ELEVEN REASONS WHY...

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Abstract: The reason why this article was written is the tendency of young readers to reject Romantic poetry and Victorian realist literature as being anachronistic, melodramatic , even boring. While enumerating a few reasons which triggered this phenomenon, the author tries to go to the roots of the readers' criticism of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature in order to be able to bring counterarguments in a follow-up of this study.

Keywords: Romantic poetry, Victorian literature, anachronistic, imagination, realism.

Reading Peter Gay's "Why Romantics Still Matter" and Philip Davis' "Why Victorian Literature Still Matters" strengthened my belief that literature, like language, is a living 'organism', a whole, and that today's literary productions are part of a chain in the evolution of universal literature. This is what Peter Gay states in his study: *No matter what the chronological age of the older works, they remain pieces of the living history of culture, and give that history much of its life. (Gay, 2015, p.28)* Moreover, Philip Davis' opinion about Victorian literature and the realist novel is that it *is the most accessible of all, in terms of its commitment to a recognizably ordinary, mundane life. As such, it offers the portrait of such lives to real-life equivalents and identifiers as a form of emotional education. (Davis, 2008, p. 14)* And yet, we face a serious problem: young people no longer read Romantic poetry or Victorian realist prose. This article tries to highlight some reasons why new readers have lost interest in eighteenth and nineteenth century culture, why they consider it to be anachronist, and, why not say it, outright boring.

Take, for instance, Romantic poetry. How many (young) people read Byron's poems today? How many Wordsworth's or Keats'? How many people take the trouble to understand Coleridge's mysterious poems? The very adjective 'romantic' has gradually acquired a quasi-derogative nuance. "She's kind of romantic" might mean she is prone to exaggerated feelings, even unstable emotionally or a dreamer. Nowadays it seems to be better to be down to earth, a citizen of the technological era, and not dream of pies in the sky or look at the world through pink lenses.

So, one reason why Romanticism has lost a lot of ground is the poets' constant overflow of strong feelings, most often of love. It usually is unreciprocated, unhappy love rather than a feeling of harmonious togetherness. The bard is frequently disillusioned or cheated on by the beloved woman. The atmosphere is grim, the poet on the verge of depression or rather "mal de siècle". This describes pretty accurately the lover's state of mind in Lord Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty", for instance: *When we two parted/ In silence and tears,/ Half broken-hearted/ To sever for years,/ Pale grew thy cheek and cold,/ Colder thy kiss;/ Truly that hour foretold/ Sorrow to this.* The jilted poet's grief turns into shame in the next stanza: *The dew of the morning/ Sunk chill on my brow –/ It felt like the warning/ Of what I feel now./ Thy vows are all broken,/ And light is thy fame;/I hear my name spoken,/ And share in its shame. (Gardner, ed., 1972, p. 563)*

Oftentimes love is associated with premature death and despondency. Thus, the poem acquires a tragic tone when the loved woman dies of a mysterious cause, like in William

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Wordsworth's "Lucy": *She lived unknown, and few could know/ When Lucy ceased to be;/ But she is in her grave, and oh,/The difference to me! (Gardner, ed., 1972, p. 495)*

Stranger still is the serenity, almost willingness with which death is embraced. The lover in his bereavement seems to come to terms with his fate, he no longer misses his mistress who is in a magical communion with the surrounding natural elements, thus continuing her existence: *The floating clouds their state shall lend/ To her; for her the willow bend;/ Nor shall she fail to see/ Even in the motions of the storm / Grace that shall mould the maiden's form/ By silent sympathy. (Gardner ed., 1972, p. 495)*

At other times, even if the cause of distress is not love, the lines overflow with melancholy, deep sadness – as in Shelley's poem "A Lament" - while the reader is not aware of the real cause of this state of mind: *Out of the day and night/ A joy has taken flight;/ Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,/ Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight/ No more – Oh, never more! (Gardner, ed., 1972, p.596)*

Of course poets still fall in love, and they are disappointed or cheated on. Of course they have strong feelings, but the way in which they express them has dramatically changed. Fewer and unambiguous words are used in order to express feelings and personal experiences. Language can even shock by its bluntness and simplicity, sometimes violence or vulgarity. It speaks to reason that this new poetry will appeal to the new readers, who don't usually beat about the bush or can't be bothered to resonate with a complicated situation. While Romantics complain pitifully about life being unfair, modern readers expect solutions. Here is the first stanza of the love poem "I Carry Your Heart" by e .e. cummings: *I carry your heart/ I carry your heart with me (I carry it in/ my heart) I am never without it (anywhere/ I go you go, my dear; and whatever is done/ by only me is your doing, my darling)…(e. e. cummings,1991, p. 124)*

Loving is no longer an unusual experience but a normal (happy or unhappy) human emotion, which is overtly expressed in plain everyday language. Feelings of love, hate, dissatisfaction, disappointment or despair need no longer be 'embellished', adorned with beautiful words. This, for example, is Eminem's way of rapping dissatisfaction in the 21st century, instead of 'lamenting': *Ibeen through the ringer, but they can do little to the middle finger/ I think I got a tear in my eye, I feel like the king of/ My world, haters can make like bees with no stingers, and drop dead...(Eminem, Not Afraid)*

This is the world of drugs, disease, of violence and abuse, not that of starry skies, clear waters, the full moon reflected on the surface of a silver lake. How can we reach out to the young generation by forcing upon them images and visions which are centuries and miles away from their world? Do we have the slightest chance to make them read and enjoy "The Prelude"?

For Romantic Poets nature is an idealized, idyllic place where they find shelter from a troubled life. Most of the Romantics, especially William Wordsworth, strongly believed in the restorative power of nature. Due to the impact and the tremendous power of the natural setting a poet can experience a total union with nature in "spots of time" as Wordsworth calls them. These are our statements when we introduce Romantic Poetry to adolescents and youngsters.

Thus, when beholding a field of daffodils, Wordsworth instantaneously and intimately connects to the setting: *Continuous as the stars that shine/ And twinkle on the Milky Way,/ They stretched in never-ending line/ Along the margins of a bay:/ Ten thousand saw I at a glance,/ Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.* The next stanza brings the ' spot of time', a timeless communion with nature: *The waves beside them danced, but they/ Out-did the sparkling waves in glee;/ A poet could not but be gay,/ In such a jocund company:/ I gazed – and gazed – but little thought/ What wealth the show to me had brought….(Gardner, ed., 1972, p.506)*

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Clearly, elementary and mysterious sensations of man confronted with the little wonders of nature are voiced in these lines. Moreover, the poet is not a mere observer of the scene, he is a component part of the natural setting: the ten thousand daffodils *along the margins of the bay*.

The blatant truth (though a tragic truth, indeed) is that things are dramatically different in the 21st century. Unfortunately, this is the time when the consequences of our lack of responsibility towards nature have become painful and irreversible. Where is the healing power of nature? And what about man's communion with and amazement in front of nature's wonderful show? We are no longer humbled by natural phenomena. Consequently, none of the 'romantic' feelings seem to be the focus of contemporary poets. Their new discourse is matter of fact, down to earth, objective, sometimes sarcastic. This, for instance, is what William Carlos Williams sees - through his bedroom window, maybe - on a rainy day: *so much depends/ upon/ a red wheel/barrow/ glazed with rain/ water/ beside the white/ chickens. (William Carlos Williams, 1991, p.88)*

Obviously, an altered relationship with nature necessarily brings about a change in the way in which nature poetry is created. In the above lines there's nothing that might remind the reader of Romantic Poetry. We look at a snapshot or a still life of a fragment of reality: we are aware of the colour of the object in contrast with the whiteness of the wet chickens. It is a slice of everyday life on a rainy day with no subtle implication. Accordingly, the language is highly simplified, compound words are broken in fragments just as the big picture of nature is dwindled into a sequence. No wonder that the 21st century reader will feel more attracted to this straightforward – although not meaningless – verse.

Yet another reason why Romantic Poetry has increasingly become unpopular is the choice of themes, heroes and settings. Both Byron and Shelley spent most of their lives in exile and sought their sources of inspiration in exotic places and mythology. Although wonderfully described, a place like Xanadu, for instance, will be a strange, unfriendly place for city dwellers used to crowded streets and polluted nature: *In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/ a stately pleasure-dome decree:/ Where Alph, the sacred river, ran/ Through caverns measureless to man/ Down to a sunless sea. (Gardner, ed. 1971, p.544)*

Percy Bysshe Shelley owed a lot of his ideas to classical Greece. His poem "Prometheus Unbound" centres around the symbolical figure of Prometheus, the rebel against a tyrannical God. The focus in this poem, just like in most of Shelley's poems, is the victory of Good over Evil. In the process, love seems to be the supreme aspect of Good: *Child of Light! thy limbs are burning/ Through the vest which seems to hide them,/ As the radiant lines of morning/ Through the clouds ere they divide them;/ Shrouds thee whereso'er thou shinest .(Gardner, ed., 1971, p.581)*

Modern life has sadly taught our 21st century reader of poetry that the eternal victory of Good over Evil is utopian. It is for the social system and laws to decide if this is possible or not. Very often it is not. The so romantically and decoratively sung feeling of love, most of the times Platonic love, has fundamentally changed as well. It is no longer an abandonment of self and unconditional idealization of the partner. It has become a very complex and intricate state of mind which I don't even dare define.

George Gordon Byron created a Hero who, significantly, took his name. The Byronic Hero is a moody, gloomy, defiant, cynical and unhappy character, capable of affection, though. The most accurate representation of this romantic hero is Don Juan, the protagonist of the dramatic poem bearing the same title. "Don Juan" best expresses Byron's poetic vision and its hero best embodies the romantic ideal. Unfortunately, the many adventures Don Juan experiences – a shipwreck, an unusual love affair, slavery, serving in the Russian army among others – don't really raise the interest of our students nowadays. These melodramatic stories of heroism in exotic settings, the fight against tyranny and oppression are no longer the kind

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of literature these readers want to consume. Can we expect in a world populated by Spidermen and Batmen the Byronic Hero or Don Juan to become favourites of the readers? What do they make of lines like these, and how close do they feel to the legendary Prometheus: *Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,/ To render with thy precepts less/ The sum of human wretchedness,/ And strengthen Man with his own mind. (Gardner, ed., 1971, p.570)*

They may wonder how many of us are ready to forget about personal interests and dedicate our lives to the wellbeing of mankind, the triumph of Good in the world? One thing is for sure: heroes are no longer warriors, soldiers or mythic characters. Nowadays they are researchers, scientists whose work concentrates on human comfort and entertainment rather than on morality.

Another very serious argument is the obscure, twisted message of the verse, which fails to come across to the contemporary young and very young reader. Why dig deep for meaning in a romantic poem if in real life everything is on the surface for you to grasp? Why bother to presume what the poet really wanted to say if you can easily find answers about mundane matters? Take John Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Surely, the questions triggered off by the poem are: what's wrong with the knight-at-arms? What is he suffering from? Why is he *So haggard and so woe-begone?* The reader soon finds out that he falls in love with a fairy and follows her in her cave where he has a strange dream in which kings and princes warn him: *La belle Dame sans Merci/ Hath thee in thrall!"(Gardner, ed., 1971, p.613)* We understand that our knight is under an evil spell which will ultimately kill him for no obvious reason.

One could argue: there is a lot of magic, of supernatural power or science fiction in the literature consumed by many youngsters these days. And yet, when Harry Potter and his mates at Hogwarts perform magic, they act like the teenagers we meet in the streets today, only they were born wizards and witches. When they ride the broom, wear a cloak which makes them invisible or use a magic wand this does not seem unusual or unbelievable. J.K. Rowling's books and the movies present the events, even though brought about by magical powers, in an overt, unambiguous way, in the logic of cause and effect.

Moving on to nineteenth century prose, a very serious reason (and very often mentioned by teenagers and youngsters) why Victorian fiction is not the favourite reading of a myriad of contemporary readers involves the extensive use of descriptions in 19th century novels. If we take a closer look at Charles Dickens' novels, say "Bleak House", it will be impossible not to admit that recurrent minute descriptions ultimately become boring, and the readers tend to skip parts of them. When Krook's shop is described, we are not spared any little detail: the place is overcrowded with *blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles.(Dickens, 1981, p. 345)* The seemingly endless enumeration continues with parchment scrolls, all kinds of bags, rusty keys, bones, human hair among other useless objects. The weather too is constantly described in Dickens' novel. Fog, mud, rain, drizzle, smoke, soot are primordial elements in these passages. The word *fog* is obsessively used by the author like in the following fragment: *Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights…(Dickens, 1981, p.28).*And the description goes on and on. When asked what the role of these detailed descriptions may be, one can come up with terms like mimesis, photographic rendering of the environment, even naturalism and symbolism, but all these are not really convincing.

How much more appealing is a passage from Jonathan Franzen's novel "Corrections", in which a character's work/leisure place is described: …*On the hood of a binocular microscope lay big chips of peeled paint from the ceiling. The only dust-free objects in the room were the wicker love seat, a can of Rust-Oleum and some brushes, and a couple of Yuban coffee cans*

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which despite increasingly strong olfactory evidence Enid chose not to believe were filling with her husband's urine, because what earthly reason could he have, with a nice little half-bathroom not twenty feet away, for peeing in a Yuban can?(Franzen, 2001, p. 65) Admittedly, there is a degree of vulgarity and black humour in this fragment, but it brings the reader into the world which he recognizes as being a known environment. The place is a basement workshop inhabited by a man of about Krook's age, but a flesh and blood contemporary American, a retired engineer suffering from Parkinson's, and who won't mysteriously disappear as a consequence of 'spontaneous combustion'. There is nothing metaphorical about the description, the reader understands perfectly well why the place is described in detail and does not resent its length.

This brings us to the sixth argument: the setting of these poetic and fictional works and the characters who lived almost two hundred years ago are no longer credible. They are utterly outdated, sometimes ridiculously naïve. The way they behave, dress, speak is unusual for a 21st century lover of literature. A reasonable question would be: are we able to put ourselves into the shoes of the Romantics and the Victorians in order to fully understand their mindset? A very difficult task, and not very many are ready to take the trouble. Let us consider, for example, the opening of Thomas Hardy's "The Mayor of Casterbridge". Michael Henchard, the haytrusser, his young wife and their infant walk along a dusty road at the outskirts of Casterbridge. They stop at the tent where Henchard sells his wife and daughter for no more than five guineas. While reading the first pages of the novel you have the feeling that an ancient painting of a remote world unfolds in front of your eyes, and you don't quite understand it. Inevitably, the question will arise: seriously, is he really selling his wife and child to a stranger? The teacher will then try hard to convince them that the gesture is a symbolical one, but to no avail. Likewise, the end of "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" is at least surprising for young ambitious people: *'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. Two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as in a prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless: the flag continued to wave silently…(Hardy, 1994, p. 284)* Let's just say that such passivity, surrender to the whims of the Immanent Will would be hard to accept for a young person nowadays. The suspicions and doubts arise from Tess's unwillingness to fight for her life, now that she could be happy with her 'boyfriend'.

In opposition, how much more inspiring and encouraging is Cheryl Strayed's determination in "Wild". At about the same age as Tess's, and when she thought she had lost everything one can lose, Cheryl Strayed takes a surprising decision: to hike more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail from the Mojave Desert through California and Oregon to Washington State in utter solitude. And it certainly is not a leisure hiking. She is almost constantly in danger to be injured or even die. She endures extreme weather, blistered feet, exhaustion, lack of money for vital things, but her blind will prevails. She can be considered a role model for youngsters who are adamant in fighting for their dreams, no matter how difficult this might prove to be.

Not only the settings and characters are obsolete in many cases, but also the major themes in the majority of Victorian realist novels. Thus, it is common knowledge that the prevailing preoccupation of Victorian heroines is marriage. Marriage is still an important issue, true enough, but it is not the only aim of a young woman today. Cohabitation and partnership prior to marriage are an acceptable, even a desirable alternative – an inconceivable situation in Victorian times.

"Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen opens with Mrs. Bennet's excitement about the appearance in the neighbourhood of young, handsome and rich Mr. Bingley whom she already considers a potential husband for one of her five daughters. The whole novel, in fact,

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is about the Bennet girls getting happily married. The famous first sentence of the novel introduces the all-important topic: *It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. (Austen, 1961, p.5)* Marriage is a central theme in "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights", too. Jane, although a rebellious young woman who fights for her identity, and who becomes stronger and stronger on the way, surprisingly ends up getting married to a maimed Rochester. Even the wild Catherine Earnshaw chooses to marry very early in order to become a respectable woman. Again, the whole novel centres around couples united in wedlock, most often for practical reasons. Emma, the protagonist in the eponymous novel, who repeatedly states that she doesn't want to get married (while her sole preoccupation is matchmaking for her protégée, Harriet Smith) finally falls into the same trap and weds Mr. Knightley, a perfect match for her. Thackeray's original heroine, Becky Sharp is another example of a husband-hunting Victorian woman, who fails in her atrocious fight for wealth and gentility. And the list of eligible Victorian heroines is much longer, indeed.

Other major themes too fail to keep awake the contemporary reader's interest. In "The Mayor of Casterbridge" we witness the emergence of industrialization and its consequences for rural Britain. Donald Farfrae, the newcomer and Henchard's potential enemy, does not really convince as a representative of a new kind of agriculture. Moreover, the patriarchal world in which these characters live and toil is not familiar to young readers who don't understand the ways of that remote universe.

Although the corrupted legal system in 19th century Britain is clearly the focus of Dickens' "Bleak House", the author's criticism is metaphorical, vague and fails to reach its aim. The Lord Chancellor, the High Court of Justice, even the very numerous people involved in the endless suit are only sketched, and don't really come to life. Miss Flite who obsessively attends the trial, and keeps caged birds coveted by a shrewd cat is clearly a metaphorical representation of the numerous defenseless victims of legal injustice. In opposition, in John Grisham's "Rogue Lawyer", for instance, there is a lot of action and suspense. The protagonist, Sebastian Rudd, is as alive as can be. His clients are desperate people with little chance to win the case. The reader is part of the plot, attends the court sessions, takes the side of one character or another, and fully lives the action. Undoubtedly, this kind of fiction is closer to the new reader and will not fail to meet his/her expectations.

Paradoxically enough, in a fast developing environment, at a time when Britain was constantly gaining territories around the world, the vast majority of Victorian characters are isolated in a small, provincial setting, and their horizon is consequently limited. Let's just take Emma, who is twenty-one years of age, pretty, well-educated and rich, and has every reason and means to enlarge her knowledge of the wide world. In exchange, she lives at Hartfield and wastes her time matchmaking for her insipid friend Harriet. In George Eliot's "Middlemarch" all characters are confined to a boring provincial town whose boarders they hardly ever cross. When the newly-wed Dorothea Brooke spends her honeymoon in Italy, she is unhappy. Doctor Tersius Lydgate, an outsider to Middlemarch, marries the wrong person, makes a lot of mistakes, does not adapt, and has to die. In "Wuthering Heights" Catherine Earnshaw leaves the Heights to live at the neighbouring Thrushcross Grange where she is utterly unhappy, and will eventually die in childbirth. Her early death seems to be a direct consequence of her trying to flee from safe territory, Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff, on the other hand, disappears mysteriously, only to return a rich and determined man. His universe too – with the exception of this short interlude about which the reader is not informed at all - is limited to the two mansions and their surroundings. Jane Eyre can be considered another classical example of a constant prisoner in a small world. Her prisons are in turn the red room, Lowood school, Thornfield Hall, Moor House. Typically enough, in the end the heroine chooses to go back to one of the prisons, Thornfield Hall. But maybe the most obvious case of

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living in deliberate isolation is illustrated in Mrs. Gaskell's "Cranford". The author minutely depicts a small community, this time an almost exclusively feminine one, living in complete seclusion, so much so that: *In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears…(Gaskell, 1993, p.5)* In this God forsaken Cheshire village nothing really happens except pretending not to be poor and keeping up appearances. What would be a satisfying answer to the question: what is interesting about this ancient, unfamiliar universe, about a Victorian novel of manners in general?

Should we question the literary tastes of 21st century citizens of the world who travel extensively both for real and virtually? Should we condemn their lack of patience or of affinity with Romantic and Victorian authors now that very few conceive of a life spent in a world limited to a village or a provincial town where nothing really happens? Doesn't "Small World" by David Lodge, for instance, meet the new reader's expectations? This 'small world' becomes, in fact, a huge one: the characters are followed around an international circuit of academic literary conferences. They move from time zone to time zone from Great Britain to Hawaii, from Turkey to Tokyo, from Hong Kong to Jerusalem and New-York. Moreover, don't university teachers detect some of their own habits, flaws, even vices in David Lodge's novel?

Even if strongly criticized by many, the bestseller "Eat, Pray, Love" by Elizabeth Gilbert has risen a lot of interest among readers. It brings into focus a woman who travels the world in search of balance and real love. In Italy she indulges in eating exquisite Italian dishes, in India she finds spirituality and peace, and in Indonesia she falls madly in love. The protagonist moves across three continents and feels at home wherever she meets new places and interesting people. This world without boundaries is that of new readers who identify with it.

A frequent complaint concerning Victorian literature is the length of the novels. "Bleak House", "Dombey and Son" but also "Vanity Fair" and "Middlemarch"- to mention only a few – are challenges for any contemporary reader, given the 800 pages and more of fiction which have to be tackled with concentration. One might argue that the favourite readings of our children are serial novels of seven or more volumes which don't seem to be too long. Quite on the contrary, the authors of these sagas are under pressure as the next sequel is expected by a crowd of faithful followers. Even if the writer has eventually reached the end of his/her long story and his/her inspiration fails him/her, the insatiable adepts ask for more. So, why invoke a mere 800 pages as being a 'barrier' in the way of literary education? A possible reason could be the intricate structure of most of 19th century fiction. At a closer look a vast majority of Victorian novels have multiple plots, involving a host of secondary characters, and often different narrators with different points of view. This would mean that students should 'attack' their reading list with patience and willingness to think along with the narrator(s) and the characters. In "Middlemarch", for example, there is no apparent connection between the sub-plots which centre around the different couples. Only a close and patient reading of the novel will disclose the intricate network of relationships. In real life only a few embark upon such an endeavour.

It is true that "A Game of Thrones", the first book in the "A Song of Ice and Fire" series by George R.R Martin follows three simultaneous storylines and introduces a big number of characters, too. However, the reader does not have any difficulty in making sense of the plots, as they just flow effortlessly from one event to the other, hardly leaving room for queries and dilemmas.

And here is argument number ten which is inevitably linked to the previous one. A major reason why Romantics and Victorians are being blamed is the monotony, the lack of suspense in their work. Nothing surprising ever happens, would young readers say. In addition, in most

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cases the events in the plot can easily be anticipated, although the author tries to mystify his readers with so many words. What's wrong with the 'Amazons' in Mrs. Gaskell's novel? Why aren't they living? Is anything unforeseen going to happen? Clearly, the reader does not expect any wonder that might 'explode' in their daily routine. Or, how does Emma in Jane Austen's book not know that Mr. Knightly loves her and that this feeling is reciprocal, while the reader understands this from the opening pages? Why did Austen have to write so many pages only just to confirm what we already know? Likewise, Cathy's marriage to Edgar Linton and Heathcliff's terrible revenge are easy to predict. That Jane Eyre will finally get married to Rochester is no secret to anyone before reaching the final melodramatic scene. Happy endings, in fact, are the norm in Victorian fiction. Very rarely does a novel end in tragic or surprising circumstances.

If we look at our students' literary favourites we will understand that what they seek is the rich world of Imagination, be it fantasy, science fiction or even horror. Very many youngsters seem not to like the real world any more and, as a result, take refuge in magic, mystery, violent romance, horror or technology. This parallel universe is populated by witches and wizards, by vampires and werewolves, by imaginary creatures and spaceships. The extreme situations these characters are entangled in satisfy the new reader's need for violence, tension, and unexpected denouements. This is where they escape from the place where they are told what to read and like. And then, can you expect them to empathize with Esther in "Bleak House" when they are fascinated by Bella in "Twilight"?

The language used by Romantics and Victorians has been repeatedly mentioned in this essay. True enough, it constitutes a serious barrier on the reader's way to understand and enjoy reading. Long compound sentences, whole networks of embedded sentences, obsolete words (some of which cannot be found in the dictionary), a complex punctuation (a multitude of dashes, commas, semicolons, brackets) are real headaches for impatient readers who get lost in the intricate web of punctuation marks. In addition, the twists and turns of Victorian syntax make the reading tedious. An obvious proof is this fragment (sentence) from Thackeray's "Vanity Fair": *...With the utmost regard for the family, for instance (for I dine with them twice or thrice in the season), I cannot but own that the appearance of the Jenkinses in the Park, in the large barouche with the grenadier-footmen, will surprise and mystify me to my dying day; for though I know the equipage is only jobbed, and all the Jenkins people are onboard wages, yet those three men and the carriage must represent an expense of six hundred a year at the very least – and then there are the splendid dinners, the two boys at Eton, the prize governess and masters for the girls, the trip abroad, or to Eastbourne or Worthing, in the autumn, the annual ball with a supper from Gunter's (who by the way, supplies most of the first-rate dinners which J. gives, as I know very well, having been invited to one of them to fill a vacant place, when I saw at once that these repasts are very superior to the common run of entertainments for which the humbler sort of J.'s acquaintances get cards – who, I say, with the utmost good-natured feelings in the world, can help wondering how the Jenkinses make out matters? (Thackeray, 1994, p. 14)* It clearly is difficult to remember the beginning of this very long compound sentence in which we have the whole array of punctuation marks, a long chain of embedded sentences, and unknown words, mostly archaisms. How much more familiar is the twenty-first English vocabulary used by contemporary authors, the same language which is spoken and instantly understood by adolescents and young adults. In a span of almost 200 years language has changed considerably. People use new words to designate a new way of living, they communicate faster, in shorter sentences, and expect literature to reflect contemporary realities in everyday speech.

Having looked at all these arguments one may conclude that Romantic Poetry and Victorian literature are outdated, and don't raise interest in a large part of the reading public,

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mainly young readers. And yet, can we erase a period of more than 100 years from the history of literature? An answer to this question will be the topic of another study.

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