen hundred years to imagine the Roman commander navigating up the Thames, into a land of savagery. [...] there seems to be a need for protagonists and storytellers, and particularly protagonists *as* storytellers, to attach their narratives to someone else's, to be ever the belated followers of the track of another' (1984, pp.261-262).

Setting the narrative in the African Congo, then, not only recalls the precursory Victorian texts to which *The Book of the Heathen* operates in a self-conscious and critical ‘obedience’ to its textual precursors, but facilitates consideration of how the neo-Victorian novel has re-summoned the ‘short-circuited’ legacy of the Victorian exoticist project which, as explained in the Introduction to this thesis, presumes that what has been lost will be attained ‘elsewhere’. In doing so, Edric’s novel reveals that the substituted promise of historical (rather than geographical) exoticism within the neo-Victorian novel – so tempting for a contemporary readership in the face of ‘a *real* absence of alternative worlds’ (Bongie, 1991, p.6, original emphasis) – is necessarily predestined to failure.

Edric’s protagonists – Frasier and Frere – are initially driven by the typically exoticist fantasy of charting unmapped ground in ‘the Great Unknown, the place where [their] names will be made’ (Edric, 2000, p.63), only to be disappointed when they arrive at the station to discover ‘a place already long since sacrificed to the gods of profit and loss’ (Edric, 2000, p.118), and by no means unexplored. Their disappointment forces them into ‘fooling themselves into believing that we were going where no others had already gone before us’ (Edric, 2000, p.118) by way of compensating for their lack of authentic experience. This type of self-deception is resultant of ‘the gradual loss of alternative horizons that had to result from the diffusion of “Western civilization” to all corners of the globe’ (Bongie, 1991, p.4), which necessarily forces the individual to seek out and ‘consume’ authentic experiences in ‘alternative’ spaces, arguably in a mode not dissimilar to those perpetuated by the Victorian exoticist project. The lexicon of consumption is particularly pertinent in relation to Edric’s text as, like its Victorian precursors, *The Book of the Heathen* is – to implement the quote from this chapter’s title – ‘once again [...] on the trail of cannibals’ (Edric, 2000, p.180); unlike its Victorian precursors, however, it will not enable the reader to discover any, despite providing somewhat titillating ‘evidence’ to the contrary.

This axiom of failure is evident both by virtue of the fact that we are recalling and perpetuating the ideas and unkept promises of a project we already know to have failed, but also because we ‘forge [this past] with modern tools’ to reflect present-day cultural anxieties (Lowenthal, 1985, p.xvii). However, just as the late-Victorian adventure novel reflected the ‘modernist’s double-vision’ (White, 1993, p.7), engaging in what Chris Bongie describes as a ‘duplicitous act of renouncing and [...] re-announcing the exotic, affirming and negating it’ (1991, p.22), Edric’s neo-adventure novel similarly ‘re-

announces' the idea of the Victorian past as an exotic location before finally 'renouncing' it, revealing the fundamentally and perpetually aporetic nature of neo-Victorian exoticism.

Edric's text recalls and employs this oscillation between 're-announcing' and 'renouncing' the past as an exotic space, facilitated on a textual level by the non-chronological and fragmented plot, persistent interruptions of nightmares and hallucinations, and narrative gaps and silences, all of which – as this chapter demonstrates – contribute towards frustrating and negating our engagement with this unfamiliar, 'exotic' historical world. Departing from the idea of 'textual erotics' discussed in relation to *The Dora of Dora Damage*, the structure of, and narrative effects employed within, Edric's text is instead rendered textually 'traumatic': that the plot of the novel works 'backwards' – eventually arriving at the awful truth of the incident through Frere's confession after a suspenseful series of seemingly unconnected traumatic incidents and narrative omissions and silences – arguably also becomes reflective of a contemporary 'working through' of trauma itself, as the form of the narrative 'replicate[s] the way that trauma ruptures narrative and the witness' faculty of making sense of his overwhelming experience' (Wesseling, 2010, p.315).

However, despite this potential for transcendence from the traumatic experience as a 'working through', I argue that the intensity and frequency of traumatic representations within Edric's novel preclude this as the reason for his graphic and seemingly gratuitous re-summoning of historical suffering. It is arguable that the combination of *The Book of the Heathen*'s disturbing content in conjunction with the inferred distance of its setting is integral to its appeal to readers. The depiction of a distinctly nineteenth-century jungle scene on the front cover, in addition to an accolade from Peter Kemp (of the *Sunday Times*) emblazoned in large font directly beneath the title of the Black Swan edition of the text, which reads 'It will be surprising if this year sees a more disturbing or haunting novel', equates the notion of horror with that of a temporally and geographically distant setting,<sup>103</sup> a distance which might plausibly '[create] avenues for readers to flirt with taboo' (Weaver-Hightower, 2007, p.110). The combination of distance and horror as proffered by Edric's text reflects a distinctly contemporary motivation to seek out 'exotic' experiences, specifically those related to traumatic historical settings and events, which essentially renders the reader a 'tourist' of traumatic history. This correlation is suggested in the early stages of the episode in which the young girl is horrifically murdered (and which is

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<sup>103</sup> The front cover of Edric's text consists of a photograph obtained from the Baptist Missionary Society, titled 'preparing palm fronds for thatching, Congo, late 19c'. The photograph depicts an austere-looking British missionary – recognisable due to his iconic state of dress – standing over three African men who are gathering palm fronds against the backdrop of a lush green jungle setting.

discussed more fully in exploration of the fuller implications of this novelistic ‘scene’ towards the end of this chapter): one of the perpetrators is described as having ‘picked up the girl by a rope which ran the length of her curved back, tied between her neck and her ankles, as though he were lifting a small suitcase from the canoe’ (Edric, 2000, p.312). While likening the girl to an inanimate object dehumanises her to the point of conflating her with nothing more than baggage, I also find the fact that she is likened specifically to a ‘suitcase’ a particularly interesting and symbolically loaded word-choice in relation to the historical ‘travelling’ undertaken by the reader: indeed, it is arguable that there is no item more integral to the concept of travelling than a suitcase. This example also highlights a notable parallel between the object and the suffering body as referents to material corporeality which, as I will demonstrate, takes on significance in relation to establishing an engagement with historical suffering and a perceived sense of proximity to an ‘authentic’ Victorian past.

Indeed, in light of the perceived ‘authenticity’ of the historical setting, it is paramount to consider why this specific historical context has been re-appropriated as the setting for Edric’s tale. That the specific nature and scale of the violence inflicted upon the Congolese went largely unnoticed and unrecorded for a significant amount of time is paramount to this consideration, as this effectively rendered the brutality of the colonisers invisible, undocumented and unpunished;<sup>104</sup> in addition to this, formal historical narrative accounts of England’s colonial history ‘often erase moments of violence and suffering, as well as the cultures and individuals who undergo them, so as to produce a redemptive and reassuring account of national history’ (May, 2005, p.102). Many neo-Victorian novels therefore arguably return to sites of historical injustice to address the absence of formal historical documentation, often with a view to highlighting individual suffering in relation to collective memory; as Chad May explains, by ‘challenging and disturbing the interpretive structures that sustain these [traditional] narratives, the representation of trauma opens up the possibility of a history not dependent upon acts of erasure and forgetting’ (2005, p.102).

However, the extent of the reader’s awareness with regards to which specific elements of the text which are based on ‘fact’ (or documented evidence) – particularly those which re-present genuine human suffering – proves problematic in relation to *The Book of the Heathen*. A pertinent example of this dilemma is revealed by Henriette Roos

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<sup>104</sup> News of the brutal treatment of the Congolese by colonial officers, who ‘killed or mutilated hundreds of thousands and pushed millions of others to starvation or death from disease’, eventually reached Europe and America in the early 1900s, prompting ‘the first international human rights campaign, led by missionaries and activists, including Mark Twain and Arthur Conan Doyle’ (Stearns, 2011, p.7).

who notes that Edric's representation of the murder of the young girl is, somewhat disturbingly, based upon a genuine historical event (2009, p.73). The details of what allegedly took place are outlined by Tim Jeal, who discovered from surviving journals from the Congo that a rich Irishman named James Jameson 'purchased an eleven year old girl and had then given her to cannibals, so he could watch her being stabbed to death, dismembered, cooked and eaten', adding that Jameson had produced 'sketches of the whole ghastly process' (2007, p.356).

This information not only raises pertinent questions regarding the appropriateness of the reader's excursions into past suffering which is based on documented evidence, but also raises concerns as to whether this is further problematized if the reader remains unaware of the historical actuality of specific representations. Does the fact that Edric chooses not to inform the reader of the historical veracity of the girl's ordeal potentially negate a sense of responsibility on the part of the reader? And what effect, if any, would knowledge of the actuality of the girl's torment have upon the reader? The disunity between real and imagined historical traumas raises an interesting (but not unproblematic) approximation between 'genuine' historical narratives and fictional accounts, while the reader's perception of distance from past events further compounds this problem.

On this point, if the neo-Victorian novel proffers an authentic engagement with the historical suffering, it seems essential to consider the spectrum of readerly subject-positions and responses which inevitably arise as the result of achieving this, particularly through the use of graphic representations of violence inflicted upon the body. As a point of departure exists the possibility that readers will remain disaffected by the traumatic material or representations that they encounter, as considered by several critics. Irene Visser, for example, cites evidence put forward by Stephen Eisenman pertaining to photographs of torture in the Abu Ghraib jail in 2004 which seemingly 'evoked no political protest or upsurge of emotion [...], but rather a relative indifference' (Visser, 2011, p.280). Initially naming this specific apathy 'the Abu Ghraib effect', Eisenman questions whether 'there is something about the pictures themselves, and past images of torture in different media, that has blunted the natural human response of outrage', or even whether a contemporary saturation of such images 'rather than rendering the images of abuse and torture more horrific, made them appear less so' (2007, p.9). Luckhurst attributes this apathy to the 'Western aesthetic tradition of representing violent triumph over colonized and therefore dehumanized peoples'; consequently, the 'shock' value of such suffering is essentially diminished as the necessary and expected result of 'imperial business as usual'

(2008, p.212). However, Luckhurst also ponders whether this apathy has arisen as a response to the ‘rise and rise of the trauma paradigm’ which ‘appears superficially to be a paradigm that might address atrocity, genocide and war’ but that ultimately ‘shockingly fail[s] to do so’ (2008, p.212). Sontag, on the other hand, outlines three responses to ‘regarding’ other people’s pain: ‘A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen’ (2003, p.13). Sontag seems to effectively interrogate this possibility of readerly disaffection (without necessarily ascribing to it) as she asks, ‘Does shock have term limits? [...] Shock can become familiar. Shock can wear off. Even if it doesn’t, one can *not* look. [...] This seems normal, that is, adaptive. As one can become habituated to horror in real life, one can become habituated to the horror of certain images’ (2003, p.82, original emphasis).<sup>105</sup>

In opposition to this potential response is that fostered by LaCapra in relation to facilitating an empathic unsettlement in the reader. To briefly recap, empathic unsettlement is considered by LaCapra to be an essential facet of manifesting empathy through the ‘virtual’ experience of trauma, which enables the subject to identify with the ‘victim’ or sufferer while respecting the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’. It seems that Edric’s text seeks to bring about a sense of emphatic unsettlement in the reader through carefully constructed and troubling representations of bodily suffering, as opposed to eliciting full readerly identification with the victim, which would raise serious ethical concerns due to the fact that full identification necessarily situates the readers in the victim’s place; indeed, Luckhurst raises a potential issue based upon LaCapra’s insistent ‘reiteration’ of the divide between the two subject positions which potentially ‘suggests that it is constantly under threat of being overrun’ (2008, p.4), raising pertinent questions regarding when and how the boundaries between the two subject positions might be blurred in relation to literary representations of trauma and the problematic implications of this for Levinas’ previously-discussed call for an ethics of alterity.

### **The symptomology of trauma: Contagion and transmission**

Transmissibility is an essential consideration in relation to this potential ‘traversing’ of boundaries, and has been a central concern of trauma studies since the 1990s (Visser, 2011, p.275). The transmissibility of trauma is considered by Laub who focusses primarily on

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<sup>105</sup> In this instance I mean Sontag’s reference to ‘images’ specifically to include psychical visualisations elicited from detailed or visceral descriptions.

possible witness positions in relation to Holocaust testimony to assert the inconceivability that anybody ‘could remove herself sufficiently from the contaminating power of the event so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness’; consequently, ‘No observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity – a wholeness and a separateness – that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing’ (1992b, p.81).

Subsequently, ‘transmission has been reconceptualized [sic] to include practically all situations where trauma is involved’ (Visser, 2011, p.275), not least of all *literary* representations of traumatic events ‘via disclosure, dissemination, and bequeathal to those who come after’, as Kohlke & Gutleben effectively posit in relation to neo-Victorian representations specifically (2010, p.27).

Kohlke’s perception is informed by Caruth’s theoretical approach towards trauma. Caruth explores the centrality of trauma to essentially literary language through her analysis of ‘texts of psychoanalysis, of literature, and of literary theory’ to advance the prospect that the ‘difference between knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma’ which ‘defies, even as it claims, our understanding’ (1996, p.3); ergo, as Amy Hungerford concisely summarises, ‘trauma is embodied, without mediation, in language’ (2001, p.82). By logical extension, cutting trauma ‘free’ from the original subject of experience and instead encapsulating traumatic experience within language enables said trauma ‘not only to be abstract in the extreme, but also, by virtue of that abstraction, to be transmissible’ (Hungerford, 2001, p.83). Fundamentally, therefore, it logically follows that ‘The vehicle for contagion is language’ (Crownshaw, 2009, p.71).

In light of Caruth’s theoretical position regarding the concept of transmissibility, it is particularly interesting to note the increasing frequency and recurrence of descriptions of traumatic events in Edric’s text which are described specifically in terms of a physical contagion. For example, Frasier notably quotes towards the beginning of the novel that ‘Like Cornelius, [Abbot] harboured some notion of Frere’s contagion; unlike Cornelius, he did not understand the true nature of that contamination’ (Edric, 2000, p.26). Indeed, the report of Frere’s crime and his return to the station seems to mark the beginning of a moral decline which spreads into disorder, chaos and lawlessness at the settlement; it is also implied in the early pages of the text that a similar event had occurred prior to Frere’s imprisonment to another officer at the Station who is (somewhat unusually) named ‘Bone’. Frasier recounts that Bone ‘was allegedly the protagonist of an incident in which two old native women had been killed’, and that ‘Bone’s story was that he had been attacked by a

tribe of killers and that the old women were merely the unlucky victims of his fight to defend himself' (Edric, 2000, p.55).

To employ Miller and Tougaw's reference to the 'symptoms' of our contemporary trauma culture, the recurring motif of fever is a useful means of thinking about trauma as a physical contagion, particularly as reference to various experiences of pyrexia are notably made in relation to each major traumatic incident recited in the text. For example, preceding the incident involving Bone and the deaths of the two elderly women, Bone had allegedly 'succumbed to the same *fever*' as a disgraced scientist who had 'studied the last of the pure-bred native people' of Hobart Town and had subsequently died from the illness (Edric, 2000, p.55, my emphasis).<sup>106</sup> Interestingly in relation to the idea of contagion, this scientist reportedly and quite significantly also had 'some disgrace attached to [his] venture' (Edric, 2000, p.55). In another example, Frasier is described as having been rendered 'delirious and barely conscious' for three days (Edric, 2000, p.280) after witnessing Klein's ritualistic violence upon the bodies of Perpetua and Felicity (another narrative 'scene' which is discussed more fully later in this chapter). Additionally, Frere begins his narrative of events – so long anticipated by both Frasier and the reader – with the comment, 'I had been sick for ten days', further foregrounding the concept of contagion by advising Frasier to consider Frere's illness in terms of his 'own recent suffering' (Edric, 2000, p.309).

That seemingly contagious physical illness pre-empts the majority of traumatic occurrences in the text seems indicative of an indiscriminate moral sickness; however, this trope also raises questions regarding where such traumatic contamination *ends*; if trauma is transmitted through language, it logically follows that the reader themselves may also be vulnerable to traumatisation as the cycle of traumatic repetition – facilitated through insidious modes of 'contamination' – perpetuates. As LaCapra explains, this cycle can only lead to 'the recognition that one is already – indeed can only be – acting out or participating compulsively in the "contagiousness of trauma"', as 'Transference not only inevitably occurs; it is all-consuming' (2004, p.126).

The notable correlation between contagion and repetition becomes helpful when considering neo-Victorian returns to Victorian trauma as the neo-Victorian novel textually reflects how historical (Victorian) trauma has been subject to repetition contemporarily through the lens of our own 'trauma culture'. In turn, the concept of 'contamination' is also

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<sup>106</sup> This seems to be a reference to Edric's previous neo-Victorian novel *Elysium* (1995), in which we are introduced to Bone as a young corporal based in Tasmania in 1869, and in which Edric traces the story of that scientist's encounters with the last remaining pure-bred male Tasmanian Aborigine. Edric's invocation of a part-indigene perspective recalls parallels with Kneale's *English Passengers*.

useful in this theorisation as a means of contemplating the very essence of the relationship between the Victorian and neo-Victorian, raising questions regarding – for example – the consequences of re-considering and mediating specifically Victorian traumas through the distorting lens of our own ‘age of trauma’, and the extent to which this process potentially ‘contaminates’ historical memory of the Victorians. (This dynamic can also be reversed in consideration of the authority Victorian precursory texts have over their contemporary successors). Carroll refers to this situation in terms of an ‘anxiety of influence’ (2010, p.178), citing Gutleben’s attribution of a range of criticisms levied at the neo-Victorian text as ‘disingenuous’ (2001, p.27); ‘intellectually questionable’ (2001, p.28); ‘parasitical’, and ‘warped’ (2001, p.29), and all constituting a ‘jaundiced campaign of denigration’ (2001, p.93). As Carroll summarises in response to Gutleben’s criticisms, ‘if the neo-Victorian novel is not venerating the aesthetic achievements of a past epoch or fetishising the Victorian inheritance, it risks chastisement for tearing the totem down’ (2010, p.178).

### **Negating proximity, frustrating exoticism**

Arguably, then, one of the foremost challenges faced by the neo-Victorian novel is appropriately mediating this potential ‘contamination’ against such resultant charges, including that of inauthenticity. Indeed, the concept of ‘authenticity’ itself is, I intend to demonstrate, integral to the concerns explored in Edric’s text. For example, there is a notable correlation between Frere’s personal desire to engage in ‘authentic’ cannibalistic practices and the contemporary commercialisation and consumption of ‘authentic’ cultural experiences through thanatourism which, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, seems to offer touristic experiences that seem to be beyond reproach. Maggie Kilgour, one of several critics to highlight the parallel which can be drawn between cannibalism and consumerism, interprets the appropriation of cannibalism within contemporary literature and film as ‘a perfect [...] image for the nightmare of a consumer society, uneasy about its own appetites, including its own increasing hunger for [...] lurid tales’ (1998, p.241).

Significantly, however, no act of cannibalism actually occurs within Edric’s text: the act witnessed by Frere is in fact an exaggerated torture scene, constructed and employed for the political purpose of undermining the colonisers by throwing them into disrepute. Indeed, the nature of Frere’s downfall undermines the perceived moral and physical authority of the colonisers, and potentially jeopardises their continuing presence within the Congo. Revealing the act to be a ‘red herring’ and a pre-meditated ‘show’

fundamentally reflects the fact that the neo-Victorian adventure novel's proffering of authenticity is, in fact, illusory, calling to mind Sturken's comments – initially outlined in the Introduction to this project, and also discussed in relation to Mrs Denton's photographs of the Aborigine natives in *English Passengers* – regarding rituals staged for the benefit of tourists. Frere's excited question to Frasier during his confession – '[d]o you see, I was perhaps the first Englishman to witness the ritual from start to finish?' (Edric, 2000, p.314) – underscores this parallel, whilst also emphasising the irony that the ritual he is so thrilled to have observed, although appallingly 'real' and murderous, is staged. Edric's engagement with cannibalism as a trope within *The Book of the Heathen* seems to acknowledge the history and literary heritage of the denigrating cannibal myth<sup>107</sup> before negating it, thereby refusing to implement its re-appropriation for the gratification of a contemporary readership who are themselves in search of 'exoticised' experiences.

Despite this, inferred 'evidence' of cannibalism abounds throughout the text as a means of misleading Frere – who arguably constitutes a textual 'proxy' for the reader, a perception compounded by the first-person narrative and use of the personal pronoun, 'I' – into believing that they will eventually discover an authentic cannibal ritual taking place. During an exploratory excursion carried out under the guise of compiling a map of the area surrounding the concession, for example, Frere discovers a collection of skeletal remains which he believes definitively proves the practice cannibal ritual has taken place: '[Frere] told me where he had found the bones, and that a fire had been lit near by. He took another bone from the sack, this one blackened and broken. Yet another still had some flesh and sinew attached to it' (Edric, 2000, p.183). The gory presence of 'some' remaining 'flesh and sinew' on the bones in addition to the proximate evidence that a fire had been made 'near by' encourage an interpretation of the scene as the setting of a cannibal ritual, although later the reader can infer in hindsight that this scene is constructed as part of Frere's entrapment as it fuels his 'unconfessed and uncertain intention' (Edric, 2000, p.308) of witnessing – and even participating in – a cannibal ritual.

Impatient to make such a discovery Frere instead begins to collect souvenirs as authentic signposts of the existence of cannibal culture, commissioning Frasier to assist him in accumulating evidence to add to his 'collection of the totems and fetishes left behind at the scenes of such savagery' (Edric, 2000, p.177). In a sinister twist, Frere is

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<sup>107</sup> The 'cannibal myth' once served to justify the imperial project by stressing the necessity of the 'civilising mission', as Brantlinger explains: 'By the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884, which is often taken as the start of the "scramble for Africa," the British tended to see Africa as a center [sic] of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic "darkness" or barbarism, represented above all by slavery and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise' (1985, p.175).

solely interested in procuring human remains for his collection, totally disregarding ‘the few unremarkable pieces of pottery and wood-working’ discovered by Frasier (Edric, 2000, p.182). Frere’s obsession with evidencing the authenticity of the objects he discovers indicates a displacement of his desires onto objects which become ‘fetishes’. In an interesting parallel to the coetaneous ‘re-announcing’ and ‘renouncing’ of the exotic within the neo-adventure novel, the objects collected by Frere enable immediate gratification as consolatory substitutes which facilitate a sense of proximity to the ‘genuine’ ritual, as well as a form of ‘protection’ against the disappointment of failing to encounter the ‘real thing’, as the objects become a ‘proxy’ for the experience itself. However, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Sturken points out that tourism is largely considered an *inauthentic* activity; indeed, the tourist’s desire for authenticity is indefinitely deferred. The very nature of the souvenir itself – despite its appropriation as a substitute for the experience itself - indicates an inevitable loss of contiguity, as the souvenir cannot revive (or in Frere’s case, *prove*) the reality of an experience. As a result, the souvenir – or for the reader, Edric’s text itself - becomes ‘a memorial to the trauma of loss’ of experience (Hume, 2013, p.59).

Frere’s actions in relation to the objects illustrate his investment in them as objects which will enable him to feel ‘closer’ to the authentic ritual he seeks. Frasier describes Frere as taking one of these bones and ‘sniff[ing] deeply at it, as though wanting to commit the smell to memory’ (Edric, 2000, p.183). The allusion to Frere inhaling the scent of the remains posits sensory ingestion as a means of consumption which might foster a greater sense of propinquity to the object and, by proxy, to the ritual which was only *presumed* by Frere to have taken place. Nicholas Royle contends that the additional invocation of odour can also forestall the perception of proximity to the past: ‘[s]mell has an uncanny duplicity: it can in a split-second drop us out of the erstwhile familiarity of our present into the strange, painful and/or pleasurable, impossible country of the past; and yet a smell resists being recalled, in reality, even for a moment’ (2003, p.140). In a similar vein, Silvana Colella suggests that ‘olfactory *representations* on the written page carry with them a distinctive aroma of referentiality, more so than visual descriptions’ (2010, p.91, original emphasis), therefore explicit allusions to scent also invite (although do not necessarily enable) the reader to share in this implied enhanced immediacy, ‘to sense the past in order to make sense of it’ (2010, p.87). In consideration of Edric’s text however, the smell of scorched flesh and bone is certainly not a familiar aroma, or one that can (thankfully) be

invoked within the imagination, thereby serving only to further frustrate the reader's perception of distance from the events as they unfold within the text.

Edric similarly evidences human suffering in graphic detail to concurrently summon and eschew the reader's sense of proximity to the Victorian past. As discussed previously in this thesis, that trauma itself is characterised by visuality goes some way towards explaining the purpose of such graphic descriptions which arguably enable the reader to visualise – and therefore to engage with – historical suffering more fully. An example which highlights the significance of such representations for the reader occurs during the pair's search for totems and fetishes, as Frasier comments:

I showed [Frere] the few unremarkable pieces of pottery and wood-working I had found. One of these pieces, a ball of ebony, excited him [...]. He said it was broken from another club, a weapon designed specifically for crushing skulls. But the highly polished surface of the black wood disappointed him and he asked me if I had wiped it clean before showing it to him. I disappointed him further by saying I hadn't.

(Edric, 2000, p.182)

The authenticity of the artefact (which is essentially based on his own pure conjecture) is diminished for Frere in the absence of the viscera proving its use. The relevance of this stipulation perhaps reflects an indirect but pertinent argument in favour of the inclusion of graphic descriptions of historical violence within narrative re-imaginings, as perhaps without detailed, visceral or shocking descriptions, representations of past suffering may not be as 'realistic' and therefore ineffective in terms of eliciting understanding – or even interest – in the reader.

### **Reader as spectator: Visuality, somatic suffering and 'exoticised' traumas**

It is therefore also possible to question whether the graphic nature of Edric's descriptions privileges the visualisation of intense bodily affliction as a means of emphasising somatic corporeity, while also promoting a sense of individual responsibility in relation to historical suffering. Arguably, emphasising the physical substantiality of the body reinforces its materiality, and therefore its 'actuality' – or what Scarry refers to as 'the sheer material factualness of the human body' (1985, p.14) – within the setting of the Victorian past, which the reader can then relate to.

A greater sense of immediacy is evoked, for example, during Frere's lengthy confession which outlines in brutally graphic detail how the young girl is murdered by

‘Aruwimi savages’ who are allegedly ‘renowned for their cannibalism’ (Edric, 2000, p.309). The reader is placed in the position of a vicarious witness to the girl’s suffering, ‘watching’ the events unfold in front of them as though they are looking through Frere’s eyes. Taking place over twelve long pages of the text, emphasis is placed on the shocking details of the torture of the young girl, as well as the pleasure derived from her screams which ‘only served to increase the pleasure of the four men’ (Edric, 2000, p.313). The descriptions become long and drawn-out, with continuous references to how her suffering is prolonged by ‘drawing blood while doing her no mortal harm’ (Edric, 2000, p.316). Despite the nauseating and disturbing details elicited from this section of the narrative, Frere describes how he relished his viewing experience as he found himself ‘mesmerized’ by what he was seeing (Edric, 2000, p.314).

However, while it initially seems logical to assume that summoning the universality of human experience (which arguably transcends historical context) can facilitate an even greater sense of immediacy, the detailed suffering of the girl’s representational body fundamentally undermines the reader’s ability to achieve proximity. For Scarry, ‘[w]hatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability’, which inevitably occurs because ‘[t]he first, the most essential, aspect of pain is its sheer aversiveness’ (1985, p.4); consequently, ‘Any type of representation or signification must itself become impossible’, and attempts to do so only reinforces the ‘insistence on its very impossibility or aporetic, abyssal nature’ (LaCapra, 2004, p.127).

This ‘aporia’ or ‘abyss’ is made manifest through the juxtaposition of both graphic descriptions and ‘silences’ within the text (or, more specifically, through a *negation* of description in relation to certain traumatic instances). For example, while the slow and torturous murder of the child is described by Frere in great detail, other distinctly traumatic instances are merely inferred, or descriptions or explanations are avoided altogether. The absence of description recalls similar moments discussed in the previously considered texts; for example, in *The Voyage of the Narwhal* in relation to Erasmus’s reference to the ‘blur of impressions’ which replaced an explanation of the how certain corporeal ailments were attained, and in *English Passengers* when Baines discovers the bodies of the Aborigines at the bottom of a cliff without being able to provide an explanation as to what actually took place. A primary example of this absence of explanation in Edric’s novel occurs close to the beginning of the novel during which three Congolese natives smuggle diamonds to the Station with the intention of selling them, the largest of which had been swallowed by one unfortunate member of the party. The narrator describes how:

[...] the savages remained excited about the size of the stone still in the stomach of the third man, which he was having difficulty passing. Cornelius squeezed and prodded the man's stomach, saying that if what he could feel was a diamond, then judging by its size it was a valuable one. Fletcher pushed the three men out of the room, accusing them of wasting our time. If the diamond could not be produced then it was of no value. He told the men to come back when it was in their hands. Two of the men returned the following day with the gem. Fletcher quizzed them with the whereabouts of the man who had carried the stone, and they became evasive, saying he was in the forest tending to his wounds. 'It could have been worse,' Fletcher said. 'They could have brought us his corpse'.

(Edric, 2000, p.22)

The absence of a description of the specific fate of the man who had swallowed the diamond – which possibly would have detailed his murder at the hands of the other two men - necessarily prompts the reader to infer what might have happened 'off-stage', while also shining a light of significance upon the individual human cost of the horrific realities of such black-market trade that Victorian colonisers were illicitly engaged in. Inevitably the readers' imagination can only infer the potential atrocities inflicted upon this unfortunate character; yet it is significant that the reader is denied a definitive explanation, as such an absence works to highlight that the personal horror of this individual's situation defies representation as well as contemporary re-mediation, and consequently remains inaccessible to a contemporary reader; additionally, and again summoning Sontag's reflections upon the power of an 'imagined horror', his imagined fate as created by the reader could be particularly affecting.

Another example of a distinct *absence* of representation occurs after the inferred murder of Perpetua and Felicity, two Congolese women selected by the nefarious Klein as his 'assistants'. The two women are discovered 'hanging from the same limb of an ironwood tree a hundred yards from the compound wall' (Edric, 2000, p.339); it is inferred that their deaths are 'staged' as a suicide to mask the fact that they were murdered, as both women 'wore their nuns' habits, and around the neck of each woman was a sign saying, 'Please Forgive Us'; the same three words, and each sign written in the same careful hand' (Edric, 2000, p.339). The truth about what happened to the women remains a mystery, despite the fact that a nameless Congolese child is implicated as an eye-witness and seemingly reports what he saw to Frasier. However, the particulars of his account and what he reportedly witnessed is not revealed to the reader:

Late in the afternoon, the deformed boy ran into the compound and lay on the ground screaming until Fletcher went out to him and shook him into silence. He called the boy our bird of ill omen and told him to leave. But the boy refused to go, and afterwards Fletcher and Cornelius took it in turns to question him until he screamed again and told them of what he had seen.

(Edric, 2000, p.340)

The absence of the full description of the traumatic moment here is interesting, particularly in light of the graphic descriptions of sexualised torture which precede it (which are discussed towards the end of this chapter). This instance in the text becomes demonstrative of the status of the boy as subaltern, the authenticity of the boy's eye-witness account being negated as he is physically shaken to silence. Such narrative gaps and silences such as that experienced by the reader in this instance operates in a similar mode to that of Conrad's perhaps most famous literary phrase, (which was also appropriated previously as a sub-heading in deference to the contemporary reverberations of *The Heart of Darkness*): 'The Horror! The Horror!' (Conrad, 2007, p.86), the ambiguity of which 'allows Marlow to find in it not so much what is actually there as what he needs to believe' (Cousineau, 2004, p.73). In this way, the reader is prompted through necessity to fill the 'gaps' with their own invented – and potentially more distressing and lingering – horrors.

Another example which further illuminates Edric's implied immediacy, but also vitally enables an exploration of how the reader-as-onlooker perpetuates and indeed endorses historical suffering, occurs when a nameless man accused of theft and murder is tried and hanged by members of another concession who employ Frasier and another resident English officer, Fletcher, to fulfil the 'debatable capacity of "official observers"' (Edric, 2000, p.211). This specific narrative 'scene' (characterised thusly due to its striking visuality) is described by Sukhdev Sandhu in his review for the *Guardian* as 'quite the most harrowing I've ever read' thanks to Edric's 'linguistic minimalism' (2000, para.8). Frasier describes the trial as 'a charade, concerned with a great deal more than the matter of theft or murder' (Edric, 2000, p.212), insinuating that the man is unlawfully convicted for the purpose of providing the spectacle of torture for the 'audience'. His punishment is described in similar depth to that employed within the episode involving the murder of the girl, and both accounts place emphasis upon the lexis of 'seeing' and 'witnessing', underscoring the role of 'visuality' within the neo-Victorian adventure novel. 'I was participating', Frere tells us, 'not willingly, perhaps, and with no true understanding of the part I played – but I was *there*, I was *watching*, I *wanted* to watch, I *wanted* them to go on doing what they did. It was what I had gone in search of, what I had found' (Edric, 2000,

pp.314-5; original emphasis). Frasier similarly comments upon the large crowd of onlookers who ‘began to cheer and applaud’ at the culmination of the man’s hanging, while Fletcher refers to the man’s punishment as a ‘show’ (Edric, 2000, p.217; p.218).

Bearing witness to the distressing events confessed by Frere and reported by Frasier places the reader not only in the problematic position of spectator, but also implies an element of complicity inherent to the act of looking without intervening. Enduring three hundred lashes, ‘blood sprayed the ground in a wide circle around him’, and Frasier states, ‘I even imagined I felt the finest flecks of it on my own forehead twenty yards from where he was whipped’ (Edric, 2000, p.215). Frasier’s reference to the physical sensation of flecks of blood hitting his face from such a distance has implications for the reader’s own position, as the perception of distance – Frasier’s from the disturbing events he is witnessing; the reader’s from the temporal location of the scene as it unfolds – is shown to be unstable and problematic. The far-reaching effects of the gruesome proceedings – the metaphorical ‘blood-splatter’ on the forehead of the reader as a virtual-participant – initially infers the reader’s propinquity to the event. However, Kristeva’s understanding of the issue of proximity in relation to abjection (discussed in the Introduction to this thesis) constitutes a useful means of understanding how being confronted with representations of human suffering inevitably diminishes any perceived proximity to the events that unfold, as – ‘like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion’ – engaging with graphic representations of human suffering places the subject ‘literally beside himself’ (Kristeva, 1982, p.1).

This ‘vortex of summons and repulsion’ takes us to the heart of the reason why traumatic or graphic representations frustrate proximity to the exotic. The graphic nature of Edric’s representations of suffering ultimately results in the return of the ‘boomerang’ which brings about revulsion and rejection rather than assimilation, or greater understanding. Consequently, traumatic representations within the text constitute an unsettling narrative technique employed to trouble the reader’s sense of propinquity to – and ease with – the events that unfold, thereby negating ‘domestication’ of the past, as well as its inferred concomitant exoticisation.

## **‘They were telling me to go back, *not to look, to close my eyes*’: Eroticised traumas and promoting readerly introspection**

As explored initially in Chapter One in relation to Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*, it is also beneficial to offer consideration to the various modes of representing the *eroticisation* of trauma that manifest within the neo-Victorian novel, particularly in light of Hunt’s assertion that the historical violence which took place in the Belgian Congo is ‘also significant to issues about (overlapping) modalities of violence – structural, corporeal, symbolic, psychic, sexual – and their reproduction and somatization over time’ (2008, p.226). Kohlke notes a contemporary ‘fascination with the Victorian erotic unknown’ which ‘seems to derive largely from depictions of such anomalous practices as child prostitution and sexual slavery’, from which she concludes that ‘we extract politically incorrect pleasure from what has become inadmissible or ethically *unimaginable* as a focus of desire in our own time’, a pleasure which – as mentioned in Chapter One – results in reading for the purposes of encountering ‘degradation’ and ‘defilement’ (Kohlke, 2006, p.2).

Yet it is also possible to infer that both historical and recent testimonial accounts from the Congo which document ‘sadistic pleasure combined with the sexual torture of women’ (Hunt, 2008, p.236) most likely inform the characterisation of Klein, who is arguably one of Edric’s more blatantly depraved characters. In addition to parallels which can be drawn between Klein and Conrad’s characterisation of Kurtz,<sup>108</sup> representations of sexualised violence against women within the text are again grounded in historical fact in recognition of the extreme violence inflicted upon women specifically within the traumatic history of the Congo. Recalling the previous discussion regarding a textual sado-masochism on the part of the reader in relation to the eroticised traumas in Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage*, Edric’s text incorporates examples of the overtly visual sexualisation of trauma in relation to the enslavement of Perpetua and Felicity, two female members of Klein’s congregation who are subjected to sadistic modes of torture at his

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<sup>108</sup> These parallels have been duly noted by several critics. Norman Sherry notes the existence of a real-life Georges Antoine Klein at the Stanley Falls station, where Conrad would have encountered the man, and also stresses the fact that ‘Conrad used the name Klein in the manuscript of *Heart of Darkness* and then crossed it out and substituted Kurtz’ (1980, p.74); according to Sherry, similarities between Klein and Kurtz exist in so far as Klein ‘was a commercial agent at the Falls, that he was sick with dysentery, and that he did die in the *Roi des Belges* in the course of Conrad’s down-river rip on that steamer’, although Sherry ultimately concludes that ‘he was not involved in activities like those of Kurtz’ (1980, p.72). Hochschild similarly asserts that Conrad ‘stayed true to life when creating the charismatic, murderous figure at the centre of his novel, perhaps the twentieth century’s most famous literary villain’ (1998, p.144), while Roos draws parallels between these characterisations and Edric’s text specifically (2009, p.72).

hands. During the narrative accounts of their physical subjection, both women extol Frasier (and, by proxy, the reader) to avert their gaze from their sexual subjection:

There, on the floor ahead of me [...] lay Perpetua and Felicity, naked and prostrated, neither woman attempting to rise as I approached them, both of them with their faces turned to watch me with fear in their wide eyes, their cheeks and palms pressed to the boards. They were telling me to go back, *not to look, to close my eyes* [...] I looked down at them, at their naked backs and buttocks and tried hard to understand what I was seeing.

(Edric, 2000, p.276, my emphasis)

Perpetua and Felicity's inferred pleading for Frasier 'not to look' directly contrasts how Dora is implored to 'look' by Knightley in *The Journal of Dora Damage*; where Dora is reassured by Knightley that she can 'look, and remain virtuous'<sup>109</sup> in doing so, Perpetua and Felicity seem to meet the reader's 'gaze' and to compel them directly to cease their subjection through averting their – Frasier's – 'gaze'. This narrative scene seems to constitute a coded warning as to the ethically problematic implications of 'looking' for the reader, as explored and compounded later in the text during an incident in which Perpetua is tortured by Klein in front of the entire congregation. Wesseling notes the symbolic significance of the names bestowed upon the women by Klein himself as references to 'the first female martyrs, indicating his preparedness to sacrifice them' (2010, p.329); indeed, the imagery used to describe Perpetua's ordeal compounds this religious association through its reminiscence to a crucifixion scene:

There, beneath the altar, on a rack resembling a slanting cross, lay Perpetua, bound by her ankles and wrists to the upright and cross-piece in some semblance and mockers of the crucified Christ. She was naked but for a cloth fastened about her groin, and upon her head was a crown of thorns, pushed hard into her flesh so that she bled where it pierced her. I looked at all this, unable to fully comprehend what I was seeing, looked closer and saw the welts across her legs, breasts and stomach, saw where these bled in lines over her black skin.

(Edric, 2000, p.330)

Perpetua is martyred both literally by Klein and metaphorically for and by the reader, resurrected from the annals of history and then offered metaphorically as a 'sacrifice' at the altar of contemporary desire for the eroticised, suffering historical body. In an alternative interpretation of the significance of Perpetua's name, revisiting such historical subjection only serves to *perpetuate* – and indeed enhance, or even justify – the historical subject's

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<sup>109</sup> Discussed initially in Chapter One.

degradation, as signalled through Klein's increased motivation when discovered by Cornelius and Frasier:

[...] at the other side of the woman on the rack stood Klein, his slender cane in his hand, held above his head, as though he had stopped mid-stroke at Cornelius's sudden intrusion. The man seemed unperturbed at his discovery. He looked hard at Cornelius, at the disgust and incredulity which filled his eyes, and he smiled, almost as though he had anticipated this interruption, *as though Cornelius's arrival were part of the ritual and the punishment*, and as though *the ceremony and the woman's suffering were now enhanced by Cornelius bearing witness to it.*

(Edric, 2000, pp.330-331, my emphasis)

The emphasis placed on describing the pain of each lash, the welts and pierced skin from her crown of thorns enhances the sense of the physicality of the descriptions in a way which implies a vicarious, rather than virtual, subject position, as signalled by Frere's comment that he 'felt each [stroke of the whip] as though it were a blow to my own face' (Edric, 2000, p.330), again recalling Davis's sentiments (incorporated in Chapter One) regarding the reader's sado-masochistic engagement with trauma, as well as Mulvey's sentiments regarding the scopophilic act as one comprising degrees of identification and separation. Indeed, and as I intend to demonstrate, Edric's traumatic representations can be shown to promote an awareness of the reader's own role and position in relation to such representations in a way which situates the relevance of traumatic representation beyond merely facilitating Kohlke's criteria of 'reading for defilement'.

Edric's text arguably facilitates a limited but important engagement with the perpetrators of historical suffering as a somewhat abject means of introspection. Just as Frere questions: '[h]ow did I imagine I was going to find what I went in search of and yet remain detached from what I saw?' (Edric, 2000, p.315), the reader is indeed implicated – to an extent – within the characters' individual traumas. LaCapra's previously-considered intellection of 'empathic unsettlement' is a useful concept to redeploy at this juncture. To briefly re-summarise, the effects of empathic unsettlement are achieved through the 'virtual' experience of trauma, in which 'one may imaginatively put oneself in the victim's position while respecting the difference between self and other and recognizing that one cannot take the victim's place or speak in the victim's voice' (LaCapra, 2004, p.125). In this way, the problematic position of the reader works to implicate them as virtual perpetrators of the infliction of suffering within the text, without enabling full identification (which could again be argued to further promote the distancing effects of the text).

The configuration of reader as virtual perpetrator also works on a conceptual level as reviving true-life examples of historical suffering for the gratification of a contemporary readership serves to perpetuate the continuous rehashing and prolonged life of past torments, in keeping with Rothberg's idea of the implicated subject. This issue is furtively addressed through Frere's recognition that suffering is shown to be paramount to the enjoyment of the on-lookers; for example, during the scene preceding the thief's hanging: once unconscious, 'the men with the canes worked less energetically' (Edric, 2000, p.216), and, like the young girl, he is revived repetitively with water to prolong the spectacle. Similar motivations are revealed during Klein's torturous treatment of Perpetua, in which the narrator describes how 'Klein looked briefly to me, and I saw a flicker of uncertainty and anger cross his face. *I looked from him to the cane he held, and almost as though in response to this*, reminded of the act he had interrupted, he brought it sharply down across Perpetua's breasts' (Edric, 2000, pp.330-331, my emphasis). Incorporating such scenes of sexualised violence seems to epitomise Kohlke's sentiments regarding the readerly motivation of 'reading for defilement' as well as implicitly suggesting that it is the reader's gaze *specifically* which provides both the endorsement and justification of such representations in the first instance.

However, the reader is arguably prompted to acknowledge and explore the inherently problematic position of witness in relation to such representations. Edric's reference to the 'passing soldiers, who stopped to consider what was happening and to gape at the near-naked woman' (Edric, 2000, p.336) during Perpetua's subjection at the hands of Klein inevitably draws attention to her nakedness, which arguably compounds the exploitative nature of such a scene further by reinforcing her as the object of the male gaze; yet on the other hand, this moment also prompts the reader to question the soldiers' lack of intervention in this scene. It is possible that, for the reader to 'witness' this lack of intervention on the part of the soldiers only serves to exaggerate their perception of the distance between the events in the text and the present, the obvious impossibility of intervention on the part of the reader compounding the lack of proximity within the text.

Yet this narrative scene also seem to prompt the reader to query the increasingly apathetic responses to human suffering which seem to manifest themselves as the text progresses. Even Frasier – who arguably, as our inferred narrator, takes on the role of a moral 'barometer' against whom the reader's responses to the events in the text are measured and perhaps even compared – finds that his responses to the horrifying situations that he witnesses are diminished as events at the station become more and more

troublesome. His gradual desensitisation highlights a shift from what I have interpreted as a vicarious subject position to one of pure disaffectedness as highlighted during the narrative scene in which the bodies of Perpetua and Felicity are discovered by himself and Cornelius, whom Frasier describes as being 'unable to take [their] eyes from the bodies', and at which Frasier comments, 'I felt numbed by what I saw' (Edric, 2000, p.339). It is justifiable to interpret this 'numbness' as indicative of the psychological state of indifference to trauma that LaCapra terms as 'compassion fatigue', the analgesic effects of which might be attributed to 'the excess of media images or representations of violence and trauma' (LaCapra, 2004, p.134). Another correlation with this concept can be located in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, as Dora self-confessedly becomes 'immune' to the 'shock' of the pornographic texts that she binds due to over-exposure, recalling and affirming Sontag's previously-employed warning that shock can 'wear off', and become disaffecting.

It is also justifiable to interpret this mounting sense of apathy in Edric's characters as prophetic (at best) or reflective (at worst) of the potential consequences of seeking out the traumatic or the taboo. Indeed, that both Frasier and Frere encounter scenes which arguably constitute the ultimately nightmarish display of 'tourist'- or spectator-centred indulgence ostensibly augurs the unfathomably monstrous 'logical conclusion' of the consumerist pursuit to appease this appetite for authentically macabre experiences: the open endorsement and commodification of socially-sanctioned human suffering.

Edric explores the multiple concerns of the precarious blurring of boundaries between real and fictional accounts of historical trauma and their consumption, as well as the problematic position of the reader in relation to the innately visual 'spectacle' of trauma, in a description of an overtly symbolic nightmare experienced by Frasier preceding Frere's confession of his involvement in the death of the child. The incorporation of the nightmare is arguably significant in itself with regards to the necessarily belated cognition of trauma, which, 'dissociated from normal mental processes of cognition' (Leys, 2000, p.266), defies wilful cognition and representation, and instead returns belatedly in the form of 'repetitive phenomena' such as "flashbacks" and traumatic nightmares. As Caruth explains, 'The history that a flashback tells [...] is [...] a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood'; consequently, 'trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence' (1995, p.153). May similarly posits that 'Whether the result of a

horrifying experience or the product of an actual physical wounding, trauma is defined in contemporary theory by its aftereffects, its repetitive and uncontrollable return through dreams and flashbacks' (2005, p.102). Frasier describes his nightmare in detail, in which:

the whole of the surrounding ocean turned red with the blood of [...] savaged men, and [...] sharks came in even greater numbers, it seemed, merely to indulge themselves in the pleasure of swimming through this blood. I saw creatures here and there carrying torn limbs; I saw men scrambling along the reef to where they believed they might be safe only to have the sharks become birds and seize them where they crawled; I heard the screams of men in the water attacked from below by a dozen of the creatures at once [...] And throughout all this, Frere, beside me at the rail, had become more and more excited, almost yelling with joy at the spectacle before us, applauding some particularly dramatic or entertaining effort on the part of the men or the fish. [...] Others among the *Alpha's* crew stood alongside us and chorused Frere in his cheering. I was entirely alone in the disgust and revulsion I felt at the spectacle [...]

(Edric, 2000, pp.304-305)

Described in terms of consumption by Frasier as a 'bloody feast' (Edric, 2000, p.305), Frasier's nightmare symbolically encapsulates the problematic and inherently voyeuristic position we inhabit as readers revelling in the spectacle of the body in pain, consuming them with the same ferocious urgency as a shark might. Implicit reference to what Frasier 'saw' and 'heard' compounds my previous supposition regarding the integral role of the senses within neo-Victorian fiction, while the specific words 'indulge', 'pleasure', 'spectacle', and 'entertaining' again highlight the appealing visuality of traumatic representation as entertainment. Significantly, Frasier comments after waking from his dream that 'I had seen nothing of what I dreamed, and yet it seemed more real to me than [...] than the empty room in which I found myself' (Edric, 2000, p.306); this blurring of what is real and what is imagined affirms Sontag's reflection upon the affecting nature of an 'imagined horror' as discussed previously in this chapter, as do the lingering physical effects of the dream renders it 'as vivid to [Frere] in its waking aftermath as it had been while [he] slept, and [his] wet brow and shaking hands registered the last of its passing tremors' (Edric, 2000, p.306).

Edric's descriptions of the lingering physical effects of the nightmare imply Frere's own vicarious traumatising as he struggles to understand his position in relation to the traumatic events which have taken place. Further compounding Edric's exploration of the blurring of boundaries between subject-positions is Frere's occasionally unstable sense of identity. A number of apparent similarities manifest themselves between Frere and Frasier during the course of the novel which are of considerable interest. Frere's prominent refusal

to narrate his experience of the traumatic incident itself promotes much interest in Frasier, who ultimately seems to struggle to position himself in either the vicarious or virtual subject position in relation to said event. As a result, Frasier seems to end up occupying the role of a secondary witness through sharing Frere's narrative testimonial, consequently struggling to understand the extent of his own implication and role in the events that took place. Together, Frere and Frasier could be considered as embodiments of two 'halves' of one complete psyche, specifically the conscious and subconscious: one side repressing, the other engaging with, socially taboo desires. Consequently, Frere can be read as Frasier's agent of 'wish fulfilment' – or even an alternative 'self' – in a similar dynamic to that existing between Kurtz and Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with Marlow perceiving Kurtz to be an 'exceptionally exalted figure in whom he may contemplate certain positive qualities that he himself lacks' (Cousineau, 2004, p.73), while remaining 'a potential and fallen self' (Guerard, 1962, p.244). Compounding the parallel between Frere and Frasier are the proximity of their names; interestingly, Frasier initially notices the potential connection himself: "'Frère,' I said, as though by this simple expedient I might understand something vital of him. 'From the French for "brother"?"' (Edric, 2000, p.83, original emphasis).<sup>110</sup> The inferred possibility of some 'relatedness' or of an intrinsic connection between the two characters is implied several times throughout the text; in one example, Frasier notes that:

He and I were frequently compared, inevitably to my detriment. He was wordly, whereas I, for all my military service, had lived a cloistered life; he was open to all new experiences, whereas I insisted on being forewarned of everything; he was a man moving back and forth on contradictory currents, whereas I was a man set rigidly in full sail in one and only one direction. I knew that these remarks were not intended to hurt me, and that my persecution was never anything but playful – Frere himself always arguing in my defence – but at the time I heard in them more truths than I wished to acknowledge.

(Edric, 2000, pp.96-97)

That Frasier is affected by these 'truths' and consequently perceives them as an absence in himself but a presence in Frere also supports the idea of the two men as embodying two 'halves' of the unconscious mind. In turn, the reader is consequently prompted to reflect

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<sup>110</sup> The word 'Frère' also means 'Friar' in French, a translation which invites consideration of Frere's character and of the text itself in relation to Christian doctrine. Although this consideration is beyond the scope of this thesis, the significance of Christianity in relation to Edric's text is considered in Wesseling's chapter titled, 'Unmanning Exoticism: The Breakdown of Christian Manliness in *The Book of the Heathen*' (2010).

upon the potentially profoundly affecting nature of imagined horrors, as well as their motivations for, and appropriateness of, their readily position as voyeuristic bystanders.

**Conclusion: or, ‘the abnormalities and not the divinities of men that have fascinated me’**

As explained in the Introduction to this project, LaCapra posits empathic unsettlement – facilitated through the virtual, rather than vicarious, experience of trauma – as essential for achieving an effective understanding of historical suffering. Edric’s text demonstrates the potential issues which arise when boundaries between the virtual and vicarious subject-positions become blurred. Having witnessed various acts of torture as though looking through the eyes of each character, and ‘felt’ the metaphorical ‘blood splatter’ on their foreheads, the reader is prompted to look to the uncharted territories of the human psyche as a means to confront the spectrum of impulses which may manifest themselves in activities such as ‘dark tourism’ when considered in terms of accepted social expression. This is not to place value-judgements on ‘dark tourism’ as such, but is merely to urge reflection upon where such social phenomena originate, what function they might fulfil, and to consider the ethical issues which might manifest themselves as a consequence.

With the loss of alternative geographical horizons and the inherent limitations of a retreat to historical ones, as demonstrated in *The Book of the Heathen*, exoticist fantasies of escape such as that seemingly offered by Edric are persistently frustrated. In the context of the exoticist project’s intrinsic cognising of what is other or alien, graphic portrayals of human suffering become a means of pushing the boundaries of human experience and cognition. As a result, Edric’s disturbing representations become alternative signifying spaces for readers to engage in the unexpected process of confronting what may initially seem alien within themselves. Just as Frere eventually admits that ‘it has always been the abnormalities and not the divinities of men that have fascinated’ him (Edric, 2000, p.308), the reader is urged to gaze *inwards*, and to scrutinize their own ‘abnormalities’. Célestin’s figuration of exoticism (explained initially in the Introduction to this thesis) as ‘contain[ing] both the voyage out and the return’ is an apt description in this regard, serving as an analogy for the process of ‘travel and ‘return’ experienced by the reader as ideas of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘self’ and ‘Other’ – so integral to the concept of exoticism – are decentred, and brought together as one. As a result, the individual may find what they

considered to be ‘other’ within themselves, through the exploration of boundaries which are psychological, rather than geographical or temporal.

On this particularly fitting note, this thesis will now move towards a final exploration of its own ‘terrain’ and boundaries as a means of synthesising key findings from this study. The final, concluding chapter of this project ruminates on the significance of this findings of this project in relation to the field of neo-Victorian studies more generally, before finally offering some thoughts regarding how the scope of this research might be developed in the future.

## Conclusions:

**“We’re not graverobbers,” he said. “Nor resurrection men. [...] And what would we learn from violating them?”**

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*I value most that self-consciousness that insists that I reflect on the complexity of what is at stake at any given point in my own time about my interests in the Victorian.*  
(Kaplan, 2008, p.53)

*The journey gives him perspective.*  
(Boym, 2001, p.12)

This thesis began with a description of an ongoing series of grisly and gruesome short stories featured on the BBC News website which, I proposed, demonstrated a lingering contemporary interest with the more sensational, macabre, and – fundamentally – corporeally traumatic elements of the Victorian period in the popular imagination. I also proposed that these stories revealed a fascination akin to that described by Kohlke as a ‘perverse nostalgia’, and suggested that the neo-Victorian engagement with trauma, and most particularly the textual ‘re-embodiment’ of historical suffering, constitutes a prominent and unprecedented mode through which present-day culture re-engages with the Victorian past, the symptoms of which manifest themselves via the representational (neo)Victorian ‘body’. The question posed in the title of this concluding discussion (which constitutes a quote from Barrett’s *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (2000), p.90) perhaps most concisely encapsulates the enquiry that this thesis set out to explore in light of this perceptible present-day fascination and engagement, which is: what can be – and indeed, in the context of this thesis, has been - learned from the resurrection of Victorian traumas and the (re)appropriation of corporeal violations in the neo-Victorian novel specifically?

As mentioned in the Introduction to this project, this thesis has been structured in such a way as to facilitate its own form of ‘journey’, charting an exploration of neo-Victorian textual territories and their significance in relation to mediating contemporary concerns and frustrating exoticist impulses. To effectively synthesise my findings and in turn draw conclusions about what has been learned during the course of this thesis and its broader significance in terms of neo-Victorian studies more generally, I will first briefly retrace the terrain charted in this thesis.

Explorations began in Chapter One in the one-time ‘heart’ of British Imperialism in London to examine how the neo-Victorian novel evidences a present-day fascination with

exoticised and eroticised traumas. Offering close consideration of *The Journal of Dora Damage*, this chapter concluded that Starling's text reveals pertinent insights into the reader's own attitudes and desires as opposed to those of the Victorians, as well as of the parallels which can be drawn between historical and contemporary forms of exploitation – such as 'poverty porn', 'misery lit', and the concept of 'wound culture' – and which manifest themselves through their Victorian 'equivalents' in the neo-Victorian novel.

In Chapter Two we charted a vicarious voyage to the Canadian Arctic with the crew of the *Narwhal* to trace the traumatic aftermath Franklin's lost expedition as one of Britain's most prominent and lingering cultural traumas. Barrett's text aptly demonstrated the way in which the neo-adventure novel figures the reader as a vicarious 'tourist' of history, revealing a parallel between Victorian and present-day fascinations with 'frontier' travel and adventure, and particularly with the physical hardships of such enterprises as an indicator of present-day dissatisfaction with essentially inauthentic consumer 'experiences'. The role of visuality in relation to traumatic representation was revealed as a means of acknowledging the significance of Victorian visual culture in relation to Arctic exploration and ethnographic 'display', as well as of inferring (as well as frustrating) a sense of proximity on the part of the reader.

From here we boarded the *Sincerity* in Chapter Three and charted a new course to colonial Australia in anticipation of exploring the seemingly heterotopic combination of abject and redemptive humour, satire and violence in relation to Kneale's representations of the cultural dispossession and decimation of the Australian Aborigines. The unsettling combination of effects resultant of the hybridity of these two features of the text revealed the incongruousness of the reader's desires for the textualised, subjugated 'Other' through the collapse of boundaries, while the text's engagement with the theme of ethnographic 'display' (a point of correlation with Barrett's text) and its traumatic, exploitative heritage served to prompt consideration of the current debates surrounding the 'ethics of display' in relation to mediating cultural memory.

Our journey ended in colonial Africa in Chapter Four, where we traversed the very extremes of abjection, thanatourism, and socially-sanctioned suffering in *The Book of the Heathen*. A markedly perverse and unsatisfying neo-adventure novel, Edric's stylistic mirroring of the effects of trauma epitomised the aporetic nature of the neo-Victorian traumatic 'returns', while his narrative accounts of torture and subjugation which cleverly manifested textual methods of inferring proximity and 'implication' pushed the reader (or, at least, this reader) to the very limits of their ability to withstand representational

suffering. Pushing the boundaries in this way ultimately revealed such abjectly disturbing representations to serve as a prompt for readers to engage in the unexpected process of directly confronting their own drives and desires (rather than those which might ‘fuel’ Edric’s characters) which encourage them to ‘seek out’ suffering in the first instance.

Having charted the course that this thesis has taken, the remainder of this concluding discussion will draw together the implications and impact of the study itself, as well as offering some thoughts on the ways in which this research could be developed in the future.

## **Beyond the borders of neo-Victorian studies: A summation of implications, impact, and future areas for consideration raised by this study**

### **A productive approach towards nostalgia**

In particularly apt terms given the subject matter of this thesis, Sally Shuttleworth has described the Victorian era as ‘an ever fertile terrain which we draw upon to feed’ – and, I argue, also importantly to *reflect* – ‘our own needs and desires’ (2014, p.179): this thesis has charted this ‘terrain’ by means of employing the idea of ‘travel’, ‘exploration’, and (neo)adventure, and demonstrating how these concepts simultaneously facilitate and frustrate the reader’s exoticist desires. Analysis and consideration of the primary texts has, as summarised above, ultimately revealed how trauma – and particularly representations of physical and corporeal violation and subjugation which manifests as a perverse nostalgia in the novel – has itself become implicated within a variety of interrelated exoticist ‘consumption’ practices which impart pertinent and timely insights into present day anxieties, issues, and preoccupations.

In light of these findings, perhaps the foremost contribution that this project can make to the field of neo-Victorian studies is a means of rethinking the idea of nostalgia (or, more precisely, the various – and particularly unprecedented – ways in which nostalgia manifests itself) for its usefulness as a lens through which to perceive our own present-day preoccupations. As mentioned in the Introduction to this project, a number of critics in the field have repudiated nostalgia as unproductive, uncritically and sentimentally retrospective or – to again quote Gutleben’s phrase employed in this project’s Introduction – a form of ‘wistful revisionism’.

And yet, as this project has shown, nostalgia is a far more complex concept than these descriptors indicate or credit. This dissertation has revealed that rethinking the traditional idea of a nostalgia which manifests as a straightforward, sentimental yearning might open up new spaces in neo-Victorian scholarship for insight and understanding of how the neo-Victorian engages with our own time and culture. My proposal of the sub-category of the neo-adventure novel, for example, highlights the extent to which a relatively ‘typical’ or traditional understanding of nostalgia in correlation with the concept of exoticism is both acknowledged and simultaneously subverted within the texts under discussion, and is reconfigured into a distinctly perverse nostalgia which inherently unsettles and disrupts the ordinary ‘texture’ of a nostalgic return to the past. By recognising nostalgia itself as a phenomena which ‘arises in response to a set of specific cultural, political, and economic forces’ (Su, 2005, p.4) and manifests in multiplicitous ways, this thesis has been able to demonstrate the ways in which the neo-Victorian novel ‘imports’ and explores present-day preoccupations and concerns by representationally ‘exporting’ them into temporally (and geographically) different historical locations and scenarios without ‘diminish[ing] the contemporary relevance of Victorian sites of cultural emergence’ (Leavenworth, 2012, p.274).

Very recently, critics including Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss have called for ‘a reorientation of the notion of nostalgia’ (2014, p.10), or what John Su perceives as the need to ‘[rethink] the common biases against nostalgia in order to see its full range of complexity’ (2005, p.4). Interestingly, both critics specifically call for a reorientation of how we conceptualise nostalgia in the neo-Victorian novel specifically ‘which takes psychoanalysis and material culture in to account’ (Boehm-Schnitker & Gruss, 2014, p.10), a request which might well constitute a recognition of the pervasiveness and concerns implicit to present-day consumer culture. More specifically, I would like to suggest that a nostalgia for Victorian technologies specifically – for example, travel, media, communications, and scientific technologies, to list just a few – might constitute a very productive line of enquiry to pursue to this end for its significance in the neo-Victorian,<sup>111</sup> as according to Svetlana Boym, ‘both technology and nostalgia are about mediation. As a disease of displacement, nostalgia was connected to passages, transits and means of communication’ (2001, p.346). I foresee that this could constitute a particularly fruitful line of future enquiry and another means through which to reconfigure an understanding of the usefulness of nostalgia to the neo-Victorian.

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<sup>111</sup> This preoccupation manifests itself in a variety of ways which might constitute productive lines of initial enquiry – for example, in Steampunk, fashion, and literature.

## **A journey of ethical introspection**

The significance of acknowledging the neo-Victorian as a contemporary product through which authors can effectively mediate present-day concerns, rather than a genre characterised by the simple, uncritical recycling of Victorian (traumatic) histories for present-day exoticist and escapist desires, should not be underestimated, particularly in light of the genre's capacity to promote ethical reflections and understandings of, as well as approaches towards, traumatic histories and historical subjects. The commodification of (historical) traumas, a somewhat inevitable and undeniable facet of the neo-Victorian novel, is always likely to sit uncomfortably with the idea of an ethical approach to history; however, if - as this thesis has revealed - the neo-Victorian is proven capable of eliciting a greater awareness of present-day issues and preoccupations, it logically follows that charting the emergence, popularity, dwindling, and indeed disappearance of tropes such as trauma (for example), as well as specific themes and subjects, will similarly reveal – and better enable us to perceive - pertinent insights into our own cultural moment.

On this note, as well as charting a geographical and temporal neo-Victorian 'terrain', this thesis has also charted an explorative 'journey' from the 'outside-in', an expedition of self-reflexive moral and ethical introspection in relation to the motivations and implications of 'seeking out', and engaging with, historical suffering. What began with an exploration of readerly indulgence in eroticised, titillating traumas and seemingly harmless forms of popularised 'exploitation' and the 'spectacle' of 'Otherness' is revealed by the end of this thesis to have deeply disturbing and unsettling implications in relation to the potential 'extremes' that these forms of traumatic 'entertainment' might, in the nightmarish extremes, facilitate, as well as how the individual might unknowingly become complicit within the very traumas that they have sought due to their desires to 'read for defilement'. Recalling Rothberg's idea of the implicated subject, which has been integral to figuring the idea of readerly complicity in the perpetuation of historical subjection, Sausman suggests that 'whereas the traumatised subject is condemned to a repetition of the same set of pathological symptoms until released through narrativising the repressed event, neo-Victorian fiction can be read as a self-conscious investigation of these symptoms, appearing as both victim and analyst of its own traumatic traces' (2011, p.119).

The epigraph from Kaplan which is incorporated at the beginning of this concluding chapter epitomises what I perceive to be a particularly prominent and important

ethical function of trauma in the neo-Victorian novel, which promotes reflection and introspection on the part of the reader regarding their own motivations for seeking out historical suffering, as well as of the reader's unknowing vicarious 'implication' or 'complicity' in perpetuating historical suffering and popular, present-day forms of exploitation. As Dorothy Figueira recognises, 'What is at stake in exoticism is an act of recognition' (1994, p.11): what the neo-Victorian offers is the propensity for the reader to recognise drives and desires that might seem 'Other' to themselves. In such a way, it is possible to enact an ethical approach to neo-Victorian traumas, as 'In viewing reading transactions ethically we search for a means to understand appropriate and inappropriate responses to representations of suffering': as Atchison states, 'ethical readers we do not want to venture into voyeuristic titillation that arises from objectifying another's pain' (2008, p.46), particularly when the boundaries between 'Self' and 'Other' have been revealed to be illusory. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel in fact reveals that 'initial alienness' of exoticism was a mirage produced by self-alienation. In reality, one only confronts aspects of the self' (Figueira, 1994, p.12).

### **Areas for future research**

Three main avenues which I perceive of interest for further consideration and future research (or, to employ a fitting term in relation to the focus of this thesis, for exploration!) beyond the confines of this thesis have manifested themselves during the compilation of this project. Firstly, while *The Voyage of the Narwhal* and *English Passengers* answer (to an extent) to Stef Craps' recognition that 'if trauma theory is to redeem its promise of cross-cultural engagement, the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition' (2014, p.46), this thesis also admittedly manifests a void in analysis of neo-Victorian texts produced within a specifically postcolonial context – for example, in what Ho describes as 'ostensibly "proper" postcolonial sites such as India and the Caribbean' (2012, p.13),<sup>112</sup> and by postcolonial authors. Current scholarship suggests that neo-Victorian literature is beginning to reflect upon the realities of world globalisation, and in doing so is underscoring the need for a move away from eurocentrism, and the 'continued maintenance of Britain at [the] center [sic]' of neo-Victorianism (Ho, 2012, p.13). The intersection between trauma and exoticism in the 'proper' postcolonial neo-Victorian (con)text (to appropriate Ho's terminology) constitutes

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<sup>112</sup> Ho describes 'improper colonialisms' in relation to 'those texts that subtly attend to experiences of empire' while 'maintaining Britain as the imperial (literary) center [sic]' (2012, p.11).

an area for further consideration in the future as a means of extending the scope and findings of this thesis, as per Rothberg's assertion of a contemporary need to understand 'our' positioning in [the] globalized [sic] scenario of exploitation and trauma' (2014, p.xv).

Secondly, it became increasingly obvious during the process of compiling this thesis that the majority of representations of 'travel' in the texts selected for discussion within this thesis focus upon men's travel and adventure, and the 'stationary' experiences of women (i.e. in *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, which touches on this issue briefly); of course, this is most likely in genuflection of the traditional adventure novel in which (literal) adventure and exploration was an exclusively male pursuit. However, research conducted by critics such as Dea Birkett in her book *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (1989) reveal that many women were indeed transgressing their perceived boundaries in pursuit of the same experiences and adventures as their male counterparts, although – interestingly – this is revealed as a potentially contentious area of consideration, as 'In [their] troubled and contradictory lives lay more than portraits of feminist heroines, but women who both were exploited by and exploitative of the prejudices of their time' (1989, p.xi). In light of this fascinating revelation from Birkett, I propose that further research in to representations of how specifically female travel and exploration is appropriated in the neo-Victorian novel – or, indeed, if manifesting a dearth of texts which examine this subject, a consideration of the reasons for this - could also constitute an interesting area for future consideration.

Finally – and on a more subject-specific note, and as mentioned very briefly in Chapter Two of this thesis – I propose that it will be particularly interesting to chart the cultural and artistic development of the Franklin mythos in light of the very recent discovery of one of the lost ships from his expedition, particularly in relation to neo-Victorian engagements with the subject. Given the level of interest already generated by the discovery in the public imagination (as indicated by the flurry of somewhat sensational news articles which have occupied the media of late), I anticipate a plethora of new neo-Victorian engagements on the subject in the near-future which might conceivably contain new, interesting and timely insights into how we re-engage with the history of the expedition, and which, in doing so, will doubtless reveal more about ourselves than our Victorian predecessors.

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## **Annex: Ethical Approval**

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**Included:** Form UPR16: Research Ethics Review Checklist

# FORM UPR16

## Research Ethics Review Checklist

***Please complete and return the form to Research Section, Quality Management Division, Academic Registry, University House, with your thesis, prior to examination***

<b>Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information</b>		<b>Student ID:</b>	<b>329078</b>
<b>Candidate Name:</b>	<b>Emily Jane Scott</b>		
<b>Department:</b>	<b>SSHLS</b>	<b>First Supervisor:</b>	<b>Dr Elodie Rousselot</b>
<b>Start Date:</b> (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	<b>October 2010</b>		
<b>Study Mode and Route:</b>	Part-time <input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>	Integrated Doctorate (NewRoute) <input type="checkbox"/>
	Full-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/>	Prof Doc (PD) <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Title of Thesis:</b>	Traversing Trauma and Consuming Perverse Pleasures in the Neo-Victorian Novel.		
<b>Thesis Word Count:</b> (excluding ancillary data)	79,757 words.		
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>			
<p><b>UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:</b> (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: <a href="http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/">http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/</a>)</p>			
<b>a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?</b>			<b>YES/NO*</b>
<b>b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?</b>			<b>YES/NO*</b>

<b>c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?</b>	<b>YES/<del>NO</del>*</b>
<b>d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?</b>	<b>YES/<del>NO</del>*</b>
<b>e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?</b>	<b>YES/<del>NO</del>*</b>

\*Delete as appropriate

<b>Candidate Statement:</b>	
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)	
<b>Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):</b>	n/a
<b>Signed: (Student)</b>	<b>Date: 26/09/2014</b>
<b>If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain why this is so:</b>	
Ethical review not required	
<b>Signed: (Student)</b>	<b>Date:</b>