

NEO-VICTORIAN LITERATURE

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Annotation. The article examines the key themes of Neo-Victorian literature. Particular attention is paid to deconstruction. Examples include the novels “The French Lieutenant’s Woman” by J. Fowles, “Master Georgie” by B. Bainbridge.

In broader culture neo-Victorianism stands for an aesthetic movement that plays with styles, fashions and technologies of the Victorian period. Neo-Victorian literature consists of works that engage with the history, literature and culture of Victorian period (1830–1900). The Victorian period is deliberately deconstructed from a self-conscious perspective of the 20th and 21st centuries. We have every reason to suppose that the construction of “Victorianism” turns into deconstruction according to the aesthetics of Postmodernism. Neo-Victorian texts do not represent the historical Victorian past; they can only represent some contradictory ideas and stereotypes about a former time. Scholars point out the difference between middlebrow historical fiction and more serious neo-Victorian works, for example, in “Neo-Victorianism: The

Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009” A. Helman and M. Llewellyn suppose that “... neo-Victorian texts “must in some respect be self-consciously engaged with the act of (re) interpretation, (re)discovery, and (re)vision concerning the Victorians” [Cite with 3].

There are key themes in neo-Victorian literature. They are imperialism, colonialism, war, gender and sexuality (especially female and queer sexuality), class, science and technology, boundaries between fiction and history. By the way, many of these topics were tackled or touched upon in the literature of the 19th century. Neo-Victorian writers rediscover these themes and reinterpret traditional meanings in numerous quotations from the Victorian period.

“The French Lieutenant’s Woman” (1969) by John Fowles is set in the 19th century England. This text abounds in quotations, allusions, reminiscences from Dickens, Thackeray, Bronte, Hardy, Tennyson, Max, Darwin which are reinterpreted. The self-conscious omniscient narrator reminds the reader that we judge from the ideology of the 20th century. Fowles draws parallels between the Victorian period and the present time. The novel focuses on sexual guilt and female sexuality. The plot is based on love triangle. Charles has to choose between respectable Ernestina and Sarah, a woman of little reputation: there are rumours that she was a lover of the French lieutenant who left her alone. The Victorian binary opposition “angel/whore” is deconstructed. In the book “The Modern British Novel” M. Bradbury wrote : “The French Lieutenant’s Woman” is a work that both reconstructs and deconstructs the Victorian novel, and ... its ideas of character and society, historical progress and evolution, chronological narrative and Godlike storytelling” [Cite with 2, p. 118]. Following the postmodern idea of endless deconstruction of meanings, Fowles gives three endings: the reader must discover himself how this novel ends.

The novel “Master Georgie” by Beryl Bainbridge deals with the British experience of the Crimea War. The main themes of the work are cruel imperialistic war, technology of photography, love and sexuality. The novel calls attention to the real historical events –the battle near Balaclava, the siege of Sebastopol. “Master Georgie” is full of reflections on war; fighting between countries is depicted as cruel, senseless event; death is shown as a matter of chance. The traditional Victorian concept of a glorious British military empire is completely deconstructed.

The novel is told by three first- person narrators, who have known George Hardy for a long time. Each narrator has his own story, his personal truth. They have different opinions about George who masters their thoughts. Being a typical Victorian hypocrite, Mr. Hardy is not a master of his own life. He hesitates over the choice between traditional family values of his class and bisexual inclinations.

The science of photography was developed throughout the 19th century. The photography as a document of the war from the battlefield is an important theme of the novel [1, c. 15–16]. Bainbridge shows that not all pictures are genuine records of the true events. The last episode of the novel is very symbolic. The central character Hardy is dead; his body is used for the composition of six soldiers, who survived. We inclined to consider that Master Georgie turns into postmodern simulacrum, representing absence of reality.

So, “The French Lieutenant’s Woman”, “Master Georgie” deal with deconstruction of Victorianism and can be called neo-Victorian novels.

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