

## CRITICISM AND PREJUDICE: THE ISSUE OF CANONICITY AND NEO-VICTORIAN WORKS

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**Abstract:** *This paper asks the question whether historical and neo-Victorian works belong to the same genre or if they need to be approached separately. The focus then switches to the criticism of these works and the effect it has had on the discourse surrounding them. It uses excerpts from The Western Canon by Harold Bloom to introduce some of the characteristics of canonicity and to discuss whether these criteria are fair and attainable. To demonstrate the frequently biased attitude towards these books, The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles and Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem by Peter Ackroyd are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *canonicity, historical novels, John Fowles, neo-Victorian literature, Peter Ackroyd*

### 1. Introduction

The issue of literary canonicity is usually approached through two opposing positions, either for or against the canon, being opened to a greater variety of texts. In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom (1994) strongly argues against such opening as, in his opinion, this would lead to the destruction of the canon. When it comes to literary works, this selectivity also leads to the exclusion of historical novels. As a result, many of these works are deemed unworthy of their inclusion among other influential texts. The contempt aimed at historical novels leads to the discrediting of a genre which also contains books that deserve consideration.

Bloom (idem: 21) asserts that “[t]he historical novel seems to have been permanently devalued”. He references the observations of Alastair Fowler, who notes that certain genres tend to be more popular in different eras. Consequently, the literary canon might accept works that are “regarded as more canonical than others” at different times (idem: 20). Dean Rehberger (1995: 59) also tackles this issue, when he writes that:

Borrowing its form from the aesthetic conventions of the novel and its content from the pages of history books, historical fiction appears as both history and literature, information and entertainment; however, neither the discipline of History nor English accepts this impure and mixed form as a legitimate expression of its discipline's demands. On the other hand, the historical novel is considered to be vulgar because it is an immensely popular form.

According to Rehberger, historical novels are often viewed as “impure” because of their wide-reaching popularity, despite being worth admiring. Furthermore, because of depicting both truth and fiction, historical fiction might

appear out of place, never truly fulfilling the requirements of either. Neo-Victorian narratives continue in this tradition, and they have received a lot of attention due to their attractive themes, resulting in their influential position within contemporary culture.

Despite their popularity, works revisiting the past faced, and some still face, various obstacles. Although Harold Bloom's work was published almost thirty years ago, many of his arguments are echoed in critical works up to this day. On the one hand, historical fiction can be seen among the awarded and acclaimed literary works. Nevertheless, on the other hand, these texts still deal with the uniquely specific issue of being disregarded while also appreciated. Their omission from the canon created by Bloom is often addressed by critics; however, as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010: 10) note, there is criticism coming from within the genre as well. An issue arises when defining a constantly evolving category, together with having a tightly formed image of what makes a neo-Victorian text "good". These rather contrasting views show that the attempts to present neo-Victorianism as legitimate and valuable lead to omissions and bias aimed at works in the historical fiction genre. The limiting criteria do not result in a precise definition of this particular category of texts; therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the changes likely to occur in the newer texts, instead of being tied down by rigid and harmful assumptions about what should and should not be accepted as neo-Victorian. This is not to say that all works whose plot is placed in the nineteenth century must belong to this genre or that their classification as neo-Victorian has to be overly vague. Heilmann and Llewellyn (2010: 6) argue that some of these texts "cannot be identified so precisely because they fall quite clearly into the category of historical fiction set in the nineteenth century rather than being texts about the metahistoric and metacultural ramifications of such historical engagement". As a result, there are features to be observed when discussing neo-Victorian fiction; however, it is necessary to take into account that the development of this new genre is still an ongoing process.

This article introduces and confronts some of the common criticism that both historical and neo-Victorian fiction face. In order to do so, it is also important to discuss certain features that could be viewed as typical for these genres. Furthermore, in order to illustrate some of the key aspects of neo-Victorian novels, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) are referred to. These novels challenge the criticism aimed at historical and neo-Victorian works by surpassing the limiting description of the genre and showing the significance of their plots. While Fowles's influential work has been acknowledged due to its critical and skilful engagement with the past, it still embodies many of the features critics cite as faulty when discussing the genre. Similarly, Ackroyd's work illustrates the (lack of) importance of historical accuracy and specificities of neo-Victorian revisitations. Therefore, although by no means marginal, these texts show that much of the criticism discussed in this article should be reconsidered.

## 2. Neo-Victorian, historical or both?

Before the discussion regarding the value of neo-Victorian and/or historical novels can be explored, it is important to establish the differences and similarities between these two genres. The most obvious distinction is the scope of historical novels that is not limited only to nineteenth-century depictions, as it is with neo-

Victorian fiction. However, there are still debates about whether neo-Victorian works should be viewed as a subcategory of the historical novel or whether they deserve to be placed in a distinctive category. Additionally, it is also debateable whether a text depicting the Victorian era is consequently neo-Victorian. Although this paper argues that these two groups should be viewed separately, their similarities cannot be overlooked as unimportant. Many critics also consider these genres in conjunction; therefore, it is currently impossible to omit either of them when focusing on their development and definition.

As with all expanding and changing approaches and genres in literature, it is difficult to arrive at a singular definition that could neatly categorise what it truly means for a work to be neo-Victorian and why it is different from the already established historical novel. Additionally, despite the long tradition of the historical novel, its definition is still much disputed. In *The Return of the Historical Novel?*, Johnston and Wiegandt (2017) discuss the two leading definitions of historical novels, one provided by Hungarian theorist Georg Lukács (1937) in *The Historical Novel* and the other coming from Canadian academic Linda Hutcheon (1989), who coined the term “historiographic metafiction”.

Lukács’s work is impossible not to consider when discussing the literary tendency to revisit past themes and events. The author also distinguishes between different types of historical novels, specifically the “old” (classical) and the “new” (modern):

The classical historical novel arose out of the social novel and, having enriched and raised it to a higher level, passed back into it. ... The new historical novel, on the other hand, sprang from the weaknesses of the modern novel and, by becoming a ‘genre in its own right’, reproduced these weaknesses on a greater scale. (Lukács 1989: 242)

The definition of the historical novel reflects the negative standpoint of many theorists who tend to devalue this genre. According to Lukács (1989: 237), there has been a decline in the quality of the portrayal of the past since the crucial “immanence” of history is missing. The new version of the historical novel is considered to be “a ‘contemporary novel’ on a historical theme, i.e. pure introjection” (ibid.). The way past experiences and events are portrayed is significant to truly understand the motivation behind people’s conduct (idem: 42). Lukács thus emphasises the social aspect of the novel. The roles and experiences of the characters are essential, and history should be deeply incorporated into the basis of the work to provide the relevant context.

On the other side of the argument, stands Linda Hutcheon’s postmodern point of view, which does not give that much importance to the authenticity of past portrayals. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon (2004: 146) writes that “[h]istoriographic metafiction, while teasing us with the existence of the past as real, also suggests that there is no direct access to that real which would be unmediated by the structures of our various discourses about it”. The postmodern scepticism overshadows the depiction of history; instead, it focuses on the various uncertainties occupying contemporary literature and its discourse. This “introversion, a self-conscious turning toward the form of the act of writing itself” (Hutcheon 1989: 9) allows for the focus to shift to the text itself, circumventing the anxieties of historiography. The (im)possibility of the authentic portrayal of the past is thus a common issue discussed in postmodern literary circles. The question

that could be asked and which is also revisited in this paper is whether historical accuracy is necessary and whether possible mistakes devalue neo-Victorian works. Dana Shiller (1997: 541) suggests that these revisitations have merit, regardless of whether they can retrieve authentic information or not. Just as Hutcheon emphasises, the focus should be on the narrative through which we experience the world.

Applying the label “historical novel” to neo-Victorian texts is insufficient, as the latter does not only evoke the past. Many neo-Victorian novels can be categorised as postmodern and as part of historiographic metafiction. It is not uncommon for works to receive more than just one label, which thus makes it possible for them to belong to multiple categories. However, while trying to describe the genre, there are some words that tend to be used more often than others. To elaborate, the prefix *re-*, as in *revision*, *re-reading*, *revisiting*, and so on, offers a look into the key elements of these novels. It is a significant aspect in Ann Heilmann’s and Mark Llewellyn’s (2010: 4) definition of the genre as well. As they write in *Neo-Victorianism*, “texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*” (emphasis in the original). Since neo-Victorian novels are inherently secondary in their return to the nineteenth century, it becomes crucial for them to focus on the aspects that distinguish them from the previous writings and which add validity to their themes.

Another significant feature of neo-Victorian texts is pointed out by Jessica Cox (2019: 3), who talks about the importance of “the relationship between contemporary and Victorian culture”. Understandably, the relevance of this genre is directly affected by the connection and shared influence of the past on the present and vice versa. Kate Mitchell (2010: 39) comments on this crucial bond, stating that “the spatial distance between the present and the past is negligible”. However, she also adds that Victorian themes are often depicted with attention to their strangeness and “absolute otherness. Rather than the shock of recognition, we experience the terror (and sometimes pleasure) of alterity, the fright (and satisfaction) of estrangement” (ibid.). Mitchell’s remarks illustrate how the depictions of the other and the marginal grew in popularity. Hutcheon (1989: 12) similarly notes that “[t]he ‘ex-centric’ – as both off-center and de-centered – gets attention. That which is ‘different’ is valorised in opposition both to elitist, alienated ‘otherness’ and also to the uniformizing impulse of mass culture”. These points lead to another significant feature of neo-Victorian works, which is giving attention to the overlooked issues and characters. As Cora Kaplan (2007: 3) summarises, they “highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire”.

Thus, when looking at some of these influential definitions of the neo-Victorian genre, a more specific idea of what it actually is begins to take shape. Neo-Victorian works can be seen as critical, but also as revisionist. They are inventive, but in many ways secondary, coming after the age they depict. They address issues that deserve more attention and prove the importance of the continuous discussion of topics that are still relevant in the twenty-first century. It is no wonder that the time of Queen Victoria’s reign is popular to re-examine. The nineteenth century is in many ways romanticised and idealised, which also makes it the perfect candidate for critical re-evaluation.

To conclude, although there are differences between the definitions of historical fiction and Neo-Victorian literature, they are not always significant.

Nevertheless, as this paper argues, neo-Victorian works should be considered sufficiently unique to acquire their own category that takes into consideration their evolution and changes. The reason behind this attempt to separate historical and neo-Victorian texts is twofold. Firstly, it bestows more attention on the second half of the twentieth and first half of the twenty-first-century revisionist literature. Secondly, and more importantly for the argument of this paper, it gives neo-Victorian works a fighting chance, as they can distance themselves from the criticism which has been directed at historical novels for a long time. Because of the ongoing changes in the genre, treating neo-Victorian literature as a subset of historical fiction might have a negative impact on its development and subsequent understanding.

### 3. Inspired by the predecessor

In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders (2006: 120) notes that neo-Victorian texts are often influenced by canonical works from the past and therefore require, as Harold Bloom suggested, close knowledge of such works (he even provides a list of what he considers important past canonical works). Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* as well as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* serve as illustrative examples of this tendency. Ackroyd, whose interest in history is also visible in this neo-Victorian novel, repeatedly refers to influential, canonical texts and significant figures that form the book's structure. For example, Thomas De Quincey is one of the recognised authors referenced in Ackroyd's novel. De Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts" plays a crucial role in the investigation of the Limehouse murders and stands out as the possible motivation behind them. Other works, such as Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, are also mentioned; however, their role in the narrative is not that significant.

Fowles, similarly to Ackroyd, does not shy away from mentioning real historical figures and texts in his postmodern novel. Besides the use of Victorian writings at the beginning of the chapters, the author also makes connections between characters in his work and Victorian books. An example in this sense is servant Sam Farrow and his literary counterpart Sam Weller from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. Fowles (1987: 40) acknowledges and embraces these similarities, calling Dickens's character "the immortal Weller", which points to the canonical importance of this Victorian text. Furthermore, the writing style of the novel reflects and, according to Hutcheon (2004: 45), "parodies" various nineteenth-century authors. The result is a book in which the depicted era inspires its style and characters.

Indeed, nineteenth-century texts and themes are a popular source for contemporary revisionist literature. Sanders (2006: 121-122) notes that this is "partly because of the lively interaction and cross-fertilization between the high and low arts in this period", but it is also due to the popularisation of the novel that could adapt itself to the readers, based on their reception of the work. Since the writings that were published in separate instalments could be adjusted, they gave more opportunities to the authors, who then participated in their own form of adaptation and appropriation. They got the chance to change problematic parts, develop storylines and characters that were positively received and minimise the features that the readers did not enjoy.

What results from these Victorian borrowings are novels that combine past and present and still manage to introduce something unique and worth reading. Fowles's work shows especially clearly what Tammy Lai-Ming Ho (2019: 3) describes as a "search for communion and identity-formation". She observes the complicated relationship between the two different ages – one being depicted in the work and the other being the time when the text was written. The results are often writings that "are aggressive, simultaneously pushing away and enthusiastically embracing their ancestors' influence" (ibid.). Although the connection to one's predecessor can be used to achieve a well-developed literary work, this is clearly a daunting task. Fighting against the past and trying to differentiate one particular text from others only for the sake of individuality is impossible and also illogical for neo-Victorian literature. Ultimately, authors can either embrace the connection or struggle to find a new way back to the past.

#### 4. Fact and fiction

The complicated relationship between fact and fiction ultimately leads to inaccuracies and anachronisms in fictional works depicting previous eras. However, instead of interpreting them as an offence against precision and authenticity, it should be pointed out that some critics have concluded that history itself cannot always be believed, and complete historical accuracy is unattainable.

Peter Ackroyd does not strive to be accurate in his portrayal of nineteenth-century London, nor does he try to hide the mistakes that ultimately surface in his novel. Ackroyd himself states in an interview: "I have such a loose hold on the truth. I mean, continuously we are inventing ourselves as a person, so that I don't find any real sacrosanct quality about so-called facts and so-called truths" (Onega 1996: 214). In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, he combines real historical figures with fictional ones and changes several dates and names. Some of the alterations are insignificant and do not lead to any major plot changes. They are there not because of the author's imprecision and lack of vigilance, but because Ackroyd does not want to be restricted by factuality. To quote Petr Chalupský (2003: 31): "Being a writer whose principal theme is the past is not an easy role in ... the period commonly referred to as postmodernity, during which the concept of history, its very nature and understanding, has undergone an ultimate transformation". On the one hand, striving for perfection is pointless; on the other, its lack is always used as an argument against historical/neo-Victorian works. Ackroyd does not avoid the postmodern doubt; on the contrary, he uses it in his novels to portray "a plurality of perspectives with the potential of generating a diversity of (hi)stories ... by exploring new, unconventional, unsought for or speculative coincidences, connections and motivations" (idem: 37). This uncertainty is a significant part of neo-Victorian literature, because it allows the author to explore areas that have not been sufficiently explored before. Staying within the limiting margins and only portraying the objective and verifiable truth goes against what defines these texts. Additionally, it could be argued that the combination of factual and fictional strengthens the novel, as it is not tied down by the rules and limitations of either.

In his significant neo-Victorian work, John Fowles not only refers to actual historical figures and events, but also starts his chapters with various fragments from other texts, including those of important Victorian authors, such as Thomas Hardy and Tennyson. His combination of the nineteenth-century themes and

setting with the twentieth-century narrator creates a novel that is situated both inside and outside the depicted era. The complicated love story between Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson is intertwined with commentary on the hypocrisy and double standards of the nineteenth century. Fowles points out the ridiculousness of Victorian novels, where love was portrayed in a very chaste and naïve way. At the same time, “the output of pornography has never been exceeded” (Fowles 1987: 232). As a result, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* merges the innocent angels in the house with the new women. It points out that the information which was predominantly featured in these texts does not truly reflect the reality of the times. This brings forth the impossibility of true authenticity when portraying an age known for its secrets and pretence.

This image of the division between the real and the fictional is relevant not only in the discussion of the historical and neo-Victorian works, but also when examining the narratives that often reflect the uneasiness between the two. Shiller (1997: 540) notes, inspired by Linda Hutcheon's exploration of historiographic metafiction, that “neo-Victorian novels are acutely aware of both history and fiction as human constructs, and use this awareness to rethink the forms and contents of the past”. Therefore, even in a work that relies on facts about the nineteenth century, an admittedly fictional story (as the narrator himself points out) of Sarah and Charles is no less authentic or relevant.

## 5. (Un)original past

Bloom (1994: 4) notes that originality is the common link that connects canonical texts, and therefore it is what is expected of authors to achieve in their writings. According to him, “One mark of an originality that can win canonical status for a literary work is a strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies”. Historical novels always come after the era which they depict, and this alleged secondariness is their foundation as well as the added complication in terms of their importance. Louisa Hadley (2010: 58), in her book *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, writes that “[t]he question arises as to whether these novels can be said to exist in their own right, as independent and unique works of art, or whether they are merely parasitic on their predecessors' texts”. A short answer might be that there is a place and need for this genre in contemporary discourse that does not seem unnecessary or repetitive. An example of this importance is the connection people have to their ancestors and history.

A. S. Byatt (2002: 93), who is another author of influential neo-Victorian texts, states that the “preoccupation with ancestors has always been part of human make-up, and ... comes naturally”. The long history of novels revisiting the past supports this statement. Furthermore, “[r]eading [these works] becomes an act of communal recollection not only between ourselves and our contemporaries, but also between ourselves and our Victorian ancestors” (Mitchell 2010: 173-174). The societal need to understand both our present time and that of our ancestors fuels the stories explored in these narratives. Ackroyd's character Elizabeth Cree, for example, is fascinated with the Ratcliffe Highway murders, which happened almost forty years before she was born. These real events, which resulted in the death of seven people, intrigues the murderess, who considers visiting the site of this crime a pleasant activity. The murders cause strong emotions in people who have heard

about them. They are also a powerful motivation for Elizabeth to kill the family that now lives there – repeating the history and bringing it into the present.

Another notable instance of the current importance of the historical novel as a genre mentioned by Hadley (2010: 3) is that “despite the extraordinary critical neglect of this area, the historical novel has been one of the most important genres for women writers and readers in the twentieth century”. Besides the space it creates for writers and readers, it also offers a unique platform for insufficiently addressed issues and topics that were not fully developed in the texts of their canonical predecessors. Fowles (1987: 379) keeps at the highlighted periphery of his work a New Woman, “flagrantly rejecting all formal contemporary notions of female fashion” and expectations of conduct. Sarah, who becomes ostracised for being a fallen woman, does not represent a typical Victorian heroine looking for security and love in the arms of a man. The author takes this expectation one step further in his dual ending, where the readers can choose whether the female character reconciles with her lover or not. Fowles also emphasises that both conclusions should be accepted as equally believable. Similarly, Ackroyd decides to create a heroine that refuses to embody a predetermined Victorian female role and to be constrained by the limits of her gender. As a result, these novels are able to critically address their predecessors and offer a more contemporary point of view that arguably enriches the portrayal of the characters and their obstacles.

## 6. Escaping the twenty-first century

The two words often used to justify the devaluation and rejection of historical novels are “secondariness” and “escapism”. The issue of secondariness has already been addressed, as the discussion of originality and influence inherently relates to this topic. Escapism is often mentioned when commenting on narratives that take place in the past, and their themes might be thus considered unimportant when compared to more contemporary and pressing issues. Additionally, such a revisitation is often described as a work that romanticises past times, without seriously attempting to explore problems worth debating. Diana Wallace (2005: ix), in *The Woman's Historical Novel*, concludes that “[t]he tendency has been to associate women's historical novels with romance and thus to stigmatise it as escapist”. Furthermore, she adds that we should re-evaluate “both the assumption that historical novels are necessarily escapist because they are set in the past, and the assumption that escapism is *per se* a ‘bad thing’”.

The two selected neo-Victorian works in this paper cannot be described as merely romance novels. Fowles presents the question of looking for and finding love, but its representation is much more complex than just an affair between two characters. The most important relationship for Sarah is the one she has with herself as she is learning to accept who she is, even if others do not do so. Clearly, the route to self-knowledge and, ultimately, freedom from the constraints of society is not a topic that was relevant only over a hundred years ago. As it has been mentioned on numerous occasions, one of the most discernible functions of neo-Victorian stories is to discuss topics that can still teach us something nowadays, and this is exactly what the novels discussed here also attempt to do. The narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* invites the reader to critically evaluate the data presented about the Victorian era; furthermore, he also includes postmodern playfulness with the limits and preconceived notions regarding the construction of a novel.



This need for critical reading is significant in Ackroyd's book as well. The diary entries used as a source of information turn out to be filled with deceit, and the historical information included throughout the work is not always exact. Moreover, Elizabeth, just like Sarah, does not need to find validation through her marriage. She uses it as a means to expand her opportunities and to be able to explore her needs and desires regardless of what her husband wants or expects. As a result, both novels and their main heroines surpass oversimplified interpretations of neo-Victorian novels.

Some criticism related to escapism targets the reliance on nostalgia as a powerful but facile tool which attracts readers. Hutcheon (2004: 19) refuses the stance that postmodern revisitations are inherently nostalgic, noting that "[w]hat starts to look naive, by contrast, is the reductive belief that any recall of the past must, by definition, be sentimental nostalgia or antiquarianism". Nostalgia, just like escapism, limits the scope and importance of rewritings and adaptations of the past. The result is a justification for the omission of texts from serious critical discourse and their refusal to be considered worthy in any way. The issue of nostalgia is explored by Mitchell (2010: 4) as well, who does not refute its possible occurrence in these works; however, she elevates its importance and role in them. This move towards a re-evaluation of what nostalgia means in the critical discussion of the past brings forward a possibility to repossess this term and enhance its significance and nuances.

It appears to be impossible to address neo-Victorian writings without mentioning these terms used to devalue them. Kaplan (2007: 3) defines Victoriana as "more than nostalgia", automatically defending it from the anticipated criticism. Heilmann and Llewellyn (2010: 6-7) use a satirical list drawn up by Miriam Elizabeth Burstein on her website "The Little Professor", which identifies features in neo-Victorian works in a joking manner. This list echoes some of the criticism of the genre and its predictability; however, Heilmann and Llewellyn use it to explore some of the points that are true of this literature. Thus, the attitude of these contemporary critical works discussing and defining the historical and neo-Victorian genre reflects the assumption that they are going to be scrutinised chiefly for their interest in the past. Nevertheless, it could be argued that paying attention to the overlooked and underrepresented issues adds value and seriousness to the neo-Victorian novel in terms of its interest and scope, moving it further away from frivolous topics.

## 7. Conclusion

When discussing neo-Victorian and historical fiction, the weight of the long-term criticism that has been directed towards them is impossible to avoid. It is present in the new definitions of the emerging neo-Victorian genre, as well as in the discussion and analyses of novels that reassess the portrayal of the past and its specificities. This article has attempted to make a distinction between the contemporary works in the nineteenth century and the well-recognised historical fiction. However, it has become apparent that, as long as these genres share criticism, it remains difficult to separate them altogether. Therefore, in order to assess these texts and move past this stage, it is necessary to re-evaluate the validity of this disapproval.

Peter Ackroyd and John Fowles present a postmodern approach to the past in which the readers' expectations are continuously subverted in order to explore the

possibilities of the neo-Victorian literary works. These explorations, which constantly resurface in new revisitations, push forward and develop neo-Victorianism and should therefore serve as sufficient proof that texts like these deserve further consideration. While it would be misleading to argue that all works of this genre are worthy of more attention, it would also be equally unreasonable to dismiss these novels, based on preconceptions that do not necessarily hold up when closely scrutinised. The fact that Bloom's list of Western canonical works has been criticised is understandable. Not just because of some of the requirements presented by him, but also due to the inherent nature of writing a list that can never truly encompass all the writings that are worth reading and deserve more attention. The point of this criticism (whether it is concerned with historical/neo-Victorian fiction or other works that Bloom refuses to acknowledge) is not to demand more historical/neo-Victorian texts to be included in Bloom's canon. A much more meaningful goal would be for these books to be granted the same chance as works that do not have to face such an overwhelming amount of prejudice even before being read.

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