

**Writing Back: Perceptions of Women in *Jane*
Eyre's and Charlotte Brontë's Fictional Afterlives**

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research in English Literature at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

Abstract

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has remained a playground for essentially different variations of adapting, revisioning and rewriting since its publication in 1847 until now. It can be read as a romance, in which Jane and Mr Rochester are finally reunited and married. However, it can also be interpreted as a novel that challenges and criticises power relations and class hierarchies. This thesis explores the intertextual relationship between the chosen neo-Victorian novels, *Charlotte* by D.M. Thomas and *Coldwater* by Mardi McConnochie in relation to their pretexts, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre*.

The aim of this thesis is to offer new ways in which to understand feminist and postcolonial theory within neo-Victorian rewritings. The focus of this analysis is on the development of the construction of Victorian womanhood presented in *Jane Eyre* and its impact on the twenty-first century perception of female characters. In order to explore how the representations of women as well as the approach of writing back have evolved within Neo-Victorian Studies, this project adopts an intertextual comparative approach. Neo-Victorian novels have reshaped the literary heroine due to feminist and postcolonial criticism while partly supporting the development of female stereotypes as well.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Since its publication in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has remained a playground for essentially different variations of adapting, revisioning and rewriting. Various critics such as Cora Kaplan have suggested that this is due to "its themes and rhetoric, which have summoned up the powerful politics of affect at the heart of gender and modernity" (*Victoriana* 7). When taking a look at the content of *Jane Eyre*, one may read it as a romance, in which Jane, the long-suffering heroine and the hero, Mr Rochester, who has brought suffering on himself, are finally reunited and married. However, it can also be interpreted as a novel that challenges and criticises power relations and class hierarchies. Although the protagonist Jane rises in class status and attains power at the end of the novel, the continuing inequalities concerning gender roles in the Victorian era are nevertheless pointed out. As Erica Hateley states: "*Jane Eyre* is clearly readable as one of the consistent motifs of our culture's self-representation" (1022). It has already been discussed that contemporary reworkings critically explore the ending of the novel in new ways (Schaff 29) and thus scrutinise Jane's abandonment of her rebellious characteristics in favour of the supposedly safe and conservative choice of getting married.

This thesis explores the intertextual relationships between two neo-Victorian novels, *Charlotte* by D.M. Thomas (2000) and *Coldwater* by Mardi McConnochie (2001) in relation to their pretexts, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and the original *Jane Eyre*. The aim of this thesis is to offer new ways in which to understand feminist and postcolonial theory in the context of neo-Victorian rewritings as well as to provide an evaluation of the development of and future for rewritings. Similarities and differences in the postcolonial and feminist perspectives of reading texts also imply how important it is to be aware of interdisciplinarity because of the distinctions of the two fields. The focus of this analysis lies on the development of the construction of Victorian womanhood presented in *Jane Eyre* and its

impact on twenty-first century perceptions of female characters. In order to explore how the representations of women as well as the approach of “writing back” have evolved within Neo-Victorian Studies, this project adopts an intertextual comparative approach.

Adrienne Rich defines the concept of rewriting as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (18). Thus, the rewriting of a work or theme suggests the need to look at the past in order to rethink positions and deal with mistakes. Hence, rewriting itself implies a retrospective look at a text and a further comparison thus makes it important to discuss the ideologies that are being challenged while writing back to the pretext. In using this method, authors are aiming to fill the gaps of a text in order to give those, mainly the female as well as the colonized, who have been left out, a voice. Jean Rhys’s postcolonial rewriting *Wide Sargasso Sea* is moreover understood as unconsciously introducing “a new literary movement whose very essence consisted in rethinking and rewriting Victorian myths and stories” (Gutleben 5). *Wide Sargasso Sea* has hence been described as one of the novels that founded Neo-Victorian Studies (Kohlke *Introduction* 3) and it can furthermore be regarded as an example for the approach of the “rewriting and reinterpreti[ng] of the Victorian” (Kaplan *Victoriana* 154). This thesis understands Rhys’s novel, which has moreover been canonised, as another equally important pretext for this analysis and comparison.

An additional scope is added to this project by considering the fact that “canonic texts from the past [...] have arguably been central to the construction of ‘our’ consciousness” (Widdowson 491), and that rewritings promote a reformulation of the perceptions of those who have been marginalised by those in the majority. While, for instance, women writers have been widely excluded from the literary canon (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2), the fascination with the method of writing back can be identified as an approach to reclaim a female past as well as an awareness of “authorship as a mode of resistance and self-determination” (Kapurch 96). However, as Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin argue, the

approach of engaging with the omitted stories of so-called madwomen has been over-proportionally used with “the risk of turning them into clichés” (5). This concern is linked back to the question of whether the approach of writing back still incorporates the postcolonial political agenda of rectifying history in order to “defeat ‘historylessness’ and regain an identity” (Widdowson 493). Rewritings have hence become a popular practice within Postcolonial Studies of “replacing colonialist images of difference with more empowering representations from the margins” (Mardorossian 7).

Apart from the impetus to engage with Victorian literature and “the multiple ways the nineteenth century is being recycled and deployed in present-day cultural discourses” (Bowler and Cox 1), the fascination with the Brontës themselves has further evolved. Ever since their discovery in the mid-nineteenth century, various academic scholars have approached the Brontë family from every conceivable field. Furthermore, their novels, in particular Charlotte’s novels and Emily’s *Wuthering*, have inspired writers to adapt or rewrite their plots centring around universal topics such as love and despair. Another reason for this, as Heather Glen states, appears to be that the works of the Brontë sisters “may seem all too easily accessible” (1). Thus, the fascination with their life and work has remained unaltered, although the reception of the three sisters and their position in the canon of literature has changed over the centuries¹. As Patsy Stoneman argues, “[r]eaders grouped by culture or historical period are likely to share responses” (216), consistent with the changes in literary taste over the centuries. The Brontës’ rather short lives and dramatic prose together with their supposed remoteness from the world and presumed resistance to their prevailing social standards, have helped create a “long tradition of bibliographical reading” (Glen 3) and in developing a space for a continuing “composite myth” (Stoneman 214). As Patricia Ingham points out, “[t]he first requirement for myth status is a story that is so compelling in its original form that it is endlessly reinterpreted according to the tastes and concerns of each

¹ Naturally, the three sisters have been compared and ranked, as they “broke upon the cultural scene as literary triplets” (Ingham 219). Neither their reputation nor that of their brother has remained unchanged over the centuries (Stoneman 231).

temporary society and the literary genre which captures them” (216). Thus, the reception as well as criticism of Charlotte Brontë, in particular, has developed in rather extreme ways over the centuries.

On the one hand, literary criticism constructs Charlotte Brontë as a “victimized Victorian woman perfected by human suffering” (Kirchknopf 109) based on her depiction by her friend and biographer Elisabeth Gaskell. On the other hand, contemporary perceptions vary from iconizing Charlotte Brontë and her work to deprecating both as shallow, unworldly or limited. This variety of different perceptions has thus further established the so-called Brontë Myth. Interestingly enough, Anne has only marginally become part of this myth. At the centre of the Brontë Myth, however, stands the “very dominance of the world's greatest love stories” (Stoneman 236): *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Nevertheless, feminists “have drawn new attention [...] to Anne] as a sharp-eyed, tough-minded critic of society” (Stoneman 231). Hence, it might be argued that the myth of the Brontë family can be linked to romanticisation and that Anne's prosaic and realistic view of society does not fit in with this picture.

The various and widely differing depictions of Charlotte's life furthermore continue to have “a significant effect on our interpretations of her work” (Bock 24). However, before Charlotte's female identity was revealed, critics did not imply connections between the author and the work, as they “rather stressed the writer's ability to engage the reader's attention and emotions” (Bock 24). In particular, Gaskell's biography of Charlotte evoked the identification of the author as the protagonist. The permanence of “vibrant and contemporary interpretations” (Ingham 244) in the field of Brontë Studies, moreover, underlines the need to continue research while focusing specifically on illustrating how gender-influenced power relations are connected to contemporary fiction concerned with *Jane Eyre*, and Charlotte Brontë herself. While there have been other postcolonial works which have been influenced by Charlotte's work or engage with *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well, only *Coldwater* and *Charlotte*

allude to, or even rewrite Charlotte herself. As this project is specifically interested in feminist and postcolonial readings of the selected novels and furthermore takes into account that Charlotte Brontë herself has been the basis for romanticisation, new ways to engage with the past as well as the future are offered.

Both *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* are highly aware of their intertextual as well as metafictional status. Even though Bertha Mason is evidently a minor character in the original plot, Rhys pays attention to Mr Rochester's first marriage and the cause of Bertha's eventual madness. *Coldwater* as well as *Charlotte* allude to and transform *Wide Sargasso Sea's* usage of madness in different ways, and can thus be argued to take the postcolonial and feminist reinterpretations of *Jane Eyre* even further. These narrative transformations will be highlighted and discussed as well as their representations of gender. Gender has been identified as the crucial link between the works, while comparing Charlotte Brontë's novel to her neo-Victorian successors, since the latter clearly encourages a debate about women's position in society then and now. As neo-Victorian literature can be defined as a comment on the past, the usage of metafiction and intertextuality is of special interest for the analysis. Hence, the chosen reworkings comment on gender constructions and explore dualisms such as fiction and reality, self and identity. Social injustices such as gender inequality can therefore be exemplified and identified as a main goal of these neo-Victorian reworkings.

Thus, the intertexts which are connected to *Jane Eyre* underline the wish to escape the gendered time and place of the female protagonists and imagine new possibilities as well as the urge for re-contextualisation. While analysing two different versions of reworkings of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well as Charlotte Brontë, I shall also discuss to what extent the perception of femininities within neo-Victorianism might influence its readerships and hence challenge understandings of feminism or post-feminism in general. As Molly Engelhardt argues, contemporary reworkings of *Jane Eyre* might “create potential re-readers whose lives and perspectives may be changed in unpredictable, even feminist, ways”

(143). This thesis thus aims to address the question of whether the process of 'writing back' can be regarded as a worthwhile approach in order to right the wrongs of the past, to subvert the literary canon and to highlight social inequalities.

In order to explore how the representation of women as well as the approach of writing back in relation to *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Brontë has evolved within Neo-Victorian Studies², this project will adopt a comparative approach. Critical readings of *Jane Eyre* as well as *Wide Sargasso Sea* will be provided in order to facilitate an analysis of their afterlives. Crucial for this thesis are the readings by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as well as Gayatri Spivak, who have discussed and influenced the analysis of both canonical novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* respectively. In a second step, the field of Neo-Victorian Studies will be situated within feminist and postcolonial theory while engaging with the impact of the concepts of metafiction and intertextuality. The pretexts will be situated within the field of Neo-Victorian Studies and methodology will provide the basis for the close readings of both neo-Victorian reworkings. *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* will then be compared, and the significance of these readings will be suggested. As re-contextualising the past aims at facilitating an understanding of both the Victorian culture and our contemporary society, this thesis hopes to provide clarity on what the perception of femininities within Neo-Victorian Studies signifies for the future of the process of rewriting.

² When referring to the field of study neo-Victorianism is written in capital letters.

Chapter 2. Locating the Pretexts

Jane Eyre

Elaine Showalter's and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal analyses of the novel have established *Jane Eyre* as an important text in feminist thinking (Kaplan *Victoriana* 23). As Elsie B. Michie argues, "it was as if *Jane Eyre* provided a key to the struggles not just of the Brontës but of other nineteenth-century women writers" (15). Gilbert and Gubar's influential reading of the novel has also introduced the figure of the madwoman who "rebel[s] against the strictures of patriarchal society" (Donaldson 11). The novel is furthermore regarded as one of the central works of Victorian literature and has been included in the British literary canon (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann 9). While the text is constructed as a coming-of-age novel as Charlotte Brontë imagines Jane as a poor orphan who finds employment as a governess, Jane's occupation furthermore serves as a link for those critics, who read Jane as Charlotte's alter ego. Charlotte herself worked as a teacher most of her life and her works centre on "characters that experience the [same] frustration of being dependent teachers" (Michie 7).

As a character Jane functions as a connection between working-class and upper-class, because of her occupation as a governess. The notion of Victorian femininity is thus blurred as women of the upper class were expected to live a domestic life without working, while the governess belonged to the working-class, which moreover ascribes a certain androgyny to the occupation. While interacting with men from the upper-class, governesses could however be regarded as strikingly sexual and transgressive figures, especially because of their "working against existing gender norms" (Godfrey 860) and thereby disturbing the "gendered Victorian separation of public and private spheres" (Schaff 27). Consequently, Kaplan argues that "[s]uch dramas were full of condensed meanings in excess of the representation of sexuality and sexual difference" ("Pandora's Box" 39). These sexual tensions can hence be exemplified by having a look at the relationship between Jane and Rochester as well as the obstacles that they have to overcome in order to be together.

The women with whom Jane becomes acquainted while staying and working at Thornfield Hall are either evidently feminine and, as Gilbert and Gubar believe, serve as “negative role-models” (350) for her, or they function as placeholders for patriarchal power such as the housekeeper Mrs Fairfax. However, Mr Rochester's ward Adèle as well as Blanche, the woman whom Mr Rochester uses to make Jane jealous, can be regarded as manipulated and weak-willed. Jane is the only woman who is able to free herself from Rochester “who has bought women, is willing to become a bigamist, and acts as a despot” (Zonana 172). However, Jane falls in love with Rochester, not because he is her master, but because he gives her the feeling of being equal, important, talented and intelligent. Hence, a reader must truly feel for Jane as her longing for self-determination and freedom seems to be an essential wish of every human being. As Mike Edwards points out, “Jane commands our sympathy as she struggles to overcome obstacle after obstacle to her happiness and development” (9).

Rochester and Jane's emotional equality can for instance be depicted when he admires her paintings. Jane herself has no doubt about this equality, as it is described during their first betrothal scene:

I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, or even of mortal flesh: - it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet equal, - as we are! (*JE*³ 292)

Nevertheless, she is almost a child in comparison with Rochester, who is twenty years her senior and, because of his secret marriage to Bertha and the presence of Adèle already sexually experienced. It is furthermore problematic that it takes a man to make her realize her own capabilities as it implies that a man has not only the power to control a woman's life but also her mind.

In spite of her desire for freedom and equality and his preference for her rebellious character traits, Rochester nevertheless tries to master Jane, for instance, as he dresses her as a

³ *Jane Eyre* will further be referred to as *JE*.

doll (*JE* 309). Rochester himself plays with the concept of gender as he dresses as an old woman in order to tell Jane her fortune (*JE* 225). While using tricks and disguises that give him a certain power, he thereby attempts to gain power over Jane. Jane, however, notices his disguise and confronts him: “I believe you have been trying to draw me out – or in; you have been talking nonsense in order to make me talk nonsense” (*JE* 234). Nevertheless, Jane is only an employee of Rochester and as Joyce Zonana illustrates, Rochester “commands and Jane is 'obliged' to obey” (168). This sultan-slave-motif (Zonana 179) contributes to the colonial aspect, which will be of further interest when analysing *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

However, Jane notices Rochester's behaviour towards women and is not willing to become one of his mistresses after his marriage to Bertha is revealed. In comparison to Rochester's wife, who was once a beautiful woman, Jane is described as being rather plain. Rochester's further neglect of Bertha can thereby give Jane a sense of what she herself could have become, if she were more attractive. This is due to the fact that although the novel “deconstructs ideals of beauty and the perfect body, it simultaneously is heavily invested in the notion of physiognomy, of reading moral character through facial features” (Donaldson 16). That Jane's outward appearance is described as plain is therefore another evidence for how the perception of the female characters is linked to their outward appearance or sexuality. Thus, Jane is constructed in comparison to beautiful women such as Blanche or Bertha. This further leads to the assumption that beauty represents the possibility to sexually master someone else as well as implies moral decay, which Rochester fears and therefore needs to suppress. Charlotte Brontë uses the accounts of Bertha's condemnable behaviour to make the reader empathise with Rochester's extreme action of locking her away.

Bertha is described as deriving from a family of “idiots and maniacs through three generations” (*JE* 337) and she is silenced as she is only described through the eyes of others. Her state of mind seems to serve as an explanation for why she ended up in the attic. Jane even defends Rochester after it is revealed that he has actually already been married and

thanks him for his good treatment of her. Although she decides to leave him, he yet does not evoke her anger, as might have been expected due to her courageous character and the fact that he has constantly betrayed her. Nevertheless, Jane must be seen as an emancipated woman, for her time, even though she does not try to help or even save Bertha from her imprisonment.

Jane is strong enough to leave Rochester as she has already demonstrated her frustration with her rather limited opportunities in comparison to men. Jane exclaims that:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (*JE* 129-130)

This paragraph is one of the very few moments in which the text overtly criticises the situation of women in society as well as invoking men to change this injustice by introducing equal rights, because women and men are basically already equal. This strong confidence in herself, despite Jane's weak outward appearance, may be seen as an illustration of why the novel still fascinates readers of the twentyfirst century and has led to its popularity in feminist discourse.

Nevertheless, it seems that Jane would only feel complete when being married herself as she describes herself: "Jane Eyre who had been an ardent, expectant woman – almost a bride – was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate" (*JE* 341). Not being married is thereby equal to the status of being a girl living a rather bleak life than a joyful one as a 'real' woman. But before Jane can be reunited with Rochester, she must first come to terms with her past in order to mature and to reach real equality with Rochester. Her flight from Thornfield Hall therefore proves to be the only possible solution in order for her to forget the horrors of her past as well as to enter into a content partnership with Rochester. Thus, Jane's chance meeting with Diana, Mary and St. John Rivers, who turn out

to be her relatives, reconciles her with her own past. The plot thus follows the conventions of a coming-of-age novel.

Jane refuses St. John's attempt to marry her in order to assist him during his missionary work in India. For her, accompanying him as a partner would be an option, but marrying without love, is clearly not (*JE* 447). After she hears Rochester's voice, calling out for her, she leaves her family and returns to Thornfield Hall (*JE* 515). She must however find out that Bertha has destroyed the house by setting it on fire, killed herself by jumping off the roof and thereby leaving Rochester a poor and blinded man as he has tried to save Bertha. Though one may interpret Rochester as a man who suppresses women and thus stands for patriarchy, one must nevertheless acknowledge his ambition to save Bertha, which causes his blindness. This disability can furthermore be interpreted as a punishment for his mistakes, such as the attempted polygamy in the past. The development of the plot implies poetic justice as Jane inherits a fortune from her uncle and is now socially equal to Rochester, although she appears to possess power over him by taking care of him.

Though finally achieving independence, Jane finds her own happiness in being married to Mr Rochester. On the one hand, it is clear that Jane longs for the equality of men and women and emphasises the opportunity for women to become independent to a certain extent. On the other hand, however, it has been pointed out that she cannot yet be regarded as revolutionary, since Jane believes in traditions such as the right fulfilment of the relationship between men and women in marriage. The conventional ending of the novel has thus caused disagreement among feminist critics, as they do not interpret the end of the novel as Jane's final achievement of freedom and mastery of patriarchal hierarchies but as a further entrapment. Some feminist critics even complain that "[t]he heterosexual nexus of passion, power and force is the sexist basis of rapist ideology and this is, in the end, all the action Jane ever finds" (Duncker 27) as she gives up her independence by marrying.

Jane's rebellious features, her angry behaviour as a child as well as her hunger for

equality have been praised by “feminist readings, such as those of Elaine Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar” (Tonkin 122). While earlier critics have hence interpreted her as a feminist forerunner, more recent critics read Jane “as a battleground where readers can detect the play of conflicting impulses” (Michie 17). Jane’s complex and sometimes even paradoxical characteristics are thus exemplified and celebrated. Furthermore, as Kaplan states, Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar “consider the role of Bertha Mason, but none find in the representation of Rochester’s mad white Creole wife the disturbing discourse of race and empire that would concern critics only a few years later” (*Victoriana* 24). The reading of Bertha as Jane’s double has hence been neglected by critics as it is “limited to the constraints placed on the personal advancement of the heroine-narrator, without wider application to the oppression of class or race” (Tonkin 122). The character of Bertha is a catalyst for the cause of the plot but she is still marginalised as she can simply be killed off after having accomplished her ‘purpose’.

Wide Sargasso Sea

The postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre*, which discusses the omission of Bertha's story as well as the source for Jane's inheritance, is certainly only possible since contemporary readers apply a different ideological perspective and historical knowledge to the text. This is a problem, which Charlotte Brontë, whose intention seems to have been purely to tell the coming-of-age story of a young governess, was not aware of (McLeod 157). Furthermore, this discussion serves as the starting point for Rhys's reworking. Rhys herself has stated that she “was convinced Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* viii-ix). As Wolfgang G. Müller points out, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is intended as a critique and revision of *Jane Eyre* (63) and centres on Rochester's first marriage and the cause of Bertha's eventual madness. Hence, “[t]he relationship between Brontë's Victorian classic and Rhys's post-colonial classic raises fundamental questions concerning intertextuality and its ideological implications” (Müller 63).

It has been argued that Rhys established an emancipated female character at the expense of the character of Rochester (McLeod 167). As Angela M. Thum states: “Rhys is calling for a reinterpretation both of Brontë's novel and of the attitudes of British colonialist male” (148). Rochester's name is never mentioned throughout the novel, which can be seen as a way to silence him and thereby sacrificing his identity. However, it will be Rochester, who in the cause of the plot renames Antoinette as Bertha. The ability to name someone thus implies power over them, and is furthermore linked to the construction as well as deconstruction of identities. To have a name thus suggests to have an identity. Although her heroine is considered as a personification of a contemporary protest against male domination, critics are uncertain whether to call Rhys a feminist or not (Carr 11-12). Feminist critics especially did not welcome her work unequivocally. Furthermore, Rhys's ambition to write back the story of Antoinette does not yet involve the option of necessarily altering the ending

of *Jane Eyre*. Keeping the fairy-tale-like ending of this novel in mind, Jean Rhys clearly wanted to rewrite the story to show another possible view of the actions that lead to Bertha's imprisonment and to give her her voice back, as she never speaks directly raises it throughout *Jane Eyre*. The fact that Bertha's voice is rather ascribed by someone else than reclaimed by herself is, however, also problematic and although Spivak is sympathetic with the approach, she furthermore disagrees with the possibility that rewriting offers the ability to reclaim one's own voice through someone else.

The worldview of the male colonialist is demonstrated through Mr Rochester's ambition to come to Jamaica was to get married to a wealthy woman. It has been his father's plan and though being an adult, his own opinion seems to have been without any interest. As he imagines writing to his father: "No begging letters no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son" (*WSS*⁴ 39). Rochester thus tries to establish his own independence from his father while depending on Antoinette's fortune. As Robert Kendrick argues, this is ironic in itself as "the very means by which Rochester would establish himself as a mature subject results in his inability to do so" (241). His idea of society is clearly not restricted to the profit-making of the colonies (McLeod 7). His colonialist attitudes can also be seen as one of the important features that influence Rochester's and Bertha's relationship. As John McLeod points out, "[u]nder colonialism, a colonised people are made subservient to ways of regarding the world which reflect and support colonialist values" (19). Thus, the oppressive hierarchies and cultural differences are already implied before Rochester and Antoinette even get married. Antoinette does, according to her state of in-betweenness (Thum 161), foreshadow further complications and does not agree to marry him right from the start. Rochester, however, tries to comfort her in promising her "peace, happiness, and safety" (*WSS* 46), but he will "not accept her as an unconditionally loved equal" (Kendrick 240). After marrying Antoinette, he gets more and more used to her, but he is not able to truly understand her due to their differences in race, class and gender.

⁴ *Wide Sargasso Sea* will further be referred to as *WSS*.

At first they are driven towards each other, evolving a wild passion, but their honeymoon turns out to be a disaster, although Rochester promises her that he will not take away their shared happiness. Additionally, Rochester is agitated by jealousy, as rumours of a previous affair between his wife with her half cousin reach him. Although he refuses to pay Daniel Cosway for telling him 'true' stories about his wife's past and her family, he nonetheless turns away from Antoinette. Her sexual desire is presented as an unnatural behaviour and one of the factors that causes a madness equal to that of her mother's. To have some kind of revenge for her supposed affair, Rochester furthermore has sexual intercourse with one of the black female servants close to the window of his wife's bedroom. Thus, Rochester intends to hurt his wife, as he is not truly interested in the servant. This incident furthermore reveals his misogynist mindset and racially motivated oppression as he uses another woman, who is racialized, in order to feel better. The servant's race serves another indicator for the oppressive, colonialist attitudes of Rochester. This moreover underlines his inability to reflect on his behaviour as well his double standards as he is allowed to betray his wife.

The fact that their relationship is deeply influenced by power is furthermore foregrounded by the text. Rochester is conscious of his own lack of power as he admits: "She has bought me" (*WSS* 39). The servants are further aware of this, which appears to be even more humiliating for him (*WSS* 36). Rochester has caught a fever shortly after his arrival in the Caribbean and convinces himself that he has actually been out of his mind when he agreed to marry Antoinette (*WSS* 38). This fever also serves as an explanation for his behaviour whenever he loses control. His desperate attempt to regain control logically leads to anger towards his wife as he regards Antoinette as the root of his problems. Feeling disturbed by his financial lack of power as well as self-control, he will consequently not allow any tenderness towards her, he continues to desire her sexually.

The cultural misunderstanding must be seen as working both ways, as the text suggests that they will never be part of the other's culture and society. This cross-cultural problem is even more complicated when looking at Antoinette's ethnicity. She is creole but of English descent (*WSS* 37), which results in a state of in-betweenness as she has no real place in either societies. Her status as a “white creole” also makes it easy for critics to use her for various interpretations of her ethnicity:

In the eyes of the ex-slaves she is a “white cock-roach” (63), in those of the new white colonisers she is the “white nigger”, for Christophine, she is *béké* (the patois term for white) and *not béké* (100) and her husband observes that she is “a lunatic that always knows the time. But never does” (107). (Arizti 44)

The failure of their relationship results in Rochester's inability to understand her attachment to her home and close relationship with her black people such as Christophine. His incompetence in understanding the landscape equals his misunderstanding of Antoinette and her identity. He describes the landscape as follows: “It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness” (*WSS* 52). He further says about his wife: “I felt little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (*WSS* 56). Hence, both the landscape and his wife are depicted as beautiful but remain foreign and strange to him. This lack of comprehension as well as the awareness of it thus inevitably leads to hatred. Rochester states, that “[a]bove all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness” (*WSS* 112). This absence of understanding between cultures is furthermore inherent to the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. As McLeod argues, “[t]he cultural values of the colonised peoples are deemed as lacking in value, or even as being ‘uncivilised’, from which they must be rescued” (19).

Rochester sacrifices Antoinette, when turns her home into a place that she hates as she has been taken away from her beloved home and decides to return to England. While trying to control her, for instance, by renaming her Bertha, Rochester is in fact the reason why Antoinette finally seems to be turning mad (*WSS* 108). Thus, Antoinette's madness can indeed

be seen as the consequence of emotional abandonment. Madness has furthermore been ascribed to women in order to underline the “patriarchal logic[,] which argues that men are essentially rational and that women are essentially outside of rationality so defined” (Allen 152). Furthermore, Antoinette is aware of Rochester’s attempt of regaining power and notices how he robs her of her identity as she says: “Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass” (*WSS* 116). But though Rochester aims at locking her away in order to forget her and turn her into a mere memory, it is Rhys who ensures that this will not happen as she tells Antoinette's story in a way that makes it impossible to forget, the story behind the madwoman in the attic.

In the last part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester seems to have achieved his goal of breaking her, as Antoinette has turned into a ghost that has lost everything: her husband, money and above all, her freedom. When Rochester accuses her for having no right to speak for him, Antoinette simply answers: “No I had no right, I am sorry. I don't understand you. I know nothing about you, and I cannot speak for you...” (*WSS* 112). It appears as if she has lost all of her willpower. She is moreover aware of his power over her and rather cynically labels her imprisonment as protection: “After all the house is big and safe, a shelter from the world outside which, say what you like, can be a black and cruel world to a woman” (*WSS* 115). Rhys thus refers back to Victorian ideals of women being confined to the domestic sphere. It seems as if Antoinette has given in to Rochester’s perception of what a woman should and should not do. By committing suicide, Antoinette imagines returning back to her childhood while dreaming of it, which Rochester has stolen from her when taking her to England (*WSS* 122-23). She can hence be regarded as reclaiming her past as well as choosing her own future. Bertha's action in *Jane Eyre* may thus retrospectively be judged as the only option left for her of freeing herself of patriarchy. However, this also implies the existence of

a social order such as patriarchy in the first place. While Antoinette is somehow able to break free, society, however, remains the same.

Hence, Rhys's version does not rewrite *Jane Eyre*'s ending, but follows its footsteps in foreshadowing Bertha's tragic end, as Antoinette dreams of herself as setting a fire and jumping off the roof of Thornfield Hall. Susan Meyer furthermore interprets Bertha's burning down of Thornfield Hall as an important device for the development of the story. Her destruction of the house redistributes wealth and equalizes gender power, and it does so by cleaning away Bertha, "the staining [dark] woman who has represented oppression" (Meyer 91). This way of cleaning indicates the formation of a new healthy environment as the alternative to oppression. Nevertheless, the reader has to imagine whether this action will actually take place in the future or whether it will only remain a nightmare.

However, although Rhys wanted to give Bertha her own voice back, Antoinette/Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* still ends up in Thornfield Hall's attic and imagines her own suicide. Thus, Rhys's goal is not entirely achieved as Antoinette's only way out is to commit suicide. Nevertheless, the viewpoint of the narrative takes the reader right into the action of the plot and thus enables the reader to experience "the point of view of a colonial subject, who is doubly or even triply 'other' to the British audience of Brontë's fiction: 'mad', a woman, a mulatto colonial subject" (Allen 151). It is hence the reader's experience that will enable Bertha not to break free but to be acknowledged as a human being and not as a metaphor or double for Jane or even as an animal.

Chapter 3. Situating Neo-Victorian Studies within Feminist and Postcolonial Theory

In order to facilitate the following analyses of my chosen texts, the field of neo-Victorianism as well as its relation to feminism and postcolonialism needs to be discussed in more detail. Neo-Victorian Studies is a relatively new and still emerging academic discipline, which has developed out of Victorian Studies and in “response to the prevalence of neo-Victorian work within popular culture” (Bowler and Cox 6). Neo-Victorianism is such a broad and recent field that it remains to be seen what “properly belongs *in* and *to* it” (Kohlke *Introduction* 1, emphasis in original). Ann Heilman and Mark Llewellyn’s *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century 1999-2009*, which was published in 2010, is the most comprehensive discussion about Neo-Victorianism up to date. The interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed online journal, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, was, furthermore, only founded in 2008.

As its founder, Marie-Luise Kohlke, proposes, “fictionalised biographies or re-imagined memoirs” (*Introduction* 6) form one of the various trends within neo-Victorianism. As Heilman and Llewellyn point out, the mixture of facts and fiction “brings forward questions about the appropriation of ‘real’ Victorian lives into creative texts, and the nature of authenticity in this process” (19). This use of fictionalised biographies is furthermore important for the analyses of *Coldwater* and *Charlotte*. Romantic representations of the Brontë sisters such as “[t]hree solitary figures, struggling against the wind” (Stoneman 214) and the “very dominance of the world’s greatest love stories” (Stoneman 234) that they wrote have helped to establish the Brontë Myth. By treating the Brontës as fictional characters and thus as “figments of a shared cultural imagination opens up new possibilities but also additional dimensions and tensions” (Heilman and Llewellyn 20) concerning the authenticity of neo-Victorian novels. Thomas and McConnochie, therefore, add new material to the Brontë Myth.

Jane Eyre has been recycled in every possible way; however, most analyses neither

include intertextual strategies nor their aims as a basis. Julia Kristeva's term intertextuality implies that "[a]uthors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts" (Allen 35). Thus, rewritings make use of the concept of intertextuality in order to "produc[e] a clash of fictional worlds which [...] is clearly intended to have profound cultural and ideological reverberations" (Müller 65). Rewritings are hence "self-conscious about their metafictional intertextuality" (Widdowson 496). Although generally controversial, a certain distinction between the readership of neo-Victorian literature has to be made. Those who are aware of the intertextual and metafictional network will interpret the rewritings differently as they are able to unpack the underlying connections to another extent. The challenge for the reader is hence "to find constructive and illuminating ways" (Allen 149) of analysing intertextual literature. One can furthermore argue that this issue of knowledge is also an issue based on gender, as a female reader might pay attention to different aspects than a male reader. As Eleonora Federici points out, "the reader chooses his own path through the story, and he does so according to his literary and cultural encyclopaedia" (93). Patricia Waugh furthermore states, that "[m]etafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2).

The awareness for both metafiction and intertextuality implies that the reader has knowledge of various other significant texts, which are important to uncover the connections and differences between the used texts. As Heilman and Llewellyn propose, "[t]his differentiation into diverse reading experiences [...] is prompted by the games-playing of the novels themselves" (18). The neo-Victorian works thus play with the reader as he/she has to distinguish between fact and fiction and therefore open up new possibilities for re-reading or re-interpreting. A rewriting furthermore forces the reader "to recall how the pre-text had it and how the re-vision reinfects this" (Widdowson 502). It is hence implied that the reader himself/herself rewrites the pretext according to his/her interpretation of the pretext as well as

the rewriting of it. In order to deconstruct, for instance, romantic notions, “[t]he intertextual networks [...] offer a dialogue between works, as well as the potential for renewed or revised perspectives on the earlier texts and cultural moments of their original production” (Bowler and Cox 4). This dialogue between the Victorian and neo-Victorian novels is understood as vital in discussing how the perception of women as well as the process of rewriting has changed.

The focus of my thesis lies on neo-Victorian fiction, which is deliberately set within the Victorian era. Neo-Victorian fiction also makes use of the approach of writing back in the way that the novels seek to represent marginalised voices and sexualities as well as postcolonial criticism (Kohlke *Introduction* 3; Llewellyn 65). The genre can hence be described as expanding into a sub-genre of historical fiction or arguable even historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction "refutes the view that only history has a truth claim" (93) and thus implies that literature can be regarded as a site for alternative memory. The metafictional aspect of neo-Victorian novels thus underlines its critical and self-conscious ability. Two key-thinkers within the field of neo-Victorianism, Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, state that neo-Victorian criticism provides a thoroughgoing basis for new insights, as it "avoids the nostalgic imprisonment in the past and performs its ethico-political duty for the future" (Kohlke and Gutleben 22). Kohlke furthermore argues that literary works “act as conduit of and to the nineteenth-century past for current and future generations” (13). Neo-Victorian rewritings therefore fill a gap between Victorian and contemporary literature as they celebrate as well as criticise the Victorian era while attempting to reformulate perceptions of those who have been or are being marginalised. However, this form of correcting the past entails the dangers of oversimplifying and romanticising, as will be analysed in the subsequent chapters.

The marginalised or limited role of women in history and society is a particularly common agenda of neo-Victorian fiction. Even though the position of women in society has

significantly changed, the notion that our contemporary society, which is often referred to as a postfeminist period, is an actual time after feminism needs to be rejected. As McDonald and Goggin point out, “debates over whether feminism – and/or society- has moved forward or backward, and how hierarchies are preserved by those in power [...] are still very much alive today” (4). As has already been suggested, the rewriting of marginalised female characters has, however, been overused within the neo-Victorian genre as critics have become aware of this “persistence of these tired tropes” (McDonald and Goggin 5). Neo-Victorian literature is defined as a self-conscious method of rewriting (Heilman and Llewellyn 4) and furthermore draws a “treacherous line between sexual and political critique and voyeuristic impulses” (McDonald and Goggin 5), the overuse of, for instance, madwomen within the genre can thus be regarded as a self-conscious method of rewriting, and a critique in itself.

Thus, the sexualisation of the Victorians can be interpreted as a critique of our supposedly “enlightened stance towards sexual liberation and social progress” (Kohlke *Sexsation* 56). The term Orientalism was originally coined by Edward Said, who defined it as “a means of appropriation, of asserting discursive, symbolic, and political power over the Other” (Kohlke *Sexsation* 68). The emergence of a new form of Orientalism therefore implies that our contemporary society is far from being sexually liberated as we keep on gazing at and exploiting bodies in a voyeuristic manner. Kohlke furthermore reads this sexualisation as a new form of Orientalism (*Sexsation* 67) and sex tourism, for instance, can hence be read as a return of oppression. Tourism itself has also been discussed as a modern way of perpetuating former colonialist structures within Postcolonial Studies⁵.

Incest, which is a recurring theme in both *Charlotte* and *Coldwater*, is one of the many prohibited forms of sexualities that are presented in neo-Victorian novels in general. The description of sexuality in neo-Victorian works can be argued to parody “our cultural obsession with sexuality” (Kohlke *Sexsation* 61) while at the same time retrospectively criticising gender, race and/or class relations within the Victorian era. However, these

⁵ See further: Jamaica Kincaid: *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000.

descriptions of sexuality also entail the danger of down playing or even romanticising, for instance, incest. The length of this thesis does not allow for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the incest theme in literature. However, as Jane M. Ford indicates, one of the major laws that enabled the persecution of incest coincided with the Victorian era as the “Punishment of Incest Act was passed in 1908” (12). It needs to be pointed out that “incest between fathers and daughters, [...] constitutes abuse of power and authority and is a more traumatic experience for the female participant” (Ford 3). In an act of attempting to impose patriarchal structures, the daughter is isolated from potential suitors and “deprived of her prerogative of a natural, progressive maturation, of the opportunity for sexual participation when she is ready for it, and of freedom of choice” (Ford 9). As a consequence, “the victims of incest grow up to become archetypally feminine women: sexy without enjoying sex, repeatedly victimized yet repeatedly seeking to lose themselves in the love of an overpowering man” (Herman quoted in Ford 9). The tyrannical father and the absent mother are thus common factors when the incest theme is being used in literature. One well-known play by William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, makes use of the incest theme (Ford 47-53) and this play not only serves as another pretext for *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* but has also gained particular interest within the field of Postcolonial Studies.

Said has argued that although colonies were important for the cause of the plot of Victorian novels due to financial reasons, their political situation nevertheless remained meaningless to the colonizers at the same time⁶. Thus, various rewritings of *The Tempest* reuse the relationship of Prospero with his servants Caliban and Ariel in order to reveal the oppression of the colonizer on the colonized⁷. Furthermore, Said is not the only postcolonial theorist with whom the neo-Victorian works are concerned. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak argues that the subaltern and women in particular remain voiceless. The

⁶ See further: Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds.: *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

⁷ See further: Bill Ashcroft: *Caliban's voice. The transformation of English in post-colonial literatures*. New York & London: Routledge, 2009.

notion that women “have been silenced by, and largely excluded from, literary history” (Eagleton 1) has become a concern of feminists since the 1970s. While trying to establish a female literary tradition, contradictory viewpoints among feminist scholars were furthermore revealed. As Mary Eagleton points out, “how can feminism speak of the relentless silencing of women while at the same time maintaining that there is a formidable tradition to uncover [...] [and] how can feminism claim a rich plurality of female voices and then produce a rather narrow and homogenous literary heritage [...]?” (2-3). Consequently, Spivak is also influenced by this concern. Although she sympathises with the approach of ‘writing back’, she also points out that white women cannot speak for coloured women.

By alluding to concepts of postcolonial theorists such as otherness, Thomas and McConnochie nevertheless follow the approach to rewrite marginalised characters but also give voice to those who are in charge such as the fictional overseer Captain Wolf in *Coldwater*, who is among others based on Patrick Brontë. As Bowler and Cox argue, for neo-Victorian works the “echoing of voices and ideas performs an intertextual weaving with the present moment and exhibits a simultaneous recognition of and departure from that past” (3). Hence, Neo-Victorianism offers the possibility to come to terms with diverse viewpoints and dominant ideologies at specific points in time. The blurred neo-Victorian status of combining both, postmodern and Victorian ideas, thus proves an excellent basis for the subsequent discussion.

Although Jean Rhys's novel is about a male-female relationship it is also a novel about the relation of England to its colonies. Rhy's reading of *Jane Eyre* is clearly influenced by postcolonialism, which engages with “the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects” (Quayson 2). Feminism as well as postcolonialism are concerned with the social ills and oppressions of women and colonised people. While Rhys's aim was to give the madwoman in the attic of *Jane Eyre* her voice back, *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* use the reclaiming of a voice through the act of writing. *Charlotte*'s protagonist Miranda does so

while writing a fake autobiographical ending for *Jane Eyre*, and *Coldwater*'s Charlotte while writing *Jane Eyre* itself. Social injustices such as gender inequality and class hierarchies can hence be exemplified and identified. However, *Charlotte's* main character Miranda, like *Coldwater's* protagonist Charlotte, is a white female character. They incorporate the power of the coloniser while at the same time being oppressed by patriarchal attitudes.

While looking at how the perceptions of female characters within the neo-Victorian scope of Charlotte Brontë's fictional afterlives have altered over the course of time since Jean Rhys's influential postcolonial rewriting *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966, it is necessary to analyse gender relations as well as the treatment of the 'other'. The term 'other' implies the existence of binary oppositions, which have been criticised "because of the way in which one term is privileged over the other" (Bolt 33). However, Bertha functions as the mad 'other', which needs to be locked up. Through Rhys's reinterpretation, the interpretation of the character has changed. This is furthermore due to the fact that "cultural thinking about psychiatry, mental illness, and the asylum [has changed] from the late 1960s to the present" (Donaldson 12). As Elizabeth M. Donaldson states, Bertha's/Antoinette's burning of Thornfield Hall was influenced by this change and madness was suddenly read and romanticised as rebellion (12-13). However, "madness itself offered women little possibility for true resistance or productive rebellion" (Donaldson 14). Although the usage of madness as metaphor might at first appear as positive, it "indirectly diminishes the lived experience of many people disabled by mental health" (Donaldson 15).

The postcolonial and feminist lenses through which the novels will be read, compared and analysed already imply that the thesis is interdisciplinary although it is situated in the field of literary studies. Nevertheless, literary studies themselves are understood to be inherently interdisciplinary, as the disciplines of History, Gender Studies, Sociology and Cultural Studies have influenced postcolonialism and feminism. Hence, one must be aware of the different approaches and disciplines while making an intertextual comparison of the

novels in order to point out how *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* seek to rewrite and to understand *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and how these rewritings have hence affected the perceptions of female characters.

Textual analyses and particularly those that are influenced by intertextuality and metafiction, require knowledge that is not simply based on the texts themselves. Gender studies, which have been influenced by both feminism and history, need to be taken into consideration while examining the perceptions of women. As Susan Kingsley Kent argues, “women's history could only provide a partial view of women's lives if it did not take gender - the interrelationships of male and female - into account” (49). Our understanding of femininities is thus affected by the relationships, or rather power relations, of the characters, and links back to the depiction of women. Feminist literary criticism uses feminist thought as a lens to interpret literature and its reception. The aim of feminist literary critics is furthermore to understand gender roles and power relations. It should, however, be pointed out that a distinction must be made between literature that can be read and interpreted as feminist and literature that is intended by its authors to be feminist. Contemporary authors such as Mardi McConnochie and D.M. Thomas have been influenced by the ideas of feminism in particular. And this can be seen in their treatment of Brontë's work.

When comparing how *Coldwater* and *Charlotte* rewrite both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, their use of madness, sexuality, perception of women and the 'other' as well as their intertextual and metafictional interweaving of the pretexts with the fictionalised biography of Charlotte need to be taken into consideration. Thomas's and McConnochie's approaches are quite different. *Charlotte* like *Coldwater* is a highly complex rewriting that uses various intertexts like *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and furthermore interweaves a fictional sequel of *Jane Eyre* with the story of its author Miranda, who is a feminist and Victorian scholar. As the novels draw attention to the fact that they are art, readers are challenged to deconstruct their actual meaning and intention. The use of Charlotte Brontë's

life aims at ironically playing with the Brontë Myth as neo-Victorian fiction acknowledges both: the appreciation and the rejection of her as a literal genius.

Chapter 4. Classifying and Relocating Neo-Victorian Novels

Charlotte

D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* has a bi-partite structure involving a Victorian plot and a contemporary plot. The Victorian part carries on where *Jane Eyre* concluded, while the contemporary section centres on Miranda's life in 1999. However, Thomas "places the metafictional issue of re-writing at the heart" (Detmers 94) of his work, so that it instantly becomes apparent that this is meant rather as a radical commentary on both periods than simply a sequel. Thomas's first chapter appears to be Jane's diary while actually reusing or even plagiarizing essential parts of the last chapter of Charlotte Brontë's novel: "READER, I MARRIED HIM. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present" (*Charlotte* 7, emphasis in original). However, Thomas's borrowing of original material from *Jane Eyre* eventually becomes less evident and provides a basis for Thomas's more subversive approach, as will be further discussed. These borrowings become, however, only evident for a knowledgeable reader.

In contrasting *Jane Eyre*'s Victorian codes with social and sexual 'otherness', Thomas challenges preconceptions, both within and of the nineteenth century. Jane's diary, for instance, includes accounts of her sexual encounters. Thus, Thomas follows both the contemporary misconceptions about repressed sexualities in the Victorian era, as well as blatant ignorance as Jane wonders, "how the husband's ... finger can convey the male seed into the womb" (*Charlotte* 42). This leads her interlocutor, Jane's former teacher Miss Temple, who is now a married Maria Ashford to the exclamation: "Oh, my poor innocent Jane Eyre!" (*Charlotte* 42). This section implies Jane's naivety even according to Victorian standards. It furthermore clearly contradicts *Jane Eyre*'s depiction of Jane and Rochester's happy ending that even includes the production of children. Thomas's Jane and her perception of sex are thus ridiculed, while at the same time shifting *Charlotte* into an overt critique.

In Thomas's version, Jane suffers through an unconsummated marriage, as she does

not sexually arouse Rochester. She is, however, freed of her bleak married life when Rochester dies in a horse-riding accident. Thomas herein alludes to a possible unstable condition of Rochester as he suggests that Rochester “made a suicide attempt” (*Charlotte* 50) after Bertha’s burning down Thornfield Hall. Facing financial problems, Jane is, hence, left in a devastated situation until she meets Grace Poole and realises that she might have inherited further wealth tied up in the Caribbean. Thomas therefore introduces a seemingly unlikely sisterhood as Jane and Grace end up traveling to the West Indies together. This incident is also linked to an intertextual reference of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as Jane describes herself as dreaming “like Ariel, like Caliban, of freedom [...] [and] obsess[ing] with sailing towards the setting sun” (*Charlotte* 66). While in Victorian times the Caribbean implied oppression for non-white people, they are yet depicted as Jane’s ultimate destination for independence.

Another frequently used narrative device by Thomas is his insertion of metafictional comments:

No novel, whether a virile, rumbustious concoction by Mr Fielding, an urbane social comedy by Miss Austen or – dare I say it? – a gloomy, muffled romance by one of the Miss Brontës, can be more than a feeble echo of what actually occurs to all of us (*Charlotte* 36-7).

Thomas’s Jane overtly criticizes Jane’s original author for her romantic illusions and in Miranda’s eyes Charlotte Brontë, is an “extraordinary liar” (*Charlotte* 118). Miranda goes on to hint at Oscar Wilde’s essay “The Decay of Lying” as she continues: “Not all novelists are liars; the further a novelist departs from reality as we experience it, the less of a liar he or she is.” (*Charlotte* 118) Miranda furthermore reveals her own generalising perception of Charlotte Brontë. Thomas thus clearly alludes to the phenomenon of the Brontë Myth as Miranda follows the prevailing romantic misconception that *Jane Eyre* is indeed Brontë’s own story. Another problem that arises is the denial of Charlotte Brontë’s ability to master a fictional autobiography. As Carol Bock suggests, “[g]ranting that Brontë was in control of her art also significantly affects our understanding of the role we are to play as readers of her work” (34).

Trusting Charlotte Brontë's talent to write about something that she has not experienced herself implies that her novel is indeed fiction rather than an actual autobiographical account. This moreover opens up the possibility for a female tradition in writing art and challenges the reader to deconstruct underlying social implications and to participate in the interpretation of these.

Thomas continues to subvert Victorian codes not only within the contemporary frame of his novel but furthermore as part of his Victorian plot. Thus, in another metafictional passage, Jane goes on to further challenge the romantic ideals of the reader:

Reader, this is a very different picture of my marriage from that which you were presented with in what I would call my 'romantic' version. Reality, however, does not often coincide with romance. I will remind you: 'When his firstborn was put into his arms, he could see the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were – large, brilliant, and black...' Well, events did not quite happen like that. (*Charlotte* 44)

Rochester's regaining of his sight, as well as the ending of *Jane Eyre*, are presented as wishful thinking as well as unrealistic by the reader. The existence of romance is thus furthermore denied and ridiculed. *Charlotte*, is also clearly not intended to be read literally and it comes as no surprise that Jane's diary turns out to be written by Thomas's contemporary heroine, Miranda, thus revealing Miranda as the real fraud.

Charlotte also acknowledges the influence of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and even pays "tribute to [the novel][...], as a brilliant exploration of Bertha" (*Charlotte* 119). Moreover, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only used as another source text but Jean Rhys herself is introduced as an acquaintance and possible sex partner of Miranda's father Ben, as well as Miranda's own starting point for her fictional account. Miranda states that, "I have a moral problem about *Jane Eyre*. [...] I'm going to take [...] [Jane] to Martinique" (*Charlotte* 151). Miranda's idea of her alternative version for Jane thus recalls Rhys's intention for rewriting *Jane Eyre*. Although Thomas follows the path of neo-Victorian novels in trying to rectify Bertha's marginalised position, she does not become a major character as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Thomas's account of Bertha's story is moreover contradictory. On the one hand, Rochester is

depicted as a brutal husband who started beating her after giving birth to their son, not unlike his depiction in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. On the other hand, while partly following Brontë's account, Bertha is depicted as violent and unfaithful.

However, Brontë's indirect condemnation of the lunatic 'other' in the form of Bertha is criticised by celebrating an interracial relationship instead. Robert Rochester, whom Thomas introduces as the abandoned black creole son of Bertha and Rochester, is "a freeborn Negro" (*Charlotte* 160). His parents abandoned him because of his skin colour, as it is described as a "great shock for both of them" (*Charlotte* 190). His birth therefore led to Bertha's miserable life, as she could not be considered as white anymore. Robert, however, turns out to live a happy life and even asks Jane to marry him, while *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha is confined to a life in the attic and Thomas's Bertha has to endure the marital rapes of her husband. Hence, Thomas undermines Victorian ideals, as *Charlotte*'s only blissful relationship appears to be that of Jane and Robert. Thomas's intertextual examination of *Jane Eyre* becomes a basis for social critique of nineteenth century representations of the 'other' or rather gendered and racial relationships.

All of Miranda's actions seem to be meaningless. She sleeps with every man she meets and tends to deceive everyone. As Christian Gutleben states, "[t]he acknowledgement of the counterfeited nature of the Victorian pastiche may then well be a self-conscious commentary on the very function of retro-Victorian fiction as an escape from and a compensation for the contemporary malaise" (180). In a world in which nothing seems to be of value anymore, this malaise is further inherent in the depiction of Thomas's main character. Just like the protagonist of Thomas's novel *The White Hotel*, "[her] experiences do not entail knowledge or understanding, on the contrary, in contradiction with the most common conventions of our humanist, rationalist culture, they underline the heroine's sense of redundancy and pointlessness" (Gutleben 181). (indent) This perception of seemingly impossible advancement within contemporary society is for instance evident when Miranda is

asked how she would picture Charlotte Brontë if she were living today. Her answer is as follows:

Yes, I think she might have followed a similar track. She'd have read English, probably, gone to London, taken a Ph.D. – which might have interfered with her creativity. She'd have married ... [...] she might by now be on her second marriage, or be divorced and bring up a couple of children of her own! Who can tell? She'd probably, like me, be teaching in a university. In other words, she'd be a much less interesting person. (*Charlotte* 121)

In this rather nostalgic account, Miranda celebrates Charlotte Brontë as an important author of her own era but clearly cannot imagine the same fate for her if Charlotte were contemporary. It almost seems as if Miranda is longing to live in the Victorian era precisely because women did not have the same choices and opportunities that they have today. Charlotte Brontë's enduring popularity and success appears to be linked to her then ground-breaking work. If written today, *Jane Eyre* would, however, not have the same effect as it eventually had. Due to our ever-changing world and society, the approach to mental illness has for instance significantly changed since the nineteenth century until today. Miranda's perception of the nineteenth century is indeed more hopeful than her rather bleak notion of her own times. With this perspective, our contemporary society seems to offer nothing but stagnation and Miranda's own state of being is described as similarly meaningless and distorted: "I died a long time ago. I have drowned. I am underwater" (*Charlotte* 72). Miranda furthermore impersonates not only Jane but also Charlotte Brontë as she uses her name as identification during her travels. While alluding to how critics and readers alike have used the character Jane Eyre and its author Charlotte Brontë interchangeably, this constant state of impersonation of others might furthermore point towards the reason for Miranda's confusion and identification problem. As Kirchknopf points out, Miranda "has to account so many identities [...], that she cannot develop a coherent self" (135). Thus, the Victorian era seems to offer meaning, which can be regarded as a basis for nostalgia and mythologization. Nevertheless, neo-Victorian fiction cannot be defined as purely nostalgic either, as it clearly exists in a contradictory space of what Gutleben defines as 'nostalgic postmodernism' (200).

However, Thomas's most disturbing intervention is his usage of pornographic sex scenes between Miranda and her black lovers. Thomas depicts her partners as dehumanised objects, recalling the horrors of slavery. As Sue Thomas argues, “the racism inherent in its conventions, and domestic sexual exploitation, [are] all paraded before [the] readers with a tasteless and breathless exhibitionism” (112). Despite the abolition of slavery, tourism or rather sex tourism continues to be a modern form of colonialisation. Although mostly men practise sex tourism, Thomas provokingly imagines his female protagonist to behave in exactly the same way. It is furthermore no coincidence that Miranda is depicted as an academic, who is not only interested in Victorian but also in Women’s Studies. Thomas thus implies that Miranda is certainly aware of the oppression caused by colonialism as well as being a supporter of equal rights for women. However, this knowledge and mindset does not affect her own degrading behaviour towards her Caribbean lovers.

Although Miranda uses oppressive language when talking about her lovers in the Caribbean, she is nevertheless still a victim herself, as her own father uses her to act out his perverted fantasies. By choosing the name Miranda, Thomas furthermore alludes to *The Tempest* and makes use of the incest theme. Thomas’s approach is highly uncomfortable for the reader as he points out their “potentially voyeuristic expectations” (Delnieppe 142) and denies the reader the comfort of a rectifying rewriting. His use of an exploitive gaze might therefore be argued to succeed in the paradoxically inherently political agenda of rewritings in the first place. As Christian Gutleben argues, “neo-Victorian fiction feels exempt from any other political responsibility – as if the operation of denunciation were a self-sufficient and ground-breaking eye-opener” (169). However, the question of whether a reader, who has been potentially influenced by existing misconceptions of the past, will be able to overcome his or her opinion by reading a rectified version of the past, remains unresolved. Furthermore, contemporary rewritings thus seem to use the idea of rewriting the wrongs of the past rather as a fashionable tool than as an actual political response.

The voyeurism and thus immorality of the plot furthermore link back to its representation of sexuality and gender. On the one hand, Thomas turns his readership into accomplices while gazing at exploited bodies; on the other, he uses empathy as if it was an “ethically demanded sensitivity” (Thomas 110). Therefore, Thomas can be argued to follow an extreme way of challenging and alienating his audience. As Fanny Delniette argues, “Thomas uses pornography to give a parodic tone to his rewritings and to make the reader aware of the expectations they bring to the text” (140). Therefore, the use of pornography is a tool to point to power relations and inequalities within contemporary society as well as to reveal how the insertion of sex into a Victorian plot has become a contemporary convention. Nevertheless, apart from these differences, it is the similarity of the plots, especially in the depiction of sexuality, which is striking. Rochester’s exploitive sexuality is indeed similar to Miranda’s sex tourism. However, Thomas shifts the gender of the sexual exploiter.

Furthermore, Thomas alludes to Said’s argumentation that the orient is depicted as female and oppressed by the male occident as he turns the gender around and describes women as capable of being as sexually oppressive as men. Miranda is depicted as “looking for long black bodies like Jerry’s to think my torpedos into” (*Charlotte* 72). Although Thomas uses metaphors of war to describe Miranda’s power over her lover, which aims at a revision of patriarchy, their relationship is evidently still that of an oppressor and an oppressed. The major difference, however, is that Miranda is sensitive enough to reflect her behaviour:

From somewhere near the ceiling I looked down at our entwined bodies, distantly, with amusement. It’s said that newly dead people do this – look down at their corpses. The difference was, I wasn’t newly dead; I died a long time ago. (*Charlotte* 71-72)

Her depiction of herself even involves a certain kind of regret as their sexual encounter is described in terms of death rather than passion. The sexual liberation of women is thus depicted as implying neither progress nor real equality.

Miranda’s mother Emma and Jane are one of the many examples for Thomas’s usage of Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha. Emma is depicted as a manic-depressive, who commits suicide

while Thomas's Jane tries to commit suicide by drowning herself in a pond. Emma is also of Celtic ancestry, which might imply a further "allegory of internal British imperialism" (Thomas 112). Miranda herself describes her mother as being full of "bewitchingness and [...] misery" (*Charlotte* 84) as well as behaving seductively. A further example for his recycling of Charlotte Brontë's character in *Charlotte* is Miranda. She and Grace are described as impersonating Bertha and thus leading "to a degree of arousal and satisfaction" (*Charlotte* 168) on behalf of her own father and Rochester respectively. Thus, Rochester is depicted as masochistic, and performing marital rape, and Ben as a Prospero figure, whose incest taboo only leads to actual penetration. Both behaviours thus entail a criticism of patriarchal and colonial attitudes. At the same time, Thomas depicts contemporary women like Emma as nymphomaniacs who are nevertheless still victims of patriarchy.

Ben recounts one incident when Miranda shakes him in the middle of the night and accuses him of abusive behaviour towards both her mother and herself.

'You're a fucking rapist, a mind-rapist!' And [she goes on] much more of the same, mad, unreal: how [he][...] drowned her, as [he][...] drowned her mother; how she existed underwater, like a submarine; how all those years alone with [him] [...] made it impossible for her to find a different life. (*Charlotte* 153)

Thomas furthermore describes Miranda as exhibiting a maniac Bertha like sleepwalking behaviour, threatening Ben's life with scissors while wearing nothing but a robe that is loose enough to show her naked breasts. She also states that Ben is indeed the true father of her unborn child, which she conceived in the Caribbean and which also led to the split from her husband. As Sue Thomas argues, her pregnancy can be interpreted

[a]s an allegory of internal English colonialism Thomas suggests that the feminist daughter's incestuous sexualising of Prospero as addressee of her sexual exploits, a playing out of, for her, incomplete parts of their relationship, reinvigorates him. (102)

Strikingly, Miranda makes use of the image of the submarine, as she does while describing her sexual encounter with Jerry. The incestuous abuse of her father is thus linked to her own exploitive behaviour towards men. Apart from her accusations mentioned above, which only

appear in the unconscious state of sleepwalking, Miranda never blames her father for his actions just like her male acquaintances in the Caribbean, take part in her own oppressive behaviour. Delniette thus argues, that “[c]olonialism [...], racism and patriarchy are [...] intimately linked in the novel, and the greatest injuries seem to be those done to the ‘mind’, because they make the victims cooperate with their oppressors” (149). Thomas thus alludes to the work of another critic, Frantz Fanon⁸. Fanon suggested that the white lover offers some form of recognition to the black lover (Thomas 108). Miranda’s black lovers seem to seek a certain form of recognition while participating in her degrading sex games. Thomas therefore points to the fact that racism as well as gender inequality still exist in our contemporary society disguised in a condition of mental slavery.

Miranda furthermore records her sexual encounters for Ben and even moves in with him. She also does not interfere when Ben tickles his granddaughter’s vagina while bathing her although she confronts him about this. Ben himself declares that he is very much aware of a possible sexual abuse as he states: “Of *course* it was sexual! Of *course* tickling her little pussy was sexual! But it wasn’t harmful!” (*Charlotte* 145, emphasis in original). It is Miranda’s husband David, who denies Ben access to his granddaughter thus transforming him into another Bertha version as he is metaphorically locked away. In the end, Miranda, however, decides to stay with Ben as she admits that she only feels free with him. Paradoxically, Ben is depicted as ignoring Miranda’s accusations while comforting himself that he has always been a liberal father. Instead of taking her seriously he overgeneralises and blames “[w]omen [...] [for being] as mysterious as the black turbulent ocean out there” (*Charlotte* 159) and states that “Women’s Studies [...] is [...] nonsense” (*Charlotte* 143). Thomas’s depiction of his male characters can hence be regarded as complicated and partly misogynistic to say the least.

However, Thomas’s portrayal of women can be considered just as problematic. It

⁸ See further: Franz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. 1967. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

almost seems as if Thomas suggests that the female victims of rape are indeed the perpetrator themselves, as his Bertha claims that Rochester is indeed her slave not she his (*Charlotte* 116). When Miranda recounts how a male tutor sexually abused her, she suggests that “it was fun” (*Charlotte* 89). Her depiction as a femme fatal might seem absurd. However, her overtly sexual appearance seems similar to victims of incest (Ford 9). Moreover, Thomas imagines a rather unsatisfying ending for Miranda, as she is never really able to free herself of her father’s incestuous behaviour. Instead of marrying one of her black lovers, who proposes to her, Miranda exclaims in another metafictional comment: “Reader, I told him to piss off” (*Charlotte* 136). Thomas thus alludes to *Jane Eyre* and ridicules Jane’s confession to the reader that she is married to Rochester. As Miranda returns home in order to move in with her father, David, who does not want to lose his children, moves in to the third floor. He thus turns into another Bertha figure while Ben makes a metafictional joke about David’s situation and implies that they should “[f]ind him a Grace Poole” (*Charlotte* 156).

However, Thomas’s characters are caricatured and exaggerated so his intention might yet again be to play with the expectations of his audience, which would expect the author to criticize exactly that. As Andrea Kirchknopf argues, “[t]he exciting quality of the novel is that we are offered both possibilities of interpretations” (134). Kirchknopf thus agrees with Gutleben, who states that Thomas’s approach can be argued to be both subversive and seductive at the same time (*Charlotte* 176). The title of the novel already implies that this will turn out to be a conventional sequel. Thus, Thomas clearly plays with the expectations of an audience who might be familiar with various forms of adaptations of canonical Victorian literature, and specifically familiar with *Jane Eyre*. Miranda is even described as having “an idea for creating alternative endings to nineteenth-century novels – to bring out some of the repressed issues” (*Charlotte* 150) while aiming for a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*. As Delneppe states, “[*Charlotte*] thus indirectly provides a commentary on certain contemporary fiction that, under a façade of intellectual respectability guaranteed by the reference to the Victorian

classics, uses sex as a selling argument” (142-43). Thomas also includes pictures of headless and almost naked black bodies in his publication. His intention in doing so can be interpreted as on the one hand, dehumanising and exploiting and on the other hand, criticising and revealing exploitation through this voyeuristic form of gaze. The novel can hence be regarded as an ambiguous critique of a literary industry that aims at commercial success, while at the same time using *Jane Eyre*’s popularity in order to achieve exactly that.

Thus, *Charlotte* is not just a social critique, as the ending can hardly be considered subversive after all. Instead, the novel rather forms a contradiction in itself as Thomas tries to please and yet disgust his audience at the same time. His intention seems to be that of blurring conventional and ethical boundaries as he depicts such shocking power relations as the incestuous relationship of Ben and Miranda. On the one hand, Thomas subverts *Jane Eyre*’s conventional happy ending, while painting a rather bleak and sexually unfulfilled married life for Jane. On the other hand, Miranda paradoxically seems to find comfort in her nostalgic and romantic understanding of the Victorian world. Both heroines, Jane and Miranda, seem to be symbolic of their own times. While Miranda is disillusioned, Jane is hopelessly romantic. However, the similarities of Miranda’s and Jane’s rather bleak married lives are striking. Thomas even imagines Miranda with an equal passion for reading and writing as Charlotte Brontë. Besides, Miranda’s decision to write fictional autobiographies seems to be an option of freeing her suppressed emotions. Although Thomas confines Jane to an unhappy ending with Rochester, he liberates her at the same time as he allows her to speak her mind. Rochester hence becomes another Bertha figure as he is killed off in order to open up the possibility for Jane to break free from patriarchy and live a self-determined life. Thomas thus rectifies Rhys’s version as he destroys Rochester as the symbol of the existence of patriarchal society. In this way, Miranda’s and Jane’s parallel stories comment on various stages and perceptions of women’s lives: marriage and sexual liberation as well as intellectual freedom and independence.

While representing awareness for still existent gender inequalities and racism, one of the paradoxical solutions offered by *Charlotte* seems to be a return to Victorian romantic ideals. The love between Jane and Robert is indeed presented as implying some kind of healing for the lack of substance and progress of modern times in the form of an interracial and equal relationship. As Gutleben states, “the contemporary ideological outlook of the novel goes beyond the contemporary characters’ ethical and metaphysical vacuum to reintegrate the possibility of romantic love and authentic human discovery” (203). Thus, the contemporary and the nineteenth century protagonist and their respective worlds form a union that opens up a new direction for contemporary literature in general as it points in the direction of rediscovered values and meaning within postmodernism.

Furthermore, Thomas blurs boundaries of social taboos in depicting incest as well as questioning pornographic voyeurism. As Delniette argues, “[*Charlotte*] writes pornographic versions of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to comment on a type of contemporary fiction that it shows as decadent and opportunistic” (152). While *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenged the reception of *Jane Eyre* and eventually became a canonical novel in its own right, *Charlotte* challenges the reader’s perception of the works as well as our reception of their authors. Hence, *Charlotte* is more than a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*. It is furthermore a rewriting of the rewriting, or rather the beginning of a whole chain of rewritings. Thomas provides no easy solution to how he wants us to experience his novel. Thus, the experience of reading the novel almost feels as if the critical reader is indeed rewriting the pretexts and misconceptions about Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* himself or herself. It is the interpretation and critical analysis on behalf of the reader that turns *Charlotte* into a rewriting.

Coldwater

Like D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte*, Mardi McConnochie's *Coldwater* is not a sequel but explores the metafictional and intertextual issue of the process of rewriting. *Coldwater* locates the three Brontë sisters and their father on an imaginary penal colony on an island close to Australia, which resembles the actual historical place of Norfolk Island. McConnochie's choice of place implies secluded remoteness and lingering conflicts between the convicts and their overseer as penal colonies were conceived as a form of ultimate punishment. The island, moreover, recalls the remoteness of the Yorkshire moor and thus the Parsonage in Haworth, where the Brontës spent most of their lives. While interweaving various intertexts⁹, the novel is mainly concerned with "the psychology of tyranny, and the nature of repression, both cultural and personal" (Tonkin 115). However, McConnochie's take on rewriting marginalised colonial history differs from that of Rhys and Thomas as she focuses on the violence visited on convicts instead of for instance reimagining her characters as indigenous.

Although McConnochie does not focus on interracial relations, the power relation of the overseer - convict mirrors that of the coloniser-colonised relationship. The role of the convicts is yet another marginalised history as they were displaced from their home in Britain to a country as far away as Australia left to be forgotten and at the mercy of their overseer. The fictional overseer in *Coldwater*, Captain Wolf, states that "[f]or felons at home in England, the greatest threat we have (after hanging) is transportation" (*Coldwater* 44). McConnochie's agenda can hence be interpreted as political as she focuses on the description of the inhumane situations of the convicts. Maggie Tonkin suggests that through her novel, McConnochie's "notion of the badlands is an analogy for the process of colonialization, [...] [but it] is also made to serve as an analogy for the literary text" (116). While the oppression of indigenous people in Australia has gained more and more interest, little reminds

⁹ The novels *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Wuthering Heights* as well as the play *The Tempest* have been identified as intertexts. McConnochie interweaves these intertexts with biographical information and reception of the Brontë family as well as the historic accounts of two different commandants of Norfolk Island. Moreover, McConnochie makes use of literary criticism of her used intertexts.

contemporary Australians of its founding as a penal colony.

McConnochie's approach of writing back does not, however, stop here as her major intention can be argued to be that of reversing the implications that form the basis for the Brontë Myth. For instance the assumed strong solidarity between the three sisters is challenged, as Charlotte remains an outsider while Anne and Emily form a team. Furthermore, Charlotte Brontë's supposedly strong sense of work ethic as a writer is continually ridiculed. It comes as no surprise that the time of action of the plot is 1847 alluding to the publication year of *Jane Eyre*. McConnochie clearly rewrites *Jane Eyre* among other intertexts but "abandons the constraints of Brontë's plots, and gives free reign to the metaphors of insurrection and slavery" (Tonkin 123). McConnochie's intertextual web also consists of *The Tempest* and historical accounts of two temperately different commandants of Norfolk Island, the brutal James Morisset and the progressive reformist Alexander Maconochie (Tonkin 117 and 119). This leads to the construction of the rather ambiguous character of Captain Wolf, who furthermore entails features of the supposedly supportive father of the Brontë sisters, Patrick Brontë.

Captain Wolf's character furthermore serves as the starting point of action as well as the further development of the plot of *Coldwater*. His life is threatened by one of the convicts, and his daughters Charlotte, Emily and Anne start to reconsider their options, as they are made aware that they would have to support themselves if their father dies. Thus Charlotte suggests that they should all start writing a novel despite the fact that her own perception of women mirrors the ideas of women of nineteenth century society as she thinks that "a woman's knowledge of the world was imperfect, her education inadequate, and her intellect more feeble than a man's" (*Coldwater* 31). Nevertheless, her urge to write a novel is greater than her ideas of female abilities and her understanding of morality and gender roles. Following the Brontës, she hence proposes that they should use pseudonyms in order to disguise their identities. In another metafictional insight, which provides a commentary on

supposed gender roles, Emily wonders what kind of voice she should use while writing a novel. She exclaims that she “cannot write as a Woman – yet [...] [she] cannot write as a Man either – to do so would be a betrayal of all that” (*Coldwater* 38) she is. Her solution is that she must find a “shadow self” (*Coldwater* 38) to be able to speak. McConnochie thus alludes to feminist debates about whether women should write like men or like women¹⁰.

The arrival of a new convict, however, has profound consequences for all family members. Just like Prospero, Captain Wolf tries integrating Finn O’Connell into his household as a servant, alluding to *The Tempest*’s Caliban and *Wuthering Heights*’s Heathcliff. He even imagines him as a proxy for his deceased son Branwell. While Branwell Brontë’s “habit of drinking” (Michie 8) led to a further fatal disease, McConnochie cynically rewrites his death as caused by dehydration in the outback. This tragedy leads to Charlotte’s first encounter with Aborigines and leaves Captain Wolf paralysed. Charlotte is surprised that the native is not a “spear-brandishing savage [...], but [...] seemed reserved [and] self-contained” (*Coldwater* 64). Wolf has similar prejudices as he is depicted as afraid of a possible revolution, which might spread because of “dangerous ideas” (*Coldwater* 58) among the convicts. To avoid such a situation, Wolf advocates the position that convicts should not be able to read. However, he longs to educate Finn in order to transform him into “an equal amongst the best of colonial society” (*Coldwater* 58). The domestic sphere, which belonged exclusively to his daughters, is hence agitated, and this leads to a number of incidents that challenge the basic understanding of gender, class and race within the Wolf family.

As Emily finds out that Charlotte has secretly read parts of her novel, not only their different perceptions of women but also about their father become evident. Emily’s writing is metafictional as she is writing about *Coldwater*, just like McConnochie. Emily moreover depicts their father, whom Charlotte identifies as the main character, as mad. Charlotte is shocked by this content as she questions: “Cruel? Mad? This was not the man I knew”

¹⁰ See further: Mary Eagleton: “Women and Literary Production.” *Feminist Literary Theory. A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 61-69.

(*Coldwater* 72). She furthermore criticises Emily's female character as being "*too* headstrong – [as she thinks that] it is potentially alienating for the reader" (*Coldwater* 74, emphasis in original). This leads to a discussion between the sisters about literature as they start discussing each other's writings. McConnochie describes them as "the charmed circle" (*Coldwater* 77) and thus follows romantic illusions of the three Brontë sisters working together.

Charlotte is moreover depicted as having romantic ideals as she hopes for a suitor with "intellect, spirit [...] [and] passion" (*Coldwater* 47). McConnochie evidently rewrites *Jane Eyre* as Charlotte rejects a marriage proposal from Captain Bates, who is likened to St. John Rivers, than marry a man she does not love. To Charlotte this appears to be a "ghastly travesty" (*Coldwater* 82). Similar to Jane Eyre, Charlotte describes herself as a woman who is "not a beauty" (*Coldwater* 81) and "could not afford to choosy" (*Coldwater* 81) but longs for love and is aware that she deserves "better than this" (*Coldwater* 81). Bates's idea of love, however, is bleak as he suggests that "[m]arrying for love seems a foolish practice [...] and one doomed to failure" (*Coldwater* 81). He follows St. John Rivers's idea of marriage as build on companionship rather than romance as he nevertheless thinks that a man should marry but certainly not for love.

However, Charlotte believes in romance and love as she has experienced it with her father's lieutenant Thomas Glade. Although they bond over discussions about literature, Charlotte longs for a physical form of love. Her passionate behaviour is likened to that of Jane, although McConnochie goes even further as she rewrites the scene in which Rochester and Jane confess their love to one another. Rochester is secretly married but nevertheless proposes to Jane. As Jane finds out the truth, she runs away since she cannot endure staying at Thornfield Hall and becoming his mistress. In McConnochie's version, however, Glade admits that he is married and Charlotte claims that she does not need to get married, since "[l]ove is enough" (*Coldwater* 92). With this intertextual reference McConnochie frees Jane and hence her impersonation Charlotte from the constraints of Victorian society and opens up

the possibility of revised gender roles. McConnochie furthermore implies an option for gender equality as her treatment of Glade, the revisioned Rochester, shows a realistic man, who is self-conscious enough to know that an affair would disgrace Charlotte and thus turn her into a fallen woman due to the preconceptions of his time. However, he is sensible enough to place her position in society before his own needs. On the contrary, Rochester is self-centred enough to offer Jane a life that would degrade her own moral standards.

The incident leaves Charlotte heartbroken, but while her ambition “to become a brilliant woman, [...] to redefine what a woman was capable of” (*Coldwater* 97) is demolished, she finds content that her status allows her “to create fictional words, to write, to think, to speak in forbidden voices” (*Coldwater* 98). Following feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre*, McConnochie thus reinvents another option for Jane as she denies Charlotte a fulfilled marriage but allows her to raise her own voice and have “the freedom to live a subterranean life” (*Coldwater* 98) of her own. McConnochie can be argued to rewrite both Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre, and hence, with an intertextual as well as metafictional approach, transforms them into her own hybrid character Charlotte.

At the same time, Emily starts having an interest in O’Connell. McConnochie plays with the perception of Emily Brontë as the wild child of the family and reimagines her as a passionate abolitionist. As Miller states about Emily Brontë, “[a]bove all, she seems to have loved liberty: freedom to think her own heterodox thought, freedom from social pressures, freedom from having to submit to the will of others” (186). McConnochie’s Emily thus condemns slavery and compares the convicts to slaves. While her father does not approve of her expression of opinion in front of others as Emily even attacks him, she is nevertheless courageous enough to propose that slavery “is degrading to the slave because it deprives him of his humanity, but it is just as degrading to the slave-owner, because it encourages him in all the vices of tyranny, arrogance, cruelty, and the indulgence of degrading passions” (*Coldwater* 117). Although Captain Wolf thinks that he should “beat [...] [O’Connell’s]

insubordination out of him” (*Coldwater* 107), he is also reminded of himself and believes that “[m]en of enterprise *should* be able to rise” (*Coldwater* 107, emphasis in original).

This, once more, demonstrates Captain Wolf’s ambiguous character. McConnochie hence plays with the existing and contradictory representations of Patrick Brontë, which, on the one hand derive from Gaskell’s account of domestic violence (Miller 41) and on the other, from later biographers of the Brontë family such as Juliet Barker¹¹. Gaskell, for instance, “suggested the girls were small and sickly because their father didn’t feed them meat when they were children” (Michie 14). Miller, however, argues that Barker rescues “Patrick from Gaskell’s caricature, using the evidence of contemporary newspapers to reveal him as a respected figure of some standing” (Miller 41). Gaskell’s intention of a bleak picture of the Brontës’ lives can furthermore be explained as an attempt to save her friend from criticism of her, according to Victorian standards, progressive writing and life. As Michie argues, “[s]uch descriptions triggered sympathy for the Brontës, inviting critics to view the three as enduring hardships rather than flouting conventions” (14). Thus, as Miller states, Gaskell met Charlotte “in a spirit of protective sympathy” (39). McConnochie, furthermore, draws on Gaskell’s depiction of Charlotte as “irreproachably sexless” (Miller 69), as her character Charlotte is shocked by Emily’s affection towards O’Connell.

As the family members find themselves experiencing new relationships and challenging situations, the domestic sphere and thus the unity of the Wolfs is put to the test. Captain Wolf’s bed catches fire and O’Connell is the one to save him. This scene recalls Jane’s saving of Rochester as his bed is set on fire by Bertha. In his diary entry, Captain Wolf describes “a woman, robed in white, with a pale face, and weird, dark, burning eyes” (*Coldwater* 124). Although it is not revealed who is responsible for the fire, Emily is described as having issues with sleepwalking thus implying that she could have been the woman in her father’s room. The possibility of sleepwalking and its similarity to Bertha’s roaming around Thornfield at night in an unconscious state of mind can furthermore be

¹¹ See further: Juliet Barker: *The Brontës*. London: Abacus, 2010.

interpreted as representing Emily's veiled passions. Thus, McConnochie also implies Gilbert and Gubar's already earlier mentioned interpretation of Bertha as Jane's double. It is Charlotte who moreover addresses this implication as she raises the question of whether her sister Emily has gone mad (*Coldwater* 157).

After she has returned from being missing while apparently sleepwalking, Emily admits to Anne that she dreamed of O'Connell calling on her and that she found him "in the barn, among the beasts" (*Coldwater* 146). Hence, McConnochie reuses *Jane Eyre* as well as *Wuthering Heights* as she recalls both Jane's dream of Rochester calling on her and Heathcliff's dismissal from the house to the barn by Catherine's brother. Thus, McConnochie combines the literal characters of Jane, Bertha and Catherine with further references to the biographical depictions of Emily Brontë as well as *The Tempest's* Ariel. Emily states that "Ariel's song comes to mind –*but doth suffer a sea change/ into something rich and strange*" (*Coldwater* 120, emphasis in original). And she moreover uses Catherine's declaration of her relation to Heathcliff as she exclaims: "He is mine and I am his" (*Coldwater* 147) about O'Connell. McConnochie thus hints at an equally passionate relationship and a newborn wish for freedom. In comparison to Catherine, however, Emily is willing to marry O'Connell. Anne reminds her that although their father likes O'Connell, he will never agree for her to marry him as O'Connell is not "that special" (*Coldwater* 147). Class is thus identified as an issue that cannot be overcome.

The motif of madness in *Coldwater* is furthermore not exclusively ascribed to one character but remains dispersed. Although successful in the end, the team spirit of the sisters is tested, as Emily believes that Charlotte was the one to give her secret about her affair away. As Captain Wolf finds out about the affair, his patriarchal attitude and lunacy appears. He tries to duel O'Connell, and others have to intervene, as he seems to be under "the influence of powerful emotions" (*Coldwater* 161). Captain Wolf is furthermore described as feeling "cruelly deceived" (*Coldwater* 161) as neither Anne has betrayed her sister's trust by telling

him about Emily's affair nor has his "own Charlotte" (*Coldwater* 161). To him, Emily is nothing more than a "liar and a whore" (*Coldwater* 162) and he exclaims: "Oh God, I shall go mad –" (*Coldwater* 162). Thus, Captain Wolf not only loses control over his daughters but also of his mind and tries to regain control by extreme measures. In another incident, he locks them away and destroys their works and dreams hence alluding to both, Rochester and Prospero. While his daughters perceive him as the one being "almost hysterical", (*Coldwater* 163), his perception is that their works are "product[s] of diseased minds" (*Coldwater* 163). The sisters try to protect their work, but Captain Wolf is "too far gone in his anger" (*Coldwater* 163) so that they are too afraid to intervene.

Moreover, Captain Wolf tells Charlotte that she will never become a great writer as she "lack[s] sophistication, and [...] [has] no insight into the workings of the real world" (*Coldwater* 170). Although Charlotte can't "forgive him for taking the one thing away from [...] [her] which made life tolerable" (*Coldwater* 176), his mind game works on her as she states that "all [...] [her] words had deserted her" (*Coldwater* 176). Hence, the portrayal of Captain Wolf's madness as well as his action of locking his daughters away furthermore recalls Rochester's portrayal of a man losing his senses in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Moreover, Charlotte is likened to Antoinette as she allows him to control her mind and describes her passion for writing as dead. Emily, however, does not permit her father to "crush [...] [her] spirit" (*Coldwater* 177) and manages to obtain paper and pen, which Captain Wolf has denied the sisters. She is described as "possessed by some new spirit, a devouring flame that burned intensely" (*Coldwater* 178). The prohibition from writing has only made her even more passionate and inventive about her work. Being denied a voice by her father thus only makes her voice stronger.

In the meantime, Captain Wolf has "shut [himself] up [...] like a hermit" (*Coldwater* 192) and starts obsessing over the idea that the convicts are planning a revolt. Although implying that he at first believed himself to be suffering from melancholia, he argues that

O'Connell has brought the Irish potato plight into his house. Just like Rhys's Rochester, he blames an illness for his behaviour rather than comes to terms with his initial problems and fears. As Captain Wolf has transformed from brutal to humanistic and evolved back to a mad patriarch, his daughters, however, reinvent their unity as they discuss what they should do next. It seems clear that they will have to convince their father to leave the island or that he would be removed from his post. Charlotte, even though she loves her father, acknowledges the fact that their father has gone mad and that it is her responsibility to take care of her sisters. Meanwhile, Anne has made the acquaintance of a diver, who shows her how her father has tortured convicts and whose aim is to free his own brother from the island. This proof of their father's tyranny as well as Emily's destruction of her own novel in the waves leads Charlotte to write to the Governor in order to get her father removed from the island. Charlotte cannot understand Emily's intention to destroy her own work and implies that her novel "could have been an instant sensation" (*Coldwater* 239). Anne, however, believes this to be a sacrifice. McConnochie thus likens Emily's destruction of her novel to Antoinette's and Bertha's sacrifice of their lives. It is hence implied that in order to break free from patriarchy, sacrificing parts of or even the whole identity are necessary.

Although Captain Wolf wants Charlotte to get married, he furthermore starts implying that he would want for Charlotte to stay with him, as he would "feel the loss of [...] [her] most keenly" (*Coldwater* 232) while staring and grinning at her. Hence suggesting an incestuous interest in his daughter. Later on, he wants to talk to Charlotte and although he pretends to owe her an apology, he insults her and declares that he has turned her into some kind of monster. He, once again, likens her to Jane, as he states that she is plain and that if she "could find a man weak or foolish enough to marry [...] [her], [...] [she would] make his life a misery" (*Coldwater* 255). He furthermore explains that Branwell's loss has driven him to believe that she could take her brother's place. Thus, Captain Wolf turns out to have been implementing some kind of experiment as he has wondered how they could turn out, if he

“pretended [...] [that they] were boys instead of girls” (*Coldwater* 256). McConnochie hence implies that gender is culturally and socially constructed. Even though initially resisting Victorian misbelief that a woman is inferior to a man, Captain Wolf appears to have given in to misconceptions about women as he proposes: “I knew what science said about the inferiority of female mind: too much stimulation of the brain drives a woman mad, weakens her constitution, makes her ill and eventually kills her” (*Coldwater* 256). According to his perception, he “tried to produce a genius, and [...] [has] only succeeded in making a shrew” (*Coldwater* 256). Charlotte is shocked by his opinion as she questions his true intentions.

These intentions become clear as he states that he would have wanted a wife just like her. Her father’s incestuous interest is moreover implied as he stares at her “with a strange, confused hunger that found a momentary echo in [...] [her], an echo which was almost immediately swamped beneath an avalanche of fear” (*Coldwater* 257). Charlotte realizes “*that for all that time [...] [she] was trying to be a son to him, and [] thought he was trying to make a daughter out of [...] [her], he was actually trying to turn [...] [her] into a wife*” (*Coldwater* 257, emphasis in original). Later in the night, he comes to her room and tells her the story of his first wife, Bertha Mason, whom he obliged to stop writing, as he feared that this was the true reason for her inability to get pregnant. Misconceptions that an educated wife would not be able to fulfil her duties in the household as well as the confinement to the domestic sphere for women in Victorian times are hence alluded to. Bertha becomes depressed and in an urge to help her, Captain Wolf called on a doctor, whose advice was to keep her away from any kind of writing. Charlotte’s initial impulse is to ask her father if it didn’t “*occur to [...] [him] [...] to let her begin writing again*” (*Coldwater* 259, emphasis in original). Although Charlotte’s mind has been infected by her father’s perception of gender roles and ideologies, she is still capable of revealing the falseness of his belief.

McConnochie goes on interweaving metafictional and intertextual accounts as Bertha’s story recalls that of Brontë’s and Rhys’s versions of Bertha. However,

McConnochie's Bertha endures an even more brutal fate as she eventually tries to kill herself, but does not succeed, as the window she jumped from was not high enough, Captain Wolf thus completely locked her up. As the kitchen catches fire, Bertha's door is opened for her to escape and a few weeks later, her body is pulled from a river. Captain Wolf implies that Bertha was Charlotte's real mother only to go on claiming that Charlotte is indeed Bertha. Even though Charlotte refuses to agree, she admits that she feels just like Bertha as she has been "locked up and silenced, confined in the nursery by the man who loved me best of all" (*Coldwater* 261). As Tonkin argues, "[t]his passage simultaneously ironizes the psychobiographical tradition that reads the character of Jane Eyre as Charlotte Brontë's fictional alter ego, and the feminist tradition that reads Bertha as the repressed aspect of Jane's character" (126). Although Charlotte believes that Bertha has never existed, she cannot "forget this woman, the wasted life she represented" (*Coldwater* 265). As Tonkin argues, "*Coldwater* does not attempt a positive revision of Bertha's story in a manner analogous to Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (125). However, it is Bertha's story that helps Charlotte to break free as it reminds her of her own purpose and dreams in life. Even though merely used as an allegory, McConnochie rectifies Bertha's story by enabling Charlotte to reclaim her own life.

The three sisters hatch a plot and in the end it will be their father who ends up locked up in his room refiguring Bertha. All three daughters as well as their male counterparts furthermore allude to Jane's rebelliousness. While trying to escape the island, Emily and O'Connell die and only Anne and the diver are able to make it to the shore. They can all nevertheless be argued to eventually break free from patriarchal oppression. In a metafictional exclamation Anne states that she "want[s] to get out of the house of fiction and see the great world" (*Coldwater* 302, emphasis in original). Anne thus implies that she wants to write her own story now that she has escaped her father's control.

Charlotte, in another intertextual as well as metafictional impulse, is able to travel to London and publish her novel. While one of the publishers tells her that nobody "wants to

read a romance set in Australia [...] [since] [t]here's no-one there to admire [...] [as there are] [j]ust convicts and cannibals [,]" (*Coldwater* 306) Charlotte nevertheless finds a publisher who believes in her work. McConnochie furthermore alludes to contemporary literary criticism about *Jane Eyre* as Mr Smith argues that "[t]here are people who would say that a character with such naked ambition [...] is shocking and immoral. Such unladylike behaviour! Surely there cannot be such persons in civilised society?" (*Coldwater* 307). However, his opinion about Charlotte's heroine clearly implies that Charlotte is trying to publish *Jane Eyre* and thus breaking free from her father's oppression as she successfully reclaims her voice.

Comparison of Charlotte and Coldwater

As it has been pointed out, all of the chosen novels have been influenced by their time of creation and as we move forward in time, societies, ideas and perspectives have changed even further. Although Thomas and McConnochie use the process of writing back in different ways, they can both nevertheless be argued to take the postcolonial and feminist reinterpretation of *Jane Eyre* as well as the approach of writing back even further than *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The crucial factor here is that Thomas and McConnochie add existing literary debates as well as the history of reception of the works to their rewritings. Their intertextual and metafictional game, however, does not end there as they also include biographical information about Charlotte Brontë. Thomas moreover uses Rhys's biography as an intertext while McConnochie uses biographical accounts of two commanders of Norfolk Island.

The audience can of course enjoy reading the novels without having any background knowledge about the used intertexts. The intertextual and metafictional game, however, only unfolds its complete potential if the reader is aware of the games that the authors play and are thus able to deconstruct their actual meaning. As Tonkin argues, "*Coldwater* relies for its effects on a knowing reader who is familiar not just with *Jane Eyre*, but also with the critical debates surrounding that 'cult text of feminism', as Spivak has it, in which Bertha is read as the privileged signifier of occluded narratives" (126). *Coldwater* and *Charlotte* use "Bertha Mason as a polyvalent metaphor for the various 'repressed' of colonialism, conventional nineteenth-century codes of femininity, and the Brontë Myth itself" (Tonkin 126). Paradoxically, both neo-Victorian novels use Bertha as a metaphor and thus deny her her own story. Yet, as Spivak points out, the act of giving a voice back to Bertha is not retrospectively possible as it implies the passive act of someone reclaiming a voice for someone else. Furthermore, Shoshana Felman states that "[t]o 'speak in the name of', to 'speak *for*', could thus mean, once again, to appropriate and to silence" (52, emphasis in original). However, since Bertha is a character in a novel, she will never be truly able to reclaim her own voice.

Nevertheless, the neo-Victorian reworkings reclaim Bertha's marginalised voice through the act of writing, as Thomas's Charlotte/Miranda as well as McConnochie's Charlotte are successful writers. Her story is thus turned into a leitmotif, which helps the neo-Victorian protagonists to reclaim their voice. As it has been discussed previously, madness has been merely ascribed to women and thus served "to silence and 'other' (marginalize) certain groups of people and certain forms of behaviour" (Allen 153). While Bertha is merely a catalyst for the plot, Rhys's arguably mad Antoinette becomes the protagonist of her novel. In *Charlotte* and *Coldwater*, however, Bertha's madness is furthermore ascribed to both fathers, Ben and Captain Wolf. In reversing a gendering of madness, the authors thus follow Rhys's interpretation that one needs to question who the actual mad person really is. It is implied that the act of locking up already points in the direction of a mad perpetrator rather than an actual mad victim. The idea of a possible regaining of control furthermore implies madness in itself.

Although Thomas's Miranda and McConnochie's Charlotte are both strong and independent female characters, Miranda is a more complicated character than Charlotte. As one of the common motifs of neo-Victorian novels is its usage of exploitive sexualities, Thomas disturbs his readers with his sex scenes. As Kohlke argues, "[i]n an ironic inversion, the Victorian age that once imagined the Orient as seductive free zone [...], itself becomes Western culture's mysterious, eroticised, and exotic Other" (*Sexsation* 68). *Charlotte* and *Coldwater* can, however, be regarded as exceptions within the genre as it is not only the female body which is exploited. The "imperialist adventures by would-be conquerors of exotic female Others" (Kohlke *Sexsation* 62) are turned around as the gender is reversed. Nevertheless, the influence of pornography on *Charlotte* cannot be denied and gives rise to social discomfort. *Coldwater* also addresses sexuality more openly than the Victorian pretext. The novel is, however, not as explicit as *Charlotte*. The neo-Victorian novels rewrite not only

our perceptions of women but also rewrite Charlotte Brontë as well as our ideas of the Victorian era.

Although quite different, *Coldwater* as well as *Charlotte* make use of the scenes in *Jane Eyre*, in which Bertha sleepwalks, in a similar way. Thus, through the depiction of Miranda's and Emily's sleepwalking, Thomas and McConnochie reuse the sequence in which Bertha as well as Rhys's Antoinette unconsciously rebel against patriarchy. However, while in *Coldwater*, this scene remains the only moment in which Miranda rather unconsciously rebels against patriarchy, McConnochie's Emily is described as far more determined to raise her voice and criticise her father. Thomas implies that Miranda is sexually liberated as she can have sex with whomever she wants. Nevertheless, she is a victim of her own father's fantasies and it remains questionable whether exploitative sex scenes in *Charlotte* are indeed liberating for female characters and/or readers. In particular, the liberation is linked to the degradation of others. Miranda also does not entirely break free from her father as she returns to live with him. Hence, Thomas's depictions are not just disturbing but with regards to his usage of incest also dangerous.

However, these depictions challenge the female reader to stand up for herself as Miranda proves to be a bad example for emancipation. Another problem that remains inevitable for feminist studies is the issue of sisterhood, which *Coldwater* addresses within the conflict among Charlotte and her siblings. Although complicated, their unity, however, leads to their breaking free from oppression. Thomas imagines a similar sisterhood for Jane, as he couples her with Grace Poole while traveling to the Caribbean. It is hence implied that although possibly complicated, friendships among women prove to be a supportive basis, which helps women to live a self-determined life. This wish for freedom of the female characters is also suggested as Thomas's Jane and McConnochie's Emily allude to Ariel's song. *Coldwater* as well as *Charlotte* thus imagine new possibilities for their female protagonists.

Although madness is ascribed to different characters throughout the novels, the female characters are not depicted as mad at the end of each novel. This moreover indicates the breaking free from control. Instead of a happy ending through marriage, Miranda and Charlotte remain single and authors. Miranda tells her suitor to “piss off” (*Charlotte* 136) and Charlotte does not want to marry if it is not for love. Instead, Charlotte would rather become a mistress. The act of writing therefore not only alludes to the production of literature as Anne’s exclamation: “*I want to get out of the house of fiction*” (*Coldwater* 302, emphasis in original) but also implies mastering one’s own narrative as well as power over their bodies and sexualities. Thus, both rewritings challenge the reader to reconsider his/her perceptions of gender roles and femininity and to engage in the reclaiming of women’s voices.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Neo-Victorianism has not only become a more and more popular field of academic interest but also a widespread genre with various forms of media. The consistent reinterpretations of our Victorian predecessors not only influence our perception of the Victorians but also concern how we perceive the era as well as the "moral categories underlying our selections of what *matters enough to tell in the first place*" (Kohlke *Introduction* 11, emphasis in original). Thus, *Jane Eyre* provides an example of why the Victorians still matter to us as we constantly rewrite and perceive them as our counterparts against which we define our modern society. While Christian Gutleben suggests that the way of looking and writing back to the Victorians points to the incompetence of our society "to propose a new model for the present" (8), Muller argues that "no identity [...] can properly define itself except in comparison to what it perceives to be its past" (130). Rewriting the Victorians may thus rather aim at positioning ourselves in contrast to our predecessors "regardless whether this fills us with pride or anxiety" (Muller 130).

As it has been pointed out, Neo-Victorian novels can be argued to have reshaped the literary heroine due to feminist and postcolonial criticism while partly supporting the development of female stereotypes as well. To argue that the perception of women or rather female characters has changed can of course only be achieved to a certain extent through the textual analysis of literature. Expanding the findings of this thesis, empirical investigations and archival research on, for instance, the depiction of female madness in literature as well as the changing perception of what constitutes madness in society over the centuries in the first place could be made in relation to *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Brontë and their afterlives. It should nevertheless be pointed out that the analysed novels express certain aspects of the social atmosphere of the period and society they were written in and were writing about. Novels hence impact upon the perception of readers, just as reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* "has influenced a generation of readers' responses to Brontë's character" (Donaldson 12) and like

Gaskell's biography of Charlotte has affected the depiction of Jane. Textual analysis can thus offer new ways to theorise, study and understand contemporary societies.

Other recurring themes could be discussed in more detail in further research, which could expand in various directions. One could, for instance, explore the intertextual network even further by having a closer look at the influences of *The Tempest* or Charlotte Brontë's biographies. Furthermore, a closer investigation of the history of convict islands such as the actual penal colony Norfolk Island could be carried out. Thus, archival research not only in Australia but also at the Haworth Museum in Great Britain could be conducted. This material would allow for a more comprehensive picture of how intertextuality and metafiction in relation to Jane Eyre's and Charlotte Brontë's fictional afterlives affect our perception of female characters.

This thesis has focused on Charlotte Brontë, additional material, however, would also open up the possibility to compare her work with that of Emily and Anne and therefore get to the bottom of the basis for the established Brontë Myth. As the neo-Victorian novels have added new material to the Brontë Myth, the development of readers' perceptions of the pretexts could also be explored and scrutinised. The strength of an intertextual approach lies in its ability to interconnect film adaptations and literary works. This opens up the possibility for a discussion of how early film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* have diminished the plots and therefore "sweetened" (Rylance 163) the controversial subjects of the novels. Moreover, one could also have a closer look at how male characters are depicted in rewritings of the Brontë sisters to discuss the development of gender-related issues even further. The term and genre of neo-Victorianism itself also needs to be defined more clearly in order to distinguish what it substantially entails and to facilitate categorisation.

As it has been discussed, certain changes concerning gender roles can be revealed in the chosen rewritings while having a look at how rewritings have developed over the course of time. However, the necessity and relevance of further research becomes clear when looking

at our everyday life. In recent years, a radical feminist movement called Femen¹² has been established in the Ukraine. While the perception of gender roles of some people might indeed be challenged by the women's riots as well as their use of their breasts as 'weapons', others might still participate in shaming and gazing at the women's bodies rather than reflecting on their attitudes. Since thoughts and opinions are indeed free, one might therefore not achieve the wanted change of mind and breaking free from patriarchy through the exhibiting of female bodies. However, while there seems to be no simple solution to change people's perceptions about gender, it nevertheless proves one thing: that we are far from being a liberated society with equality among genders. As long as misconceptions of equating feminism with man-hating as well as female bodies as a common property still exist, change is desperately needed as it affects our perceptions of women as well as men. To give up the challenging of perceptions concerning gender, would mean to give in to existing social ills and inequality. The political agenda of rewritings thus remains relevant as has to a considerable degree been shown with the analyses of *Charlotte* and *Coldwater*.

¹² See for example: Suzanne Moore: "The Femen scandal shows how muddled we are about men and feminism." *the guardian.com*. The Guardian, 5 Sept. 2013. Web. 5 Okt. 2014.
<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/04/femen-men-feminism-victor-svyatski>>.

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