

THE (NEO-)HISTORICAL IN BRITISH LITERATURE AND VISUAL ARTS (20TH-21ST CENTURIES)

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LIST OF ABSTRACTS (following the order on the programme)

DAY 1

Ayako Mizuo (Ryukoku University, Japan), “The Neo-Historical Austen: Sisterhood, Female Autonomy, and the Ethics of Care in Gill Hornby’s *Miss Austen*”

Delineating the late years of Cassandra Austen (1773-1845), Gill Hornby’s *Miss Austen* (2020) also illuminates the life of Jane Austen (1775-1817). In spite of her contribution to Jane’s literary success, Cassandra appears to have been neglected and underestimated by the Jane Austen industry—biographies, critical works, biofiction, and Austen-inspired stories and adaptations. Whereas Hornby’s biofictional narrative of Cassandra, Jane’s sister, unveils her tough spinsterhood in early-nineteenth century England, an intriguing neo-historical element in the novel is the representation of sisterhood among women living in hardship. A contemporary approach to sisterhood and the female autonomy represented through reciprocity in *Miss Austen* could be employed through the ethics of care which Carol Gilligan theorises. Gilligan, a psychologist and ethicist, redefines the act of care and caring in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982, 1993). The ethics of care, according to Gilligan, provide “the vision that self and other will be treated as equal worth, ... that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt” (63). Spotlighting sisterhood in *Miss Austen* from the perspective of the ethics of care destabilises the conventional categorisation of Cassandra as an invisible woman buried in history. It further allows an alternative reading of Jane Austen’s fiction by focussing on sisterhood and female autonomy.

Drawing on the ethics of care, my paper discusses the way in which sisterhood and female autonomy are represented through the biofictional narrative of Cassandra in *Miss Austen*. I then explore the way in which Anne Elliot’s autonomy is demonstrated through the sisterhood deployed in *Persuasion* (1817), Austen’s last novel which is occasionally referred to in Hornby’s *Miss Austen*. I argue that a neo-historical reading of Austen in terms of sisterhood and female autonomy has significance for recent scholarship on Jane Austen.

James Dalrymple (Université Grenoble Alpes, France) “Spitting image: improvisation, impersonation and ellipsis in Mike Leigh’s *Mr Turner* (2014)”

A biographical film about J.M.W Turner presented special difficulties and attractions to filmmaker Mike Leigh. Although not commonly associated with period films, *Mr Turner* (2014) was his third historical work and his second biopic about artists in the Victorian era (the first being 1999’s *Topsy Turvy*). Despite the artist’s renown, the Mike Leigh film was the first attempt at making a feature biopic of Turner’s life, albeit focusing on his final 25 years, and not one adapted from an existing biography. Indeed, in many ways Turner makes an unlikely subject for heritage cinema, having been notoriously inarticulate and reclusive. Played by Timothy Spall, no attempt is made to romanticize Turner as a figure, who expresses himself largely in the form of grunts. Boorish and often contradictory in his personal affairs, Turner is also shown to have been seemingly unrefined in his artistic process: spitting on the canvas and stabbing at it crudely with paint brushes. It could be said that the film counterweighs the *painterliness* of Turner’s favoured landscapes with the *ugliness* of his screen persona. Little effort is made, either, to psychoanalyze the artist, largely avoiding the “pathologization of genius¹” that characterizes a number of biographical films about (tortured) artists. Instead, it

¹ Vidal, Belèn, “Introduction”, *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. Oxford, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013, p.9

is a film characterized by ellipsis: more a series of vignettes of Turner's life and the landscapes which inspired him.

Mr Turner raises a number of interesting questions about representing the past, coupling "a responsibility to history" with an approach Leigh describes as "spontaneous and organically creative"². If all biopics operate in a "liminal space between fiction and actuality"³, fewer do so quite so self-reflexively. This article will thus explore the way in which *Mr Turner* engages with expectations around both biographical film and heritage cinema more generally. We will also reflect upon how J.M.W. Turner as a subject seems to dovetail with Leigh's own contrarian "auteur" persona and idiosyncratic approach to character, notably his extensive use of improvisation in rehearsals to shape the script. How, we will ask, can Leigh's elliptical approach to narrative be seen to map onto Turner's celebrated proto-impressionism?

Dorothea Flothow (University of Salzburg, Austria), "Detecting the Past to Prevent a Bleak Future: Philip Kerr's *Friedrich the Great Detective* and the Neo-Historical YA Novel"

Unlike many of the examples of post-modernist historiographic metafiction, as they proliferated in the late twentieth century, *Friedrich the Great Detective* (2017, German translation: *Friedrich der große Detektiv*), displays little of the intellectual playfulness that characterized these earlier texts. Though at first, it seems like a light-hearted adaptation of Erich Kästner's famous children's novel *Emil und die Detektive* (1929, English title: *Emil and the Detectives*) it is in fact anything but. Instead, as this paper proposes to show, Philip Kerr's homage to Kästner show-cases some of the key intergeneric trends and political engagements of the historical novel as it has developed in recent years.

Featuring at the intersection of historical crime fiction, biofiction, memory text and young adult historical fiction, the novel not only combines significant forms and developments of today's popular historical culture. *Friedrich the Great Detective* features a young neighbour and avid reader of Erich Kästner as its eponymous hero, who, fascinated by the fictional Emil, aims to become a detective in interwar Berlin. Against the rise of the Nazi party, however, the teenager's playful pursuit soon turns political as both Friedrich's favourite author and his favourite novel become subject to persecution, as a friend and modernist painter is murdered by the authorities, and as Friedrich and his friends have to join the Nazi youth organisations. Thus, Philip Kerr's historical crime story is also a bleak warning of nationalist populism. It showcases through the intertextual memory of *Emil and the Detectives* how the bohemian, intellectual Berlin of the 1920s became the bleak, violent city ruled by the Nazis. Told through the eyes of young Friedrich, this transnational novel illustrates how present-day historical fiction addresses past and present political wrongs and attempts to shape the historical memories of its readers to ensure a better future.

Keynote 1 : Jerome de Groot (The University of Manchester, GB), "The historical novel NOW"

Siobhan O'Connor (independent scholar), "Men, Moors and Manchester: Masculinity and Post-National Histories in Benjamin Myers' *The Gallows Pole* and Ian McGuire's *The Abstainer*"

This paper will consider two historical novels, that re-imagine places, people and acts of resistance to institutional authority that have been marginalised in Britain's historical imagination. In so doing, these texts explore the complexities of power, identity and belonging within a nation shaped spatially and socially by inequality and exclusion. In engaging with new histories of social class, diaspora and region these texts posit narratives that look beyond and beneath the national and towards transnational and post-national futures. Furthermore, in

² Raphael, Amy, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*. London, Faber & Faber, p.441

³ Bingham, Dennis, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?* London, Rutgers University Press, p. 7

telling the stories of seemingly powerful men who are ultimately erased by a state which serves elite interests, they complicate ideas of masculinity.

Benjamin Myers' *The Gallows Pole* (2017) and Ian McGuire's *The Abstainer* (2020) are both set in the industrial North-West, a region that is under-represented in popular re-imaginings of the English past. While Myers' novel depicts the harsh landscapes of a 1760s West Yorkshire on the verge of mechanisation, McGuire locates his characters in the streets of Manchester a century later. The protagonists are both working-class men who find themselves outside the law and divided in their relationships with their communities. One is the leader of the notorious Cragg Vale Coiners whose criminal activities almost collapsed the British economy and the other a fictitious Irish policeman seconded from Dublin and tasked with bringing down the covert, anti-colonial operations of his Fenian compatriots.

Both novels are interested in constructions of masculinity and nationhood, and in acts of self-fashioning and self-narrating: acts which inevitably conflict with state coercion and the rule of law. The books will be read as neo-historical fictions that contribute to contemporary discourses around geography, gender, and class and ask important questions about what place, community and identity might mean in a post-British Britain.

Georges Letissier (Nantes Université, France), "Prurient sapience: Tom Crewe's genealogy of gay culture in *The New Life* (2023)"

Since the publication of his debut novel *Tom Crewe*, a young historian who defended a thesis on late-Victorian British political culture at Cambridge, has received accolades in the media, both in England and abroad. The titular "New Life" is a historical reference to a progressive Fellowship, a forerunner of the Fabian Society, committed to promoting sexual emancipation in the last decade of Victorian England, the context of Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895. Epistemologically, "the New Life" is also the liberty taken by a historian when he ventures into the realm of fiction, to reimagine the past from the vantage point of what was a utopian project in the first place. Indeed, Crewe emancipates himself from the strictures of solid facts and firm chronology.

Following in the footsteps of E.M. Forster, Ronald Firbank, A.E. Housman, or Alan Hollinghurst, among others, Crewe contributes through fiction to enriching a history of (male) homosexuality. The latter probably received some impetus when the LGBTQI+ archive project was launched in 2011. Yet it is Crewe's approach to the (neo) historical novel which will engage our attention. It is characterised by a two-tier montage of discourses bearing on a largely unhistorised past. Indeed the young novelist takes up an authentic source, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), a medical textbook, co-authored by John Addington Symonds and Henry Havelock Ellis, to (mostly) imagine the encounter between the two men and document the different steps of their collaboration. Not only is the reader afforded a privileged access to the backstage manoeuvrings behind the "scientific" project, but they also share in the intimate life of both men, which is relevant to avoid any undue simplification on the political stakes entailed by sexual mores.

It can be argued that Crewe by eroticising the production of historically-bound knowledge (*Sexual Inversion* partakes of the biopower later theorised by Michel Foucault) and by celebrating emancipatory movements (Uranians but also feminists and reformers of all stripes) suggests that there is more to history than what is actualised by facts recorded by historians.

Peter D. Mathews (University of Macau, China), "Imogen Hermes Gowar's *The Mermaid and Mrs. Hancock*: Rethinking the Eighteenth-Century Marriage Plot"

This paper examines how Imogen Hermes Gowar's novel *The Mermaid and Mrs. Hancock* (2018) uses its eighteenth-century setting to rethink the literary device of the marriage plot. One key reason why historical novelists are interested in the eighteenth century is the new conception of freedom that formed during this period, especially in the context of the slave trade. The first part of this paper thus focuses on the character of Polly Campbell, a former slave who now works in London as a courtesan, and how she comes to realize that, despite the luxury around her, her position is really a hidden form of slavery. The second part considers

how the life choices of women in this term are shaped by economic considerations. Seeing matrimony as a form of servitude, many of Gowar's female characters choose prostitution and the money it brings as an act of empowerment, only to find that financial considerations repeatedly betray their desire for freedom. In the face of this double bind, the final section looks at how Gowar's protagonists, Jonah and Angelica, attempt to construct a new twist on the marriage plot that consciously eschews the logic of economic transaction, seeking instead to place desire and forgiveness at its center.

Sylvie Maurel (University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France), "The pressure of history in *The Children's Book* by A.S. Byatt (2009)"

In A.S. Byatt's fiction, histories and stories, to borrow from the title of one of her collections of essays (2009), are often interwoven. *The Children's Book*, published in 2009, is no exception. The novel is set in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, starting in 1895 and ending in the aftermath of the first world war in 1919. The first two decades of the 20th century are meticulously researched and chronicled, the narrative keeping track of the timeline with almost obsessive precision. Through the stories of three large families, it offers a cultural, social and political panorama in which a wide range of fictional characters come into play with real ones. In at least one of the protagonists, Olive Wellwood, story and history intersect: she is a popular writer of children's literature who is much indebted to Edith Nesbit and keeps her bohemian family in a web of stories.

History is given pride of place in *The Children's Book*, and focussing on a late Victorian generation of Fabians, the novel qualifies as neo-Victorian or neo-historical fiction in the sense that it revises common assumptions about Victorian and Edwardian times. The novel chooses to foreground progressive characters and modes of living that depart from some of the cultural stereotypes attached to Victorian culture. One would also be tempted to see it as historiographic metafiction, a compound of storytelling and history self-reflexively exploring the line between fact and fiction. However, the paper will argue that Byatt's concern in this novel is perhaps less with the relationship between story and history than with the pressure of history which, as the narrative moves inexorably towards the conflagration of the first world war, exercises a form of predation on individual and collective fates, while taking its toll on the momentum of storytelling through relentless reference to dates and historical facts.

Jean-Michel Ganteau (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, France), "Historical Fiction, Material Realism and the Poetics of the Inventory"

In the wake of recent developments propounded by influential specialists (Bentley, Boxall, Wilson), this presentation will consider that even if 21st-Century historical fiction jettisons some of the reflexivity and irony that it took on board in the late 20th century, notably through a poetics associated with postmodernism, its return to what may appear as traditional forms does not imply "a return to an older, more secure form of history" (Boxall). It is rife with ethical concerns and resonates with the novelist's "responsibility to [historical]truth" (Wood). In other terms, this presentation will argue that, with the demise of the cultural and linguistic turns, and with the advent of the material turn, the responsibility to truth has come to rely on the consideration of material forces. In Boxall's terms, "[t]he novel is driven by the desire to penetrate the truth of the past, the past as material history rather than as narrative invention". This presentation will take its lead from the preceding statement and will consider the way in which, in a spate of contemporary British historical novels, the traces of the past are consigned in a poetic and a logic of the inventory, in which note-taking and "rag-picking" (Benjamin, Onega) constitute a practice of and a pre-condition for the elaboration of narrative. Through the means of the elementary grammar of the inventory, the texts that the presentation addresses (Melissa Harrison's *At Hawthorn Time*, Jon McGregor's *So Many Ways to Begin*, Sarah Hall's *Haweswater*, among others) feature elements like the collection of data that pre-dates the elaboration of a narrative. In doing so, they rely on a poetics of the ordinary that is anti-historicist and that is faithful to Foucault's conception of genealogy as opposed to history. By taking on board basic elements of material realism, such novels try to come as close as

possible to historical truth, introducing material and bodily experience (the narrator's, the readers') into the heart of the historical narrative

Chi-min Chang (University of Taipei, Taiwan), "The Space of Light and Shadow in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*"

An Artist of the Floating World, written by Kazuo Ishiguro, is narrated by a Japanese artist, Ono, who is confronted with the undercurrents of social judgments and critiques owing to his turning away from Japanese traditional painting, Ukiyo-e, to the propaganda paintings for the war before WWII. The artist's reminiscences of the past demonstrate the entanglements between artistic endeavours and socio-political oscillations incurred by the war. Interestingly, the narrative, pivoted on the socio-historical dissensus over artistic manifestations before and after WWII, not only shows how art is given a voice in historical narrative but makes a distinct space of light and shadow, resembling the chiaroscuro in painting. The crevices, a kind of silence, evolving from the dissensus create the space of light and shadow in which Ishiguro intriguingly makes the invisible loom over the visible, the unsaid sounds louder than the said, unfolding the collisions and compromises between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern, Japan and the West, shame and honor, failure and hope. Aligning with what Jacques Rancière contends in *Mute Speech*, the interplay of light and shadow in the narrative bespeaks a kind of historical truth by not only lifting the barrier that separates facts and fiction but unveiling a different texture of historical narrative. This novel is not merely a novel about art in history but about how art renders a different vision of history.

Conversation with Lucy Caldwell, winner of the Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction.

DAY 2

Elsa Cavalié (Avignon Université, France), “The concept of anachronism is the historian’s truth⁴

Uses of Anachronism in Retellings of Greek Myth”

Novelistic retellings of Greek Myth hold a special place among historical, or neo-historical novels, unlike Kazuo Ishiguro’s evocation of appeasement politics in 1930s England in *The Remains of the Day* or Hilary Mantel’s masterful recreation of Tudor England in *Wolf Hall*, those novels seem to use the remote historical period they recreate as background rather than subject. However, it could be argued that historical works of fiction aiming at a sense of the past rather than historical reliability are increasingly common: Neo-Victorian novels such as Sarah Waters’ or TV series such as *Bridgerton* or *Penny Dreadful* belong to a subgenre in which the relationship to History as recounted by the historians seems deliberately loose. Amongst Greek Myth retellings, a great number of novels share those aesthetic and thematic features with their Neo-Victorian counterparts: to name but a few, Costanza Casati’s *Clytemnestra*, Jennifer Saint’s *Ariadne* or Jessie Burton’s *Medusa*.

However, not all retellings participate of the same aesthetic, and some of them, although not claiming to provide an accurate, in the sense of historically (or archeologically), verifiable rendition of the past, do actually engage with history, and the representation of history. Pat Barker’s Trojan trilogy and Alice Oswald’s poems evoking the *Iliad* (*Memorial*) and the *Odyssey* (*Nobody*) belong to that category.

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, anachronism – to be understood not as inadvertent factual slip-up but as a deliberate aesthetic, ethical and political choice – is one of the common features of those works. In this talk, I will evoke the different categorizations of anachronism, such as Serge Zenkine’s and Thomas Greene’s, to expound on the fact that the concept, or technique, develops on several levels. That plasticity enables fiction to adopt a polymorphous and nuanced take on history that allows Barker and Oswald to build complex connections between the past and the present. I will then use Didi-Huberman’s notion of the “paradoxical fertility of anachronism” (translation mine) to show that the critical discourse about history may be revitalized rather than discredited by the “betrayal” of historical fact.

Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir (University of Iceland), “Greek Myth Rewritings in the #MeToo Era:

A Move Towards a ‘Neo-Mythohistorical’ Subgenre Within Historical Fiction?”

Over the past decade or so we have seen a resurgence of interest in rewritings of Greek myths, many of which have women taking centre stage, their lives and experiences centralised in texts attempting to redress past grievances and injustices. A significant strand of these deals with women’s traumatic experiences that lead to rage, desire for vengeance, and sometimes acts of violence. In this way, the texts subvert and reject patriarchal restrictive ideas concerning gender-specific attributes (women as demure, accepting, non-violent), representing a refusal to adhere to societal and cultural pressures that suggest women’s anger is indicative of (mental) instability and should be contained. This is in line with developments in the #MeToo era, as argued by Orgad and Gill (2019):⁵ “Against the consistent containment, policing, muting and outlawing of the expression of women’s anger in media and culture, the current moment, specifically in the wake of the #MeToo movement, seems to represent a radical break.”⁶

Contemporary Greek myth rewritings engage with a past that is both mythical and historical, in the sense that the myths spring from a very distant historical past with some indicative markers of events, social structures, and geographical locations. Contemporary British rewritings approach this distant past in different ways, many embracing the more fantastical

⁴ Rancière, Jacques. ‘Le Concept d’anachronisme et La Vérité de l’historien’. *Inactuel*, no. 6, 1996, p. 53.

⁵ Shani Orgad & Rosalind Gill (2019). “Safety valves for mediated female rage in the #MeToo era,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 19:4, 596-603, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2019.1609198](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1609198). (page 598).

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 598.

(and purely mythical) elements, with the Greek gods playing an active role as characters (e.g. Hannah Lynn's *Athena's Child*, 2020), while others approach the material from a more realistic angle, anchoring the story in a world that might really have existed, and where the gods only exist in people's imagination (e.g. Claire Heywood's *The Shadow of Perseus*, 2023). Yet they share the quality of enabling "a re-appraisal of cultural events, themes and characters" by "pushing beyond what we know or think is 'true' about the past [and here, Greek myths] in order to invent new histories" (SEAC's cfp; Harris 199, cited in the cfp), also in line with neo-historical fiction as defined by Rousselot and outlined in the call for papers. Importantly, these rewritings highlight the male-centric nature of the Greek myths and portray the subjugation of and injustices against women in the past, while also directly addressing contemporary concerns. My argument is that this current wave of Greek myth rewritings is a direct reflection of as well as important contribution to debates surrounding the #MeToo movement, not least concerning the issue of women's rage/anger and its outlets. The question I also want to pose is whether we could then move towards classifying such rewritings as yet another subgenre of historical fiction, i.e. the 'neo-mythohistorical'.

Justine Gonneaud (Avignon Université, France), "A Neo-Mythical Gaze on Medusa: Filling in the Blind Spots of Cultural Memory"

Within the framework of the conference questioning "The (Neo-) Historical in British Literature and Visual Arts", I would like to address the feminist retellings of the myth of Medusa produced within the last decade, focusing mainly on Natalie Haynes rewriting of the myth in her novel *Stone Blind* (2023), with occasional comparative references to other contemporary iterations, such as Jessie Burton's *Medusa: The Girl behind the Myth* (2021), Skevi Philippou's *Medusa: Though the Eyes of the Gorgon* (2010), or Luciano Garbati's sculpture "Medusa With The Head Of Perseus" (2008).

Stone Blind, long-listed for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2023 and unanimously praised as a 'feminist rewriting' of Medusa's story by literary critics, offers a prominent stage for women's voices. I would like to argue that the novel self-consciously reactivates and restores overlooked aspects of the mythical past rather than rewriting them. In the neo-historical vein, the novel aims at reappraising the cultural transformation of the character of Medusa and at questioning the mechanisms that led a collective cultural memory of a founding myth to obliterate key aspects of the original texts.

In the first part of this essay, I would like to explore how the novel re-invigorates the original myth by exploiting or exhuming parts that may have been – sometimes quite literally - 'lost in translation' – in order to revive the myth in all its original complexity. Looking back on the Antique sources of the story, the novel fleshes out the perspectives of various characters involved in Medusa's fate, in order to propose a multidimensional, polyphonic perspective on the Gorgon's tale. In a second part, I will analyze how the polyphonic recasting of the story allows for the coexistence of contraries in order to create a morally ambiguous world where notions such as monstrosity and heroism are re-defined. Finally, using Héléne Cixous's essay "The Laugh of Medusa" as a guideline, I would like to discuss the apotropaic dimension of the story of Medusa, as a figure of female empowerment allowing for the creation of a neo-mythology as she reverts her gaze against a patriarchal order.

Keynote 2: Diana Wallace (University of South Wales, GB), "'Ought it not all to be re-written instantly?': modernism and the re-invention of historical fiction"

Jana Valová (Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic) "Unveiling the Ordinary "Other" in Neo-Victorian Biofiction"

While neo-Victorian literature is often concerned with stories about fame or infamy, deviance, and shocking Otherness, the genre also shows a keen interest in servitude. The servant character can be characterised by inherent invisibility, with their roles strictly prescribed and their freedom limited.

Neo-Victorian narratives experiment with the issue of invisibility and ordinariness, portraying servant characters with multifaceted desires and natures. These experiments result in varied levels of development of the servant character, as will be discussed in relation to two neo-Victorian biofictional works: *Lady's Maid* (1990) by Margaret Forster and *The Mistress of Nothing* (2009) by Kate Pullinger.

The depiction of Wilson (*Lady's Maid*) and Sally (*The Mistress of Nothing*) constantly emphasises these maids' subordinate and marginal positions compared to their mistresses, who hold all the power. When portraying the overlooked working class, adding and fictionalising stories that have been insufficiently documented becomes crucial. It is evident that without their well-known mistresses, Wilson's and Sally's revisitations would not exist. However, a question arises as to whether, because of their mistresses, they can also not become pivotal characters in their neo-Victorian revisitation.

This presentation argues that the Otherness of both protagonists is not only rooted in their subordinate working-class position but also in the suggested ordinariness and secondariness of their lives, reliant on their employers and suspended in indeterminacy that makes them liminal. This reliance is further emphasised by the stories told due to the servant's connection to their more well-known employers. As a result, both Wilson and Sally represent neo-Victorian protagonists of what Kohlke⁷ categorises as biofiction of marginalised subjects, while the narrative also provides "skewed insights and revelations ... into the (more) noteworthy personalities" (Kohlke 11), in this case, their mistresses Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Lady Duff Gordon.

Barbara Braid (University of Szczecin, Poland), "Reclaiming apparitional lesbians in neo-Victorian biofiction: *Gentleman Jack* versus *Learned by Heart*"

Anne Lister's diary is a rare document of queer history that demonstrates lesbian lived experience in the past. For that reason, Lister's diary has become a tempting source for neo-Victorian appropriation, fleshing out the apparition of a historical lesbian in cultural memory. A revisionist TV series *Gentleman Jack* (HBO/BBC 2019-2022) ensures Lister's recognition in the mainstream media and restores her place in popular history as a lesbian living an unapologetically queer life in Regency England. Nevertheless, the creators of the series are also interested in complex intersections of gender and class within Lister's family, community, and romantic relationships, pointing out the privilege she enjoyed in spite of her gender and sexuality. Going even further, Emma Donoghue's novel *Learned by Heart* (2023) recovers a character largely absent from Lister's diaries and *Gentleman Jack*, that is, Lister's first lover, Eliza Raine, a young woman of colour, illegitimate and ultimately incarcerated in a lunatic asylum. Consequently, Donoghue's novel points out crucial problematics of neo-Victorian biofiction as a genre, asking, for instance, whether in the effort to recover some voices from the past, neo-Victorian biofictions detract from or distort the others. It also illustrates the importance of historical documentation as a source of biofiction. *Gentleman Jack*, based on Lister's diaries, inadvertently and unavoidably offers us a version of events filtered through Lister's perspective. Yet, by selecting events from Lister's life that precede her diary, and relying solely on her imagination, Donoghue envisions Eliza Raines and Anne Lister as equally fictional. Therefore, *Learned by Heart* is one of many examples of neo-Victorian biofictions that build authenticity and reparative historiography not through historical documentation, but through fictionality and imagination.

⁷ Kohlke, Marie-Luise. "Neo-Victorian Biofiction and the Special/Spectral Case of Barbara Chase-Ribouds *Hottentot Venus*." *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2013, pp. 4-21.

Isabelle Roblin (Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale, France) "Graeme Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project* (2015): a Slippery Neo-Historical Novel"

From the title page onward, Graeme Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project* is deliberately baffling for the first-time reader, playfully blending as it does reality and fiction. Subtitled "Documents Relating to the Case of Roderick Macrae", a seventeen-year-old Highlands crofter who, in 1869, murdered three people, it plays on the similarity of the family name (Macrae) of the real author and the (fictional) main character. It is also characterized as "A Novel" "edited and introduced by Graeme Macrae Burnet", who is thus not credited as having authored the "novel" but only as having collected the various documents which, "taken together [...] form a tapestry of one of the most fascinating cases in Scottish legal history" (Burnet 4). The preface and the contents of this fragmented text - consisting of diverse and contradictory witness statements and accounts, a map, a glossary, newspaper articles, a (fictional) extract from the work of a (real-life) Scottish surgeon - continue with the literary *jeux d'esprit* and make *His Bloody Project* resolutely postmodern in its presentation. However, the use of scrupulous verisimilitude, a traditional technique of the conventional historical novel, in terms of setting, language, description of the feudal conditions in the 19th century Highlands of Scotland etc., "distinguishes it from the more explicitly self-reflexive mode of postmodern parody" (Elodie Rousselot, *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 4). It can thus be considered a neo-historical novel, a new subgenre of contemporary historical fiction. I shall first examine in detail the claims made by the supposed "editor" of the novel and the way in which this collection of allegedly found documents plays with a long literary tradition; then how, without any hint of nostalgia, it engages with the Victorian past it depicts for twenty-first-century readers, and leaves them wondering about the mutability and ultimately the unattainability of truth.

Claire Hélie (Université de Lille, France), "The Pendle Witch Trials: Exorcising Witches in Neo-Historical poetry"

The trial of the Pendle Witches in 1612 made history, as Poet Laureate Simon Armitage showed in his 2012 documentary, "The Pendle Witch Child", which focussed on Jennet Device, the 9-year-old whose accusations led to 10 – her own mother included – being hanged. Neighbourly jealousy, the stigma of poverty, the repression of non-conformism, patriarchal laws, and the credit given to the voice of one child had led to an unfair trial. 21 years later, Jennet, now a grown-up, was accused of witchcraft by a 10 year-old. Yet this time, his testimony was questioned and finally rebutted, meaning that she was found not guilty, even though she was not discharged and died in prison.

This sensational trial quickly made it into writing, first, through *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, a supposedly verbatim account of the trials which actually left aside a few facts while fabricating the voices of the accused. Later, in Victorian England, the event was romanticized by William Harrison Ainsworth (*The Lancashire Witches*, 1848) and became a central element of local folklore (Baines 1867; Harland & Wilkinson 1882) that popularized the image of the witch on a broomstick. So much so that poems on the region have since at least namechecked the trials one way or another (Billington, 1876).

More recently, Geraldine Monk, Blake Morrison and Camille Ralphs have recounted the trials so as to give a voice to their miswritten participants. The poems not only use historical research in their handling of the event, they also interrogate the process of history-making and writing history by experimenting with the poetic form and voice : multiple narratives, dialect writing, free spelling... are used to critically and creatively rewrite the Pendle trials. Besides, two of the collections are intermedial in nature and two are reconfigurations of former collections, thus calling into question the infallibility of the written word over other media. The use of prosopopeia or ventriloquism (Davies 2012) takes the form of an exorcism, the eviction of the evil forces of violent history by resorting to poetic experimentation and empathy.