

Memory Frictions: Conflict-Negotiation-Politics (International Conference on Contemporary Narratives in English), 6-8 May 2015, University of Zaragoza (Spain).

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Title: “Memory Frictions and Reconciliation: Neo-Victorian Gothic and Gender Violence in Katy Darby’s *The Whores’ Asylum* (2012)”

Abstract:

Katy Derby’s first novel, *The Whores’ Asylum* (2012), is an attempt to deal with the issue of prostitution and rescue work in Oxford in the 1880s. The protagonists, Stephen Chapman –a brilliant medical student –, Edward Fraser –a Theology student –, and Diana – the woman who runs a refuge for fallen women – are the three angles of a triangle where friendship, desire and secrets meet at the heart of Victorian England. Their aim is not only to keep order in this working-class suburb, but also to find the way to show sympathy for the deaths and suffering of the “prostituted other”. At the same time Darby makes use of the Neo-Victorian Gothic to recover aspects of the Victorian archive which provide the setting to discuss issues of morality, sexual exploitation and reform so important for the Victorian mind but also of relevance in our contemporary societies. Similarly, the novel’s commitment to the memoir style represents an attempt at the restoration of justice for those neglected by past and present communities and whose suffering does not deserve any political consideration. Following Judith Butler’s theories of gender, violence and mourning, this paper aims to discuss issues of the Victorian neglected other and contemporary concerns about the deaths and suffering of the victims of sexual exploitation.