“THIS IS THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY, YOU KNOW”: TRACES OF THE VICTORIAN GOTHIC ROMANCE IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER’S JAMAICA INN

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Abstract

Before publishing her seminal novel Rebecca (1938), Daphne du Maurier had published Jamaica Inn in 1936, deliberately setting its action in the nineteenth-century and featuring a young heroine, Mary Yellan, who, after her mother’s demise, is compelled to live with her aunt Patience and her uncle Joss Merlyn in their gloomy house known as Jamaica Inn. Explicit references to the nineteenth-century become recurrent in the novel; as a case in point, Francis Davey, the vicar in the novel, openly addresses the heroine stating “this is the nineteenth-century, you know.” Jamaica Inn especially underlines clear intertextual links with early Victorian gothic romances such as Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre and Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights. This article aims at analysing the intertextuality established between Daphne du Maurier’s novel Jamaica Inn and the Brontës’ canonical nineteenth-century gothic romances so as to highlight Jamaica Inn as a forerunner of Neo-Victorian fiction as well as to show that not all literary manifestations written at the time of modernism adopted an entirely critical position with regard to the immediately preceding Victorian past.

Key words: trace, gothic romance, Victorian fiction, modernism, Neo-Victorianism.
Con anterioridad a la publicación de su influyente novela *Rebecca* (1938), Daphne du Maurier publicó *Posada Jamaica* en 1936, situando deliberadamente su acción en el siglo diecienueve y retratando a una joven heroína, Mary Yellan, quien, tras morir su madre, se ve obligada a vivir con sus tíos, Patience y Joss Merlyn, en su misteriosa casa llamada Posada Jamaica. Referencias explícitas al siglo diecienueve recurren en la novela; como claro ejemplo, Francis Davey, el vicario en la novela, se dirige abiertamente a la heroína diciendo “éste es el siglo diecienueve, ya sabes.” *Posada Jamaica* especialmente pone de manifiesto claros giros intertextuales en relación a romances góticos victorianos como es el caso de *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë o *Cumbres Borrascosas* de Emily Brontë. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la intertextualidad que se establece entre la novela *Posada Jamaica* de Daphne du Maurier y los canónicos romances góticos victorianos de las hermanas Brontë con el propósito de señalar *Posada Jamaica* como precursora de la ficción neovictoriana, al tiempo que demostrar que no todas las manifestaciones literarias escritas durante el periodo modernista adoptaron una posición enteramente crítica con respecto al pasado victoriano que inmediatamente las precedía.

**Palabras clave:** rastro, romance gótico, ficción victoriana, modernismo, neovictorianismo.

1. Retracing the Victorians: from modernist to postmodern perspectives

With the advent and recent proliferation of a great number of novels within Neo-Victorian fiction, contemporary critical theory, and, especially, postmodern approaches have contributed enormously to theorising and analysing these works, giving shape to what has become known as Neo-Victorian Studies, to use the term that has currently acquired most wide acceptance. In this respect, critics such as Marie-Luise Kohkle have conflated the inception of Neo-Victorianism with
the publication dates of seminal postmodern novels such as Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) in the decade of the 1960s.

The apparently inextricable connection established between Neo-Victorianism and postmodernism has been aptly and frequently noticed to the extent that Gloria Jones and William Naufftus have described Neo-Victorianism as “the re-emergence of the Victorian novel in a postmodern form”, thus taking for granted that the Neo-Victorian novel can be categorised as a species of postmodern fiction (Carroll 181). Likewise, Christian Gutleben has extensively noticed the similarities existing between postmodernism and Neo-Victorian fiction, considering Neo-Victorian texts highly illustrative of postmodern tenets, and vice versa, taking postmodernism as an appropriate critical apparatus to use in order to analyse Neo-Victorian texts.

Nonetheless, critics such as Robin Gilmour have stretched the origination of Neo-Victorianism further back in time, referring to novels such as Michael Sadleir’s *Fanny by Gaslight*, published in 1940, and Marghanita Laski’s *The Victorian Chaise-Longue*, published in 1953, as apt precursors of the genre (189). Following this tendency, Matthew Sweet has even more recently claimed that novels dating back as far as the 1920s could be considered neo-Victorian antecedents precisely because they engage in a dialogic exchange, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, which ranges from satiric sentimentalism to parodic diatribe in relation to the irretrievable Victorian period (Sweet xvii). In terms of chronology, these precursory Neo-Victorian texts necessarily coexisted with the quest of innovation that characterised the modernist movement and what Matthew Sweet sarcastically refers to as “the Modernists’ open season on the Victorians” (xvii) in relation to the anti-Victorian attitude that used to characterise modernist tenets. In this respect, Sweet’s claim to identify the first Neo-Victorian texts many decades prior to the advent of postmodernism would destabilise the traditionally assumed belief that Neo-Victorian novels —envisioned as texts that willingly move back to portray and recreate the nineteenth-century from a contemporary perspective— are uniquely and inextricably linked to postmodernism, both exemplifying postmodern theories as well as stimulating postmodern critical approaches.

Modernists were thus the first to pave the ground to establish an ongoing debate with the immediately preceding Victorian period, even
if their approach was naturally uninviting, significantly contributing to coupling the epithet Victorian with values which stood in sharp contrast with modernist principles. In this respect, Andrea Kirchknopf aptly refers to “the highly dismissive reaction to the Victorian age” which characterised the modernist refusal of the nineteenth-century, often betraying clear Oedipal undertones, thus being reluctant to accept the parental authority and assumed stiffness of the Victorians from a modernist perspective that mostly looked for innovation and intellectual freedom (57). As Simon Joyce argues, a decisive feature of the Bloomsbury group of British modernists was precisely their so-called anti-Victorianism, willingly assuming that what could be termed as Victorian had to come to an end.

As a case in point, Simon Joyce refers to Virginia Woolf's manifesto of Bloomsbury modernism entitled Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown (1923), which, in his view, implicitly criticises the Edwardians for not making a decisive break with their Victorian past, thus engaging in a sort of Oedipal struggle with them in “the terms their predecessors had taught them”, to use Cora Kaplan’s and Anne Simpson’s terms (xii). Likewise, Lytton Strachey’s Eminent Victorians (1918) ultimately seemed to amount to deconstructing the Victorians’ own view of themselves through Strachey’s sketches of Victorians that he felt had been overvalued. This willing attempt to distance themselves from the Victorians could be perceived in their efforts to relegate all things Victorian to a remote past and differentiate themselves from their precursors, even though this aim would often prove self-defeating, as Simon Joyce further admits (10). In this sense, it can be argued that the Modernists’ effort to insist on innovation and difference inevitably gave way to what Harold Bloom termed ‘the anxiety of influence’, precisely because of their will to set themselves apart from the Victorians even if necessarily departing from the Victorian shadow.

Nonetheless, drawing on Robin Gilmour’s precepts about stretching Neo-Victorian traces further back in time to reach works published in the mid-twentieth-century, it can be argued that Daphne du Maurier’s novel Jamaica Inn, published in the year 1936, presents significant echoes referring back to the nineteenth-century. Likewise, Jamaica Inn also shows a remarkable intentional vein to establish a dialogue with major Victorian tenets, even if it was published many years prior to the advent of postmodernism. Hence, given the principles regulating
Neo-Victorian fiction, *Jamaica Inn* could be regarded as a forerunner of this genre. In fact, Daphne du Maurier’s novels often underscore a sense of a bygone era, given the author’s lifetime interest in history and the past as well as the early influence that her grandfather, the well-known Victorian writer George du Maurier, exerted on her writings. Therefore, even though *Jamaica Inn* was released during the years of the modernist period, it refers back to the nineteenth-century through nostalgia rather than scorn, thus distancing itself from modernist literary works that often rejected their immediately preceding Victorian past.

Thus, even though the ongoing return to the nineteenth-century mostly characterises Neo-Victorian novels published in the rise of postmodernism and beyond, it may be claimed that this willing return to establish a dialogue with the Victorian period truly began to take place through the modernist movement, soon after the Victorian age was perceived to be drawing to a close, even if, in most cases, it was merely to underline its difference in relation to the immediately preceding Victorian past. As Cora Kaplan notices, as a case in point of the diverging dialogue established with the nineteenth-century, there lies the evolving and different treatment of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in the twentieth-century by critics such as Virginia Woolf and Raymond Williams, respectively. In her essay entitled “*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*,” published in *The Common Reader* (1925), Virginia Woolf underlines the necessary differences perceived between Charlotte Brontë’s perspective and that of any twentieth-century reader, considering that this fiction had ‘no lot in the modern world’ and wishing that modernist aesthetics would disregard and transcend this type of nineteenth-century women’s fiction for both being too focused on the domestic as well as being too afraid of female anger.

Conversely, as Cora Kaplan also claims in her seminal volume *Victoriana*, Raymond Williams’ celebration of *Jane Eyre* in his essay “Charlotte and Emily Brontë” published in his volume *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), more than forty years after Virginia Woolf’s dismissal of *Jane Eyre*, is rooted in the novel’s capacity to challenge conventions through a woman’s voice, as the narrator effectively establishes an intimate relation with the reader through a confessional mode. The facile approach of equating postmodernism with a nostalgic view of the past, envisioning the nineteenth-century as “the
privilege site of return for a mal-adjusted present” (Carroll 176), and conversely, modernism with a persistent anti-Victorian feeling because of its permanent search for innovation only seems to respond to a general tendency which disregards the fact that some novels published in the advent of modernism willingly recreated the nineteenth-century with some sense of loss, and conversely, some Neo-Victorian novels, published through the heyday of postmodernism, aimed to recreate the Victorian period so as to highlight the inequities and hierarchies that characterised Victorian times.

This Manichean or traditionally established dichotomy of modernist as anti-Victorian and postmodern as somehow pro-Victorian precisely because of its will to recreate an irretrievable past seems to be based on no ground. Actually, in the light of Neo-Victorian studies and its aim to analyse twentieth-century novels recreating the Victorian period, novels published at the turn of the century or the first half of the twentieth-century, and thus in the advent of modernism, displayed a clear intention to portray the Victorian era, even if with a different aim if compared with postmodernism. In this respect, it can be argued that modernism first began to renegotiate with the Victorian past in an attempt at ‘othering’ Victorian life and institutions. As Marie-Luise Kohlke argues, early twentieth-century works already engaged in conversation with Victorians, both moving “forwards in re-conceptualising the nineteenth century but backwards too” (4-5), thus paving the ground for future Neo-Victorian endeavours. Stretching the limits and the origins of Neo-Victorian fiction seems to be a particular focus of attention in Neo-Victorian Studies, as critics are willing to move further back in time to analyse early works of fiction, even with no postmodern purposes, which go back to the nineteenth-century and recreate it from a contemporary perspective. An analysis of the trace of the nineteenth-century in Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Jamaica Inn*, especially taking into consideration the Brontës’ legacy, may thus contribute to this thread of study within Neo-Victorian studies which seeks to explore early works published many years prior to the advent of postmodernism.

2. An early exponent tracing the nineteenth-century

As a reflection of this growing interest, Daphne du Maurier’s often underrated novel *Jamaica Inn*, published in 1936, can be highlighted
as an early exponent, a twentieth-century novel that goes back in time to recreate the nineteenth-century through a mixture of nostalgia and condescension at the time modernism was considered to be in its prime. As an early supporter of a willingly literary recreation of the nineteenth-century, Du Maurier's novel gained some unprecedented popularity at the beginning of the twenty-first century, being republished by Virago Press in 2003, and then, reprinted twice a year in the short span of three years, from 2004 to 2006. In its 2003 edition, Sarah Dunant, contemporary writer of historical novels, wrote an introduction highlighting the dual nature of Du Maurier's novel, paying homage to Victorian classics but also displaying an important undercurrent of modern sensibility. In this respect, Sarah Dunant seemed to be well aware of the interest that *Jamaica Inn* might possibly have for Neo-Victorian scholars and readers, and, thus, emphasised blatant Victorian echoes that she could identify as reverberating all through the novel. Dunant highlights the fact that Du Maurier's novel “opens with echoes of Dracula” (vii), and she also deliberately depicts Joss Merlyn, Mary Yellan’s uncle in *Jamaica Inn*, as “the romantic hero inverted into violence and self-loathing – a Mr Rochester without a Jane to redeem him” (viii), thus referring to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Sarah Dunant’s stress on the Victorian undertones underlying Daphne du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn* seems to respond to what Christian Gutleben considers a “certain commercial orientation” (182), which often dominates Neo-Victorian novels through the use of paratactic blurbs that emphasise any resemblance of a contemporary novel with a Victorian classic in an attempt to attract more readership, thus corroborating the still ongoing popularity of Victorian fiction. Despite the important Victorian resonance reverberating in Du Maurier’s novel, Dunant also notices its contemporary modern background, and thus, its presumed reluctance to succumb to the happy ending that characterising most Victorian plots as well as the sense of reassurance that most readers experiment by the end of many Victorian novels. Hence, Dunant also admits that “[f]or a book which at one level is a romantic adventure story, *Jamaica Inn* is full of decidedly unromantic thoughts” (x). Likewise, even if claiming that the end of the story brings “the reader out of the darkness into at least a semblance of light” (xi), Dunant also seems to whisper to any prospective reader that “you can be sure Mary [the female protagonist of Du Maurier’s novel] will not sleep well at night” (xi).

All in all, *Jamaica Inn* arises as a novel published in the inter-war period, with a modern sensibility, but with strong romantic undertones, revealing a clear and obvious legacy to the gothic romance and Victorian classics, mainly Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn* could be both interpreted as an early exponent of Neo-Victorian fiction as well as a modern novel within the tradition of romance fiction. Its portrayal of nineteenth-century Cornwall through a series of undeniable Victorian echoes and the display of a turbulent love story reminiscent of nineteenth-century gothic romances contributes to conferring a nostalgic depiction, which conforms to a Neo-Victorian return to a past that has inevitably been lost. Nonetheless, as a novel with specific modern undertones, it also seeks to take a bleaker and less reassuring picture of life, as well as unveiling a fairly vindicating attitude with regard to gender issues.

### 3. Revealing Victorian echoes

Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Jamaica Inn* tells the story of young Mary Yellan who, having been brought up in a farm in Helford, is compelled to move away and live with her Aunt Patience and her husband Joss Merlyn after her mother’s demise. This beginning inevitably brings to mind *Jane Eyre* as a child, when she comes to live to Gateshead Hall, under the protection of her despondent aunt, Mrs. Reed. In Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Jamaica Inn*, even though Mary’s memories of her aunt are comforting, her prospects to live a happy life with her relatives come to no avail as she gradually realises that all the villagers try to avoid approaching the gloomy and threatening Jamaica Inn, which presents many points in common with Emily Brontë’s depiction of the house of the Earnshaws, Wuthering Heights. On her arrival, Mary gains insight into the vicious nature of her uncle Joss, who is permanently inebriated, and her aunt’s hopeless subjection to her husband as a result of fear; a beginning that significantly echoes Isabella’s despondent life with her husband Heathcliff, as well as Hindley Earnshaw’s dissolute habits in *Wuthering Heights*. Mary soon realises they both keep a terrible secret and begins to feel trapped in a dreary place which is never open to the public and only seems to give shelter to terrible secrets and rooms with locked doors, in clear resemblance with Thornfield in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. As also happens with many heroines of the Brontës’ novels,
in a short span of time, Mary’s innocent and child-like appearance undergoes a blatant transformation as she falls under the untamed and gloomy influence that pervades Jamaica Inn. Against her will, Mary increasingly grows attracted towards her uncle’s younger brother, Jem Merlyn, despite his coarse and devious manners. Nonetheless, Mary is uncertain whether to trust Jem when she realises that her uncle is apparently the leader of a gang of smugglers attacking wrecked ships to slaughter any survivors and rob them of their possessions.

When one day Mary gets lost on the moors, she becomes acquainted with Francis Davey, the albino vicar of a neighbouring village and a wicked alter ego of Mr. St John in Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. Francis Davey offers Mary help and shelter and comes to her rescue when she is left alone after spending the day with Jem, or when her uncle compels her to accompany his gang of wreckers and witness the slaughter of the survivors of a crash as they try to reach the shore. Mary decides to report her uncle to the authority of Squire Bassat, but when Mary goes back to Jamaica Inn, she finds both her uncle and her aunt murdered. In her despair, she is again rescued by the vicar, who offers her shelter and relief. However, during her stay, Mary discovers a drawing of the vicar in which he has pictured himself as a wolf while the members of a congregation have heads of sheep. As a result, the vicar confesses he is the actual leader of the gang as well as the murderer of her uncle Joss and her aunt Patience. As the vicar runs away on the moors taking Mary as a hostage, Jem manages to follow them and defeat the vicar in a fight, rescuing Mary, who eventually plans to go back to her former peaceful and quiet life in Helford. Nonetheless, as she walks on the moors to Helford, she encounters Jem in a cart heading towards the opposite direction, and after some hesitation, Mary realises that she is no longer able to pursue her former life, and thus, finally agrees to stay with Jem; a conclusion that also echoes *Jane Eyre* and the final decision of the young protagonist to go back to Edward Rochester.

Du Maurier’s novel *Jamaica Inn* clearly follows the plot of the *reifungsroman* or novel of female development, depicting Mary Yellan’s loss of innocence and the process whereby she comes to terms with her own nature, and especially, her own sexuality. Some episodes and narrative twists in the plot as well as the portrayal of characters such as Mary Yellan, Aunt Patience, and both Joss and Jem Merlyn, often evoke and inevitably bring to mind some of the passages in the Brontës’
gothic romances, thus contributing to a significantly prematurely Victorian revival merely a few decades after leaving the Victorian period behind. In this respect, as Patsy Stoneman admits in her volume *Brontë Transformations*, these Victorian novels could easily be coalesced with the quality that Jacques Derrida named as ‘iterability’, that is to say, a capacity to be constantly re-read and re-written, making use of diverse meanings and striving for plural effects (2). Likewise, Du Maurier’s novel and her particular homage to the Brontës also match Linda Hutcheon’s view of writing as revision, bringing her novel closer to Neo-Victorian and early postmodern endeavours.

Broadly speaking, despite its publication in the 1930s, Daphne du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn* seems to illustrate the three features with which Daniel Candel Bormann associates Neo-Victorian novels, mainly the awareness of time flowing as poised between the Victorian past and the present, the dialogue with a Victorian past, and the use of any narrative levels to achieve this purpose, from the narration of action to argumentative exposition (62). The important influence of Victorian writings on Du Maurier’s novels has frequently been highlighted by critics, often taking for granted that one of the strongest influences to create her renowned novel *Rebecca* was Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, while her fascination with the Brontës would become obvious when she published the non-fiction volume entitled *The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë* in 1960. Likewise, often noticing Du Maurier refused to be categorised as a romantic novelist, critics such as Oriel Malet have noticed that her brand of romanticism unveils outstanding sinister overtones which rather seem to recall Wilkie Collins’ sensation novels.

The Victorian trace in Du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn*, to use Jacques Derrida’s critical concept, seems to pervade important passages in the novel as well as the portrayal of some characters, which are strongly reminiscent of those in Victorian gothic romances. Mary Yellan’s arrival at Jamaica Inn echoes the first time Mr Lockwood sets foot on Wuthering Heights, especially for the sinister connotations that all the neighbourhood attaches to the family manor. In clear resemblance with Wuthering Heights, Jamaica Inn is depicted as a dilapidated house, vulnerable to bleak weather, which in turn reflects the fallible and dissolute life of its inhabitants. In Daphne du Maurier’s novel, Jamaica Inn is described as follows: “there was no other house, no other cottage. If this was Jamaica, it stood alone in glory, foursquare to the winds”
Significantly, this description resembles that of Mr. Lockwood once he arrives at Wuthering Heights as, in his narration, he highlights the bleak weather to which the house is constantly exposed:

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff’s dwelling. ‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house. (24)

Likewise, when Mary Yellan first sets eyes on her uncle, her depiction of Joss Merlyn inevitably recalls that of Heathcliff in Emily Brontë’s novel, as Mary states that her uncle “was a great husk of a man, nearly seven feet high, with a creased black brow and a skin the colour of a gypsy” (16). Mary’s description brings to mind Mr. Lockwood’s well-known portrayal of Heathcliff, depicting him as “a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman” (26). Similarly, Joss Merlyn’s marriage to Aunt Patience strongly recalls that of Heathcliff and Isabella, as both women are degraded as a result of their respective subjection to their husbands. However, for the most part, Joss Merlyn’s permanent state of inebriation is also reminiscent of Hindley in Emily Brontë’s novel; likewise, the way he treats Aunt Patience often recalls Hindley’s harsh treatment of his sister Cathy.

In terms of its plot, Du Maurier’s novel often brings to mind several passages of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, such as her encounter with the vicar Frances Davey, the locked room in Jamaica Inn and the supernatural undertones that seem to pervade her family’s manor house. Mary Yellan’s first encounter with Francis Davey on the moors bears a close resemblance with Jane’s almost preternatural first meeting with Edward Rochester, when both Mary and Jane overhear a horse approaching and their imagination unleashes to indulge in frightening fantasies of goblins and creatures of the night until they finally catch sight of the rider. In *Jamaica Inn*, this scene is described as follows: “Mary waited in the middle of the track, her nerves a-jingle with the suddenness of the approach, and presently the horse appeared out of the mist in front of her, a rider on his back, the pair of ghostly figures lacking reality in the dim light” (94). This description in *Jamaica Inn* certainly resembles Charlotte Brontë’s novel, when Jane Eyre is about
to meet Edward Rochester, and feels haunted by goblins in the midst of nature:

As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie’s tales wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a ‘Gytrash,’ which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me. (117)

Later on in Du Maurier’s novel, Mary Yellan feels unable to hide her surprise when she sets eyes on Francis Davey for the first time, noticing his vampiric pale eyes and white hair despite his blatant youth, finally realising that he is an albino: “she saw his eyes for the first time from beneath the brim of his hat. They were strange eyes, transparent like glass, and so pale in colour that they seemed near to white” (95). Likewise, in Charlotte Brontë’s novel, when Jane first meets Mr. St. John, she is also immediately struck by his eyes, “which were large and blue, with brown lashes” and “his high forehead, colourless as ivory, [which] was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair” (363). Francis Davey and Mr. St. John resemble each other not only in terms of physical appearance and in their role as vicars of the congregation, but also in the continuous assistance that they both offer to Mary and Jane respectively, even if both will prove to be very different from each other by the end of these two novels.

Likewise, Jamaica Inn, in clear resemblance with Thornfield in Jane Eyre, is full of trapped doors and dark secrets waiting to be unravelled. Soon after her arrival, Mary notices that “in the opposite direction from the kitchen, was another room, the door of which was locked” (31). Aunt Patience’s reluctance to tell her niece the secret lying behind that door and the preternatural explanations, in which Mary begins to indulge out of fear, establish a parallelism with Jane’s arrival at Thornfield and her immediate realisation of a dark secret lying dormant in the attic of Edward Rochester’s manor house:

Mrs. Fairfax stayed behind a moment to fasten the trap-door; I, by dint of groping, found the outlet from the attic, and proceeded to descend the narrow garret staircase. I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its
two rows of small back doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle. (112)

Taking into consideration these blatant echoes of early Victorian gothic romances in Daphne du Maurier’s novel, Jamaica Inn can be described as a palimpsest of Victorian texts and thus as a forerunner of Neo-Victorian fiction, being rooted in a Victorian tradition and seeking to bring those gothic romances back to life but from a modern perspective. In this respect, Du Maurier’s novel also responds to the Neo-Victorian aim to offer “critical friction”, to use Mark Llewellyn’s term, in an attempt to shed light over the Victorians from a contemporary view, and vice versa, striving to go deeper into our contemporariness through a return to the past.

4. Looking down on Victorian traces

Either as an early Neo-Victorian attempt to transform Victorian classics or as a modern exponent trying to highlight its difference from the immediately preceding Victorian period, Daphne du Maurier’s novel departs from the early Victorian gothic romance to transform it and address it to a modern readership. Despite the nostalgia for a lost past and the blatant intertextuality with novels such as Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre, Jamaica Inn also underlines a subversive discourse which destabilizes Victorian values and standards. Joss Merlyn, Mary’s uncle, plays an active role in smuggling and profiting from the wrecked ships on the coast of Cornwall, thus showing a dreadful counterpart to the splendour of the British Empire and its float. Likewise, Joss Merlyn and Aunt Patience are far from exemplifying and spreading the Victorian ethics and values presumed in the institution of the family, which is perceived as totally disrupted in the novel. Moreover, Mary Yellan stands in an awkward position, dangling from the angel-of-the-house image that she seems to impersonate when she arrives at Jamaica Inn, to that of a fallen woman as she decides to ramble upon the moors with Jem Merlyn and finally resolves to stay with him despite his coarse manners and his dissolute past.

Despite the novel’s subversion of Victorian notions of empire, family and somehow gender, Jamaica Inn becomes specially subversive with regard to religious issues. Francis Davey, the vicar of Altarnun and clear counterpart to St. John in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, hides his
identity as the real leader of the smuggling gang as well as the eventual murderer of Mary Yellan's relatives in Jamaica Inn. Even though Francis Davey always comes to Mary's rescue when she is in need, she eventually manages to unravel his true and dark nature. Choosing the vicar and the priest of the novel to play the role of the villain involves a significant challenge to one of the Victorian pillars: religion. Even in his cinematic adaptation of Du Maurier's novel, Alfred Hitchcock felt compelled to disregard any unsympathetic portrayal of the clergy as it was forbidden by the Production Code in Hollywood, finally choosing the squire, Bassat, instead of the vicar, to become the villain in the film.

Nonetheless, Francis Davey also fulfils an important metanarrative function in Du Maurier’s novel which underlines his double nature. In his series of encounters with Mary Yellan, he often tries to soothe and appease her anxiety repeating the litany “this is the nineteenth-century, you know,” in an attempt to convince her that, in the century of progress and advance, there is no place for any irrational fear. Conversely, when Mary unveils his identity as both smuggler and murderer, Francis Davey confesses his scepticism about the modern world and his nostalgic wish to return to the past. His double-sided nature is somehow reminiscent of the conflation of apparent opposites in novels that intend to trace back the past. In this respect, like Daphne du Maurier, as a modern writer indebted to the Victorian gothic romance, Francis Davey also attempts to recreate a past that has been inevitably lost but also pinpoints those presumably Victorian aspects that he feels compelled to criticise from a modern and contemporary perspective.

5. Conclusions

Only two years before publishing her seminal work Rebecca, Daphne Du Maurier envisioned a novel totally set in the nineteenth-century, with clear echoes of early Victorian gothic narratives mostly reminiscent of the Brontës’ great classics. Recent re-editions of her often underrated novel Jamaica Inn display an increasing interest in rediscovering early modern novels with Neo-Victorian aims preceding contemporary postmodern novels, which give shape to most Neo-Victorian fiction. The rediscovery of early novels with Neo-Victorian aspirations remains an important domain to explore so as to prove Matthew Sweet’s thesis that Neo-Victorian fiction was firstly rooted
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in early modernist novels at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The blatant trace of Victorian echoes in Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Jamaica Inn* transforms it into a forerunner of Neo-Victorianism as a novel intentionally set in the nineteenth-century with both a nostalgic and subverting purpose, thus bringing to the fore a blending of both Victorian recreations and modern tenets, thus, to use Marie-Louis Kohkle’s words, ‘othering’ Victorianism from a modern perspective.

Exploring Daphne du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn* in order to find traces of early Victorian novels not only enriches the study of Du Maurier’s fiction but also contributes to destabilising the traditional assumption that Neo-Victorian features only pertain to postmodern works. This comparative approach can be further extended to other Du Maurier’s novels. As a case in point, her bestselling novel *Rebecca* has traditionally been highlighted from this perspective given its acknowledged homage to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Similarly, Du Maurier’s first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, published in 1931 and whose title derives from a line in Emily Brontë’s poem “Self-Interrogation,” is also heavily influenced by *Wuthering Heights*, as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have aptly noticed. Moreover, Du Maurier’s romance novel, *Frenchman’s Creek*, published in 1941 and portraying the love affair of the protagonist, Dona, with a pirate, equally brings to mind evocative images of Heathcliff, as Kathy imagines her beloved friend being of noble origins and kidnapped by wicked sailors. Likewise, Du Maurier’s novel *My Cousin Rachel* also presents remarkable similarities with sensation novels by Victorian writers such as Wilkie Collins, and especially, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, taking into account the plot of the novel as well as the double nature of the protagonist. Hence, by means of pursuing this comparative approach, it is possible to delineate the important influence Victorian literature, and the Brontës in particular, exerted on Daphne du Maurier’s novels, and thus, identify evocative traces of the nineteenth-century in many of her literary works.
WORKS CITED


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