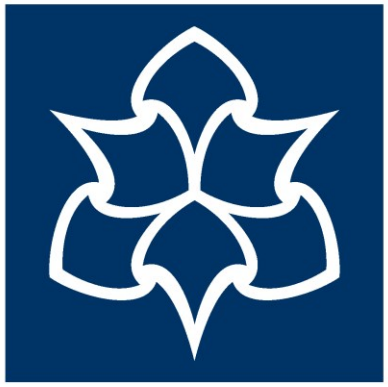

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‘A Sphere within a Sphere’: Neo-Victorianism, Digital Cultures and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries*

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Introduction: Applying Mortar 'to the Cracks and Chinks of Earthly Recollection'

This thesis will explore the development of neo-Victorian fiction and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013) and will assess whether the text has a place within the contemporary digital world[1]. These are all things I will address throughout the project, but first I will give a brief introduction to Catton's text, *The Luminaries* (2013). *The Luminaries* is set in 1866, on the goldfields of Hokitika, New Zealand. The novel begins with a focus on the protagonist Walter Moody, a new arrival to the town, who ends up being in cahoots with 12 other men simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The topic of discussion between the other men is the death of Crosbie Wells, and the destiny of his fortune. The men are in agreement that the events surrounding Wells' death are suspicious; which include the suspected attempted suicide of Anna Wetherell (a local prostitute) and the disappearance of a young gold-miner, Emery Staines. During the clearance of Wells' property a significant amount of gold bars were found, and subsequently claimed by his newly widowed wife Lydia Wells, who turns up out of nowhere to claim the fortune. And so begins the tale of mystery, death and greed, interweaving the lives of these thirteen men, a prostitute, a dead hermit, a missing gold miner, a Chinese opium dealer, a widow and her lover. As Andrew Tate writes in his review of the novel for *Third Way* (no date), *The Luminaries* is 'a quest-romance about desire, faith and the search for home'; it is 'an ambitious narrative that pivots on ambiguous male relationships - replete with obsession, rivalry and repressed mutual admiration' (Tate, no date:

[1] Please note this project will be using the Manchester Metropolitan University Harvard referencing system, which differs slightly to the Harvard referencing system.

Online) in a nineteenth century setting. The text was critically acclaimed receiving the Man Booker Prize in 2013, subsequently making Catton the youngest author to ever receive the award.

I am aware of other avenues I may have explored within the text such as: death, the authority of the past, gender, and the inner consciousness of the individual perceiving subject. Moreover, it would have been possible to develop a theorized postcolonial reading of the text: a line of critical enquiry, which is briefly touched upon in chapter two. However, due to the nature of my research project and the limitation in word count, choosing to focus on the narrative techniques and astrology enabled me to explore *The Luminaries* as a neo-Victorian novel in more critical depth. With that in mind, the first chapter of my thesis will focus on discussing the key themes, tropes and questions surrounding the genre of neo-Victorian fiction. It will begin by analysing the current critical literature surrounding the genre and will move on to assess the development of the form from historiographic metafiction to neo-Victorian. To successfully analyse the development of the genre I will explore four key texts: John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Sarah Waters' debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and finally Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002). As Kate Mitchell purports in her critical text *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), 'the cultural phenomenon of neo-Victorian fiction is inescapable', and there has been a boom in its popularity since the term was first mentioned in the title of Dana Shiller's article 'The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel' (in 1997). It then took a further 5 years for the genre to be placed in a book title. This happened to be by Daniel Candel Bormann in *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel: A Poetics (and Two Case Studies)* (2002).

Despite the continuous rise in popularity of neo-Victorian fiction, the form appears to still be 'missing definitions', and as Kohlke proposes, any possible 'generic, chronological, and aesthetic boundaries – [...] properly belong to the project ahead' (Kohlke, 2008:1-2), and as Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann suggest in their book *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010):

> the 'neo-Victorian' is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism, [...] texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians'* (4).

But what does this mean for the digital age and is there still a place for neo-Victorian fiction, such as Eleanor Catton's within our contemporary digital culture?

The second chapter is the heart of my project and where I engage closely with Catton's novel. This chapter will contain a close analysis of two main areas to *The Luminaries*: Catton's playful narrative structure and her painstakingly complex use of astrology. I begin by exploring the narrative structure of *The Luminaries* in order to analyse the way in which Catton explores different forms of storytelling. To do this I examine, in depth, the narrative layers that Catton has created through her omniscient narration and moments of authorial intrusion throughout. I then go on to discuss Catton's use of astrology and how this plays an integral role to the plot, the nature of each character, and their relationships within the novel. Following this I explore how Catton addresses the notion of death throughout and how this emphasises the tension between past and the present in both *The Luminaries* and neo-Victorian fiction as a genre.

Following this the third, and final, chapter will focus on the place of Catton's text in our contemporary digital culture. This chapter will open by briefly touching upon the narrative techniques explored in chapter two to give this, admittedly speculative, chapter a stronger grounding in Catton's text. I will then explore Catton's text as a product of (and for) the digital culture, in so much that the text would have been written very differently, if at all, if it was not for computer programmes. Following this I will discuss the notion of paradoxical relationships both within Catton's text and our wider contemporary digital culture as we are encompassed in a 'large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small stilled world of horror and unease; […] a sphere within a sphere' (Catton, 2013: 454). This will move the chapter onto the idea Will Self draws upon that in the increasingly digital age 'reading [has] become the solitary acts of social beings' (Self, 2013:The Guardian Online), and how our online behaviours have changed the way we read, both on/offline.

As it stands there has not been much critical work on Catton's text, with the main article being written by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in their introduction to a special edition of *Victoriographies* (2015), titled 'To a Lesser Extent? Neo-Victorian Masculinities'. As they state 'Catton's novel is about the tales men tell one another' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2015: 97), and there 'is a shortage of men in Neo-Victorianism' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2015:97). Though this would appear to be true the role of masculinity within Catton's text, and neo-Victorianism as a whole, is not an avenue I have chosen to pursue within this project. There are a plethora of readings I could have given to Catton's text, but due to the size of this project I have chosen to focus on the trajectory above, and despite the exploratory and speculative nature of my final chapter it is a discussion worth having and is yet to be explored as neo-Victorian fiction evolves.

Chapter One: Mining the Field

In this chapter I will discuss some of the key themes, tropes and questions surrounding neo-Victorian literature. To do this I will briefly analyse four key texts spanning five decades, the trajectory of which will begin with John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), grounding the discussion with the historiographic metafiction of the late 1960s. I will then move onto Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), a novel described by Sarah Waters as treading an 'agile path between realism and fantasy' (Waters, 1984:6). Thirdly, Sarah Waters' debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) will be discussed, where lesbian erotic drama meets cross dressing identity politics, finally Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), a Wilkie Collins inspired neo-Victorian novel of epic proportions. The examination of these texts will explore some emerging key tropes of neo-Victorian literature from the late 1960s. In doing so, I will explore how the mode of neo-Victorian fiction has changed from being classed as historiographical metafiction and developed into the neo-Victorian fiction we read today. To do this I will discuss links to postmodernism, intertextuality, fantasy, narrative techniques, the activation of the reader, and commentary on the present as the genre has developed. By extension, this survey will provide the foundations for exploring *The Luminaries*: Eleanor Catton's 2013 neo-Victorian novel, which will be the focus of the rest of this thesis.

John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and Historiographic Metafiction

In order to fully explore Catton's text I must discuss Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a novel now considered one of the most influential 'neo-Victorian' texts. Fowles' novel is a key primary text for Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics*

of Postmodernism (1988): a monograph in which Fowles's novel is categorized as a work of 'historiographic metafiction' (5). According to Hutcheon novels classed under this term are 'intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically [laying] claim to historical events and personages' (Hutcheon, 1988:5). She goes on to state that historigraphic metafiction has a 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs', giving grounds for 'its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past' (Hutcheon, 1988:5). She also discusses these works as challenges to 'the [increasing] uniformization of mass culture' as it seeks to 'assert difference, not homogenous identity' (Hutcheon, 1988:6). This is explored in Fowles' narrative as he states:

> You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it...fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf - your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in the flight from the real reality. That is the basic definition of Homo sapiens (Fowles, 1969:97).

Here he explores fiction as a 'human [construct]', as we are all in 'flight from the real reality' creating our own versions of the past (Fowles, 1969:97). This quotation is an example of Fowles exploring his own work as historiographic metafiction. The narrative is full of moments like this as he playfully explores his purpose for writing the novel. He opens this chapter stating:

> I do not know. This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 'voice' of) a convention

> universally accepted at the time of my story […] if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word (Fowles, 1969:95).

Here Fowles is showing his awareness of the novel as a social construct as his text is adhering to the '[conventions] universally accepted at the time' (Fowles, 1969:95) of his writing. It is a trope he adheres to throughout his novel, sometimes in a rather garish fashion, but it places the text within the genre of historiographic metafiction . Fowles has a 'theoretic self-awareness of history and fiction' (Hutcheon, 1988:6), just as neo-Victorianism is self-consciously re-working the contents of the past to create new modes of fiction.

For me, Fowles and his postmodern work of historiographic metafiction posed a 'challenge' in the late 1960s, through his direct, smug narration, which may explain the lack of any significant neo-Victorian texts emerging in the 1970s. As I look to examine a key text from each decade, starting with the work of Fowles, I have yet to find a novel from the 1970s showing any significant development of the neo-Victorian genre. It seems to me that a rest period was needed after the initial challenge before subsequent authors were able to take it up. Fowles' work can be seen to explore the views of Lyotard, in that 'postmodernism is characterized by […] incredulity towards master or metanarratives' (Hutcheon, 1988:6). This 'postmodernist contradictory art' installs order but then 'uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning' (Hutcheon, 1988:7), as Fowles' work shows 'another inheritance from the 1960s to believe that challenging and questioning are positive values (even if solutions to problems are not offered)' (Hutcheon, 1988:8). The work of Fowles posed a challenge and question to the world of literature and 'many cultural commentators have since argued that the energies of the 1960s changed the framework and structure of how we

consider art' (Hutcheon, 1988:8). This may work towards explaining why there was no significant work of neo-Victorian fiction until the 1980s.

The distance we now have from Fowles' novel gives space for what Margaret D. Stetz discusses in her article 'Neo-Victorian Studies' in the journal of *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2012), as the idea that 'literary genres […] become real when they are parodied' and the 'the neo-Victorian novel, therefore, must now be real for its features have become so familiar and readily distinguishable' (339). Though such distinguishable features have changed since the publication of Fowles', his pivotal text provides an 'ironic commentary upon the nineteenth century from a twentieth century vantage point' (Stetz, 2012:339) in first person narrative. Fowles' pastiche of Victorian fiction has itself been parodied and re-envisioned by John Crace in his novel *Brideshead Abbreviated: The Digested Read of the Twentieth Century* (2010). As Stetz discusses, Crace is able to expose:

> the chief pitfall for both writers and readers of neo-Victorian fiction: the danger of smugness, based on the inescapable circumstance of knowing more about the world in which the characters find themselves, as well as about worlds to come, than they can ever know' (Stetz, 2012:339)

This is something writers of neo-Victorian fiction can fall foul of, particularly when there is a third person omniscient narrator. It is this 'smug' narration that can be seen throughout notable works of neo-Victorian fiction, four of which I am going on to discuss in this chapter.

Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Fantasy

Any agenda the narrator may have when considering the potential 'smug' narration of a neo-Victorian narrative brings me to discuss Angela Carter's *Nights at*

the Circus (1984), published 15 years after Fowles *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* The version of the novel I am using, interestingly, has an introduction by Sarah Waters, one of the most prominent neo-Victorian writers of the past 15 years. In the introduction, Waters compares Carter to other prominent 'magic realists' such as Salman Rushdie and Garbriel Garcia Marquez, who are both of particular interest to Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* Yet the biggest difference, Waters points out, is that Carter 'wrote, always, with a distinctly feminist agenda, determined to debunk cultural fantasies around sexuality, gender and class' (Carter, 1984:6). Carter is a feminist icon, particularly through her support of 'founding the women's publishing house Virago Press, in 1979' (Carter, 1984:6). The novel *Nights at the Circus* is a prime example of her 'challenging of the canon, the rewriting of fairy tale and myth [and] the imagining of female utopia and dystopias' (Carter, 1984:7), a key trope of many feminist works throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Carter's novel still explores areas of the postmodern and just as Hutcheon discusses historiographic metafiction as a mode of literature used 'to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning' (Hutcheon, 1988:7), Carter, through her first person narrative, asks us 'is not this whole world an illusion? And yet it fools everybody' (Carter, 1984:16). There is a tension throughout her novel surrounding the wings of the heroine 'Fevvers', 'a suitably larger than life […] winged Victorian 'Cockney Venus'' (Carter, 1084:6), and whether they are real or not. There is much contestation surrounding her wings as 'in a secular age, an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax, in order to gain credit in the world' (Carter, 1984:17). The subversion of reality throughout the novel is a key part of Carter's novel, and differentiates her work from any of the others I am discussing within this chapter.

Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and Social Commentary

The idea of the world as an illusion that 'fools everybody' (Carter, 1984:16) can be seen within Sarah Waters' debut neo-Victorian lesbian drama *Tipping the Velvet* (1998). This novel is an example of neo-Victorian literature acting as social commentary as the novel was published in the same year that Matthew Shephard was 'lynched' in America in an act of homosexual hatred. Shephard was 'stretched along a Wyoming fence not just as a dying young man but as a signpost, "When push comes to shove," it says, "this is what we have in mind for gays"' (Sprinkle, 2011: xvii). LGBT rights were of particular note at the time of Waters' novel, making the subject matter even more poignant. But it is the focus on gender roles and hiding your true identity that acts as the illusion that 'fools everybody'. Throughout the novel, the protagonist Nancy "Nan" Astley falls in love with a male impersonator extraordinaire who was performing at her local theatre in Whistable: Kitty. She soon becomes infatuated with Kitty and finds a way to become her dresser. As their relationship develops, Nancy moves to London with Kitty and the pair becomes a male impersonation double act. They are inseparable until Nancy returns to their home to find Kitty in bed with their manager, Walter. Distraught, Nancy becomes a 'male' prostitute and subsequently hits rock bottom. In the third part of the novel, Nan begins to see the error of her ways and works to get her life back on track.

As explored by Mandy Koolen in her article 'Historical Fiction and the Revaluing of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet'* (2010), Waters' novel shows an ability to 'destabilize the idea that studies of differences and similarities across time must exist in tension and opposition to each other, while incorporating factual historical detail in order to convey the specificity of life in

Victorian England' (Koolen, 2010:371). With this particular time frame in mind, her novel also demonstrates that:

> historical fiction may use the past to comment on issues of contemporary concern and, by establishing temporal distance between readers and characters, make difficult social critiques more likely to be heard and taken seriously (Koolen, 2010:372).

Waters' novel acts as a mirror to the difficulties homosexual men and women faced in the Victorian period, and how much these issues are still prominent. It is important to have this brought to the forefront of culture within the framework of a neo-Victorian novel, as Koolen discusses there is an issue with current explorations of the history of homosexuality. More 'queer historians' are attempting to 'distance themselves from their forerunners in order to appear more intellectually rigorous and objective' in an 'attempt to legitimize sexuality studies within the broader discipline of history' (Koolen, 2010:373). However as Koolen argues, 'focusing only on historical differences inhibits understandings of how present sexualities and genders grow out of and exist in response to the past' (Koolen, 2010:373).

This focus on 'historical differences' is extremely problematic, especially within the field of queer historical studies. In distancing themselves from their 'forerunners' they are forgetting a major part of social development. The quotation from Nancy that, '[she] was a solitary girl, in a city that favoured sweethearts and gentlemen; a girl in a city where girls walked onto to be gazed at' (Waters, 1998:191) is achingly familiar even still. Despite the fact this novel was published nearly two decades ago, this issue is still at the forefront of today's culture, women, or anyone dressed as such, may feel the uncomfortable 'gaze' of society. When Nancy encounters the physical manifestation of the 'gaze' upon her as she walks with a sense

of being ‘free’ and yet simultaneously ‘bound’ is explored as she states, ‘how much freer would I paradoxically be, bound to this lady – bound to lust, bound to pleasure!’ (Waters, 1998:249). Here it seems a better option to Nancy is to be a ‘kept’ woman to another who liked to ‘limit the numbers who gazed at [her]’ as ‘she feared that like a photograph [she] might fade’ (Waters, 1998:280). This is a comment on the idea that, as a woman going against societal convention, it would be better for her to be ‘bound’ to another who keeps her away from the gazing eye of a disapproving society, uncomfortable with who she is. It is also an exploration of the cultural idea that women are given worth through their youth and good looks, and once these ‘fade’ they are no longer noticed or valued within society.

Despite the cultural issues being discussed throughout the novel there are many moments within Waters’ narrative that demonstrate an awareness of the fleeting nature of time and cultural norms. The story is a vessel for opinions on the current state of society, despite all the struggles women and homosexuals were (and still are) facing:

> Things *are* changing. There are unions everywhere – and women’s unions, as well as men’s. Women do things today their mothers would have laughed to think of seeing their daughters doing, twenty years ago; […] If people like me don’t work, it’s because they look at the world, at all the injustice and the muck, and all they see is a nation falling in upon itself […] but the muck has new things growing out of it […] new ways of being alive and in love (Waters, 1998:391)

These words are spoken by Florence (Nan’s eventual partner), yet it feels like an intrusion from Waters, acting as social commentary. Saliently, though, that ‘intrusion’ can be read as an act of postmodern playfulness; whilst Waters uses the figure/voice

of the author to make a serious social point, which is indicative of a movement beyond mere play in her narrative. Despite these words being written two decades ago they resonate just as much now as ever. 'If people like [Sarah Waters] don't work' it is because they do not see the point in trying to bring these issues to the forefront of people's minds, when it is in fact the opposite. It is increasingly important to have contemporary cultural concerns such as, homosexuality, sexuality, promiscuity (and its consequences), transgender and transvestite issues, explored in literature.

Despite the legalization of same sex marriage in March 2014, we still do not have equality within society. It feels even more important to be discussing this passage nearly twenty years after it's original publication when Waters states that, 'women do things today their mothers would have laughed to think of seeing their daughters doing, twenty years ago' (Waters, 1998:391). Despite her writing *then* from a place of historical hindsight, we are reading it from a place of further hindsight where same-sex marriage is a reality. As Koolen states, writers like Waters 'bring the past to life and provide readers who feel alienated by fact-based, "objective," and/or heterosexist histories with a way of engaging with the past' (Koolen, 2010:373). The narrative Waters provides creates a space for readers to gain insight into the world of homosexual, transgender or cross-dressing individuals. The text holds a mirror up to society and explores the feelings of those alienated and marginalised within our culture. Narratives such as Waters' are extremely important in working towards changing perceptions and making such life choices 'normal' and removing any negative connotations within society.

Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White,* Intertextuality and Activation of the Reader

The responsibility of the author to activate the reader throughout a neo-Victorian text and the exploration of intertextuality can be seen in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) as from the offset he shows a clear structure to the roles of author and reader from the opening paragraph:

> Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them. This city I am bringing you to is vast and intricate, and you have not been here before. You may imagine, from other stories you've read, that you know it well, but those stories flattered you […] The truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether' (Faber, 2008:1).

This opening creates a distance between the narrator and the reader. Although the passage invites the reader into the 'vast and intricate' city (that we soon learn is London), it is clear that the narrator is in control as the reader is called 'an alien from another time and place altogether' (1). Faber's novel 'plays at the hermeneutical process of contemporary ways of understanding the Victorian past, and it does so by intermedially appropriating adventure-game strategies, whose visual setup is structured by the focalisations of the characters in the game' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:5). To do this Faber puts the reader in a place of 'historical hindsight', expressing an awareness of intertextuality through the smugness at the fact the reader has been 'flattered' and tricked by previous stories. The smug and superior feeling to Faber's narration is similar to that of Fowles, in his 'retrospective record of history, a re-capturing of the past' (Faber, 2008:62). Faber's adherence to tropes of sensationalist fiction are also in the sheer size of his novel as it demonstrates 'an

awareness of the material form of the Victorian novel and attempt to replicate it' (Palmer, 2009:90), but there is more to Faber's narrative than mere size.

Another key emerging trope of neo-Victorian fiction is evident in Faber's use of 'a range of print and non-print forms (advertisements, newspaper articles, diaries)' (Palmer, 2009:90), which can be linked to Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859). In Faber's text, for example, the newspaper article used in chapter 30 to announce Agnes Rackham's death is used to cover up the truth of Agnes' disappearance, giving it 'power over life and death' (Palmer, 2009:91). As Palmer lays out in her article, sensation novels, 'like most novels, […] were first serialized and then published in volume form, but sensation novels with their cliff-hangers and red herrings, made good use of serialization' (86). This form of fiction is discussed in R. C. Terry's work *Victorian Popular Fiction, 1860-80* (1983), as it catered to the demand of 'a good story well told in realistic terms and in the spirit of useful, energizing commitment to life and people' (5). The fiction's popularity was a product of the subsequent rise in numbers of readers within mid-Victorian Britain, circulating libraries, weekly/monthly magazines, publicised trials, journalism and public education.

The 'Memory Work' of Neo-Victorian Fiction

To delve deeper into what constitutes a work of neo-Victorian fiction I want to touch upon the works of a key postmodern theorist, Linda Hutcheon, and an exploration of the relationship between neo-Victorianism and postmodernism, Hutcheon purports in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) that:

> The postmodern is, if it is anything, a problematizing force in our culture today: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical

> and the "natural". But it never offers answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined (and limited). (xi)

The idea of the postmodern creating more questions than it answers is a key point to consider when it comes to link between postmodernism and neo-Victorian fiction. As I will discuss further in this chapter, neo-Victorian fiction is yet to have a fixed definition as to what constitutes the genre. This in itself is postmodern, as this mode of fiction is currently raising more questions than it answers. Hutcheon goes on to state in 'Part 1' of the book that 'postmodernism cannot simply be used as a synonym for the contemporary', instead she gives her own meaning as it being 'fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political' with a focus on the '"presence of the past"', a presence that I will go on to discuss in the second chapter of my thesis. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is 'a site of the struggle of the emergence of something new', which I see mirrored in the increasing popularity of neo-Victorian literature (Hutcheon, 1988:4). There is a tension within the form of the neo-Victorian between moving forward, evolution and adaptation whilst simultaneously focusing on the past; a tension that in itself is postmodern.

This tension is increased when we think that the term 'neo-Victorian' is relatively new. The term was not placed in a book title until 2002 by Daniel Candel Bormann in *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel: A Poetics (and Two Case Studies)* (2002). As a result, John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a novel considered to be perhaps the foundational text in the evolution of neo-Victorian fiction, was not considered as neo-Victorian until twenty-two years after its publication. Initially, Fowles' work came under the genre '"historical fiction" […] with the particular period involved left unspecified' (Stetz, 2012:340). Neo-Victorianism then had to wait a further eleven years to have 'what

every field nowadays seeks as an anchor – a peer reviewed journal' dedicated to it (Stetz, 2012:341). This was *The Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies*, an electronic publication released in the autumn of 2008. As Mary Louise Kohlke, the founding editor, states in the first issue:

> the necessary debates around 'neo-Victorian' – as term, as genre, as 'new' discipline, as cultural happening, as socio-political critique, as reinvigorated historical consciousness, as memory work, as critical interface between the present and past – urgently require an appropriate forum, both to be brought more fully into focus and to facilitate a long-term productive exchange of ideas on the neo-Victorian's nature and purpose with suitable intellectual rigour (Kohlke, 2008:1).

It is the 'reinvigorated historical consciousness, as memory work' that piques my interest the most in this quotation (Kohlke, 2008:1). Neo-Victorian fiction appears to have grown and matured via the genre of historiographic metafiction, and therefore has more responsibility to the past it is using to create new modes of fiction. The working as a 'critical interface between present and past' is a challenge for neo-Victorian fiction, and something that must be articulated with great care and consideration, especially as the genre is still working towards having a solid definition (Kohlke, 2008:1). As Stetz goes on to discuss, Kohlke avoided giving any clarification to 'the (still) missing definitions or delineate possible generic, chronological, and aesthetic boundaries – objectives which more properly belong to the project ahead', leaving the genre open to further clarification (Kohlke, 2008:1-2),.

Despite the genre missing a clear definition other scholars in the field of neo-Victorianism have articulated their own definitions. I will firstly discuss the work of Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, in their co-authored field-defining book *Neo-*

Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009 (2010). Within this book they argue:

> the 'neo-Victorian' is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians'* (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:4).

This begins to show the growth of neo-Victorian fiction from 'historical fiction' to something with more substance. Heilmann and Llewellyn have begun to explore some of the key themes to neo-Victorian fiction, including its self-consciousness, '*(re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision'* as we look back and adapt the fiction of the past. The idea of neo-Victorian fiction being self-conscious in its engagement is something I will explore in further detail within the second and third chapter of this thesis. But at this moment, when thinking about the adaptation of the past within neo-Victorian fiction, it is important to consider the thoughts of Louisa Hadley, author of *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010). Hadley defines neo-Victorianism as 'contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both'. She states that:

> neo-Victorian fictions […] are not merely part of the contemporary fascination with the Victorian past; they are aware of the purposes the Victorians are made to serve and […] self-consciously comment on the political and cultural uses of the Victorians in the present (Hadley, 2010:14).

Again, Hadley is articulating the fact that neo-Victorianism should be more than historical fiction. There needs to be another layer to its fiction as 'aware' and being able to 'self-consciously comment' without acting as 'merely part of the

contemporary fascination' (Hadley, 2010:14). Taking into account these critical voices a trend begins to appear as, according to the scholars, for a novel to be considered neo-Victorian it must be aware of its position as a neo-Victorian novel. These novels are required to be '*more than* historical fiction' as they must be '*self-consciously engaged with […] (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision'* (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:4). As Kohlke states, neo-Victorianism must act 'as memory work, as critical interface between the present and past […] with suitable intellectual rigour' (Kohlke, 2008:1). Therefore it is this 'memory work', self-conscious engagement and awareness of itself as a form of (re)interpretation that they argue is integral to a neo-Victorian text.

The Role of the Author in Neo-Victorian Fiction

When considering these initial definitions of the genre I must explore the fact that what we now class as neo-Victorian fiction has emerged from postmodernity. This can be seen in the way 'postmodernity has generated a range of returns back to the past' with a particular focus on 'the Victorian's' own instincts to explore and adapt the past and the present into a different sense of the future' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:212). The preoccupation with the past, present and future can be traced in Victorian fiction and in exploring these ideas neo-Victorian writers are reflecting on a Victorian strategy. This can be exemplified through Collins' text *The Woman in White* (1859) as Walter Hartright discusses his relationship with Laura Fairlie. Hartright talks about the 'revival' of their love, as 'it was as if Time had drifted us back on the wreck of our early hopes to the old familiar shore!' (Collins, 1859:396). Here Walter also reflects upon the need for change to avoid repeating past mistakes as he states 'that it rested with [him] in the first instance, to recognize the

necessity for a change (Collins, 1859:396-97). Here he is discussing the need to 'explore and adapt' the past in order to change the future, not just for himself, but for Laura, Marian and future generations. It is within the neo-Victorian project I see the need for the relationship between adaptations to 'be altered in some settled manner for the […] in the first instance, to recognize the necessity for a change' (Collins, 1859:396-97). Collins' narration shows the self-consciousness that neo-Victorian fiction requires. Collins shows an awareness of the importance of learning from the past to create the future, something inherently necessary to any piece of neo-Victorian fiction. The relationship between the present and the past must be explored and used within a piece of neo-Victorian fiction to be successfully '*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision'* (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:4). There is an air of responsibility in this section of Collins' text and it lies with one man, Walter Hartright the current narrator of the story. Collins here speaks to other authors and calls for change. In doing so he explores the responsibility of an author to influence audiences and change the relationship 'in some settled manner for the future' (Collins, 1859:397). Kohlke, Heilmann and Llewellyn would argue that this is a necessary aspect to neo-Victorian fiction in order to surpass being classed as mere historical fiction. This is a trope of both Victorian fiction and neo-Victorian fiction that there is a huge sense of responsibility within the role of the storyteller to influence their reader. Within both Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction, the author must connect with their readers in a timely fashion, expressing their understanding of current issues '[exploring] and [adapting] the past and the present' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:212) in order to give readers a clearer vision of the future.

The influence a Victorian author will have had over his or her reader is explored by Beth Palmer in her article 'Are the Victorians Still With Us? Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century' (2009). Here Palmer discusses that Collins was 'situated at the center of […] anxieties about a rapidly technologizing print culture and its perceived effects on readerships' (Palmer, 2009:87) and that one of the key tropes of Victorian sensation novels was to 'stimulate readers' nerves, not their moral faculties' (Palmer, 2009:87). Palmer goes on to argue that 'sensation fiction's most significant and lasting legacy is a self-consciousness about how the contemporary moment is constructed in and by print culture as it mediates the past' (Palmer, 2009:87), a key trope of neo-Victorianism. To explore this point further she discusses the work of Wilkie Collins, and the more recent 'pastiche' work of Michael Faber and Sarah Waters. In doing so she discusses Faber and Water's 'self-reflexive interest in the materiality of print culture and the status of their novels in comparison with others [as] an inheritance from the sensation fiction of the 1860s' (Palmer, 2009:92). I take issue with Palmer's choice of the term 'pastiche' with reference to the work of Waters and Faber, particularly when compared to a novel such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* despite Faber's narration in *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) being a nod to the work of Fowles. With that being said, I agree that 'their neo-Victorian novels demonstrate that self-consciousness regarding a book's place in print culture is a legacy of the sensation novels they pastiche' (Palmer, 2009:90). This can be seen through the fact that both Faber and Waters have capitalized on the success of their novels, as *Fingersmith* (2002) and *The Crimson Petal and the White* have been adapted into BBC TV mini-series. It is this self-awareness, self-consciousness and self-reflexivity

of the place these novels hold within the wider culture, as often happens with neo-Victorian novels that I have discussed in this chapter.

The rise in popularity of a specific literary genre says a lot about the culture of its time and although there are key trends within the discussion of neo-Victorian literature, there is still yet to be a clear definition of what constitutes a neo-Victorian novel. As Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss argue, clarifying it would be problematic as 'a strict definition would exclude texts from scrutiny' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:3), ones which may deserve interrogation, but would be excluded as a result. As Marie-Louise Kohlke states in her article 'Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein: Prospecting for Gold, Buried Treasure and Uncertain Metal' (2014), there has been a 'cultural gold rush' with regards to neo-Victorianism as creative practitioners are writing, and re-writing, in and on the literary genre. She refers to neo-Victorianism in the broadest possible sense as:

> Indicating cultural and critical practice that re-visions the nineteenth century and its latter-day aesthetic and ideological legacies in the light of historical hindsight and critique, but also fantasy – what we *want* to imagine the period to have been like for diverse reasons, including affirmations of national identity, the struggle for symbolic restorative justice, and indulgence in escapist exoticism (Kohlke, 2014:21).

As much as neo-Victorianism evades solid definition, there are certain tropes that typically constitute a neo-Victorian novel. Just as with the previous discussions of neo-Victorianism, here Kohlke refers to the field as a 're-vision' of the nineteenth century 'in the light of historical hindsight and critique' (Kohlke, 2014:21). This is key to the self-conscious engagement within neo-Victorianism and the ability to reflect upon, adapt and evolve the form based upon 'what we *want* to imagine the

period to have been like' (Kohlke, 2014:21). The more I discuss what is expected of the neo-Victorian novel, the more responsibility the novels have. Whilst there must be an air of 'fantasy' and 'escapist exoticism' about them they are to serve their purpose of 'restorative justice' with 'affirmations of national identity' (Kohlke, 2014:21). These expectations are problematic especially when the dangers of nostalgia are considered, something I will touch upon at this particular juncture. However, my main focus on nostalgia will be in the third chapter of this thesis.

The role of the author in encouraging or discouraging this feeling of nostalgia in neo-Victorian novels is discussed by Kate Mitchell in her book *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010) as she puts ownership in 'the role of the reader in producing historical meaning' (33), which Stetz explores as being 'the "agency" that fiction encourages and enables its audience to exercise in how and what it will remember' (Stetz, 2012:342). This interpretation differs slightly to those previously discussed, adding another level of depth to the genre, one that includes the reader and embraces their involvement rather than placing onus on the author. The latter-day 'hindsight' and 'historical legacies' portrayed by neo-Victorian novelists are often concerned with the issues surrounding the Empire, our 'national identity' and struggles for 'restorative justice' concerning the attitudes and behaviour towards the colonies the Empire took control of. We are trying to 're-vision' the Victorian period to be what we want it to be through the 'escapist exoticism' (Kohlke, 2014:21). The genre is becoming its own form of critical justice towards the national behaviour of our ancestors. As discussed by Heilmann and Llewellyn in their book chapter 'Spectrality and S(p)ecularity*',* 'we are presented as somehow superior readers because we have the advantage of historical hindsight' (161), so as 'superior readers' we are now expected to create the 'restorative justice' presented to us by the author.

This poses questions surrounding issues not just of neo-Victorianism, but also post-colonialism, a topic I would have liked to explore in further detail within this project, however, due to the size of the thesis it is a venture I have not had the opportunity to take further.

The Neo-Victorian 'Project'

When it comes to exploring neo-Victorianism in more critical depth one must consider the process of adaptation and evolution within the form. As Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss discuss in their book *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (2014), the 'fascination with things Victorian has been a British postwar vogue that shows no sign of exhaustion' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:1). In addition, the 'neo-Victorian project' (as they refer to it) 'is still in the process of disciplinary differentiation and comprises a larger body of primary resources' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:2). With Schnitker and Gruss referring to neo-Victorianism as the neo-Victorian 'project' gives a real sense of the tone of their critical focus. The definition of 'project' is:

> 1. a. A plan, draft, scheme or table of something; a tabulated statement; a design or pattern according to which something is made. *Obs.*
>
> b. A mental conception, idea, or notion; speculation. *Obs.* […]
>
> 2. b. *Educ.* An exercise in which school or college students study a topic, either independently or in collaboration, over an extended period; piece of research work undertaken by a student or group of students (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015: Online).

The neo-Victorian project is a collaborative 'mental conception', a 'notion' up for 'speculation', which follows a certain 'design' or 'pattern'. The form is still in the

early stages of discovering exactly what this 'design' or 'pattern' is, as many noted academics in the field of neo-Victorianism are researching and discussing, whether collaboratively or independently, what defines the genre. The fiction of the Victorian period has evolved and been adapted to create neo-Victorian fiction. However, as the form increases in popularity there is a building tension within its evolution. It is inspired by and focused on the past, a period that is complete, and yet neo-Victorianism is '[extending] outwards beyond something else', beyond both the Victorian period and itself. This tension within neo-Victorianism is problematic, especially when it comes to solidly defining the characteristics of the form. However, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss argue that the lack of definition for neo-Victorianism is necessary as the form is constantly evolving and changing. They suggest the genre may always exist in a state of change and redefinition, which works with the idea that neo-Victorianism is forever defined by the now, which is always in flux.

The idea that a neo-Victorian text 'must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re) interpretation, (re) discovery and (re) vision concerning the Victorians'* (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:4) may appear as though neo-Victorianism is a static form, with its (re) hashing of old ideas. However, with controversial novels such as Sherry Browning Erwin's *Grave Expectations* (2011) and Sarah Gray's *Wuthering Bites* (2010) emerging into the field Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss argue that this kind of 'mash-up' gives a new life to neo-Victorian texts. These texts are literary 'mash-up's of the general plot and quotations from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861) and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), with a dash of werewolves, vampires, blood, and guts. These novels show that whilst 'postmodernity remains a helpful reference point […], the neo-Victorian has moved beyond postmodern concerns such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity [and]

metafiction' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:4). There is still a place for them within neo-Victorian fiction, though they are not as prevalent now as they were twelve years ago in the work of Faber or Waters. In light of this, it is important to consider 'the way we adapt now' and in Heilmann and Llewellyn's chapter 'The Way We Adapt Now: or, the Neo-Victorian Theme Park' (2010) they raise a critical question on what it means to adapt the Victorians now:

> What are we adapting: the Victorians/Victorian text or the mediation they/it have already undergone in popular culture? Does each adaptation move us further away from the Victorians […] or does [it] represent a new challenge to adaptors in terms of how they deal with the issue of authenticity itself? (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:212)

The self-reflexivity of neo-Victorianism opens up issues of authenticity and adaption. Neo-Victorianism is full of repetitions while dealing with contemporary issues as the idea of (re) interpretation is at its heart, something Heilmann and Llewellyn discuss as giving the genre a new form of life. Llewellyn touches upon this in his article as he works to reassure 'those holding academic positions in the more traditional areas of nineteenth-century literature or history that they [have] nothing to fear, and everything to gain, from engagement with this new endeavor' (179-80). This position is also a key point in Kohlke's essay as it is reiterates that ''Victorian' should not be viewed as occupying a secondary or inferior position within the conjunction' (Kohlke, 2014:22), because as much as the neo-Victorian genre is fashionable within literary circles, it does not wish to take anything away from its inspiration. In fact, the essay emphasizes the period as an 'object of desire and recuperation as much as contestation and subversion' (Kohlke, 2014:23). It is important to consider that neo-Victorian literature is not trying to take a superior stance to that of the Victorian period, it is

simply evolving and adapting the form through the process of self-conscious engagement, (re)vision and (re)interpretation. The genre is in a place of 'historical hindsight' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:161) with authors as 'agents' to the reader, whose role it is to produce their own 'historical meaning' (Mitchell, 2010:33). To me this suggests that neo-Victorianism will forever be in a state of evolution and flux as it creates a more subjective atmosphere surrounding the genre. It feels as though the role of author as master storyteller and omniscient interpreter is changing to incorporate and welcome the views and opinions of the reader.

The role of the author is key in giving the neo-Victorian form substance and true engagement with the Victorian period. As Mitchell explores, neo-Victorian fiction:

> turns upon the question of whether history is equated, in fiction, with superficial detail; an accumulation of references to clothing, furniture, décor and the like, that produces the past in terms of its objects, as a series of clichés, without engaging its complexities as a unique historical moment that is now produced in a particular relationship to the present. […] Can these novels recreate the past in a meaningful way or are they playing nineteenth-century dress-ups? (3)

This shows the task neo-Victorian fiction is facing since the historiographic metafiction fiction of the late 1960s up to contemporary neo-Victorian fiction, as the early iterations of postmodern neo-Victorian fiction seemed to be preoccupied with how the novels appeared on the surface, rather than delving further into their responsibilities to the Victorian time period. The genre is working towards true engagement with the past in all 'its complexities as a unique historical moment that is now produced in a particular relationship to the present' (Mitchell, 2010:3). Although

there is a place for the 'superficial' complexities within neo-Victorian fiction this 'nineteenth-century [dress-up]' (Mitchell, 2010:3) is a gateway to exploring a more complex cultural commentary. Some critics, such as Mitchell, may consider the materiality of the nineteenth century a cliché. However, I would argue that having a true sense of self-awareness and reflective engagement within the form of neo-Victorian fiction is helping it evolve and adapt into a more complex genre, equipped with historical hindsight for its cultural commentary.

The neo-Victorian project is a way of '[redeeming] socio-cultural exclusions of the Victorian era (at least in an imaginary realm)' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:5) and this self-reflexivity is a constant and integral part to the construction of contemporary identity, particularly in our contemporary digital world. The form is moving away from the postmodern preoccupation with surface appearances to become self-reflexive as 'the neo-Victorian project lends itself particularly well to negotiate 'who we are today' […] [surveying] the manifold strategies catering to today's identity politics' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:5). Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss discuss neo-Victorian as a genre which:

> more strongly integrates questions of ethics, reconsiders the author, [and] allows the referent to become visible again behind the veil of material signifiers (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:4).

Hadley attributes this perception of Victorian characters as their having 'an existence beyond the confines of the novel', which in turn 'spurs the desire for adaptations and sequels of classic Victorian texts' (Hadley, 2010:32) or a revival of the form altogether. This trend of neo-Victorianism, Hadley argues, should not be 'dismissed as merely a backlash against postmodernism or a nostalgic urge to revive the attributes that contribute to its popularity due to 'the massive readership Victorian

novels have enjoyed through their position as 'classic novels'' (Hadley, 2010:32). One example of this would be with James Wilson's *The Dark Clue* (2001), a sequel to Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859). Catton's novel takes inspiration from the work of Collins as she creates a ''reimagining' of a Victorian novel', as her 'return to the Victorian era is grounded in a concern with historical narratives (Hadley, 2010:33) rather than attempting to provide a sequel. According to Hadley, the neo-Victorian preoccupation with 'resurrecting Victorian figures' means '[engaging] with questions that are central to the way in which we narrate the Victorian past' rather than simply participating in the 'contemporary nostalgia for the Victorian era' (Hadley, 2010:33).

The contemporary author's responsibility towards narrating the Victorian past can be seen as a way in which the repressed can be freed and break away from modes of control, as discussed by Suzanne Keen in her book *Victorian Renovations on the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation* (1997). In this book she discusses the links between Victorian 'annexes' (a term she coined) and their relation to modern day literature. Narrative annexes, as Keen explains, 'allow unexpected characters, impermissible subjects, and plot-altering events to appear, in a bounded way, within fictional worlds that might be expected to exclude them' (Keen, 1997:1). It is these processes of adaptation to which the neo-Victorian project is bound, just as the narrative annexes of the Victorian period are described by Keen as appearing 'in a bounded way'. As Heilmann and Llewellyn discuss:

> Adaptation is a fundamental part of neo-Victorianism as a concept because all engagements with the Victorian in contemporary culture that fulfill the metatextual and metacritical requirements […] are necessarily adaptations or appropriations […]. Adaptation is by its nature an evolving form, and one

> which we have inherited from the nineteenth century (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:244).

Adaptation makes neo-Victorianism an evolving form, and is why the genre has increased in popularity over the past ten to fifteen years. The sense of nostalgia we feel for the Victorian era, Victorian fiction and art in particular, is evident in the popularity of neo-Victorianism as a form of literature. It is a problematic nostalgia, as the validity of feeling nostalgia for a way of life we did not experience directly is questionable. However, it invites authors to reimagine the form, reinterpreting the narration, narrative structure and plots to evolve and adapt them for the twenty-first century.

The idea of adaption itself is not one of originality but of development and evolution as Heilmann and Llewellyn explore. Fredric Jameson, another key postmodern theorist, discusses historicity and nostalgia in his article 'Utopia as Replication' (2010), as he states:

> the reawakening of that historicity which our system – offering itself as the very end of history – necessary [sic] represses and paralyzes. This is the sense in which utopology revives long dormant parts of the mind, organs of political and historical and social imagination which have virtually atrophied for lack of use, muscles of praxis we have long since ceased exercising, revolutionary gestures we have lost the habit of performing, even subliminally (Jameson, 2010:434).

Here he is stating that although he views nostalgia as doomed, or stagnant, it is necessary for the sake of present day culture, rather than a historical homage. Neo-Victorianism is acting as a way of '[reviving] long dormant parts of the mind', as we are now in a place to have sufficient historical hindsight to use our Victorian past as a

way to awaken 'organs of political and historical and social imagination' (Jameson, 2010:434). Laurence Scott invites the reader to be wary of the nostalgia trap in his book *The Four-Dimensional Human* (2014) as he recalls an experience down memory lane via YouTube, or 'time's warehouse', as he searches for the BBC Christmas series *The Box of Delights.* As he finds the video he is looking for he describes experiencing the reality of nostalgia:

> How quickly tedium set in. I was impatient, not for what I had forgotten, but for what I could half remember. […] When I found him I did feel a frission of recognition, but the overwhelming sensation was of estrangement from that potent atmosphere of memory. […] Everyone knows by now that you can never go back, so I'm not sure why I needed to live out this anticlimax (Scott, 2014:1524).

Here, Scott explains the dangers of playing with nostalgia and mistaking it for memory. The reality of the two are very different and something that must be excised with caution. I think this is the biggest importance: having the mode of neo-Victorianism classed as such, rather than being mere historical fiction. Historical fiction places too much solidity on the genre, whereas neo-Victorianism is using the Victorian period as nostalgic inspiration. The project is working on adapting and evolving the form as it attempts to reverse Jameson's atrophy. The neo-Victorian project is attempting to awaken 'revolutionary gestures we have lost the habit of performing' (Jameson, 2010:434) through evolution and adaptation.

Another significant difference between neo-Victorian fiction and historical fiction is this sense of adaption, evolution and self-reflexivity. There is a critical self-awareness to the form, often with different narrative techniques, which in itself is an adaption from modernism and postmodernism. The evolving form of neo-

Victorianism is an evolution of these modes of literature, something Linda Hutcheon, argues in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) as being 'repetition without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty' (173). This gives an explanation as to the popularity of neo-Victorian fiction. It is the 'repetition' of narrative structure, form and subject matter of the Victorian period, without 'replication' (although the new genre of 'mash-up' literature poses a problem to this point). The form gives the comfort of a ritual well placed in our literary heritage and yet as it adapts and changes with the times, it attempts to keep the 'delight of surprise and novelty', with new ways to manipulate the narrative structure and subject matter to the author's wishes. Neo-Victorianism has a persistent ability to adapt, (re)discovering ways to keep itself modern and relevant.

Feeding Off and Back into the Neo-Victorian 'Project': Towards a Reading of *The Luminaries*

Although Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss discuss the idea of self-reflexivity as an important aspect to the form of neo-Victorian fiction, they do warn against too much self-reflexivity, especially as a solid definition of the form is up for debate. They warn against this as it 'forestalls the analysis of immersive practices of reception and consumption, which may turn out to be equally defining features of the neo-Victorian project' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2014:7). One of the main questions I will ask moving into chapter two and three is how the responsibility of the author has changed within neo-Victorian fiction, and reading in contemporary digital culture? How Catton is working to '[drive] the neo-Victorian project', fitting into:

> The period's predominant literary forms, such as the *Bildungsroman*, triple-decker novels, sensation fiction, or the dramatic monologue; and their

> attendant narrative conventions, including the omniscient narrator or multiple narrative perspectives, poetic justice, and closure (Kohlke, 2014:22).

Using the critical foundations I laid throughout this chapter I will continue to explore Catton's text as a piece of contemporary neo-Victorian fiction. To do so I will display the way in which she adheres to neo-Victorian tropes and how her playful yet carefully crafted narrative structure has made *The Luminaries* a key text in the neo-Victorian 'project'.

Chapter 2: *The Luminaries* and the Paradox of the Narrator

In this chapter I will explore Eleanor Catton's novel *The Luminaries* (2013) as a work of neo-Victorian fiction with close examination and exploration of certain themes within the text. I will discuss how Catton contributes to the ongoing evolution of neo-Victorian literature through her use of omniscient narrators, a playful narrative structure and astrological mapping. Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss state in 'Introduction: Spectacles and Things – Visual and Material Culture and/in Neo-Victorianism' (2011), it has become widely established that:

> Neo- Victorianism is largely an endeavour to explore the nineteenth-century past through historiographic (meta-)fictions, processes of remembering and forgetting, spectrality, (em-)plotting, self-reflexivity and/or nostalgia (2).

I will discuss the idea of Catton's text exploring the 'nineteenth-century past' in more depth, with a particular focus on '(em-) plotting' through her use of astrology and the 'self-reflexivity' of her narrative structure. Catton's narrative displays the 'past through historiographic (meta-)fictions', and as Ann Heilmann states:

History – as at once a site of fact and fiction, consensus and contestation, ideology and materiality – has provided a particular and powerful imaginative resource for […] writers over the past few decades (205). This can be seen through the complex narrative structure within *The Luminaries* and her adherence to astrological charts. Throughout this chapter I will also reference Eleanor Catton's interview with Robert Macfarlane following her Man Booker Prize win back in 2013. In this interview she discusses in detail her use of astrology and the process she followed to ensure the text had a deliberate structure, meaning every aspect of the narrative is happening at the exact moment it was supposed to.

This chapter focuses exclusively on the richly complex narrative structure of *The Luminaries* including Catton's painstakingly symbolic use of astrology. Before I begin exploring Catton's narrative structure in more depth I will briefly touch upon the theory of narratology. Though my project is not concerned with thinking about the general principles of narrative; it does share a narratologist's concern with the structure of an individual text, *The Luminaries.* As Paul Wake explains in his article 'Narrative and Narratology' (2013):

> Narratology, which has roots in structuralism and which draws much of its terminology from linguistic theory, is the study of the ways in which narratives function. Rather than being the study of one particular narrative, an individual novel for example, narratology begins from a consideration of the ways in which narrative itself operates. That said, the value of narratology lies in its application, and the narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan makes a valuable point when she suggests that narratology should have a "double orientation" that allows it to "present a description of the system governing all fictional narratives" and, at the same time, "to indicate a way in which individual narratives can be studied as unique realizations of the general system" (Wake, 2013:23).

Throughout this chapter I will be exploring how the narrative of Catton's text operates with a focus on the 'system governing' the fictional narrative. Narratology as a theory relates to my examination of Catton's text as this chapter looks 'in minute detail [at] the inner "workings" of [the] literary [text]' as Lois Tyson purports in the book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2015):

> Structuralist analyses of narrative examine in minute detail the inner "workings" of literary texts in order to discover the fundamental structural

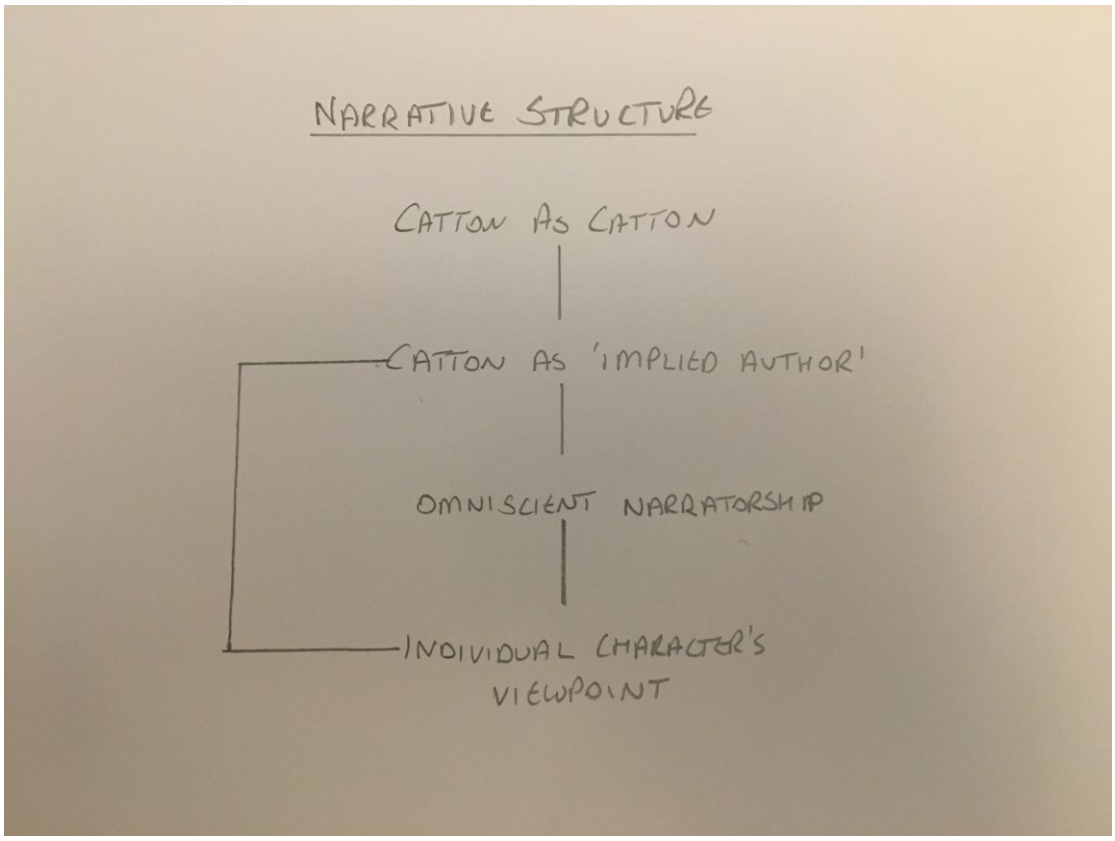
> units (such as units of narrative progression) or functions (such as character functions) that govern texts' narrative operations (Tyson, 2015:212).

My analysis of Catton's narrative structure is a perfect example of this, not only in the complex layers of narrators within the story, but also with my exploration into the structure of the narrative as a whole.

Not only does Catton have a multi-layered relaying of the narrative, her text as a whole is based on structures, patterns and maps as she created the story around the behaviour of the planets on the exact date of the book's opening, the 27th of January 1866. As Catton states in her interview with Macfarlane, she 'wanted to see if [she] could take the archetypes of the classical zodiac, which is possessed of both fixed and moving parts […] and turn them into some sort of plot' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 24:00). Catton goes on to discuss that she did not know how this was going to end, but she ended up using a computer programme that she found through theskyandtelescope.com. Using this programme she was able to input the 'longitudinal position of anywhere on Earth and dial back to any date in history' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 24:00). Upon finding this Catton put in the original date that gold was discovered in 1864 and simply watched the skies revolve, making notes along the way. As she watched the skies a 'triple conjunction' appeared to her 'in Sagittarius on the 27th of January 1866', the day on which Catton's story begins. Along with this she noticed that in that year in Hokitika there was a full moon just before the 1st of February and there was not another until after the end of February, known by astrologers as 'a month without a moon' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:26min 51). The three planets in conjunction were:

> Mercury, the planet that governs our reason, our logic, our communicative powers. Jupiter, that governs our social sense and also Mars, our sense of activity and how we're going to achieve our ambitions (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:27min 22).

Following this discovery Catton moved on to using another programme called 'Stellarium', which then allowed her to determine the 'events of the subsequent eleven parts' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:28min 28). Using 'Stellarium' gave Catton's narrative a clear astrological structure to follow. This particular method is a large part of what makes Catton's narrative different to others within the field of neo-Victorianism as the multi-layered authorial voices add another level of complexity to her text. To explore the different layers of authorial voice within Catton's text I have drawn a diagram, in order to create a clearer idea of how I see Catton's authorial structure:



The above diagram explores the four different layers to Catton's narrative voice in a similar format to that of a family tree. The decision to visualize the narrative structure in this way, in an attempt to unpick the complexity of Catton's narratorial layers, nods to the diagrams often drawn by Formalist critics. At the same time, this family tree is a self-conscious homage to the way in which Catton herself has chosen to place astrological diagrams at the beginning of each part to her book in order to give the reader a visual representation of the current status of each character in a snapshot of time.

'Following the Guides': *The Luminaries* and Narrative Structure

I want, for a moment, to draw similarities between Eleanor Catton and the work of Michel Faber. Both *The Luminaries* and *The Crimson Petal and the White* are

characterized by the sprawling length historically associated with many Victorian realist fictions; but they are similar in their narrative structure and the way 'the reader moves through the story by following the guides offered by the script, the narrator and the characters' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:5). By extension then, both novels implicitly prompt further reflections on the 'processes of reading, reception, and the marketable pleasures of reading' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:5). The 'processes' and 'marketable pleasures of reading' is something I will discuss further in my final chapter of this thesis as I explore the place of Catton's novel in the digital world. For now I will focus on the tension in Catton's narrative as she works against the neo-Victorian emphasis on 'pastness' through her playful narrative structure and storytelling. To do this she begins the novel with a 'Note to the Reader' that explores what is to come within the novel:

> As readers of this book will note, each zodiacal sign 'occurs' approximately one month later than popular information would have it. We mean no disrespect to popular information by this correction; we do observe, however, that the above error is held in defiance of the material fact of our nineteenth century firmament; and we dare to conjecture, further, that such a conviction might be called Piscean in its quality – emblematic, indeed, of persons born during the *Age of Pisces,* an age of mirrors, tenacity, instinct, twinship and hidden things. We are contented by this notion. It further affirms our faith in the vast and knowing influence of the infinite sky (Catton, 2013:65).

The opening 'Note' displays the third person omniscient narrator, so popular in neo-Victorian fiction; however this section gives reference to the fact that there is more than one person in control of the narrative. Here she explains the use of astrology throughout the text, whilst raising the reader's awareness of the fact that the

narrator/narrators are present in bearing witness to the story as it unfolds. This in itself is nothing new to Victorian or neo-Victorian fiction as it 'position[s] the reader in order to re-visualise the Victorian era' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:2); but it is the way in which Catton addresses the reader that adds to the playfulness of her narrative. As the novel progresses she allows the narrative to change hands, although she does interject throughout when the narrator is deemed inadequate in their ability to tell the story.

Catton is putting on a performance and when I refer to her as the narrator it is Catton as the implied narrator, rather than Catton the person. There is a distinct feeling that Catton as the person away from the novel is different to Catton 'the author' of *The Luminaries.* Through the process of writing this novel she is putting on a performance as the storyteller of this narrative. As I displayed in my diagram of the narrative, below this is the omniscient narratorship who act as communicators of Catton (the narrator's) story. She is showing the reader precisely, or perhaps imprecisely, who is in control of the story by using 'we' in reference to the 'authors' of this story. The omniscience of this narrator creates a tension, giving the reader both an intrusion and exclusion to the text. The reader is very much placed as a passive observer of the story, which, by extension, evokes a sense of imaginative distance from the events of the text. It almost creates a barrier, stopping the reader from becoming fully immersed in the narrative. This is a hint to the postmodern, playfulness of Catton's narrative and how the narration will change hands throughout the novel, going from the omniscience of Catton as the implied narrator, to the hands of the narratorship and down further to a chosen character's viewpoint, an interjection that is particularly prevalent with the character Thomas Balfour, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

One of the ways in which Catton's paratextual passage differs from the beginnings of other popular neo-Victorian novels is through the lack of personal attention given to the reader. The narratorship state 'as readers of this book will note', rather than addressing the reader personally, which is a stark contrast to the direct opening of Michel Faber in *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2008) as it opens with, 'watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them' (2). Similarly, Sarah Waters opens *Fingersmith* (2002) with, 'My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue' (3). Although these two other examples of neo-Victorian narration differ in the sense that Faber's narration is third person omniscient narration and extremely direct, whilst Waters is first person from the eyes of both Susan and Maud, they both hold the reader in high esteem as they address them directly, rather than directing their attention to a collective readership. The relationship between reader and narrator/narrators begins with Catton's 'Note to the Reader', a technique neither Faber nor Waters employ.

The tension in the 'Note' section of Catton's novel shows a stark contrast between the reference to the 'vast and knowing influence of the infinite sky' and the control that the collective 'we' of the narration has over the story. This leads to a tension over who has the most control over the way the narrative is to unfold. Who ultimately has control over the story? Is it the overarching 'infinite and vast' universe and the power the astrological signs has over the course of a life; or is it the omniscient narrator who has control over the way the story is to end? As readers of the story we aware that the control is with Catton, as we know the narrative had finished being written long before we are reading it. However, she infers the collective 'we' of the narrators are merely puppets to the influence of the universe, and further implies that the subject matter of the story is influenced by its beginning

in the '*Age of Pisces'.* The 'Piscean' quality to the opening is shown to have an influence over the telling of the story. Typically those who fall under the astrological sign of Pisces are seen as 'selfless', as they are always 'willing to help others without hoping to get anything back' (Astrology-zodiac-signs.com, no date: Online). As is always the case with Catton's narrative, there is an alternative way to read the idea of this display of knowledge as 'Piscean', especially when considering the weaknesses of Pisces. Although it is a selfless sign, those under the sign of Pisces are considered 'fearful, overly trusting' and 'can be a victim or martyr' (Astrology-zodiac-signs.com, no date: Online). Their characteristic dislikes include 'being criticized' and 'the past coming back to haunt' (Astrology-zodiac-signs.com, no date: Online). With this in mind the act of disagreeing with popular belief is 'Piscean' as the narratorship is providing a service to the reader, but also preventing the 'past coming back to haunt' by correcting this mistake before the narrative begins. Here the narratorship, under the guidance of Catton as the implied author, are removing any preconceived notions the reader may have over how the astrological charts should play out, without getting anything in return.

Here Catton, as the implied author, shows an awareness to the fact she is disagreeing with popular belief over which star sign the book begins under. This creates a focus on how the narration of the novel will be characterized with this conjecture being seen as 'emblematic, indeed, of persons born under the *Age of Pisces,* an age of mirrors, tenacity, twinship, and hidden things' (Catton, 2013:65). This opening 'Note', although relatively brief, is incredibly complex and gives a strong insight into how the narrative of the novel is going to unfold. It also gives a sense of the role each author plays in the telling of the story as the narratorship state 'we are contented by this notion.' (Catton, 2013:65) This small and succinct sentence

gives a feeling of unease to the end of the 'Note', because the reader is alerted to the idea that the narrative will have greater multi-layered complexity than might have been originally anticipated. There is also an implied ending to this sentence that is cut off by the full stop, making the sentence seem forced and unnatural. You can imagine the alternate version of it looking like this, 'we are contented by this notion (because the implied author said we are).' Followed by their affirmation in the 'faith in the vast and knowing influence of the infinite sky' (Catton, 2013:65) creates a feeling of unease, emphasizing the 'twinship and hidden things' that we, the readers, are going to experience throughout the novel.

Deferring their faith and responsibility, as omniscient narrators, over to the universe is problematic in the sense that typically, a neo-Victorian narrator would be all seeing and all knowing. The narrator is the reader's guide through the twists and turns to come in the narrative, knowing when to interject and lend a helping hand to the reader when they deem necessary. This initial suggestion that the story is not the creation of the implied narrator, but of the universe begins to take away the foundation of trust between reader and narrator as you become aware that the narrator is merely a vessel. Their sense of unease over this fact is emphasized within the narrators with the reiteration of 'faith' in the final sentence. It appears to be stated more for their benefit than being there for the reader. The final sentence to the paratextual passage gives a sense of closure to the running thoughts and connections made by the narrators. They are expressing their satisfaction with the time and place in which the story is set, and they have sufficient faith in the universe to guide them through the narrative.

The way in which Catton chooses to question the authority of the Victorian era as she clearly highlights the error of 'popular information' is the beginning of the

reader's 're-visualisation of the Victorian era' (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:2) as Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss propose. To further this idea of the self-conscious and self-reflexive nature of Catton's narrative I want to draw attention the ideas of Beth Palmer who discusses that, 'the neo-Victorian sensation novel depicts the past it pastiches as the self- conscious construct of print and paper' (Palmer, 2009:87). Although I will not use the word 'pastiche' in reference to any of Catton's work due to the pejorative connotations this creates, *The Luminaries* is a 'self-conscious construct of print and paper', beginning with a collective third person, omniscient narration. However, just as Michel Faber does in *The Crimson Petal and the White,* Catton allows certain characters to take over the role of storyteller throughout the novel. To explore in further detail the idea of the novel as a 'self-conscious construct' with Catton as the implied narrator creating distance between the reader and the narrative, with a particular focus on Thomas Balfour, I will draw upon the work of Heilmann and Llewellyn, specifically their section on 'Spectrality and S(p)ecularity'. Within this chapter they examine the use of glass within neo-Victorian fiction, and its use as a literal mirror. The discussion focuses on illusions and how 'we must decode the narrative in a way that the characters never can' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:161). This is something evident throughout Catton's novel with the interjection of the collective third person omniscient narration. In the most extreme sense, the decoding for the reader is done as the narrators take over the narrative in place of Thomas Balfour:

> We shall here excise their imperfections, and impose a regimental order upon the impatient chronicle of the shipping agents roving mind; we shall apply our own mortar to the crack and chinks of earthly recollection, and resurrect as

> new the edifice that, in solitary memory, exists only as a ruin (Catton, 2013: 44).

This is the first interjection within the narrative since the paratextual 'Note'. So far the story has been told from Walter Moody's viewpoint, which shows how much respect they have for his character and his ability to control the story. The narrators will interject with Thomas Balfour's narrative throughout the text, but they never interrupt Moody's consciousness. It is also shown through the fact that Moody is a representation of the thirteenth sign, which is considered to be the closest to man of all the signs, which is where the implied respect originates. Simultaneously it emphasizes their lack of respect for Thomas Balfour, as they find him tedious with his 'imperfections' and 'roving mind'.

The narration here by Catton explores the power of the storyteller, as to leave the narration to lesser beings with their 'earthly recollection' would be to leave to its own demise. As Paul Dawson, poet and author of *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (2005), explores in his article 'The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction' (2009):

> literary omniscience: an all-knowing, heterodiegetic narrator who addresses the reader directly, offers intrusive commentary on the events being narrated, provides access to the consciousness of a range of characters, and generally asserts a palpable presence within the fictional world (143).

This is something Catton implements throughout *The Luminaries* and here it is particularly important to consider her reasons for intrusion. Not only is it because Thomas Balfour has a 'roving mind' and is therefore unable to create a coherent narration, but because this is the nature of Victorian narration and is thus a remark by Catton to the 'regimental order' to which she must adhere, as a narrator of neo-

Victorian fiction. It is postmodern in its self-awareness and is a characteristic Catton implements throughout the rest of the novel. By taking over the narrative Catton, acting as the implied narrator, is exposing the flaws of Balfour's character before he has a chance to do it himself. Through dissecting Balfour's nature, Catton states that 'education had made him insular, for it had taught him that the proper way to understand any social system was to view it from above' (Catton, 2013:11), which gives further insight into the reasoning behind the narrative intrusion. The use of the word 'insular' is particularly interesting when you consider its definition:

> Pertaining to islanders; *esp.* having the characteristic traits of the inhabitants of an island (e.g. of Great Britain); cut off from intercourse with other nations, isolated; self-contained; narrow or prejudiced in feelings, ideas, or manners' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016:Online)

Attached to this are synonyms such as 'narrow-minded', 'conventional', 'prejudiced' and 'intolerant', which may be seen as a 'typical' product of the Victorian education system. It is also particularly interesting that this definition uses Great Britain as an example of being 'cut off from intercourse', 'narrow or prejudiced in feelings, ideas, or manners'. These characteristics are given to Balfour's nature and behaviours towards the other characters and inhabitants of Hokitika, particularly those who are not from Great Britain. When considering again the work of Dawson along with the implied author's narration, the question is raised as to whether Catton's narrative techniques are 'conservative and nostalgic by virtue of their form, or are they experimental and contemporary in their use of form?' (Dawson, 2009: 143-144). This notion directly relates to the questions surrounding the place of Catton's text within the genre of neo-Victorian fiction. Is Catton adding the 'conservative and nostalgic'

tones of neo-Victorian literature, or is she using her playful narrative structure to pave a new mode of 'experimental' narration?

The above narrative technique is characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction as it links to Victorian fiction and its own distinctive narrative style. The power of the 'creator' here is shown in the way the implied author interjects in order to rebuild the broken narrative of Thomas Balfour. This act of power can also be compared to the narration of Michel Faber, as both Faber and Catton the narrator choose who controls the narration at any one time. It begs the question:

> who can become the object of whose gaze, who is the subject of the gaze, what power structures are implied in gazing, and how the process of gazing is itself made conspicuous and reflected? (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, 2011:6)

In this way the 'narrative set-up also enables readers to 'see through' the representation […] thereby disavowing the constructedness of the fictional world' (Boehm-Schnikter and Gruss, 2011:6), a trope that is key to the self-awareness and self-reflexivity of neo-Victorian fiction. Catton comments that the narrators will 'apply [their] own mortar to the cracks and chinks of earthly recollection', which is a social reference to the industrialisation of the Victorian era as the narrators are repairing something that is not physical, the 'earthly recollection' of Thomas Balfour. Catton is noting that 'earthly recollection' is 'imperfect' and therefore, she harnesses the power of her omniscient, otherworldly, narratorship to reflect upon all the significant moments throughout her narrative. Here Catton is remarking that humans are overtaken by their ego and personal motives to remember and retell the most precious sections of the narrative.

While discussing Catton's place as the implied narrator of the story it is important to examine her choice of words throughout the text, as there is powerful

quality to them. This is particularly prevalent with her use of resurrection as she states they will 'resurrect as new the edifice that, in solitary memory, exists only as a ruin' (Catton, 2013:44). I will focus for a moment on two words used in this sentence and their importance to the remainder of this section and the *séance* within Catton's text. Firstly, 'resurrect' is defined in two ways, to 'restored (a dead) person to life' and 'revive or revitalize (something that is inactive, disused or forgotten)' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016: Online). In the most literal sense, the first is poignant when considering the focus of *The Luminaries* is the death of the hermit Crosbie Wells and the particulars surrounding his life, death, identity and fortune. Throughout *The Luminaries* the narrators, both Catton and her characters, are concerned with figuring out the particulars of Crosbie Wells' death, trying to 'restore [him] to life' through their meetings as a group. It is also significant considering the disappearance of Emery Staines, a young and successful prospector, who is the focus of Lydia Wells' *séance* attempt. The characters of Catton's novel know Crosbie Wells is dead, and yet he is a point of focus throughout the narrative, thus metaphorically keeping him alive. However, the characters and narrators of the story do not know whether Emery Staines is dead or not, and yet they presume the worst. It is fascinating to consider that the characters are more concerned with trying to contact someone who may/may not be dead rather than Crosbie Wells, who they *know* is dead and may be able to provide the answers they are looking for. This is a key trope for Catton as she states in her interview with Macfarlane, one of her beliefs as a writer is 'what unites us, more than anything else, are the things that we cannot know' (Catton, 2014: 67min 38), which is implemented here, as the implied narrator. Catton is uniting all the characters through this common thread, that none of them know what has happened to Emery Staines, or what really happened to Crosbie Wells. The sense of embodiment within

the novel through Catton's use of 'edifice' and 'ressurect' is an effort to make solid again something that cannot be, the Victorian time period. Attempting to resurrect the dead is a common theme throughout *The Luminaries.* It is something that divides all the characters throughout the text, as they are all working in different ways to try and discover what happened to Crosbie Wells, but simultaneously creates a paradox as it is also what unites them in 'The Crown' hotel at the beginning of the novel, as they decide to work together. This returns us to the paradoxes and tensions at the heart of Catton's text, as we think it is the material things that connect us but it is in fact the immaterial things. This brings the focus back to neo-Victorianism as a whole as the 'project' is attempting to resurrect aspects of Victorian fiction.

Astrology: 'The Players (The Planets) and Their Qualities'

Just as the characters metaphorically keep Wells alive through the inquest into his death, Catton as the implied narrator is keeping the tropes of Victorian literature alive through her work of neo-Victorian fiction. Through her omniscient narration she is attempting to 'revive and revitalize' the form of neo-Victorianism (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016: Online). As much as the form is not 'inactive, disused or forgotten' she is working upon the neo-Victorian 'project' through her otherworldly narrators and working to revive the form through her historical fiction (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016: Online). This can be seen to mirror the narrative form of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859), in which Walter Hartright, a teacher of drawing, takes on the role of detective concerning 'the woman in white', the wellbeing of Laura Fairlie (his future wife) and Marian (Miss Fairlie's cousin). The narrative is told through a collection of statements from each character. Each part of the story is told from individual perspectives, and this use of the first person narration

gives a sense of truth and an unfiltered perspective. The main difference between the two narratives, however, is the sense of trust in the words being written. Whilst Catton has her omniscient narrators to control the narrative and fix the ‘cracks' in the ‘mortar’ of an incorrect recollection of the story, Collins leaves the characters fully aware of the errors in their own narrative. As Walter Hartright states, ‘I trace these lines, self-distrustfully, with the shadows of after-events darkening the very paper I write on; and still I say, what could I do?’ (Collins, 1859:15). There is an awareness from the opening of the narrative that if he had made different choices from the outset the remainder of the novel would not have unfurled as it did, and yet he asks himself ‘what could I do?’ as he was a slave to his own human nature. The narrative in *The Woman in White* is a human narrative, full of human nature and error with a multitude of reflections upon the self, and behaviour. In hindsight, although taking clear inspiration from Collins with a multitude of perspectives, Catton's narrative is self-aware, self-reflexive and is given the appearance of being overtly controlled by a third person omniscient narrator-ship.

To move on from considering her reasoning for using the idea of resurrection I want to look at the definition of ‘edifice’. It is ‘a building, usually a large and stately building, as a church, palace, temple, or fortress; a fabric, structure’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016:Online). When discussing the narrative style of Catton’s novel, the use of this particular word is compelling. First and foremost, the omniscience of Catton as the implied narrator, using the multi-personned narratorship to impose upon the narrative whenever she deems it necessary, creates the imagery of a large, imposing building of an edifice. Also, we know there is more than one narrator but are not given a definite number. This creates even more distance between the reader and the narratorship as the ‘edifice’ of their structural ‘fortress’; safe and untouchable

protects them. The reader is unable to break the fortress and interrupt their narrative, despite their ability to regularly intrude upon the novel.

Another notable element of narrative intrusion within the text is when it comes to the two main subjects of Catton's novel: Crosbie Wells and astrology. Wells is a hermit who, until his death and the appearance of his fortune, was not the focus of any attention from the Hokitika residents. Alongside this, Catton is particular in her use of astrology, which serves as a structuring device, providing both solutions and answers as the narrative unfolds. Catton in interview with Robert Macfarlane repeatedly discusses the idea of 'paradox' being an integral part of the novel. She emphasizes her view that one of the main themes of *The Luminaries,* as she sees it is 'the paradoxical relationship […] between fate and the will' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:63min 57). She goes on the explore this relationship further with the idea that if she'd have known whilst writing *The Luminaries* that it was going to have such a prestigious award bestowed upon it, 'it would have made the writing of it impossible' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:64min 54). She knows she would not have worked with the same tenacity if she had known what the consequence was. This brings me back to the idea of both Catton's novel and narration being 'Piscean' in its quality. Characteristically writers are pushed forward to continue writing out of 'bullheadedness', as she puts it, and through fear of how their work will be received. However, as Catton states, knowing the fate of your piece of work will inevitably remove the will to write and make the process impossible. To relate this back to the characters within Catton's text, the role of narrator and astrology as a structural device, the paradoxes represented throughout the whole of Catton's text place an emphasis on the interweaving lives of each character within the text, and their individual behaviours (wills) having influence over their individual

fate[2]. As displayed in the paratextual 'Note' the narrators hold immense importance over 'instinct' and 'hidden things', with faith in a higher power when it comes to telling the story. It is then important to note that whilst the narratorship consider their storytelling 'Piscean in its quality', Thomas Balfour, whose narrative they override, is a Sagittarius. This pairing is considered 'one of the harder zodiac signs to make work' (Compatible-astrology.com, no date: Online). Pisces is a water sign and 'concerned with a realm that has no boundaries', whereas Sagittarius is a fire sign where 'maturity is seeing, realising, [and] understanding' (Astro.com, 2015:Online), which makes communication difficult between the two. Due to the sensational nature of the story, and the heavy reliance on the astrological chart, the astrological sign of each character seems to be integral to their ability to take charge of the narrative. It is therefore understandable, considering the lack of compatibility between Pisces and Sagittarius, that the narrators would intrude upon Balfour's narrative. The intrusion is imposing, authoritative and there is an illusion of power to the narration, stemming from the 'notes to the reader' at the beginning of the story. Catton has created an all-knowing, omniscient authority to the collective 'we' of the narrators and similar to the work of Collins, Fowles and Faber the reader is encouraged to put their trust in them to tell the story in the best, and most truthful, way possible.

The reference to a 'complex system of beliefs' is something the collective narratorship, and therefore Catton as the implied narrator, hold in high regard when it comes to the telling of the story. The system of astrology is just that, a 'complex system of beliefs' in the 'infinite sky'. According to Astro.com, astrology:

[2] Please note that throughout this section of the chapter I will be referring to some of the same astrological resources that Catton herself used when writing *The Luminaries*.

> Sees mankind as being not only influenced by hereditary factors and the environment, but also by the state of our solar system at the moment of birth. The planets are regarded as basic life-forces, the tools we live by as well as the basis of our very substance. These planetary forces take on different forms, depending on their zodiacal position and on the way they relate to one another […] by interpreting the roles of these players (the planets) and their qualities (the elements, signs and houses) and creating a synthesis, astrology is able to present a complete and comprehensive picture of the person and his potential, based on the natal horoscope (Astro.com, 2015:Online).

The collective 'we' of the narrators put their faith in the belief system of astrology, which is set up and implemented by Catton, the implied author. Therefore the unraveling of the novel is decided by the 'zodiacal position' of the 'players (the planets) and their qualities' (Astro.com, 2015:Online). The words chosen to discuss the planets paint the picture of each character within the story being considered a 'player' under their planetary sign. The whole novel is like a complex game of chess, with each character representing a chess piece, the hands moving the pieces the omniscient narrators under instruction of Catton, the planets and the 'vast' and 'infinite sky'. It gives a sense of the outcome already being known by the universe and that the narrators have been instructed to complete the game of chess in a certain way, meaning the checkmate is decided before the game has begun.

To explore further the idea of the 'players (the planets) and their qualities' (Astro.com, 2015:Online) I am now going to focus on the discussion of two characters in the novel, Walter Moody (the protagonist) and Aubert Gascoigne. Their astrological signs are particularly pertinent as they are an integral part to how each character communicates and how they react to others. Gascoigne is a Capricorn, a sun

sign, and is characterized as being ‘good at understanding the duties that come with being part of society’, ‘concerned with the social sphere’ as they tend to ‘worship rules’ and ‘revere tradition’ (Astro.com, 2015:Online). As well as Moody being a representation of the thirteenth sign, it is important to consider the characteristics of Sagittarius in relation to the Capricorn (and therefore Gascgoine). As stated on Astro.com, ‘fiery Sagittarius, [is] always in pursuit of the next great adventure, [and] finds earthy Capricorn's insistence on structures reassuring’ (Astro.com, 2015:Online). Capricorn is ‘cautious’ whilst Sagittarius is ‘restless’ with a ‘free spirit’ (Astro.com, 2015:Online). One of the most complex characters in Catton’s narrative is Walter Moody, the thirteenth man. This means Moody is not on the astrological chart presented by Catton despite there being a thirteenth sign in astrology. This sign is particularly compelling as the website Astro.com suggests that some:

> Astrologers suppress a 13th constellation, the Serpent Bearer (Ophiuchus), despite the fact that the Sun passes each year through this constellation (Astro.com, 2015:Online).

The confusion has arisen as the position of stars in the sky has changed, altering the attribution of astrological star signs. However, ‘fixed star constellations received their names from the seasons and from the annual rhythm of the Sun's movement, not the other way around’ and the ways in which constellations are now found in the sky is ‘irrelevant’ (Astro.com, 2015:Online). According to the Astro.com resources the thirteenth sign, the serpent bearer, is a fixed constellation with ‘no astrological relevance’. However, the Sun ‘passes through it nowadays between 29 November and 17 December, which falls into the astrological sign of Sagittarius’ (Astro.com, 2015:Online). This is important for two reasons: firstly the compatibility between Sagittarius and Capricorn when discussing the interactions between Moody and

Gascoigne. Secondly, the thirteenth sign is popularly identified with 'the healer Asclepius, the son of Apollo, who was able to bring the dead back to life', according to themindunleashed.com (2013:Online). It is considered that 'the heavens are alive and they do change after a few thousand years', and most importantly, it is 'the only sign of the Zodiac […] linked to a real man' (themindunleashed.org, 2013:Online). This is particularly important when considering the significance of Walter Moody in relation to the direction and narration of the narrative. If you consider Moody to be the only one of the thirteen men representing 'real man', in astrological terms, it makes complete sense for the omniscient 'narrator-ship' to consider him a worthy narrator. Moody is integral to how the story is completed, he is both the thirteenth man in the group and a representation of the thirteenth sign of Zodiac. He is a representation of change, evolution, and movement as he is astrologically linked to 'being able to bring the dead back to life' (themindunleashed.org, 2013:Online). This represents the path Moody has been chosen to go on by the 'infinite sky'. It shows it was always Moody's destiny to end up on the *Godspeed* and see the apparition of Emery Staines. Moody's journey was pre-planned by the 'infinite sky' and his eventual fate has already been decided.

The idea of each character's path being pre-determined also gives the sense of an overarching authority to the collective 'we' of the narration. This links to the significance of the twelve men which Moody becomes acquainted with in the Crown at the opening of the novel, as Catton writes, 'they numbered twelve, which put Moody in mind of a jury' (Catton, 2013:37), although Catton soon takes the sense of justice and authority away from this crowd of men as she continues with, '…but the presence of the Chinese men and the Maori native made that impossible' (Catton, 2013:37). The notion that the presence of the Chinese men and the Maori native

makes the group less of an authority can be linked to the 'heritage of colonialism and the British Empire, […] Victorian Orientalism and constructions of subalternity' discussed by Llewellyn and Heilmann regarding postcolonial neo-Victorianism. The 'subaltern' is defined as 'the indigenous rural subject silenced by both imperial and local discourses and structures of power' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:69), which is shown through Te Rauwhare's first interaction with Thomas Balfour, where Balfour takes it upon himself to rename him for his own benefit:

> 'Well - what do your friends call you then - your white-man friends?' […]
>
> 'Te Rau.'
>
> 'Not much better, is it?' Balfour said. 'I'd be a fool to try, wouldn't I? How about I call you Ted? That's a good British name for you' (Catton, 2013:96).

The inclusion of these characters in the group gives a 'peripheral representation of the Empire and its peoples, whose exploitation or subjection [is] yet so intricately connected with the fates of the hero/ine' (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:67). Throughout the novel, we come to learn how integral a part these characters play to the fate of the 'hero', Walter Moody, emphasizing Catton's purposeful interconnectedness of each character.

I think it is important at this juncture to briefly discuss the notion of postcolonialism within this neo-Victorian novel, particularly as one of my main resources for this project, Heilmainn and Llewellyn's critical book, focuses a whole chapter on the subject with a large quote from Edward W. Said's book *Culture & Imperialism* (1993). This passage is of particular interest to the paratextual 'Note' of Catton's text as:

> Appeals to the past are among the commonest strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what

> happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions – about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities … Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the … ideal sense intended by [T. S.] Eliot, each co-exists with the other … [H]ow we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present (Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010:67).

This links to the opening 'Note' of Catton's novel and particularly the Piscean quality of her 'conjecture'. This gives the sense that the neo-Victorian novel is giving a narrative voice to 'an age of mirrors, tenacity, instinct, twinship and hidden things' (Catton, 2013:2). Not only is this sentence a direct reference to the 'nineteenth century firmament' (Catton, 2013:2) under which the story is being told, but also an awareness of the novel as a neo-Victorian piece of fiction and therefore a commentary on contemporary society. The way in which Catton as narrator openly contradicts the occurrence of zodiac signs as 'popular information would have it' (Catton, 2013:2) is an example of Said's 'disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was' and how this gives Catton the ability to 'formulate or represent the past [shaping] our understanding and views of the present' (Heilmann and Llewelyn, 2010:67). Catton's novel is a representation of the 'tenacity' she references. The Piscean quality of the novel can be seen as a reference to the genre of neo-Victorian fiction, as 'tenacity' is defined as:

> 1. Cohesiveness, toughness; viscosity, clamminess (of a liquid); also, adhesive quality, stickiness.

2. a. The quality of retaining what is held, physically or mentally; firmness of hold or attachment; firmness of purpose, persistence, obstinacy.

b. Retentiveness (of memory).

(Oxford English Dictionary, 2016:Online)

The word is accompanied by synonyms such as persistence, determination, perseverance, insistence and constancy. This is a link to the neo-Victorian project, in that the consistency, perseverance and 'firmness of purpose' of the form keeps it serving its purpose of the 'past and present [informing] each other'. As the form of neo-Victorian fiction continues to evolve and adapt it '[means] no disrespect to popular information', whilst simultaneously acting as a mirror in exposing 'hidden things' and highlighting the 'twinship' of the past and the present.

'A Rapport with the Dead'

Neo-Victorian fiction's intimate examination of the Victorian period, a time we cannot truly know, is problematic as the writers of neo-Victorian fiction are trying to create their own truth to a time period they have only experienced through the lens of other writers. Through Lydia Wells' séance Catton's goal was to 'open a channel between this realm and the next, and thereby establish some kind of rapport with the dead', and as Catton states 'a spirit who has been murdered is far more loquacious than a spirit who has left this world in peace' (Catton, 2013:366-367). It is here, I contest, that Catton is making a mirror between the séance and neo-Victorian fiction. She is using the séance as the 'channel' between Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction and therefore making a direct reference to the fact that Victorian fiction, and the period in general, is much more 'loquacious' as it has not been left in peace. The general notion here is that there is unfinished business between the present and the

past that can never be given closure. With the popularity of neo-Victorian fiction in both the novel form and other forms of contemporary media, the past and the present will stay in this paradoxical relationship in an attempt to give back a gift of fiction to the Victorians that they cannot receive. It is an unrequited love, which is problematic, but is at the heart of Catton's novel as she focuses on the notion of humans being connected by 'the things we cannot know […] the mysteries of life are the things that we all share, and we've shared ever since humans were around' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2014:67min 37). It is this paradox of the known and unknown that we all share that is a continual trope throughout Catton's narrative, and one that makes her narrative so compelling and distinctive within the form of neo-Victorian fiction.

The tension between the past and present in Catton's narrative is shown most with the astrological structure, and another area of the unknown that Catton explores is the subject of death. Moody is a character that emulates certain characteristics of Wilkie Collins' Walter Hartright in *The Woman in White* and expresses his particular opinion on the matter in conversation with Gascoigne:

> 'We spend our entire lives thinking about death. Without that project to divert us, I expected we would all be dreadfully bored. We would have nothing to evade, and nothing to forestall, and nothing to wonder about. Time would have no consequence.'
>
> 'And yet it would be entertaining, to spy upon the living' Gascoigne said.
>
> 'On the contrary, I should consider that a very lonely prospect,' Moody said. 'Looking down on the world, unable to touch it, unable to alter it, knowing what had been, and everything that was.'

> Gascoigne was salting his plate. 'I have heard that in the New Zealand native tradition, the soul, when it dies, becomes a star' (Catton, 2013:389-390).

Death is a continuous presence in the narrative, although it is rarely discussed so directly. As there has been the death of Crosbie Wells and the disappearance/suspected murder of Emery Staines, there is a preoccupation with fate, death and time, emphasized by Catton's use of astrological signs. Although death is a continuous presence it is often dealt with on surface level, which gives a sense of keeping up appearances in the novel. This can be seen with the use of the local paper, *The Times.* It features many times, but its efficacy is brought into question as:

> There was the missing persons page in the newspaper, of course, but not every digger could read, and still fewer had the time or the inclination to keep abreast of the daily news. It was cheaper, and sometimes more efficient, to offer a reward by word of mouth instead (Catton, 2013:306)

The newspaper is there to serve a purpose, but only to the minority of the local community; those who can read and those who have time to read. Catton's use of the newspaper places more emphasis on 'word of mouth' as it offers and 'cheaper, and sometimes more efficient' service (Catton, 2013:306). In this conversation between Gascoigne and Moody their discussion of death and time is focal, showing a significant difference in opinion upon the matter of death. As Moody states 'we spend our entire lives thinking about death' (Catton, 2013:389), something Moody has had no distraction from since the beginning of the story. In the epigraph to the opening chapter it states '*Walter Moody conceals his most recent memory'* (Catton, 2013:2). Further into the chapter we are given flashbacks of the memory Moody is concealing as his mind slips 'and [returns] to it: the bloody cravat, the clutching silver hand, the name, gasped out of the darkness' (Catton, 2013:16). The reader is here given the

opportunity to ‘spy upon the living’ and see inside Walter Moody’s mind unfurling the memory he is trying so hard to conceal from the men he has found himself in cohort with. In this discussion between Walter and Gascoigne we are made aware of our position as a reader and observer of the story, working alongside the narrators to resurrect the ‘edifice’ of ‘earthly recollection’.

Catton’s text is an expertly crafted exploration of human nature and the paradox of life. We are all at once both moving and stationary, made of both fixed and moving parts. This chapter has explored, in as much detail as the word count will allow, the main features of Catton’s text, the paradoxical relationships she creates throughout the novel, her choice of different narrative techniques, astrology and death. As Tate explores in his review, through Catton’s text ‘we are encouraged to look at human activity - in both its grubbiest and most exalted forms - from a different perspective’ (Tate, no date: Online) as she tries to show the relationships and tensions between inner and outer lives throughout the text. The idea of ‘human activity’ and seeing things ‘from a different perspective’ will work as an area of focus in the following chapter: neo-Victorianism and digital culture. Moving on from the close, textual analysis of Catton’s narrative structure I want to place Catton’s novel within the – perhaps surprising – context of the contemporary digital age.

Chapter 3: *The Luminaries* and The Digital World

This chapter will briefly discuss the narrative techniques Catton uses within *The Luminaries,* and the links between the text and contemporary digital culture, with a particular focus on the way the Internet has changed the way we read. Although the arguments throughout this chapter are speculative and exploratory my critical agenda and assessment of Catton's novel will be clear. There will be a particular focus on her use of epigraphs and how she plays with and deconstructs this typically Victorian narrative technique. To apply the thinking of Beth Palmer, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss to Catton's text she 'demonstrates an awareness of the material form of the Victorian novel and an attempt to replicate it' (Palmer, 2009:90), and though this is nothing new within neo-Victorianism, it moves me on to explore the thoughts of Laurence Scott, writer of *The Four Dimensional Human: Ways of Thinking in the Digital World* (2015). He purports that 'towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the next, canonical English-language writers became especially interested in dramatizing what they saw as the essential solitariness of human nature' (Scott, 2015:331). I will discuss how this is reflected within Catton's text and how the solitary nature of reading has changed within our digital age. Firstly, this opening section will build upon the critical readings articulated in chapter two in order to provide the groundwork for the rest of the chapter.

Reading and Writing: 'The Solitary Acts of Social Beings'

To explore Catton's text as a product of contemporary digital culture I want to first discuss how Catton's novel came into fruition. If it wasn't for computer programmes, website and Google Earth, the novel may never have been written, or at least not with the same level of complexity and structure that *The Luminaries* has. As Catton states

in her interview with Macfarlane she knew she wanted to turn the archetypes of astrology and turn them into a plot. On this journey she discovered a computer programme through the website theskyandtelescope.com, which allows you to:

> Put in the longitudinal position of anywhere on Earth and dial back the date to any date in history […] and not only can you see where the planets are for every single world event, but you can also see the phases of the moon (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 24min 04).

In discovering the programme she proceeded to dial back to the date that gold was discovered in Hokitika, in 1864, and she started to watch the skies and 'took notes of what [she] was seeing, thinking that if something exciting was there it would present itself to [her]' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 24min 20). In watching the skies revolve she saw 'a triple conjunction in Sagittarius on the 27th January 1866, which is the date on which the book begins' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 26min 15). Through this computer programme she was also able to view the 'month without a moon' that I discussed in my previous chapter. With both of these things in mind this is where she started her journey into navigating the plot of *The Luminaries.* Catton directly states in the interview that 'one of the strange things is that [she] couldn't have written it without computers' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 73min 05) and that 'using Google Earth is fantastic for a novelist because you can tell how long it takes to walk between two points' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 73min 05). This notion of being unable to write the novel without computers is a paradox in itself that she is using the benefits of the digital present to write about the past, using a computer programmes to watch the past unfold in the skies.

Throughout Catton's narrative there is a continuous chain of different paradoxical relationships: between fate and the will, the bounded and the boundless, the past and the present, and the relationship of the self with the self. There is also the paradox of the text as a work of neo-Victorian fiction as it is written in the present with a focus on the past, with the novel being made up of both fixed and moving parts. The character to act as a continual link between reader and narrator, the past and the present is Walter Moody. This awareness of both the past and the present within the narrative is shown as we are increasingly shown Moody's past through his own narrative, but these words are never expressed to the other men in the present. The inner dialogue of Moody in *The Luminaries* acts to represent 'the extent to which our identities are handed to us or they are the property of external focus, and the extent to whether they can be touched by external forces' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 63min 20), and 'the paradoxical relationship […] between fate and the will' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 63min 56). This paradoxical relationship is key to the narrative structure of the text and this simultaneity creates an awareness of both past and present, and the constant relationship between the two both within neo-Victorian literature and contemporary digital culture, as she states:

> But onward also rolls the outer sphere – the boundless present, which contains the bounded past. This story is being narrated, with much allusion and repeated emphasis, to Walter Moody (Catton, 2013: 202).

The focal point here is the 'outer sphere', which relates to the reality outside of the novel being read (the physical world) and the 'outer sphere' of Walter Moody in the novel itself. This can be seen as an expression of the novel's place within digital culture as she states 'the boundless present' will continue regardless of the novel,

regardless of its inhabitants, as we are reading it. The novel also contains aspects of 'the bounded past' due to its neo-Victorian nature and conformity to Victorian literary tropes, which shows 'our continued indebtedness to the nineteenth century, for good or ill' (Llewellyn, 2008:165). It is also a remark from Catton that the past is bound where it is. There is no way to release the past from its cage, it is immovable and it is only the 'boundless present' that can be altered.

Boundless is defined as being 'without bounds or limits; illimitable; unbounded, unlimited' (OED: Online, 2016). The word itself evokes a sense of freedom from constraints and a fluidity of movement. However, bounded is defined as being 'that has bounds or limits; that has its limits marked' (OED: Online, 2016), which creates a feeling of being cut short, with a sharp ending proposing a sense of a closed book. There is a sense here from Catton of trying to control something that is uncontrollable with her use of the 'boundless present'. Not only does it evoke a feeling of freedom and opportunity, but chaos. The present is ever changing and transforming based on what has come before it. The phrase 'boundless present' is key to the relationship between Catton's text and digital culture. Thanks to the digital revolution we are in a 'boundless present' where everything feels possible. We have access to any piece of information we could ever want, via a device we carry around in our pockets. As Scott states:

> On the one hand our range of digital media furnishes us with limitless paths to oblivion, and yet through the very form of this media we are immersed in a self-replicating, repetitive process without end' (Scott, 2015:loc 1760).

This evokes a sense of unease, because whilst the possibilities we are given through the Internet are limitless we are in digital limbo. Scott discusses that we are currently 'trapped in a paradoxical relationship between content and form' (Scott, 2015:loc

1761). Between constantly being told 'the end is nigh' whilst being obsessed with the mundane goings on of 'the celebrity'. We are under constant threat of ending, from one outside source or another, whilst simultaneously existing forever in the realm of the digital world. The energy to keep us immersed comes from, as Scott puts it, 'our huge sigh of relief that the world must still be there because Gwyneth Paltrow has just dined out in it' (Scott, 2015:loc 1767). He goes on to explore the way Internet browsers were originally named and their particular reference to this sense of 'boundless' freedom and exploration.

It began with Microsoft in 1994, where he states 'one of the things we were paying for was an escape route' with the tagline 'Where Do You Want to Go Today?' (Scott, 2015:loc 469), this then turned into the Internet Explorer 'reinforcing the nomadic spirit' (Scott, 2015:loc 469), replacing its predecessor 'Netscape Navigator' and becoming 'Safari' from Steve Jobs and Apple. Then came Google's reign over the fourth dimension of the Internet with the introduction of Chrome, as Scott states: Chrome depicts itself as a rehabilitator and redeemer of the past, its role being not to transport you into the unknown but to archive the treasures of personal history (Scott, 2015:loc 521). Google broke away from the idea of freedom and adventure through the Internet; rather their tagline was 'the web is what you make of it' (Scott, 2015:loc 514). It creates a sense of freedom from consequence, as anything can be undone by the almighty omniscient power of the Internet. This is shown through the marketing techniques Google chose to use when bringing Chrome into the world. Scott explains 'this browser isn't there to take you somewhere; it is to remind you who you are' (Scott, 2015:loc 521), with the use of a broken hearted male sending an 'emotionally manipulative multimedia package to his ex-girlfriend', which was used as a tool to win her back. This overt use of web history is an exposing of the change in the way

we view the Internet now. While the Internet is still a place for adventure and escapism it can be part of Freud's uncanny, in the sense that as we have grown used to the function of the Internet and it has become very much a part of our daily lives with social media, the constant reminder of where we've been as 'the secrets of private life are broadcast, and strangers become familiar' (Scott, 2015:loc 656). It is the 'large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small stilled world of horror and unease; […] a sphere within a sphere' (Catton, 2013: 454), as 'the pages [are] thinned and blurry from the touch of many hands' (Catton, 2013:5). We are no longer the only people who have tread in the vastness; we are stepping over other people's toes and re-treading our own steps.

The reference to the 'outer sphere' as we read is something that acts as a commentary on the way we read online. As Nicholas Carr states in his book *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember* (2009), 'we all know how distracting the cacophony of stimuli can be' when reading online 'a new e-mail message announces its arrival as we're glancing over the latest headlines [...] our RSS reader tells us that one of our favorite bloggers has posted' etc. etc., and 'in addition to everything flowing through the network, we also have immediate access to all the other software programs running on our computers - they, too, compete for a piece of our mind' (Carr, 2009:loc 1498). There are positives to this competition for our attention, such as 'what economists call the "unbundling of content" [which] provides people with more choices and frees them from unwanted purchases. But also illustrates and reinforces the changing patterns of media consumption promoted by the Web' (Carr, 2009:loc1550). Here, the Internet is the collective narrator-ship in Catton's text, and we are the protagonist, Walter Moody. Our use of digital technology is the story, and the barrage of competing stimuli the

'much allusion and repeated emphasis' of that narrative. This sense of living between two realms can be seen in Catton's text as the protagonist, Walter Moody, becomes immersed in his own thoughts:

> Any amount of ordinary time could pass, when his mind was straying there. There was this large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small stilled world of horror and unease; they fit inside each other, a sphere within a sphere. (Catton, 2013:454)

This evokes an image of the time that can so easily pass as we read online, whether it is reading articles, or checking our Facebook feeds. To link this to Scott's thinking, the 'horror and unease' in our 'culture of panic' and our immersion in the world of 'the celebrity' (Scott, 2015:loc 454), tend to 'fit inside each other, a sphere within a sphere' (Catton, 2013:454), as we self-replicate and repeat the process of panic and light-relief online.

This allusion and repeated emphasis is constantly shown through the use of social media. In a study conducted by Harriet E. S. Rosenthal-Stott, Rea E. Dicks, and Lois S. Fielding from the Department of Psychology at Durham University, on 'The Valence of Self-Generated (Status Updates) and Other-Generated (Wall-Posts) Information Determines Impression Formation on Facebook' (2015), they looked into how subjects were perceived through the medium of Facebook, depending on the tone of their status updates and wall posts, whether they were positive, neutral, or negative and what kind of effect this had on voyeurs of their profiles. They explored 'whether information given by the individual (self-generated) was neglected in favor of information given by others, when forming impressions' (Rosenthal-Stott et al., 2015:2), which is an important factor in identity formation within contemporary digital culture. This idea of constructing an identity through modes of allusion and

repeated emphasis are part of the problematic situation we find ourselves in when it comes to identity both in the real world, and on social media.

Catton's democratisation of the narration is a postmodern strategy as she is debunking authorial narration, a typically postmodern critique of 19th century authors. This links to the constant barrage of competing voices online, which can be seen more than ever in the way the telling of the news has changed. As soon as there is a breaking news story there will be a multitude of voices trying to tell their own version of the same story. As we watch (or read) the story unfold as told by the narrator (or news reporter) we are aware of the other competing voices vying for our attention, as many times you can see them in the background. Balfour's constant interruptions and inability to trust Lauderback's narrative from his own experience reflects many of the digital interruptions we experience on a daily basis. As Carr discusses 'the distractions in our lives have been proliferating for a long time, but never has there been a medium that, like the Net, has been programmed to so widely scatter our attention and to do it so insistently' (Carr, 2010:loc 1860). He explores that, 'Socrates was right. As people grew accustomed to writing down their thoughts and reading the thoughts other has written down, they became less dependent on the contents of their own memory' (Carr, 2010:loc 2893), which can be seen in both the way our Facebook feeds behave as a memory bank. One of the first things you see as you log into your personal account is a 'memory' of a picture, event, or status you posted on that day in a given year. We can also see this in the progressive expansion of the epigraphs throughout Catton's novel. As the novel begins they are small summaries of what will happen in the upcoming chapter that you are able to refer back to throughout your reading of the text. However, the final epigraph acts as a summary of the text as a whole, behaving in a similar manner to the memories presented to us as we log into

our social media accounts. Scott's concern with the Internet is that it has physically changed the way we read, and as a result our brains are now wired differently with an inability to concentrate for long periods of time on a piece of text. He describes the 'Net' as 'with the exception of alphabets and number systems […] the single most powerful mind-altering technology that has ever come into general use' (Carr, 2010:loc 1895). Its influence on the way we think, read and remember is phenomenal. He goes on to discuss the way that our need to have digital 'profiles' means 'our social standing is, in one way or another, always in play, always at risk' (Carr, 2010:loc 1923) and this can be seen in the discourse between Lauderback and Balfour as each man competes to control the narrative, despite Lauderback being the only one who knows the truth of the matter.

Despite our digital profiles determining our 'social standing', as Will Self argues, in the increasingly digital age 'reading [has] become the solitary acts of social beings' (Self, 2013:The Guardian Online). The idea of 'solitary acts' is particularly interesting when it comes to the narration and recollection of memory within Catton's text. In Catton's interview with Macfarlane she relays a story of climbing a mountain with her family in New Zealand:

> When you walk up a mountain with your family […] there is no one person that is climbing more of a mountain than anybody else. In some way everybody's ownership of the experience is completely individual and it's a kind of solitude […] that mountain is something they did without help (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 12min 38).

This is relatable to the solitary act of reading, particularly with reference to Catton's novel with it's intensely complex narrative structure and being nearly 900 pages in length. When you have completed the reading of *The Luminaries* you have your own

version of the experience. You have not read any less of a novel than any other reader, a text such as *The Luminaries* is your own literary mountain. As she goes on to state, one of her father's favourite refrains was that 'a view must be deserved' (Eleanor Catton in Conversation with Robert Macfarlane, 2013: 14min 03) and no matter how you reach the end of the novel you will finish the text with a 'view', and perspective. The reading of the novel can therefore be linked to the idea of Catton walking up a mountain with her family. This in itself is a 'solitary act of social beings' (Self, 2013:The Guardian Online) as each member of the party will have their own experience and perspective when they reach the view at the top. Whereas books were once held in an immeasurable sense of high regard with the power they can have over imagination and the possibilities of life, as with Emery Staines in the novel, with his 'solitary, unsupervised childhood, spent for the most part in his father's library, had prepared [him] for a great many lives without ever preferring one' (Catton, 2013: 733). This same sense of possibility and being able to live a 'great many lives' can be seen in our social media lives. The solitary nature of human beings is seen as something inherently necessary by Scott as he explores the nature of 'the solitary human, self-absorbed, tunnelling inwards, unearthing unpleasantness and sorrow' (Scott, 2015:loc 31). The 'unearthing' of unpleasantness can give a sense of losing control over our emotions, which is uncomfortable. This can be seen through Thomas Balfour and his attempts to control how own solitary unpleasantness through a lie, which begins to unravel:

> He was unused to the awful compression that comes after a lie, when it dawns upon the liar that the lie he has uttered is one to which he is now bound; that he must now keep lying, and compound smaller lies upon the first, and be shuttered in lonely contemplation of his own mistake (Catton, 2013:80)

This is a reminder from Catton as the author that attempts to control the narrative, through deceit, are futile especially when it comes to you own happiness as a solitary human being. To lie and be deceitful is to be 'shuttered in lonely contemplation' as you wait for the lie to be discovered.

The need to keep on top of a lie by constantly trying to keep ahead of it (as is shown in the discourse between Balfour and Lauderback) is an example of 'the very human magic trick of being at once contained and roaming' (Scott, 2015:loc 341). The internet and social media outlets afford opportunities for endless self-narration: a relentless and restless process which keeps on going forward. To explore this point a little further Scott goes on to express his discomfort with the character 'Mr Tickle' as he discusses an experience of 'burrowing' through his 'remembered childhood' on YouTube:

> The figure of Mr Tickle suddenly appears […] particularly one illustration of his extensive, baked-bean-coloured arm snaking flaccidly through a bedroom window. 'Perhaps that extraordinary long arm of his is already up to the door of the room,' Roger Hargreaves suggests, unhelpfully for any child at odds with the night. But now our arsenal of mobile devices makes Mr Tickles out of all of us, with the added upgrade of being able to push our tickling fingers, as the 4D man did before us, through solid walls. Solidity itself, as we've discovered, is not what it used to be (Scott, 2015:loc 253).

Lonely contemplation no longer exists, as we do not have the ability to be shut off from the outside world and immerse ourselves in ones own thoughts. We now have constant 'invisible channels of Wi-Fi and cellular networks have carved into the material world' to contend with, and where we now 'don't touch each other in real time, we're equipped with more or less friendly arrows and the gift of perfect aim'

(Scott, 2015:loc 253). The lie to which Balfour has become bound is an expression of the difficulty with our own representations through social media. Whereas Balfour is 'shuttered in lonely contemplation of his own mistake', we are no longer given this luxury. There is now a whole host of viewers to any lie or falsehoods we create. As we set any 'lie' free out into the ether of the digital world we become bound to it in a similar sense to that of Thomas Balfour, but the bind is more permanent.

Although Balfour is able to talk his way out of a lie and it disappear into the collective memory of anyone who was involved, as users of the digital world we are 'bound' to any lies by the permanence of Internet history. Even with applications such as SnapChat where a picture, or video, only appears on other users feed for the amount of time you decide (1 second, 5 seconds, 10 seconds etc.) other users are able to screen grab these moments and make them permanent on their own devices. Even if you write something on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram in haste and delete it, the same can happen. Your 'solitary act' becomes social property, with the ability to be made permanent by 'friends and loved ones poised behind a screen' (Scott, 2015:loc 296). Whereas in the recent past 'much of social life *was* a form of containment: for better or worse, being stuck with others' (Scott, 2015:loc 280) we are stuck and held to what others decide we are stuck to, 'unused to the awful compression that comes after a lie' (Catton, 2013:80) but now bound to it by our 'everywhereness'. An everywhereness that is 'not an easy business, for it can make life feel both oppressively crowded and, when its promise is wasted, uniquely solitary' (Scott, 2015:loc 296) as we have become comfortably uncomfortable with the 'pseudo-proximity' we those we are connected to through the digital world. This is particularly poignant in the digital age when our lives, truths and falsehoods are shown on social media with a constant barrage of attempts to 'excise […] imperfections and impose a

regimental order upon the impatient chronicle' of or our own lives (Catton, 2013:44). We are digitally social beings with multiple social media accounts, subscriptions to various blogs, vlogs or newsletters. The solitary acts of writing are integral parts of our social lives as we share, like and re-tweet things written and/or read. Scott relates the thinking of Marcel Proust to this idea as he quotes:

> Even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people (Scott, 2015:loc 354).

Despite Proust's thoughts being conceived in 1922 before the dawn of Facebook, Instagram or SnapChat, they are particularly poignant to the way we live our lives digitally. The obsession of how we are perceived in 'the thoughts of other people' has become increasingly important.

The inherent link between solitary beings and contemplation over the thoughts of others can be seen in Scott's discussion of Henry James's narrative techniques in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), as he explores James's focus on Isabel Archer as she sits alone one night in her drawing room. Scott explores the potential favouritism of this section from James, as he was 'pleased to have captured a fundamental but elusive aspect of a species' behaviour: the solitary human, self-absorbed, tunnelling inwards, unearthing unpleasantness and sorrow' (Scott, 2015:loc 331). As Scott states, at the time it was written 'this chapter was progressive because it contains almost no external action' and explores the fact that 'how thinking about someone else's life is often a way of thinking about your own' while James exposes the 'very human magic trick of being at once contained and roaming' (Scott, 2015:loc 331-2). This can be linked to Moody in Catton's novel as he contemplates that:

> Any amount of ordinary time could pass, when his mind was straying there. There was this large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small, stilled world of horror and unease; they fit inside each other, a sphere within a sphere. How strange, that Balfour had been watching him; that real time had been passing – revolving around him, all the while – (Catton, 2013:23)

This explores the contrast between the almost infinite world of 'rolling time and shifting spaces' that exists within our own minds as we '[tunnel] inwards, unearthing unpleasantness and sorrow' (Scott, 2015:loc 331) while simultaneously being part of a 'small, stilled world of horror and unease' (Catton, 2013:23). For me this is a remark from Catton on the insignificance of the digital world and social media, compared to the complex world inside the mind of every human being. It also links to Scott's previous exploration of James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and how thinking about others is a way of reflecting on your inner self. It is the world 'stilled' that Catton uses here that is of particular interest to me.

As I previously explored, social media and the internet appear as though they are every changing, updating and refreshing our newsfeeds, constantly giving us new information and removing anything old from our mind's eye. However that is not the case, although it appears to be 'rolling' and 'shifting' it is in fact 'stilled'. There is no removal or refreshing, all the old information is still there, it is simply being added to and made bigger. We, in our solitary state, are the 'sphere within a sphere' of the Internet. As we spend more and more time online with our 'friends and loved ones poised behind a screen' (Scott, 2015:loc 296), 'real time [is] passing – revolving around [us], all the while' (Catton, 2013:23). There is a real sense of discomfort as Moody awakens from his daydream, losing himself in the every increasing sphere of internal thought, as he realises someone (Thomas Balfour) has been watching him the

whole time. At least in this part of Catton's text Moody is made aware of Balfour's watching eyes because he is physically present, while the realisation of this for Moody is 'strange' it is uncomfortable to think back to Scott's image of Mr Tickle and how we (and those watching us) are able 'to push our tickling fingers, as the 4D man did before us, through solid walls' (Scott, 2015:loc 253), or not, as the case may be. This moment with Walter Moody is an example of Catton taking inspiration from writers like James, as Scott explains that modernist writers in particular 'became hooked on this puzzle of the human as being, simultaneously, an introspective, secretive, enclosed consciousness and communal project' (Scott, 2015:loc 351). As digital explorers and social media fiends we are now part of this puzzle, as our 'enclosed consciousness' has become a 'communal project'. The difference between Catton's exploration of this and ours is that Walter Moody did not chose to be watched by Thomas Balfour, while we are leaving the window for Mr Tickle, and his 'flaccidly long arm', wide open.

The idea of watching and being watched is explored numerous times within Catton's text. It is a focal point particularly with Thomas Balfour who is constantly struggling with both his inner self, and his mistrust of others. This lack of trust and confusion only increases as the narrative progresses:

> Disdain, for all its censorious pretension, is an emotion that can afford a certain clarity. Thomas Balfour watched his friend […] and was scornful – and then his scorn gave way to mistrust, and his mistrust to perspicacity. […] Balfour knew without a doubt that he had not been told the whole truth; what he did not know, however, was the reason for this concealment (Catton, 2013:76)

Balfour is aware that Lauderback is concealing something, but Balfour is also hiding something from Lauderback. The two men have a tumultuous relationship as they never fully reveal their internal selves and don't trust the thoughts of one another. I see this in Scott's question that, 'for all the followers and the likes […] are we ultimately still solitary icebergs?' (Scott, 2015:loc 365). As we spend ever increasing time online perfecting our social media profiles with constant (self-) narration; reinvention; over-determination, and by increasingly reading digitally are we 'solitary icebergs' struggling to trust our own narrative or the narrative of others? The representation of this in the text can be seen in the above passage as Balfour considers his 'friend' Lauderback and his intentions. For the word 'disdain' to be used by Balfour is problematic, and ironic, as Balfour holds Lauderback's opinions in high esteem.

This clarity of disdain is similar to the way we view others online through social media, particularly with the foray of digital and real-life friends we have. Scott discusses that we have 'four broad categories of friends':

> Those planted solely in the real world and who never follow your online exploits; those with whom you interact in the real world *and* online in glorious balance; those strangely intimate friends whom you only know through online media; and, the spookiest group of all: those whom you know in the real world and who are aware of your online exploits, as you may be of theirs, but with whom you rarely if ever interact with online (Scott, 2015:loc 2060).

There is a similarity here between friends who are constantly with you in the present and those that have more awareness to your past exploits online. This strange intimacy can be seen in the opening section of the text as Walter Moody ends up being part of the 'twelve men congregated in the smoking room' with the 'impression

of a party accidentally met' (Catton, 2013:3). In this opening Moody is to become acquainted with these 12 men simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and through no choice of his own. He has no power over the situation and these 12 men, giving the reader the image of a jury, are now there to judge and deem Moody worth of being 'let in'.

The line between observer and observed is crossed when Walter Moody is invited into the group of 12 men in the Crown public house. Moody 'had an appearance that betrayed very little about his own character and […] that others were immediately inclined to trust', and while we know that 'fear and illness both turned him inward' (Catton, 2013:3), Catton is sharing with the reader Moody's lack of any want to share personal information, despite their placing trust in him. There is a initial sense of Moody having completely control over his own image as 'he had studied his own reflection minutely and, in a way, knew himself from the outside best; he was always in some chamber of his mind perceiving himself from the outside' (Catton, 2013:4), which links to Scott's discussion of Skype and how before you embark upon a video call 'the first place it transports [you] is to [yourself]' (Scott, 2015:loc 296). As I discussed in chapter two, Moody is the only character in *The Luminaries* that we can link to ourselves. He is the everyman, so his acute awareness of his external self is a representation of our digital lives with scenarios such as video calling, and 'selfies':

> How often are the initial seconds of a video call's take-off occupied by two wary, diagonal glances, with a quick muss or flick of the hair, or a more generous tilt of the screen in respect to the chin? Please attend to your own mask first (Scott, 2015:loc 296).

It gives a sense of unease to the nature of Moody and his obsession over the external representation of himself, which I see linked to Scott's thinking over the unease of the fact that 'increasingly, the moments of our lives audition for digitisation' (Scott, 2015:loc 91). Being part of the fourth dimension includes, 'co-presence, life happening both locally and in the mind of someone elsewhere' and a moment 'can feel strangely flat if it exists solely in itself' (Scott, 2015:loc 91). As previously discussed, it explores the idea your moments are always being watched by someone else, whether a friend, family member, or someone lost in a trail of Facebook 'stalking'. Scott explores the idea of 'a person as an unreadable book', which happens in Victorian novels such as in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Moody is taking inspiration from this as another representation of an 'unreadable book'. He is being told the tales of everyone else, while keeping his own firmly under lock and key. He would therefore be part of Scott's 'spookiest group of all: those whom you know in the real world and who are aware of your online exploits, as you may be of theirs, but with whom you rarely if ever interact with online' (Scott, 2015:loc 2060) as he becomes aware of the other men's exploits, but rarely reveals his own.

We can further explore 'the bounded past' and the 'boundless present' through Walter Moody's inner dialogue. The past is fixed whilst the 'boundless present' can be altered. Not only is Catton here referencing the past to which (neo-) Victorian fiction is tied, but she explores the past *we* are bound to because of the Internet. Through Walter Moody, Catton explores the uncomfortable relationship we have with our past, as he himself tries to repress a memory:

> 'It was as if a door had chinked open [...] it was costing him a great deal of effort to keep that door from opening further [...] he recoiled from [the

> memory] in order to prevent his own mind from following the connexion, and returning to the past' (Catton, 2013:6-7).

This attempt in Walter's mind to recoil from the memory, preventing it from following the connection, can be seen to reflect the way we read online. As Carr argues, not only is there a constant barrage of information and competing stimuli outside digital text, there is competing stimuli within, such as hyperlinks. The 'Net seizes our attention only to scatter it' (Carr, 2009:loc 1933), and we have to prevent the door from opening any further. Carr would argue that by wanting 'more information, more impressions and more complexity' (Carr, 2009:loc 1935) we will end up 'returning to the past' by following these connexions online, as whilst 'the net's interactivity gives us powerful new tools for finding information [...] it also turns us into constantly pressing levels to get tiny pellets of social or intellectual nourishment' (Carr, 2009:loc 1917). This feeling of freedom, opportunity and chaos are mirrored in the relationship we have with the reading digitally. In the world of the novel, the act of reading is the solitary man's attempt to connect in the nineteenth-century. Today, however, reading and writing offer rare moments of solitariness in a world saturated with social connectivity; and, increasingly, even those solitary acts take place when we are plugged into social networks. Catton's novel, with its self-consciously postmodern, neo-Victorian, self-reflexive emphasis on reading, opens up such thinking and provides frameworks for thinking about such issues. As with all neo-Victorian texts, then, *The Luminaries* is working on two temporal levels (as I discussed in chapter one): it's set in nineteenth-century New Zealand; but it's implicitly commenting on, and allowing the reader to make connections with, the twenty-first century present.

Reading and 'Competing Voices'

The form of Catton's novel can be placed within the context of contemporary digital culture: as the growing length of the epigraphs reflects a culture, which is increasingly obsessed with, surfaces and which can only deal with fragments. In a sense, then, this is a negative reading of how contemporary digital culture is reshaping the way in which we read. Our place as a reader in the increasingly digital world is something that can also be explored through the gradual change in narrative structure within Catton's novel. The text is split into twelve parts, and each part is separated into chapters, and each chapter begins with an epigraph. The first part is 360 pages long, with 12 chapters, and the first chapter being 44 pages long. The first epigraph contains a total of 27 words. However, the last part of the book contains just one chapter, it is two pages long, and the epigraph takes up two thirds of the chapter's word count. The change in reading experience and narrative structure from Catton can be seen as a commentary on the way the Internet produces text. Carr argues that online text has 'a "staccato" quality' meaning 'he quickly scans short passages of text from many sources online' (Carr, 2009:loc 160) and now his mind 'expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it' (Carr, 2009:loc 148). Carr goes on to discuss the fact that the 'the linear mind' which is calm, focussed and undistracted has been:

> pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts- the faster, the better (Carr, 2009:loc 204).

This quote exemplifies what is happening at the end of Catton's novel. The text goes from the predictable beginnings, emphasised by the 'Note to the Reader', to a chaotic, disparate ending where the information is 'short, disjointed, [and] often overlapping'

(Carr, 2009:loc 204). The ending of Catton's text can be seen as a warning as the authorial voice begins to take over the narrative, which reflects the way we read online and how this is changing the way we read novels. The authorial voice of the Internet is becoming a predominant narrator to our lives, and the end of the novel is a celebration of this fact. As the epigraphs get longer and the physical content of each chapter shrinks it is a comment on the fact there is still space for the role of author, and storytelling in the age of the Internet as the narrative and begins to take over and give order to what seems like chaos.

As we draw closer to the end of Catton's text the epigraphs take precedence. This structural choice from Catton reflects Carr's argument that 'as social concerns override literary ones' we are dealing with a time where:

> Writers and publishers will begin to think about how individual pages or chapters might rank in Google's results, crafting sections explicitly in the hopes that they will draw in that steady stream of search visitors. Individual paragraphs will be accompanied by *descriptive tags* to orient potential searchers; chapter titles will be tested to determine how well they rank (Carr, 2009:loc 1742)

This is reflected in the narrative structure at the end of the novel. Epigraphs are used throughout the novel, a typically Victorian practice and one that often appears in neo-Victorian texts, but Catton is particularly playful with her epigraphs. This comes to fruition in the final chapter, as there is a sizeable difference between the length of the epigraph and the chapter's content. Catton's structural choice brings me to think of a Google search, as when searching for a keyword or phrase online we are given cleverly crafted headlines, with a small paragraph underneath full of keywords. These 'descriptive tags' give you a hint to the article's content and you decide whether to

read it or not and Catton's epigraphs serve the same purpose. As Carr goes on to argue, 'changes in reading inevitably spur changes in writing' (Carr, 2009:loc 1726) and now that 'access [to information] is easy, we tend to favor the short, the sweet and the bitty' (Carr, 2009:loc 1552). I would argue that the change in our reading behaviour is reflected none more so than in the progressive shift in narrative structure within Catton's text. And as Will Self argued in 'The Novel is Dead (this time it's for real)' (2013) the 'deadly threat to the novel has been imminent now for a long time [...] and so it's become part of culture' (Self, 2013: The Guardian Online). The narrative structure of Catton's text is a reflection of this 'deadly threat to the novel', as the content slowly tails off in favour of headlines and descriptive tags to guide the reader. The epigraphs could be seen as an attempt for the authorial voice (i.e. Catton's) to impose some order onto the narrative. That's to say, the text has been largely polyphonic and we've heard from a range of different narratorial voices: a device which could be placed alongside the democratic nature of digital space in which, hypothetically, everyone's voice is equal. Ultimately though, the expansion of the epigraphs signals a return of the author and the individual voice. We might live in a world of cacophonic noise; but we still need authors – single minds and single voices – to give shape and meaning to the chaos. Secondly, the very length of the novel is a testament to the imaginative force of deep storytelling, which we've supposedly sacrificed in the digital age. The material form of the book, then, counteracts the anxiety regarding the future of the novel, which Self explores.

When discussing Catton's text as a product of the digital age it is important to consider the place of reader response theory. As Shaghayegh Ghandehari explores in her journal article *Definition of a reader, as a relative concept, in reader-response theories* (2012):

> unless a writer is writing in privacy; intending to keep a daily journal or just making rough drafts, he intends to attract readers to his piece of work which will gradually find an independent life of its own as it is read by diverse readers and besides each with a particular history, knowledge, manner, personality, mood, as active players who will give a new turn and direction to the created text.

Though my analysis of Catton's text as social commentary and a reflection upon the way we read online is changing within digital culture the idea of reader-oriented theorists that 'the reader's perspective counts for the actualization, or final realization of potential meanings concealed in the text', is important to consider. Ghandehari goes on to discuss that throughout history these realizations have 'shocked the author and even given new insights to him' (or her) (Ghandehari, 2012:loc 1382) and as Wolfang Iser (a major literary theorist) discusses 'literary texts always contain 'blanks' which only the reader can fill' (Iser, 1978:52), but how these blanks are to be filled completely depends on the individual diversity and background of the reader, which is integral to each reader's response to a text. This is similar to how our reading of online texts is open to interpretation and completely subjective depending on who is reading, where and when. Roland Barthes also concludes in 'The Death of the Author' (2001) that 'even the author himself does not have the power' to fill in the blanks as once the words are written 'the 'language' becomes in charge of the writing and his intrinsic interwoven words in creating work will find a separate life; distanced from the one that the author perceived he has given to them in the very first place' (Barthes, 2001:4). He goes on to ask the question that 'even if a final and complete understanding exists, who can prove and convince future readers that this will not change, be improved, reformed or recognized wrong?' (Barthes, 2001:5). This is

particularly interesting when it comes to anaylsing the end of Catton's text and how the epigraphs begin to take over the narrative. It can be seen that Catton's use of astrology throughout the text is a way to counteract any possible argument of the 'complete understanding' (Barthes, 2001:5) to the text. In the way the 'Note' explains the narrator's have faith in the all knowing and 'infinite sky', the astrological framing to the text is an attempt to give the control to a higher power to Catton as 'the author'.

The final epigraph is important when considering reader response. It is the ultimate representation of competing voices within the text, deconstruction of the narrative techniques and a final attempt to control the narrative by Catton 'the author':

> *In which Anna Wetherell is purchased for the night; Alistair Lauderback rides to meet his bastard brother; Francis Carver makes for the Arahura valley on a tip; Walter Moody disembarks upon New Zealand soil; Lydia Wells spins her wheel of fortune; George Shephard sits in the goal-house, his rifle laid across his knees; a shipping crate on Gibson Quay; the lovers lie down together; Carver uncorks a phial of laudanum; Moody turns his face to unfamiliar skies; the lovers fall asleep; Lauderback rehearses his apology; Carver comes upon the excavated fortune; Lydia spins her wheel again; Emery Staines wakes to an empty bed; Anna Wetherell, in need of solace, lights her pipe; Staines falls and strikes his head; Anna is concussed, in drugged confusion Staines sets out into the night; in concussed confusion Anna sets out into the night; Lauderback spies his brother's cottage from the ridge; Crosbie Wells drinks half the phial; Moody checks into a hotel; Staines makes a misstep on Gibson Quay, and collapses; Anna makes a misstep on the Christchurch-road, and collapses; the lid of the shipping crate is nailed in place; Carver commits a piece of paper to the stove; Lydia Wells laughs long and gaily; Shephard*

blows his lantern out; and the hermit's spirit detaches itself, ever so gently, and begins its lonely passage upwards, to find its final resting place among the stars. (Catton, 2013: 831)

This passage includes all the main characters within the novel. The novel has gone full circle, in a neo-Victorian, self-reflexive manner as Catton takes us back to the very beginning; before the paratextual 'Note' and before the narrative begins. The epigraph looks as though there are many competing voices, however as you read through there is a rhythm to the text makes it easy to follow and understand. After the confusion and deconstruction of the previous chapters this epigraph is welcome relief as you are given a succinct overview of how the story began. It also gives an interesting insight into who is actually in control of the story. Throughout this epigraph there are repeated references to Lydia Wells and her spinning the '*wheel of fortune',* which gives the image of her being in control of the story as it is repeated: '*Lydia spins her wheel again […] Lydia Wells laughs long and gaily'* (Catton, 2013:831). It is also worth noting that Lydia Wells is referred to in two different ways, twice as Lydia Wells and once as simply Lydia. This creates the idea that Lydia is a more complex character, a person who does not know herself or behaves as two different people; she has a public persona and a private. When she is Lydia she is kinder and more considerate of others as she 'spins the wheel again', whereas Lydia Wells is more sinister, controlling and careless with the destiny of others.

With Lydia Wells in mind I want to consider the difference between a literary critic and a literary reader. Although they are similar there are differences, particularly when it comes to their approach, interpretation and criticism of a literary text. Although the idea of a literary critic and their opinion having more intellectual 'weight' than that of an ordinary reader is something to be contested as simply

because they 'enjoy a rich literary background' who is to say that their opinion and analysis of a text is any more valid than an ordinary reader. As John Crowe Ransom, a theorist responsible for differentiating literary reader and critic discusses in his *Criticism* (1937), states, 'when a literary work is read, literary appreciation takes place […] but [he] argues that 'literary appreciation' is private; compared to criticism which is public' (Ransom, 1937: Online). This explores that to be considered a critical reader it depends on what you *do* with your interpretation. Whether these thoughts are kept internal or made public can also have an effect on public reception of a certain text. As Ghandehari discusses, 'a text could be acclaimed or disliked in a specific time period' due to the variety of opinions and interpretation ascribed to certain texts (Ghandehari, 2012:1384). This is one of the most important aspects to how a neo-Victorian novel is both created and received within the public sphere. As neo-Victorian novels are often created (and read as) social commentary, the opinion of the validity of the issues they discuss and how well they are received can completely depend on the time they are written and whether or not the readers of said text explore their opinions publicly or not. To show this Hans Robert Jauss points out in his article 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' (1970) that 'a literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period' (Jauss, 1970:10). This is particularly interesting to think about when considering the reader response to digital text and whether this can be considered as 'timeless' as a piece of text. Due to the cacophony of digital texts available to us the depths and endless possibilities of the Internet provides readers with time sensitive pieces of writing.

Although digital pieces of writing, articles and videos will remain in the stratosphere of the Internet forever they provide a snapshot of the time in which they

were produced. In the same way that *The Luminaries,* although a work of fiction, is providing an astrological snapshot of the first few months in 1866. With the digital pieces, it must be considered whether the snapshot they provide will be interpreted differently the more time has passed or if they will always provide a solid representation of that moment in time, if any solid representation of our digital lives is even possible?

Is the Froth Vital?

I first want to reflect upon and acknowledge the speculative nature of the work in this chapter. Catton's neo-Victorian text serves as a reflection of our digital lives through her shifts in narrative structure, use of omniscient narration and direct references to the problematic relationship we have with the 'boundless present'. In his book Carr chooses to reference Lope de Vega's 1612 play *All Citizens Are Soldiers*:

> So many books - so much confusion!
>
> All around us an ocean of print
>
> And most of it covered in froth.

But as Carr states, 'the froth itself [is] vital' and although this is with reference to the boom in popularity of the printed book, for me, it is just as poignant as we work through the 'digital revolution'. Just as Carr argues that 'far from dampening the intellectual transformation wrought by the printed book, it magnified it' (Carr, 2009:loc 1185), I argue the same is true for the way we read, digitally. The 'relationship between the book reader and the book writer has always been a tightly symbiotic one', which has given writers the 'confidence to explore new forms of expression, to blaze difficult and demanding paths of thought, to venture into unchartered and sometimes hazardous territory' (Carr, 2009:loc 1240). This is

something I see within Catton's text with the narrative structure and social commentary. We are explorers in an 'ocean of print' and though *a lot* may indeed be 'covered in froth', this froth is 'vital' in allowing an 'intellectual transformation' in the world of digital (and print) literature. Catton's text is an exploration of the true power of the narrator, whether in print or online. This is seen through the appearance of a chaotic ending, where the narrative structure initially appears unstructured but upon reflection is rhythmically deconstructed and succinct. I have read Catton's text as a neo-Victorian novel *for* the digital age. Catton's text is epic in proportions, neo-Victorian at its heart but playfully post-postmodern as it speaks to an entirely different readership, the digital reader.

Conclusion: 'A Sphere within a Sphere'

To conclude, the first chapter of this thesis was concerned with collating the current literature surrounding the genre of neo-Victorian fiction, and exploring how the form has developed from the historiographic metafiction of John Fowles in the 1960s. I discussed the notion that despite its lack of a solid definition, neo-Victorian fiction is more than historical fiction due to it's self-reflexive and self-conscious nature. The narratorial structures of neo-Victorian fiction have moved away from the 'smugness' of postmodern historiographic metafiction and evolved towards using the Victorian period as nostalgic inspiration. The neo-Victorian project is attempting to awaken 'revolutionary gestures we have lost the habit of performing' (Jameson, 2010:434) through evolution and adaptation and although neo-Victorian novels are still using the '[conventions] universally accepted' (Fowles, 1969:95) in a similar way to that of Fowles, the conventions have changed over time.

Catton's text as a work of neo-Victorian fiction adheres to the emerging tropes of the genre with her use of self-reflexive and playful narrative structures. *The Luminaries* is a celebration of the storyteller, whilst being a product of, and for, the digital age. This is proven by Catton's awareness that without computer programmes she would not have been able to write *The Luminaries* with the accuracy that she did. Throughout the novel Catton reflects upon many paradoxical relationships such as: the relationship between fate and the will and 'the boundless present, which contains the bounded past' (Catton, 2013:202). Whilst Catton's novel is 'intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically [laying] claim to historical events and personages' (Hutcheon, 1988:5), as is a staple of historiographic metafiction, the novel also gives the reader 'repetition without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty' (173).

In my final, and most exploratory chapter, I discussed the place of neo-Victorian fiction in our contemporary digital age. I explored the notion that the Internet is changing the role of the storyteller and the way we read as 'changes in reading inevitably spur changes in writing' (Carr, 2009:loc 1726). However, despite Carr's argument that 'access [to information] is [so] easy' that 'we tend to favor the short, the sweet and the bitty' (Carr, 2009:loc 1552), as our brain 'expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it' (Carr, 2009:loc 148), I argued that Catton's novel still has a place within our digital culture. This is shown by the critical reception of the novel and that *The Luminaries* is being turned into 'six, hour-long episodes […] for BBC Two' (BBC Media Centre, 2016: Online). As Self argues that 'reading [has] become the solitary acts of social beings' (Self, 2013:The Guardian Online), I purport that this has always been the case, The way we read has changed, as has the role of the storyteller and Catton's text is an exploration of the true power of the narrator, whether in print or online. Neo-Victorian texts, like Catton's are allowing an 'intellectual transformation' in the world of digital (and print) literature as the role of the storyteller evolves in the digital age.

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