ANNALES
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA
VOL. XXXVIII SECTIO FF 1-2020

ISSN: 0239-426X • e-ISSN: 2449-853X • Licence: CC-BY 4.0 • DOI: 10.17951/ff.2020.38.1.171-185

Bakhtin's Dialogism, Intertextual Theories and Neo-Victorian Fiction*

Dialogiczność Bachtina, teorie intertekstualne i literatura neowiktoriańska

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Abstract. The article analyzes varying approaches to intertextuality in the light of the recurring interest in neo-Victorian literature. It places a special emphasis on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and Gérard Genette's treatment of intertextuality, which appear to constitute suitable tools for studying the relations between the Victorian and neo-Victorian texts. Essentially, Genette's intertextual perspective offers a stable classification of texts based on the notion of "architextual network" and, at the same time, is not confined to a "closed system." While discussing the issue of intertextuality, I also briefly introduce the work done by such Polish scholars as: Michał Głowiński, Ryszard Nycz or Henryk Markiewicz. I especially draw on Nycz's division of intertextual relations: "text–text," "text–genre" and "text–reality." Nycz's theoretical proposal seems to be appropriate for the study of the Victorian and neo-Victorian novel, as intertextuality in the neo-Victorian texts can be found not only on the textual, but also on the generic and cultural level. It seems that neo-Victorian fiction deserves a special place in modern literary studies: not only does it offer a literary vision of the Victorian world, but

* The volume is funded from the budget of the Institute of Polish Studies of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, from the funds of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for activities promoting science (contract no. 615/P-DUN/2019) and under the "Support for Academic Journals" programme (contract no. 333/WCN/2019/1 of 28 August 2019). Publisher: Wydawnictwo UMCS.

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also verifies the current, socio-cultural portrayals of this bygone era, thus, providing a commentary on our present-day world as well.

Keywords: dialogism, intertextuality, Victorian literature, neo-Victorian literature, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gérard Genette, Ryszard Nycz

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest omówienie podejścia do intertekstualności w świetle zainteresowania literaturą neowiktoriańską. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona zostaje pojęciu dialogiczności Michaiła Bachtina oraz teorii intertekstualności Gérarda Genette'a, która wydaje się najbardziej odpowiednim narzędziem do studiowania relacji między tekstami wiktoriańskimi i neowiktoriańskimi, oferując stabilną klasyfikację tekstów opartą na pojęciu „architekstualnej sieci" i nie ograniczając jej do „zamkniętego systemu". Omawiając zagadnienie intertekstualności, zwracam również uwagę na wkład polskich naukowców, takich jak: Michał Głowiński, Ryszard Nycz czy Henryk Markiewicz. Wśród polskich badań nad intertekstualnością szczególnie wyróżniam teorię Ryszarda Nycza, która skupia się na trzech relacjach: „tekst–tekst", „tekst–gatunek" oraz „tekst–rzeczywistość". Propozycja Nycza wydaje się najwłaściwsza w studiowaniu powieści wiktoriańskich i neowiktoriańskich, jako że umożliwia ich analizę nie tylko na poziomie tekstowym, ale również gatunkowym i kulturowym. Wydaje się, iż literatura neowiktoriańska zdecydowanie zasługuje na zainteresowanie współczesnych studiów literackich, jako że nie tylko ukazuje literacką wizję wiktoriańskiego świata, lecz weryfikuje także obecne społeczno-kulturowe obrazowanie tejże przeszłości, oferując tym samym komentarz dotyczący współczesności.

Słowa kluczowe: dialogiczność, intertekstualność, literatura wiktoriańska, literatura neowiktoriańska, Michaił Bachtin, Gérard Genette, Ryszard Nycz

"Do we begin with texts and produce theories about them after we have read them? Or do we begin with theories about texts and then read specific texts in the light of those theories?", inquires Graham Allen in his *Intertextuality* (2000, p. 132). While this fundamental query remains unsolved, the modern literary scene hosts a growing number of revisionary works which re-narrate the previously existent texts in a modern vein and which demand a fresh theoretical outlook highlighting their simultaneous innovative and derivative character. Intertextuality, a popular critical idiom in the recent scholarly analysis, appears to constitute an appropriate theoretical tool for the study of Victorian literary revision. This article analyses varying approaches to the notion of intertextuality in the light of the recurring interest in neo-Victorian fiction. The latter "do[es] not merely replicate Victorian narrative modes, but rather transform[s] them" (Hadley, 2010, p. 147). Thus, neo-Victorian fiction approaches the past from a variety of constantly developing, modern perspectives and encourages empathetic approach to the bygone. Neo-Victorian texts illustrate the ongoing process of change that the novelistic genre undergoes. In her *(Re)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts*, Andrea Kirchknopf introduces Daniel Bormann's definition of a "neo-Victorian work":

a fictional text which creates meaning from the background of awareness of time as flowing and as poised uneasily between *the Victorian* past and the present; which secondly deals dominantly with topics which belong to the field of history, historiography and/or the philosophy of history *in dialogue with a Victorian past*; and which thirdly can do so at all narrative levels and in any possible discursive form, be it through narration of action, through static description, argumentative exposition or stream-of-consciousness techniques (Bormann 2002: 62). (Kirchknopf, 2008, p. 63)

Bormann's definition of a "neo-Victorian text" concentrates on three dominant aspects of a literary work: its haunting placement between the historical past and the present, its dialogical preoccupation with history and, finally, its narrative structure, which implements the notion of dialogue between the past and the present. In this light, studying neo-Victorian fiction in the context of dialogical and intertextual theories appears to be a legitimate choice.

Neo-Victorian fiction has been analysed from the intertextual perspective by such authors as: Bożena Kucała (2012), Louisa Hadley (2010), Kate Mitchell (2010) or Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010). For Kucała these are "the relations between a contemporary text and textually mediated Victorian world" which are paramount in the process of an intertextual exchange (2010, p. 242). According to Hadley, the intertextual relationship between Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction entails the reader's involvement in the reading process (2010, p. 143). Mitchell evokes Renate Lachmann's notion of intertextuality as "the memory of text" and argues that "by invoking Victorian literature" one "re-remembers" not only the novelistic tradition, but also the "extra-textual reality with which we associate it" (2010, pp. 121–211). Heilmann and Llewellyn reflect on the "postmodernism's intertextual playfulness," observing that it is the "reconstruction of fragmented [...] memories" which conjoins the notions of intertextuality and neo-Victorian fiction (2010, p. 34). Thus, it appears that intertextuality is an influential concept in the neo-Victorian literary studies.

While the term "intertextual" can be ascribed to literature as well as to arts and visual media, in this work it is applied exclusively to the analysis of the literary text, with the text standing for "[…] whatever meaning is generated by the intertextual relations between one text and another and the activation of those relations by a reader" (Allen, 2000, p. 220).[1] Hence, textual meaning is developed as an effect of textual interactions and the reader's active engagement. The proliferation

[1] While for Allen the formation of a "literary text" involves intertextual communication and the reader's active participation, Bakhtin also points to these aspects in his definition. For Bakhtin, reading a literary text involves communication based on the reader's knowledge: "literary texts are utterances, words that cannot be divorced from particular subjects in specific situations. In other words, literature is another form of communication, and, as such, another form of knowledge. Literary texts, like other kinds of utterance, depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the

of intertextual theories results, as Kucała argues, in the "theoretical instability" of intertextuality as a concept (2012, p. 33). Whereas intertextuality serves as an effective theoretical framework applied in the modern analysis of literary texts, the proliferating definitions of the term create confusion as well. As she aptly argues,

> [t]he ambiguous status of the concept of intertextuality in contemporary critical discourse stems, on the one hand, from the contrast between the relatively long history of the term and the substantial body of theoretical work done on it, and, on the other hand, from the persistent questioning of the validity and usefulness of the concept. (Kucała, 2012, p. 31)

The theoretical foundation of intertextuality can be credited to Bakhtin's study of a dialogue and the novel as a dialogical genre. Coining the term "dialogism," Bakhtin placed the novel – the only dialogical genre according to him – in the centre of his attention. In his essay *Epic and Novel* (published in 1970, hence thirty years after its original presentation and currently included in a series of essays entitled *Dialogic Imagination*), Bakhtin stresses the relevance of the Socratic dialogues, pointing out that they paved the way for the prototypical novelistic genre: "[w]e possess a remarkable document that reflects the simultaneous birth of scientific thinking and of a new artistic-prose model for the novel," he argues, "[t]hese are the Socratic dialogues" (2011, p. 24).[2] Bakhtin highlights the fact that the Socratic dialogues are necessarily responsive to the "real" world, rejecting the notions of the "absolute past"[3] and conclusiveness at the same time. The same postulates – the rejection of the absolute narrative and conclusive ending – propel modern authors to rewrite Victorian works in order to expose and enhance their textual dialogue with the present. In the light of the Bakhtinian thought, neo-Victorian fiction thrives on the colloquy of perspectives (without the emphasis on conclusion). According to James Philip Zappen, in the Socratic dialogues

place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed" (Holquist, 1990, p. 66).

[2] In the dialogues, Socrates usually performs as the protagonist who discusses philosophical problems by means of the "Socratic method" ("Socratic elenchus") encouraging critical and reflective thinking. According to Charles H. Kahn, "the Socratic elenchus is a successful technique for revealing ignorance in the interlocutors" (1997, p. 201). The method is based on the subsequent questioning of the interlocutor in order to enhance one's awareness of the world and the "reality" (understood as a subjective experience of the world).

[3] The concept of the "absolute past" appears first in Goethe's and Schiller's terminology and signifies "the subject for the epic" (Hoffman and Murphy, 2005, p. 51). It is "closed and completed in the whole as well as in any of its parts. It is, therefore, possible to take any part and offer it as the whole" (Hoffman and Murphy, 2005, pp. 51–52).

> Socrates is not seeking but rather questioning universal definitions because he believes that others uphold definitions that they do not understand, definitions that are grounded in cultural values that they do not question, definitions that are, moreover, in conflict with each other. (2004, p. 3)

The Socratic dialogue anticipates the "questioning" of the "universal definitions" and "cultural values." Essentially, the dialogue in such form lies at the heart of the neo-Victorian literary revision, where 19th-century texts are evoked and revisited in the modern light and where the so-far omitted or unheard 19th-century voices come to the surface in order to spring into a new literary existence. According to Bakhtin, the novel attains literary perfection as a dialogized genre filled with a plurality of voices, devoid of the "dominant force or truth" (2011, p. 20). A similar observation stems from LeBlanc's *Literary Theory Across Genre Chains*: "Dialogic understanding of speech and text reveals not simply the back-and-forth work of human interchange we might imagine in a conversation, but equally how a single strip of an utterance might contain layered voices responding to other voices" (*English in Education*, 2020). The novelistic discourse unfolds like the Socratic conversation, aiming at the cognition of the world rather than at the creation of conclusive narratives. Similarly, neo-Victorian texts delve into the Victorian past in order to recreate its multifaceted aspects through the prism of the modern age without drawing the final conclusion about the past or establishing dominant historical narratives.

The Bakhtinian notion of dialogue not only enables the revision of the literary past in the modern vein but also facilitates a revision of the novelistic genre. Accordingly, the neo-Victorian texts reach beyond the mere nostalgia for the past and provide a commentary on both the past and the present. For instance, in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), the novel acknowledged as one of the forerunners of the revisionary genre, the past and the present collide: the protagonist, Sarah Woodruff, epitomizes both the 19th-century gender struggle for equality and a proto-feminist perspective. In his novel, Fowles purposefully draws on Victorian conventions and plots including, among many others, those derived from Dickens or Thackeray. The past and the present are also merged together in Antonia S. Byatt's neo-Victorian work – *Possession: A Romance* (1990), where individual plots of two couples from the modern and bygone times are interwoven into a present-day scholarly quest after the literary gems of the Victorian age. Essentially, the title of Byatt's work (*A Romance*) is indicative of its qualities: as Cass Sunstein argues after Hawthorne, "a tale may count as a romance in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" (p. 687). Undoubtedly, at the centre of this connection lies an all-embracing dialogue. Christian Gutleben observes that neo-Victorian texts emerge in the "polarity between nostalgia and subversion," while inherently drawing on the narratives from the past:

> the fascination with Victorianism seems inevitably to come with a temptation to denounce the injustice towards some of its ill-used or forgotten representatives […]. This paradoxical form of wistful revisionism eventually leads to an aesthetic and ideological deadlock. Contemporary fiction advocates social, sexual and sometimes aesthetic advancement, and yet to do so it appropriates, reverts to and builds on a model of the past. (2001, p. 10)

It is precisely "a model of the past" that lies at the core of the Victorian literary revision. In her novel *Soulless*[4] (2009), Gail Carriger provocatively reaches for the 19th-century London setting in order to fill it with the 21st-century content. It is especially intriguing to think about neo-Victorian texts as founded on the 19th-century context and, at the same time, drawing on the steampunk genre (as in the case of Carriger's fiction), which blends the use of futuristic technology with an unquenched longing for the bygone. As Jeff VanderMeer briefly puts it, steampunk equals

> Mad Scientist Inventor [invention (steam x airship or metal man/baroque stylings) x (pseudo) Victorian setting] + progressive or reactionary politics x adventure plot. (2011, p. 9)

Such "steampunk equation" confirms the validity of Gutleben's claim that in order to reach further into the future, one needs to move backwards and draw from the literary past: it is the point that both halts and inspires one to engage in the modern, intertextual exchange of literary voices.

Intertextuality, the term which eventually "slipped into an outline of Bakhtinian dialogism" (Kucała, 2012, p. 31), is a "fluid" concept that can be roughly divided into "disintegrative and integrative orientations" (2012, p. 38). According to Kucała, intertextual approaches generally branch out into those focusing on the all-encompassing fragmentation of texts ("disintegration") and those acknowledging the co-dependent textual affinity of works. "The former," Kucała notes,

> initiated and developed by the French theorists, stresses the role of textual relations as a centrifugal force, decentring the text and disintegrating its meaning. The latter, centripetal orientation, while acknowledging the basic role of textual relations in constituting the meaning of an individual text, nevertheless strives to consolidate this meaning by focusing the analysis back on the given text and delineating its limits, if only for the sake of analytical viability. (2012, p. 38)

The term "intertextuality," in its "centrifugal," disruptive form, was used in 1966 by Julia Kristeva in her *Word, Dialogue, Novel*. Drawing on Bakthin's thought, Kristeva argues that each signifying structure carries a plurality of meanings while analyzed (each time) against a different background. According to Kristeva, the

[4] The first, opening novel from *The Parasol Protectorate* series.

"stabilization" of meaning implies a serious threat manifesting itself in the birth of ideology. The rejection of the notion of ideology draws Bakhtin's philosophy and Kristeva's thought together. Yet, although decidedly influenced by Bakhtin, Kristeva derives the basis for her theory from various sources. According to Allen, she builds her new mode of semiotics – semianalysis – not only on Bakhtin's "double-voicedness," but also on Ferdinand de Saussure's study of anagrams, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Karl Marx's notion of production (2000, p. 34). Such diversity of sources allows Kristeva to expand her study beyond the boundaries of the literary world, yet she refuses to work with the term "literature" as such.

While incorporating intertextuality into the overly broad theoretical spectrum, Kristeva questions the safe assumption that the origins of a given work can be attributed to an individual. Marko Juvan maintains that the vision of the text unleashed from the temporal and spacial dimension, devoid of the authorship and creative influence, may be threatening to those readers who are accustomed to the "traditional" perception of the reading process:

> [i]t would be difficult to convince such a reader, hardbound book in hand, that the text is boundless and that other texts and discourses intrude amid the printed lines […]. A book functions as a clearly delimited whole and presence. (2008, p. 1)

Roland Barthes' textual analyses from the 1960s and 1970s are equally challenging to the "traditional" perception of literary works, especially after his rejection of the notion of authorship in *The Death of the Author* (1967). Similarly to Kristeva, Barthes is preoccupied with the ways in which each text departs from its original source and becomes transformed into a new entity, capable of producing the infinity of meanings.

A disparate approach to those represented by Kristeva and Barthes is adopted in Michael Riffaterre's study of the text. According to Riffaterre, texts do not disintegrate but, instead, remodel the "socially normative discourse" (or, the "sociolect") in order to establish a new "significance" (Allen, 2000, p. 119). Riffaterre argues that each text is filled with "pre-supposed intertexts" which do not have to be specifically located in a given work but, instead, can be generated by the reader (Allen, 2000, p. 122). Therefore, Riffaterre emphasizes the role of the reader's "literary competence"[5] (Allen, 2000, p. 126) and his or her effort in the generation of meaning. He

[5] "When he is evoking literary competence Riffaterre is not referring to an adequate knowledge of texts and canons, but is rather referring to an adequate possession of the sociolect" (Allen, 2000, p. 126). Hence, Riffaterre is preoccupied with the idea of the conscious realisation of the sociolect rather than with the concept of the reader itself.

discusses intertextuality as "the web of functions that constitutes and regulates the relationship between text and intertext (1990a: 57)" (Allen, 2000, p. 120).

Gérard Genette offers yet another approach to intertextuality: he assumes that literary works are not original and should be treated as specimens of a confined system (Allen, 2000, p. 96). Unrestricted by the structuralist viewpoint, he coins the term "open structuralism," described by Allen as "a poetics which gives up on the idea of establishing a stable, ahistorical, irrefutable map or division of literary elements, but which instead studies the relationships (sometimes fluid, never unchanging) which link the text with the architextual network out of which it produces its meaning" (2000, p. 100).

In his *Palimpsests*, Genette states that open structuralism offers an opportunity for the "relational reading" (1997a, p. 399), the concept which appears equally valid in the process of re-narrating the Victorian works. The title of Genette's work (*Palimpsests*) stems from his assumption concerning the palimpsestuous nature of texts: "on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through" (Genette, 1997a, pp. 398–399). The palimpsestuous dimension of neo-Victorian texts is recognized by Llewellyn in his article "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?". Genette's palimpsestuous vision of texts appears congruent with Llewellyn's perception of neo-Victorian fiction and can be readily applied to the analysis of the neo-Victorian genre.

Genette investigates the interdependency between the emerging texts and the notion of the "architext" – the "basic, unchanging" concept of the text embodying the foundation of the literary system (Allen, 2000, p. 100). In *Palimpsests*, he introduces the notion of transtextuality, dividing it respectively into five subcategories: architextuality, intertextuality,[6] metatextuality, paratextuality, and hypertextuality. In his other study, *The Architext*, Genette comments on transtextuality in the following manner: "[…] *for the moment* the text interests me (only) in its *textual transcendence* – namely, everything that brings it into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts" (1992, p. 81). Architextuality is Genette's paramount term regulating the relations between the entire range of texts. As he states in *Palimpsests*, it is the category "the most abstract and implicit of all" (1997a, p. 4). Genette negates the structuralist notion of the closed, orderly relations between the "building blocks" of the text by describing the architext as a semi-web endowed with fuzzy boundaries.

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[6] Positioning intertextuality as another form of transtextuality, Genette apparently expurgates Kristeva's concept, constricting it to the narrow literary scope of "quotation, plagiarism and allusion" (Allen, 2000, p. 101). He defines "*intertextuality* in the strict (and, since Julia Kristeva, the »classical«) sense – that is, the literal presence (more or less literal, whether integral or not) of one text within another", with quotation – "the explicit summoning up of a text" – being "the most obvious example of this type of function" (Genette, 1992, pp. 81–82).

Another subcategory, metatextuality, Genette indicates in *Palimpsests*, "is the relationship most often labeled as »commentary«. It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it" (1997a, p. 4). The function of metatextuality proves invaluable in the process of internalizing texts by the reader. Metatextuality prepares one for the reception of the text and, simultaneously, forms expectations and reading strategies. The insertion of a metatextual commentary appears especially significant in neo-Victorian works, which require from the potential reader a specific background knowledge in order to become thoroughly "appropriated" and "absorbed."

Another sub-category of transtextuality is paratextuality: "[t]he paratext […] marks those elements which lie on the threshold of the text and which help to direct and control the reception of a text by its readers" (Allen, 2000, p. 103). Paratexts also comprise: "a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals" (Genette, 1997b, p. 3). The notion of paratextuality is relevant in the study of neo-Victorian texts, where it can be applied, for example, to the study of prefaces (*peritexts*).[7] The "paratextual intertextuality," which enriches such works as Clare Boylan's *Emma Brown* (2003) or Syrie James' *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* (2009), also presents neo-Victorian writing in its transformative context, reaching directly towards the past in order to invite the reader to dialogically embrace the text. Both *Emma Brown* and *The Secret Diaries* are endowed with prefaces which allow one to consciously approach these works from an intertextual perspective.

Hypertextuality constitutes another variant of Genette's transtextuality. "By hypertextuality," Genette states in *Palimpsests*, "I mean relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997a, p. 5). Hypertextuality can be used for the investigation of the semantic and structural differences underlying neo-Victorian and Victorian texts. For instance, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – treated as a "hypertext" – adds an entirely new angle to the story of Bertha Mason – a secondary character from Charlotte

[7] Preface in the neo-Victorian novel orientates one in the reading process – it provides an intentional hint regarding the reading of the text. For instance, in Syrie James' semibiographical novel, *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* (2009), the preface provides a direct clue that the text should be read as a fictionalized biography. Moreover, preface reflects on the nature of neo-Victorian texts, highlighting their attempt at revisioning the precedent narratives. In neo-Victorian novels the paratext is usually created intentionally by the author. Moreover, such a paratext constitutes a deliberate and integral part of the novel.

Brontë's "hypotext" – *Jane Eyre* (1847). In Rhys' text, not only is Bertha given a voice and narrative space, but also she is able to revisit Rochester's version of events, thus prompting the reader to ask the so-far-unasked questions regarding a sketchy, one-sided portrayal of the prisoner in the attic in Brontë's "original" novel. It appears that Genette's theory has a substantial potential for linking the Victorian texts with neo-Victorian works. Genette's theory does not insist on the ultimate classification of texts. Still, it operates within the boundaries of the scientific classification, hypothesizing that each *hypertext* possesses its *hypotext*, while the entire literary system is founded on the architextual basis.

Importantly, the notion of intertextuality has been widely discussed by Polish scholars as well, including Michał Głowiński, Ryszard Nycz, Henryk Markiewicz or Stanisław Balbus. In his article *O intertekstualności* [*On Intertextuality*], Głowiński argues that referring to intertextuality is justified only when the allusion to the previous work determines the meaning of the discussed text. As he postulates, intertextuality is invariably intentional and always targets the potential reader (2000, p. 16): "[i]ntertextual criticism seeks to establish how the previous text(s) function(s) in the new one, to reveal the techniques and thematic effect on the textual interplay (cf. Głowiński, 2002, p. 7)" (Kucała, 2012, p. 37).

In *Tekstowy Świat: Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* [*Textual World: Post-Structuralism and Literary Criticism*], Nycz treats intertextuality as a "category" embracing these aspects of texts and these relations between the given texts that condition the reception of the work in connection with "architexts" (1995, p. 83). He distinguishes three types of "intertextual indexes:" "presuppositions," "anomalies" and "attributions" (1995, p. 84).[8] According to Nycz, literary text can be looked at in terms of three kinds of intertextual relations: "text–text," "text–genre" and "text–reality" (1995, p. 95). The third relation deserves particular attention, as it touches upon the notion of "reality" which can be understood as the subject's experience. As Nycz argues, one can detect in the "text-reality" dependency the opportunity to analyse the associations of literary texts with social, historical and cultural contexts (1995, p. 95).

The bidirectional influence stemming from the "text–text" relation highlighted by Nycz is discernible in the already-mentioned Jean Rhys' postcolonial novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where the protagonist, Antoinette, stands for the textual reincarnation of Bertha Mason – the so-far ignored "prisoner in the attic" from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. While *Jane Eyre* influenced the creation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys'

[8] "Presuppositions" indicate implied meanings, "anomalies" demonstrate violations of what Nycz terms as "conversational rules," norms or literary conventions, while "attributions" point to the affiliation of the text to specified contexts, for instance, to other works, genres, conventions (Nycz, 1990, pp. 98–99).

novel endowed Brontë's work with a fresh, revisionary meaning. By re-narrating the story of the forsaken and supposedly insane female character, Rhys demonstrates that intertextual influence remains essentially bidirectional, reaching both towards the past and the future.[9]

The intertextual relations between texts established on the generic level ("text-genre") can be illustrated with the example of neo-Victorian biofiction, which, drawing on historical sources, constructs fictionalised narratives of the Victorian historical figures. James' *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* skilfully merges Charlotte Brontë's biographical sources with the fictionalised narrative. At the same time, James makes efforts not to extend her narrative beyond the *a priori* existent biographical "facts." The fictionalized biography of Charlotte Brontë bridges the gap between the past and the present, portraying the heroine as an ordinary woman who struggles with "everyday problems." The first-person narration (Charlotte speaking "for herself" in a confessional mode) approximates the reader to the heroine's 19th-century zone and allows for the historical recognition of Brontë as an actual Victorian writer but also as the reader's "confidant." While the text is structured as a biography, it is primarily a "private" story of Charlotte Brontë – a deeply personal account of an individual. The merging of Brontë's fiction with her biography in James' text highlights the connection between the authoress and her work, pointing to Brontë's sensitivity as a woman and writer. In *The Secret Diaries...*, Charlotte Brontë's life mingles with the plots from her novels, while the characters she invented and events she described are placed in her "real" world. Hence, the neo-Victorian biofiction offers an intimate account of Brontë's life where the line between the "reality" and fiction remains thin. In James' biofiction, the writer's life turns into a narrative – a story to be told from a unique perspective.

Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) can be perceived as yet another engaging example of the "text–genre" interdependency, as the plot of the novel adheres to the biographical events from Edmund Gosse's life (1849–1928). While Gosse, an English writer, originally depicted the strict relationship with his father in a partially light-hearted way, *Oscar and Lucinda* offers a glimpse into the true nature of the abuse and Oscar's escape from his father's influence.

The "text–reality" relation figures on the pages of Carriger's *Soulless*, as the novel offers a futuristic blend of the 21st-century high-tech landscape with the conventional Victorian environment. Although the blend results in the surrealistic vision of the 19th-century London, it also creates an innovative, literary world

[9] In his definition of a neo-Victorian text, Daniel Bormann also discusses the placement of the neo-Victorian fiction between the past and the present (cf. Bormann).

from the "patchwork" of the past and present textual landscapes. Hence, Carriger's fiction highlights the transformative impact of the intertextual literary reworkings.

An absorbing and thought-provoking "text–reality" connection can be also traced in Margaret Forster's *Lady's Maid* (1990), where the reader is invited to travel to London with the eponymous heroine – Wilson, who becomes a lady's maid to Elizabeth Barrett. Forster skilfully intermingles Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning's romance and married life with Wilson's equally valid yet supposedly less dignified or prominent daily struggles. At first glance, it is the historical persona of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning who is seemingly central to the plot yet, within the course of the novel, the reader notices Wilson's true validity and vitality as the main yet suppressed character. Forster's neo-Victorian text rearranges the historical perspective on Elizabeth Barrett's life, presenting Elizabeth as a vain, narcissistic and hysterical woman who diminishes the struggles of such seemingly secondary individuals as her maid. Thus, intertextuality on the "text–reality" level encourages one to revise glorified narratives from the past and acknowledge the presence of the so-far omitted, yet deeply striking, "backstage" characters.

Nycz's study of intertextuality, Marko Juvan points out, "is a good example of postmodern theoretical discourse: today literary theory is decidedly displaced from the position of objective and universal knowledge to the relative periphery of historically contingent utterances" (2008, p. 6). "Defending intertextuality, Nycz argues that its rapid entry into the critical vocabulary seems to testify to a previous terminological void exposing the insufficiency of the traditional study of influence (2000, pp. 79–82)," Kucała (2012, p. 33) observes. Whereas "influence" indicates a one-directional impact, intertextuality entails the co-dependent existence of the anterior and subsequent texts. In the light of Nycz's treatment of intertextuality, texts can be perceived as representations of individual experiences framed by the socio-cultural and historical context. Arguing along these lines, Victorian fiction immortalizes these experiences from the 19th-century standpoint, while neo-Victorian texts mirror and revive these experiences in the modern vein.

A similar notion of intertextuality as a "dialogic relationship" is offered in Heidi Hansson's study. As she maintains, the term "intertextuality" undeniably implies that "it is also intrinsically unstable" (1998, p. 23) (cf. Kucała). Moreover, Hansson stresses the involvement of the reader in the act of assimilating the text: "without the reader's desire for complete comprehension, intertextual play cannot exist" (1998, p. 22). In Hansson's view, the potential reader is expected to be acquainted with the previous and subsequent text in order to form possible associations between the two. Such is the case with Clare Boylan's *Emma Brown* (2003) where the reader is asked to draw a conscious connection between Charlotte Brontë's unfinished manuscript and Boylan's modern elaboration on Brontë's text. What is more, Hansson claims,

intertexts can entirely escape the reader's attention, particularly while they are not "physically locatable, since they can be cultural phenomena or genre-based criteria as well as actual texts" (1998, p. 24) (cf. Nycz).[10]

While Hansson points to the instability of the term, Juvan examines both the transforming power and the limitations of intertextuality:

> [o]n the one hand, [intertextuality] has functioned as a law, a historical code, and a prisonhouse that controls cultural ideology, dictating semantic and structural dispositions to each new text; on the other, it has been a key to transgression, a means of undoing conventions […]. (2008, p. 14)

Discussing the "double-facedness" of intertextuality, Juvan's considerations imply the question of ideology. Intertextuality – the notion seemingly liberating from the chains of the dominant discourse – appears equally enslaved by it, Juvan posits. According to Juvan, as soon as intertextuality enters the scientific discourse, it becomes classified and defined. In this sense, it reshapes into an ideology itself. Yet, Juvan also suggests that relying on conventions appears indispensable for the formation of any future concepts and for the sake of structuring ideas (2008, p. 15). Thus, on the one hand, intertextuality falls into the trap of what it tries to avoid – the reliance on the previously sanctioned discourse. On the other hand, this reliance contributes to the establishment of new discourses as well. Neo-Victorian novels participating in the intertextual dialogue not only try to mirror the transformative potential of the novelistic genre *per se*, but also highlight the diversity of discourses participating in the revisionary, modern writing. The neo-Victorian literary revision expands and grows into a worldwide phenomenon: it currently engages such aforementioned American writers as Syrie James or Gail Carriger. Undoubtedly, it turns into a multilayered phenomenon built on the dialogical engagement with the past. As Holquist puts it, "[l]iterature has a particularly important role to play in the economy of dialogism, then, because it affords opportunities of a unique power

[10] Following this line of argumentation, it seems that the text is what originates in the space between the written lines and the reader's mind. For instance, Boylan's *Emma Brown* includes two chapters originally written by Charlotte Brontë in 1853 and meant to begin her never-finished novel *Emma*. The title of the novel encourages one to form connections between Brontë's unfinished work and Boylan's elaboration on the initial plot. Nevertheless, in order to recognize the intertext, the potential reader is expected to possess some knowledge of Charlotte Brontë's life and her literary creations. Hence, the readers acquainted with the story of Brontë's unfinished novel will read Boylan's text differently from those ignorant of the context in which the novel appeared. Describing her work, Boylan remarks that the character of Mrs Chalfont (the leading narrator of the plot) bears resemblance to Charlotte Brontë and to Charlotte's friend, Ellen Nussey. Boylan explains that while introducing Mrs Chalfont's exquisite narrative, she had in mind Brontë's brilliant correspondence. Therefore, as the author, she strove to endow the novel with "some of [Charlotte's] tone" (2004, p. 444). However, the "reading" and decoding of references appearing in the text strictly depends on the reader's knowledge.

to explore […]" (1990, p. 82). Intertextuality, as a dialogical tool, readily assists in the present-day exchange of literary narratives and perspectives, allowing us to draw on the past and manifest its endurance in the 21st-century world.

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Article submission date: 22.10.2018
Date qualified for printing after reviews: 06.04.2020