Viktorija Krombholc[*]
Filozofski fakultet,
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu
Bojana Vujin
Filozofski fakultet,
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu

UDK: 821.111.09 Setterfield D.
DOI: 10.19090/gff.v49i1.2528
orcid.org/0009-0001-7834-6808
orcid.org/0000-0002-6769-5199
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ABSENT MOTHERS AND GHOSTLY DOUBLES IN DIANE SETTERFIELD'S *THE THIRTEENTH TALE*

Neo-Victorian literature recontextualises popular Victorian tropes and re-examines fictional and historical Victoriana's place within today's larger culture. Contemporary neo-Victorian narratives often repurpose Gothic motifs, whose unsettling nature illustrates our own ambivalent attitudes towards the Victorians and the cultural heritage they left behind. This paper analyses Diane Setterfield's debut novel *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), positing it as a neo-Victorian Gothic text and paying special attention to the motifs of doubles and motherlessness, so as to examine the ideas of identity, origin and belonging that permeate this novel on the thematic and narrative level. Particular emphasis is also placed on intertextual relationships *The Thirteenth Tale* fosters with codifying Victorian Gothic texts, especially Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The rich intertextuality of *The Thirteenth Tale* demonstrates that the novel is ultimately a story about stories and storytelling, a quintessential neo-Victorian text which re-evaluates the Victorian era's cultural, historical and literary legacy.

Key words: Diane Setterfield, *The Thirteenth Tale*, neo-Victorian fiction, contemporary Gothic, double, absent mother, intertextuality

By defining itself in relation to the Victorian period, neo-Victorianism signals its concerns with matters of identity and lineage from the very outset. The sheer volume of obsessive returns to the Victorian age found in so many contemporary narratives, along with their rich and diverse modulations, signals a relationship with the Victorian age that goes beyond mere aesthetic interest. Indeed, neo-Victorian fiction repeatedly engages with issues of cultural heritage, personal and collective memory, authenticity and belonging, representations and conceptualisations of self and Other. Ancestral links, intergenerational bonds and relationships, matters of inheritance and genealogy, be it familial, literary or

[*] viktorija.krombholc@ff.uns.ac.rs

cultural, thus lie at the heart of neo-Victorian writing, and they are repeatedly examined through the network of matrilineal links and affiliations; for Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010: 65), "[t]he mother and the maternal home, acting as they do as sites of both alienation and ultimate reconciliation, constitute central metaphors of the legacy of Victorianism in neo-Victorian fiction". On the other hand, in relation to Victorian culture, neo-Victorianism stands as its ambivalent and ambiguous double, its parasitic twin and its distorted mirror image, adopting and reshaping familiar elements of Victorian culture into imitations which are often complex, provocative or potentially disturbing. Doubles and mirror images thus constitute another key neo-Victorian trope, as a way of exploring the modulations of sameness and difference between the past and the present, exposing the conflicting need to distance oneself from the Victorians and their retrograde worldview while at the same time turning to the Victorian age as the birthplace of contemporary sensibilities. Diane Setterfield's novel *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) illustrates these concerns particularly well, with its focus on the figure of the absent mother and broken matrilineal ties, as well as its successions of twins and doubles.

Inspired by the choicest Victorian Gothic tales – among others, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) – *The Thirteenth Tale* cleverly plays with their story beats, recontextualising their motifs in an ever-repeating cycle of Gothic elements, particularly those connected to doubling and either broken or perverse familial bonds. The story is narrated by Margaret Lea, an amateur biographer and clerk in her father's antiquarian bookshop, who is summoned by the mysterious novelist Vida Winter, with the request to write her biography. Margaret, who only reads nineteenth-century literature because she prefers "proper endings" (Setterfield, 2006: 29), sets about her task by first reading Winter's most notorious work, a book of fractured fairy-tales called *Thirteen Tales of Change and Desperation* – or at least, that is the title of the coveted and valuable first edition: since the thirteenth tale is conspicuously absent, later reprints are entitled simply *Tales of Change and Desperation*. Intrigued by this mystery and by Winter's other novels she reads in feverish obsession, Margaret decides to travel to Winter's estate and take the commission: she is to listen to Winter's oral narrative and mould it into a coherent biography. Imitating the Russian doll structure of *Wuthering Heights*, Setterfield places Winter's recollections within the frame of Margaret's narration, and the reader is thus privy to both characters' stories, piecing them together to arrive at "the truth". Winter's story is a hardly believable Gothic narrative

featuring a haunted house, dark family secrets (incestuous relationships, madness, murders, suicides, mistaken and/or stolen identities, secret children…) and a series of events so fantastical that by the time the (underwhelming) rational explanation is offered, the reader might still reach for the more intriguing supernatural interpretation instead. Deliberately setting her novel in an indeterminate past, Setterfield creates a neo-Victorian simulacrum whose surface is littered with Gothic motifs and sensationalist tropes, whose essence is made of stories and storytelling, and whose "proper ending" serves instead as a challenge to the reader to question the very idea of narrative truthfulness.

Critical readings of Setterfield's novel mostly interpret it as a search for identity and meaning through the discovery of a hidden, traumatic past or a long-held family secret (cf. Heilmann–Llewellyn, 2010; Gruss, 2014 or Cox, 2019). The Angelfield family home is configured as a repository of secrets, the site of traumatic events which have been repressed and need to be processed in order to move on. The individual process of discovery and recuperation is thus read as a metaphor for uncertainties and anxieties surrounding contemporary British or Western identities. While this is certainly true of, for instance, John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004), the engagement with this typical neo-Victorian trope in *The Thirteenth Tale* is a bit more complex. The secret at the centre of Margaret's story is revealed at the very beginning and very little new information is revealed by the end of the narrative. Her quest for the true version of Vida Winter's life story bears little relation to her own life, despite the parallels between them in the form of twin siblings or their awareness of the power of storytelling. Winter herself is not on the road to discovery of a secret family past; instead, she is the sole guardian of the story and dies as soon as the story comes to an end. Even Margaret realises that the story's importance is not in being discovered, but in being told, and ultimately decides against publication, leaving instead instruction for its handling after her own death. On the other hand, the story Vida is telling is not fully her own – as she states, she is "no more than a subplot" (Setterfield, 2006: 58) in the story of the Angelfield sisters. The only true discovery comes to Aurelius Love, who is a side character in Margaret's narrative, appearing only in the second half of the story, and, with the exception of his clumsy attempt to discover the truth by approaching Vida dressed as a journalist, does not really undertake to discover the secret of his biological family, instead acting as a passive recipient of Margaret's findings.

In other words, the past in *The Thirteenth Tale* is not really painstakingly discovered, as is the case with some other neo-Victorian narratives, but rather willingly shared, and the illusion of discovery is created through *storytelling*,

aligning the act of unearthing history to the act of reading, where the reader "literally embodies (re-members) the reimagined past" (Mitchell, 2010: 7). As Vida Winter narrates her story, Margaret performs this very act of re-membering. Similarly, Susanne Gruss (2014: 131) argues that the act of storytelling is essential to overcoming traumatic experiences in *The Thirteenth Tale*; in the novel, storytelling is accorded with "anesthetic qualities" (Setterfield, 2006: 97), and Margaret is even prescribed Arthur Conan Doyle's rational detective stories as an analgesic after consuming too many highly emotional, melodramatic Victorian novels. In sharing her story, Vida asks Margaret to bear witness to her traumatic loss and the deep feelings of guilt it engenders, sentiments shared by Margaret herself, who suffers from survivor's guilt after her twin sister's death. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, a key aspect of the act of re-membering the past is the inclusion of a wide range of intertextual references and resonances, such that the narrative is essentially overdetermined by them, forming a collage of canonical Victorian texts that lends Vida's story a decidedly fictional aura. The stories mentioned earlier on – *Wuthering Heights*, *The Woman in White, The Turn of the Screw* and especially *Jane Eyre* – appear as an amalgamation of themes, motifs, settings and characters re-inscribed into the text of *The Thirteenth Tale*. *Jane Eyre* in particular plays a prominent role in Setterfield's text, "run[ning] as a leitmotif throughout the novel" (Pyrhönen, 2010: 149): not only is it intertextually present in several storylines and characters, but it is also repeatedly explicitly mentioned – as one of Margaret's favourite books, as the story Hester reads to the twins, and as the sole surviving fragment of the Angelfield library, stuffed into the bag with Aurelius and serving as a clue of his origin, though this clue can only be understood by a compulsive reader like Margaret. Moreover, *Jane Eyre* can also be seen as the Victorian ur-text of *The Thirteenth Tale*, since its other textual twins and re-imaginings, most notably, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), also resonate throughout the novel, as demonstrated by Vida's chosen name, which echoes that of *Rebecca*'s Max de Winter. Jessica Cox (2019: 46) points out that "these textual doubles are not exact clones: the neo-Victorian mirror offers a distorted reflection of its Victorian forebears". Thus, the role of Bertha Mason is given to several different characters: both George and Charles Angelfield are the gender-bent madwomen in the attic, Isabelle and the surviving twin are the more straightforward versions, with the latter prone to night-time wanderings and literally kept under lock and key, and finally, young Adeline is Bertha at her most destructive, setting fire to the house and (perhaps) perishing in it. Meanwhile, the role of Jane Eyre is replicated in Margaret herself (as the newcomer to the mysterious Gothic estate), Hester (as the plain-faced governess) and Vida (as the motherless orphan). Upon her realisation

of Vida's true origin, Margaret tells her, "You kept pointing me in the direction of *Jane Eyre.* The book about the outsider in the family. The motherless cousin." (Setterfield, 2006: 357) Books thus can, and should be used as clues for interpreting reality, sometimes even inadvertently so, like when Hester scoffs at the haunting of the children in *The Turn of the Screw*, suggesting a more rational explanation of the events instead – this is exactly how *The Thirteenth Tale* itself deals with its own uncanny child characters.

The text repeatedly plays with this merging of fiction and reality, and the portrayal of fiction as a repository of knowledge. This is how Margaret learns her ABCs: "A is for Austen, B is for Brontë, C is for Charles and D is for Dickens" (Setterfield, 2006: 14). Finally, the presence of intertextual references reinforces the status of the neo-Victorian text itself as a double. Not only is *The Thirteenth Tale* a distorted Gothic double of *Jane Eyre*, but it also serves as a doppelgänger of numerous other stories that chase each other in the text in an approximation of the fugue: for example, *Wuthering Heights* lends *The Thirteenth Tale* the haunted house setting, the moors, the disruptive Gothic orphan who ends up taking over the estate, the obsessive co-dependency (even the reunion of dead bodies in a single grave!), and the generational trauma that can only be resolved once all trace of the older generation is gone and the world is reclaimed by their better adjusted descendants. But that is not all, because Setterfield also plays with the *Wuthering Heights* structure: Margaret is the Lockwood to Vida's Nelly Dean, and the actual protagonists of the story are the Angelfield twins; in spite of all her eccentricities, Vida is the rational one compared to her fey half-sisters. Finally, Margaret's story itself is ultimately a found narrative for whoever ends up publishing it in the end, in a clear imitation of many Victorian texts.

As previously mentioned, and again echoing *Wuthering Heights*, the broken generational link and the crisis of inheritance is expressed through the figure of the absent mother, harking back to the missing mothers of Victorian fiction, "[c]ondemned to the shadows or an early grave in nineteenth-century literature" (Heilmann–Llewellyn, 2010: 65). Margaret's mother is not deceased, but she is clinically depressed, emotionally distant and largely physically absent, which is toyed with through her ghostly presence in the letters exchanged between Margaret and her father – he includes the greetings from his wife in all his correspondence with his daughter, but the words only serve to emphasise the mother's emotional distance. Vida Winter's mother remains unknown, identified only as one of the village girls who falls victim to Charlie's sadistic attacks and characterised solely by the violence that she suffers. Emmeline is forced into absent motherhood by her sister's jealousy, which results in attempted infanticide,

arson, death and permanent separation of family members. Isabelle is portrayed as a disinterested mother at first, and is then physically taken away to an asylum, where she dies shortly after, leaving the twins motherless as well. Isabelle's own mother Mathilde dies in childbirth, thus tracing a long line of interrupted maternal links and motherless daughters. These absences are somewhat compensated for by the presence of alternative maternal figures, in the guise of Mrs Love and Missus, but they are both older women who adopt these motherly roles once their own childbearing age is over, suggesting a further rupture in generational ties, as the role of the mother skips a sequence and shifts to the older generation. The skewed generational succession is highlighted through the ambiguous role occupied by Vida as Shadow – she is Emmeline's half-sibling, but she is also a protective mother figure to her childlike character, a role she also later adopts with the surviving twin.

To further emphasise this generational interruption, Vida Winter is not only motherless, but also childless, where her stories can be viewed as her children, and Margaret as her storytelling heir (another instance of an adoptive older mother), a connection further suggested by the link between Margaret's bookshop, Vida's current library and their ghostly twin in Angelfield, destroyed in the fire. In this case, the missing thirteenth tale can be read as a narrative counterpart of a missing child, the obverse of Vida and Aurelius as two parentless children who are displaced or found. The ghost of the missing child can, of course, be found in Margaret's absent twin as well. The interruption in generational ties is further configured in the slippery, uncertain nature of the characters' identities, which creates misalignment even in those ties that are recovered. Aurelius thus seemingly discovers the identity of his biological mother, but since neither Vida nor the novel itself take the final steps to find out which twin survived the fire, Aurelius, and by extension the reader, cannot be sure that the woman he comes to secretly visit in Vida's home is the same one who gave birth to him. As if to anticipate this maternal confusion, during Emmeline's pregnancy, Adeline too puts on weight for the first time in her life, and the resulting similarity between the twins at the time when they should be easy to tell apart serves as yet another uncanny doubling. The novel relies on misidentification to create its sensational twists, where Emmeline and Adeline change places[1], and so do Adeline and Vida,

[1] The twins' interchangeable identity and the resulting twists are hinted at from the beginning: when Isabelle brings them home, it is up to the Missus and John-the-dig to arbitrarily decide which one is which. After the Angelfield fire, it remains unclear which twin burnt to death, owing to psychological trauma and physical disfigurement. Even though it would have been a matter of simple examination (only one twin had recently

and the sisters' interchangeable identity is apparent when Vida, forgoing her own self, pretends at times to be Adeline and at times Emmeline when meeting the village grocer. These exchanges, along with the presence of twins, doubles and ghostly doppelgängers, points to an essential permeability of identity, loss of authenticity and other quintessential neo-Victorian concerns. While doubling is already implicit in the figure of the twin, there is further doubling between the Angelfield twins and Margaret and her own sister, but also between Adeline and Vida. Vida's character in particular points to the elusive, unstable nature of identity: she is Shadow, the "girl in the mist", the "little spy" who is mistaken for one of the village boys, which is further reflected in the fact that she constructs a series of invented biographies for herself.

Setterfield plays with such doubling by including the third sister, who comes to haunt the text as well. As Margaret suggests at the beginning of Vida's tale, "it is always with the third wish that everything so dangerously won is disastrously snatched away" (Setterfield, 2006: 50). At the same time, the dead twin is one of the main sources of horror in the novel, appearing as a ghostly spectre just outside Margaret's view or evoked by her pale image in the mirror formed by the window pane: "In the night glass was a face so pale you could see the blackness of the sky through it. We pressed cheek to cold, glassy cheek. If you had seen us, you would have known that were it not for this glass, there was really nothing to tell us apart." (Setterfield, 2006: 23) Margaret simultaneously longs to find her twin sister and dreads her reappearance ("What terrible thing is it that I am about to join myself – *rejoin* myself – to?" (142)), an ambivalence that extends to the way she perceives herself as well ("What kind of unnatural creature was I? What abomination of nature is it that divides a person between two bodies before birth, and then kills one of them? And what am I that is left? Half-dead, exiled in the world of the living by day, while at night, my soul cleaves to its twin in a shadowy limbo" (160)). Margaret's phrasing here draws on the discourse of the Victorian freak show, a cultural setting that historically would have included conjoined twins like herself and her sister. This sense of incompleteness is further reflected in Margaret's repeated use of the word "amputee"; the phrase is also

given birth), Vida decides against finding out for sure, perhaps because she is afraid of the answer that she already suspects is not to her liking: the text seems to imply that it was Adeline who survived, because Vida never retrieves Aurelius and the survivor remains catatonic, just like Adeline was after the "severance" (while Emmeline adapted to living without Adeline). Whoever she was before, the remaining twin becomes Emmeline after the fire, and the twins' bodies are reunited after they are both dead. Vida, meanwhile, is buried apart from them, an outsider to the last.

employed to describe the separation of Adeline and Emmeline effected by Hester and Dr Maudsley, which leaves the sisters as "amputees, only it was not a limb they were missing, but their very souls" (185), echoing Heathcliff's famous cry that he cannot live without his soul. The particulars of Margaret's case – the twins were joined at the heart – are highly melodramatic in true Victorian fashion, but also reiterate this perceived sense of loss, or *severance*, as Adeline and Emmeline's separation is described (181). In the end, it does not really matter which twin survived the fire, since neither can live without the other: the survivor is merely a soulless husk of her former self, wandering the grounds at night and looking for her dead sister in the earth, in a ghostly echo of Margaret's own thoughts of her dead twin ("Or – it is this I fear – has she come direct from the grave?" (142)).

In adding a third sister to the narrative, the novel thus seeks to complicate notions of belonging and exclusion, sameness and difference – Vida is both one of the Angelfield kin and an intruder, *unheimlich*, both in terms of being uncannily familiar and in the sense of not being *of the home*. If the novel's rational explanation is relinquished and the Gothic is fully embraced instead, Vida is even more sinister, as she could have literally appeared from "the mist" as a better version of Adeline, similar to the sudden appearance of William Wilson's double in Edgar Allan Poe's eponymous doppelgänger tale. This changeling then takes over Adeline's life, destroying her so that she can live – it does not matter if the real Adeline is indeed the twin who survived, because Vida locks her in the metaphorical attic and rechristens her Emmeline, taking on the mantle of Adeline in her place. Moreover, Vida is the half-sister, indicating a kinship link broken not only vertically but also horizontally, the ghost foundling who infiltrates the house, the intruder who drives a wedge between the two twins who have hitherto lived in perfect, albeit violent symbiosis, the parasite who kills one of them and takes her rightful place. Vida can also be read as a recasting of the figure of the Gothic orphan in the tradition of Heathcliff (cf. Andeweg–Zlosnik, 2013), but here it is one of the family, Adeline, who is sadistic and violent, the abject bad seed turning on their own, while the usurper, the cuckoo chick who takes her place, becomes the surviving twin's lifelong nurturer. All these meanings resonate with neo-Victorian concerns with matters of authenticity and belonging, but also echo Victorian focus on lineage and ancestry. As Heilmann and Llewellyn (2010: 64) argue, the Victorian past is "deceptively familiar to us through its literature, art, architecture, socio-cultural and political discourses, yet always ultimately intangible, and utterly remote from our experience". Like Vida or the Angelfield twins, the Victorians remain both uncannily familiar and essentially unknowable, a

misty presence in our collective cultural imagination.

The novel also deftly plays with strategies of distancing and perspective, which can be seen as a convention of the sensation narrative – the shift from third-person to first-person narrative occurs when Vida takes Adeline's place in the family, a clue to her identity that can only be fully understood once the sensational truth is revealed – but this can also be read within the context of contemporary ambivalence towards the Victorians, the simultaneous fascination and repulsion they provoke. As Margaret notes, "[i]n telling her tale, Miss Winter was like the light that illuminates everything but itself. She was the disappearing point at the heart of the narrative. She spoke of *they*; more recently she had spoken of *we*; the absence that perplexed me was *I*. What could it be that had caused her to distance herself from her story in this way?" (Setterfield, 2006: 111) This shifting perspective, we learn, is rooted in more than psychological reasons – Vida speaks of the twins as *them* because she is a separate character who has not yet joined the narrative. From such a skilful storyteller, the failure to conceal the difference between herself and the Angelfield twins must be a deliberate one, a door left ajar for the reader to wonder over. However, it also points to the uneasy relationship with Victorian ancestry and the reluctance to claim allegiance to it, to the simultaneous urge to distance ourselves from their backward ways and to acknowledge them as the source of our contemporary identities.

The novel's repeated references to mirrors evoke another typical neo-Victorian trope – the act of looking in the mirror and the "inevitable distortion that accompanies any mirror image" (Joyce, 2007: 4). As Helen Davies (2015: 2) notes, "the concept of the mirror has also been important for understanding the combination of fear and fascination attached to making a spectacle of extraordinary bodies", quoting from Elizabeth Grosz who argues that "the mirror-image threatens to draw us into its spell of spectral doubling, annihilating the self that wants to see itself reflected" (Grosz, qtd in Davies, 2015: 2). In this respect, the presence/absence of Margaret's conjoined twin simultaneously offers a promise of the spectacle of the extraordinary body and endlessly defers it, as we only get ghostly glimpses and pale visions, the freakish body featured only as the rather underwhelming descriptions of Margaret's scar, an ambiguous point of attachment and separation between the sisters. The scar acts as a ghostly reminder (and remnant) of the anticipated spectacle of freakery, a spectral trace of the monstrous other and its abject nature. It also brands Margaret as physically different, mirroring the key-shaped mark on Vida's palm and acting as another link between the two women.

Furthermore, Anne Whitehead (2004: 85) draws a connection between

fiction that explores traumatic experiences and intertextuality, where intertextual references are read as the insistent return of repressed narratives. In this respect, the repetition of key Victorian plots, characters and motifs – orphaned children, the madwoman setting fire to the house, elemental passions running high in the Yorkshire moors, sexual transgression – may suggest a need to revisit them and rework them. The text's obsession with motherlessness and broken generational ties is particularly prominent and speaks of contemporary feelings of rootlessness and deeply seated ambivalence towards cultural heritage and ancestry. On the other hand, the excessive nature of the trauma contained within Vida's tale can also be read as commentary on contemporary voyeuristic fascination with traumatic pasts, which is less concerned with the act of bearing witness, and more with the spectacle of suffering. The exploration of trauma, sexual trauma in particular, provides a link with sensation fiction, as trauma is identified by Jessica Cox (2019: 143) as one of the key aspects of the genre, where the narrative gaps suggestive of the presence of trauma are "often crucial to the novels' sensation effects"; in the words of Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010: 48), in *The Thirteenth Tale* "everything relies on our ability to 'look there in the gap' and perceive the figure in the crack". However, despite the fact that sexual abuse and sexual transgression feature prominently in Setterfield's novel – the incestuous relationship between Isabelle and Charlie, George's (implied) incestuous obsession with Isabelle, as well as Vida's with Emmeline, Charlie's sadistic raping sprees – the primary trauma in the novel nevertheless seems to stem from the loss of familial connections and the death of parent/child/sibling figures. The consequences of sexual trauma are never really explored, even if they do take the physical form of the twins themselves, just as Vida functions as Charlie's transgression made flesh, a not-so-ghostly embodiment of his past sins. The impact of the abuse on Isabelle, or on Vida's mother, an anonymous victim of rape, remains entirely absent from the narrative. For Vida herself, the central source of trauma is the loss of Emmeline rather than her own violent conception, which receives only cursory attention.

The central concern of *The Thirteenth Tale*, then, lies in an uneasy, traumatic and complex relationship with the past, one that is explored in the space between ambiguities and uncertainties concerning lineage and inheritance, identity and imitation, fiction and reality. The opening line of *Tales of Change and Desperation*, which leaves Margaret helplessly transfixed, notes that "[a]ll children mythologize their birth. It is a universal trait. You want to know someone? Heart, mind and soul? Ask him to tell you about when he was born. What you get won't be the truth; it will be a story. And nothing is more telling

than a story" (Setterfield, 2006: 26). The story of one's origin is thus both a mythologised smokescreen and a source of ultimate truth, more telling than any verifiable facts and records. In its obsessive inclusion of iconic Victorian plots and characters, the novel invites us to consider the myth we create surrounding the birth of our own contemporary culture, as the stories with which we surround the Victorians and our own relationship with them provide a telling mirror to our own contemporary anxieties and concerns.

Viktorija Krombholc

Bojana Vujin

ODSUTNE MAJKE I AVETINJSKI DVOJNICI U *TRINAESTOJ PRIČI* DAJANE SETERFILD

Rezime

Neoviktorijanska književnost rekontekstualizuje popularne viktorijanske stilske elemente i preispituje mesto fikcionalnog i istorijskog viktorijanskog doba unutar šireg konteksta današnje kulture. Savremene neoviktorijanske priče često koriste gotske motive, jer njihova uznemirujuća priroda pokazuje današnje ambivalentne stavove prema viktorijancima i njihovom kulturnom nasleđu. Ovaj članak analizira *Trinaestu priču* (2006), prvi roman savremene britanske spisateljice Dajane Seterfild. Roman se ovde tretira kao primer neoviktorijanske gotske književnosti, pri čemu se posebna pažnja poklanja motivima dvojnika i bezmajčinstva, kako bi se ispitale ideje identiteta, porekla i pripadnosti koje prožimaju tekst na tematskom i narativnom nivou. Naglasak se stavlja i na intertekstualnost u romanu, s obzirom na to da *Trinaesta priča* ulazi u svrsishodan dijalog sa najznačajnijim viktorijanskim gotskim tekstovima, pre svega romanima *Orkanski visovi* Emili Bronte (1847) i *Džejn Ejr* Šarlot Bronte (1847). Bogata intertekstualna struktura *Trinaeste priče* pokazuje da ovaj roman funkcioniše pre svega kao priča o pričama, te i na taj način preispituje kulturno, istorijsko i književno nasleđe viktorijanske ere.

Ključne reči: Dajana Seterfild, *Trinaesta priča*, neoviktorijanska proza, savremena gotika, dvojnik, odsutna majka, intertekstualnost

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