

Depiction of Mental Illness in Victorian Literature: Its Accuracy and Contribution to Public Understanding and Stigma Surrounding Mental Health

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Abstract:

This paper explores the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature, focusing on seminal works such as “Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Brontë (1847), “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens (1861), “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886), and “The Woman in White” by Wilkie Collins (1859). Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from literature, psychology, history, and cultural studies, the paper examines prevailing attitudes towards mental illness in Victorian society, the emergence of psychiatry as a discipline, and the role of institutions such as asylums in shaping perceptions of mental health. Through a literary analysis of key works, the paper explores how characters with mental illness are portrayed, the symptoms and consequences of their conditions, and the narrative techniques used by authors to convey their mental states. Additionally, the paper discusses the enduring relevance of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness, their impact on subsequent portrayals in literature and popular culture, and their significance in understanding the human experience of mental health. By critically engaging with Victorian literature, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions about mental health stigma, representation, and advocacy in contemporary society.

Keywords: Victorian literature, Mental illness, Psychiatry, Asylums, Gender roles, Cultural attitudes, Stigmatization, Gendered expectations, Institutionalization, Psychological complexity, Historical context, Societal factors, Mental health stigma

Introduction:

During the Victorian era (1837-1901), there was a growing interest in psychology and an evolving understanding of mental health. Here are some specific angles that were considered important:

1. **Portrayal of Madness and Asylums:** The Victorian literature represented madness and the treatment of mentally ill individuals in asylums (Scull, 2015; Shuttleworth, 2009). Works such as Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) or Dickens’s “Bleak House” (1853) had the conditions and perceptions of mental health institutions during that time (Matus, 1995).
2. **Stigmatization and Social Perception:** Characters with mental illness were stigmatized and socially perceived differently in Victorian literature. The societal attitudes towards mental health were reflected in the characters’ interactions and narratives (Basone, 2021; Shuttleworth, 2009).
3. **Gender and Mental Health:** The intersection of gender and mental illness in Victorian literature was present and the male and female characters experiencing and coping with mental health issues, and whether gender norms of the time

- influenced the portrayal and treatment of mental disorders was significant (Showalter, 2019; Shuttleworth, 2011).
4. **Psychoanalytic Interpretations:** Psychoanalytic concepts, such as those developed by Sigmund Freud, could be applied to Victorian literary works. Characters' behaviours, dreams, and conflicts were understood for the underlying psychological aspects related to mental health (Shuttleworth, 2009).
 5. **Isolation and Alienation:** the themes of isolation and alienation were depicted concerning mental illness. The characters struggled with mental health issues isolated from society or their families, having psychological effects of this isolation (Bashford & Chaplin, 2009).
 6. **The Gothic and the Unconscious Mind:** The use of Gothic elements in Victorian literature to represent the unconscious mind and psychological turmoil was observed. Works like Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" or Bram Stoker's "Dracula" have psychological implications (Gildiner, 1990; Mitchell & Snyder, 2009 & 2014).
 7. **Moral and Ethical Dimensions:** the moral and ethical dimensions were associated with mental illness in Victorian literature. The characters' moral failings or societal judgments contributed to their mental health struggles and the moral lessons were conveyed through these narratives (Shuttleworth, 2011).
 8. **Representations of Specific Disorders:** specific mental health disorders were portrayed in Victorian literature, such as hysteria, melancholia, or anxiety. These disorders were understood and depicted during the Victorian era and were reflected in the characters' experiences (Breuer & Freud, 1895).

By delving into these aspects, the researchers have tried to provide a nuanced analysis of the Victorian era's attitudes towards mental health, the evolving understanding of psychological disorders, and how literature served as a mirror to societal perceptions of mental illness during that time.

The Thesis Statement:

Victorian literature serves as a rich and nuanced lens to examine society's evolving understanding and depiction of mental illness, revealing complex intersections of stigma, gender norms, institutionalization, and the human psyche. Through an analysis of prominent literary works of the era, this paper will explore how mental illness is portrayed, stigmatized, and addressed within Victorian society, highlighting the multifaceted ways in which literature both reflects and influences perceptions of psychological well-being during the 19th century.

Literature Review:

Overview of the Prevailing Attitudes towards Mental Illness in Victorian Society: Victorian society's attitudes towards mental illness were deeply influenced by prevailing cultural, religious, and scientific beliefs of the era (Larner, 2023). While the Victorian period marked significant advancements in psychology and psychiatry, attitudes towards mental illness remained largely rooted in misconceptions, stigma, and moral judgments. Victorian society's attitudes towards mental illness were characterized by a complex interplay of moral judgments, stigma, gendered perceptions, and socioeconomic factors.

1. **Moral Framework:** Victorian attitudes towards mental illness were often steeped in moral and religious beliefs (Gardner, 1979). Mental illness was commonly viewed as a manifestation of moral weakness, divine punishment, or possession by evil spirits. This moral framework often leads to blame and ostracization of individuals with mental health disorders (Basone, 2021).
2. **Stigmatization and Social Exclusion:** Mental illness was highly stigmatized in Victorian society. Those suffering from psychological disorders were often marginalized, feared, or hidden away from the public eye (Podolsky, 2012). Families felt shame and embarrassment about having a mentally ill member and often resorted to concealing their condition or seeking institutionalization (Gardner, 1979).
3. **Gendered Perceptions:** Victorian attitudes towards mental illness were also shaped by gender norms and expectations. Women, in particular, were often pathologized for exhibiting behaviour deemed as “hysterical” or “nervous,” reflecting societal anxieties about female autonomy and sexuality (Showalter, 1985). Men, on the other hand, were expected to embody stoicism and strength, leading to underreporting of mental health issues among males (Williams, 2006; Showalter, 2019).
4. **Medicalization and Institutionalization:** Despite pervasive stigma, the Victorian era witnessed advancements in the medicalization and institutionalization of mental illness. Asylums were established to house and treat individuals with psychological disorders, albeit often in deplorable conditions. However, these institutions were also sites of experimentation, with emerging psychological theories informing treatment approaches, albeit often with questionable ethics (Gardner, 1979).
5. **Class and Privilege:** Access to mental healthcare varied significantly based on socioeconomic status. While affluent individuals could afford private treatment or rest cures, the poor were often left to languish in overcrowded asylums or relied on charity for support. Class disparities exacerbated the suffering of those with mental illness and underscored broader societal inequalities (Raeburn et al., 2023).

The Emergence of Psychiatry and its Influence on the Understanding and Treatment of Mental Disorders: During the Victorian era, psychiatry emerged as a distinct medical speciality, marking a significant shift in the understanding and treatment of mental disorders. The burgeoning field of psychiatry was influenced by advancements in medical science, evolving philosophical perspectives, and changing societal attitudes towards mental illness. Influenced by medical, philosophical, and social factors, psychiatry sought to medicalize mental illness, introduce therapeutic interventions, and challenge prevailing attitudes towards the mentally ill. While progress was made, significant challenges remained, highlighting the complexities of addressing mental health in Victorian society.

1. **Medicalization of Mental Illness:** The Victorian period witnessed the medicalization of mental illness, with a growing recognition that psychological disorders had biological and physiological underpinnings. This shift away from the supernatural (Gardner, 1979) or moral explanations towards a medical framework laid the foundation for modern psychiatry.

2. **Influence of Enlightenment Philosophy:** Enlightenment ideals emphasizing reason, empiricism, and the pursuit of knowledge also influenced the emergence of psychiatry. Philosophers such as John Locke and Immanuel Kant laid the groundwork for understanding the mind as a complex entity subject to scientific inquiry, paving the way for a more systematic study of mental disorders (Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Larner, 2023).
3. **Early Pioneers in Psychiatry:** Key figures such as Philippe Pinel and William Tuke played instrumental roles in reforming the treatment of mental illness during the Victorian era. Pinel advocated for humane treatment of the mentally ill and introduced moral therapy techniques aimed at promoting patient autonomy and well-being. Similarly, Tuke's establishment of the York Retreat emphasized moral and religious principles (Gardner, 1979) in the treatment of mental disorders, challenging prevailing practices of restraint and coercion (Larner, 2023; Gentilcore & Priani, 2023).
4. **Emergence of Psychological Theories:** The Victorian era saw the development of psychological theories that sought to explain the nature and origins of mental illness. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory (Mitchells, 2011) though emerging towards the end of the era, revolutionized the understanding of unconscious processes and the role of early childhood experiences in shaping psychological health. While controversial and not widely accepted during the Victorian period, Freud's ideas laid the groundwork for later developments in psychotherapy and psychodynamic treatment approaches (Larner, 2023; Shuttleworth, 2015; Raeburn et al., 2023).
5. **Impact on Treatment Practices:** The emergence of psychiatry led to improvements in treatment practices for mental disorders. Asylums, initially established for custodial care, began to adopt more therapeutic approaches influenced by emerging psychiatric theories. Moral therapy, occupational therapy, and hydrotherapy were among the interventions used to promote patients' mental and emotional well-being (Raeburn et al., 2023).
6. **Challenges and Ethical Concerns:** Despite advancements, the field of psychiatry faced challenges and ethical concerns during the Victorian era. Asylums often operated under deplorable conditions, with overcrowding, inadequate staff training, and instances of abuse. Moreover, prevailing societal attitudes towards mental illness, including stigma and discrimination, persisted and influenced treatment approaches.

Exploration of Asylums and their Role in Society, including Treatment Methods and Patient Experiences: During the Victorian era, asylums played a pivotal role in society's approach to mental illness, serving as institutions for the care and treatment of individuals with psychological disorders. The establishment of asylums reflected evolving attitudes towards mental health, though their treatment methods and patient experiences varied widely. While some asylums espoused progressive ideals of care and rehabilitation, others fell short of meeting the needs of their patients, underscoring the complexities of addressing mental health in the Victorian era.

1. **Origins and Evolution:** Asylums emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as alternatives to the harsh and often punitive conditions of earlier institutions for

the mentally ill. Initially founded with humanitarian intentions, asylums were intended to provide a therapeutic environment where patients could receive care and treatment for their conditions (Larner, 2023; Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Tosh, 2010).

2. **Treatment Methods:** Treatment methods in Victorian asylums ranged from progressive and humane to outdated and inhumane practices. Moral therapy, pioneered by figures like Philippe Pinel and William Tuke, emphasized kindness, occupational therapy, and social interaction as therapeutic interventions. Patients engaged in activities such as gardening, handicrafts, and music, aimed at promoting their mental and emotional well-being. However, asylums also employed more controversial treatments, including restraint, isolation, and even experimental procedures such as lobotomy or hydrotherapy (Raeburn et al., 2023; Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Larner, 2023).
3. **Living Conditions:** Living conditions in Victorian asylums varied widely depending on factors such as funding, location, and institutional leadership. While some asylums provided relatively comfortable accommodations and access to gardens or recreational activities, others were overcrowded, understaffed, and characterized by neglect and abuse. Patients often face social isolation, limited autonomy, and stigma associated with their mental illness (Larner, 2023; Raeburn et al., 2023).
4. **Gender and Asylum Life:** Gender played a significant role in asylum life during the Victorian era. Separate wards or wings were often designated for male and female patients, reflecting societal norms and expectations regarding gender segregation. Female patients, in particular, faced unique challenges related to their gender, including the pathologization of behaviours deemed “hysterical” or “emotional” and the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes about mental illness (Showalter, 2019; Williams, 2006; Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Larner, 2023).
5. **Patient Experiences:** Patient experiences in Victorian asylums were diverse and complex. While some individuals found solace and support within the asylum environment, others endured mistreatment, neglect, and institutionalization against their will. Patient narratives from the era, such as those documented in personal diaries or asylum records, offer insights into the varied experiences of those living with mental illness during this time (Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Larner, 2023).
6. **Legacy and Critique:** The legacy of Victorian asylums is complex, with both positive and negative aspects. While these institutions represented a shift towards formalized care and treatment for the mentally ill, they also perpetuated stigma, social exclusion, and institutionalization. Critiques of Victorian asylums highlight systemic issues such as inadequate funding, lack of oversight, and the marginalization of patients’ voices in their care (Gentilcore & Priani, 2023; Raeburn et al., 2023).

Literary Analysis:

The literary analysis for the paper included key Victorian literary works that feature characters with mental illness. It went as follows:

Brontë’s “Jane Eyre” and Bertha Mason’s portrayal as the “madwoman in the attic”: In Brontë’s “Jane Eyre (1847),” the character of Bertha Mason, the “madwoman in the attic,” serves as a complex symbol (Shuttleworth, 2011; Showalter, 2019) and a powerful critique representing various themes including gender, colonialism, and the treatment of mental illness in Victorian society. Through Bertha’s character, Brontë exposes the complexities of power and identity, inviting readers to confront the marginalization and silencing of those deemed “other” by dominant social norms (Lynch, 2012).

1. **Gender and Power Dynamics:** The portrayal reflects the limited agency and powerlessness experienced by women in Victorian society (Showalter, 1985; Williams, 2006). Locked away and silenced, Bertha becomes a symbol of patriarchal oppression, representing the consequences of female rebellion and nonconformity. Her imprisonment within Thornfield Hall mirrors Jane Eyre’s struggle for independence and self-determination within a male-dominated world (Lynch, 2012).
2. **Colonialism and Otherness:** Bertha Mason’s Creole background and status as a colonial “other” further contribute to her marginalization and dehumanization. As an interracial marriage partner, she embodies societal anxieties about racial mixing and the threat posed to British colonial supremacy. Her confinement in the attic reflects the broader imperialistic attitudes of the time, where non-Western cultures and identities were relegated to the margins of society.
3. **Representation of Mental Illness:** Her portrayal perpetuates harmful stereotypes about mental illness prevalent in Victorian literature (Shuttleworth, 2009). Her characterization as violent, irrational, and monstrous reinforces the association between mental illness and danger, further stigmatizing those suffering from psychological disorders. Bertha’s lack of agency and voice also underscores the dehumanizing treatment of mentally ill individuals during this period, who were often relegated to asylums or confined within the confines of their homes (Morris, 2013).
4. **Jane’s Relationship with Bertha:** Jane Eyre’s interactions with Bertha are fraught with tension and ambiguity, reflecting the complex dynamics of power, empathy, and solidarity. While Jane initially perceives her as a threat and a rival for Mr. Rochester’s affection, she later develops a sense of compassion and kinship towards her. Jane’s willingness to confront Bertha and acknowledge her humanity challenges the dehumanizing attitudes of Victorian society, highlighting the novel’s broader themes of empathy and social justice (Foy, 2016 & 2017; Lynch, 2012).

Dickens’s “Great Expectations” and Miss Havisham’s depiction of depression and obsession: In Dickens’ “Great Expectations,” (1861) Miss Havisham is depicted as a character consumed by depression and obsession, serving as a poignant representation of the psychological toll of trauma, heartbreak, and societal expectations (Matus, 1995). This depiction offers a compelling exploration of the human capacity for resilience, redemption, and transformation. Through her character, Dickens illuminates the destructive effects of trauma and fixation, while also affirming the possibility of healing and reconciliation in the face of adversity.

1. **Trauma and Heartbreak:** Miss Havisham’s character is defined by the traumatic experience of being jilted at the altar by her fiancé, Compeyson. This devastating

event becomes a defining moment in her life, triggering a spiral into depression, bitterness, and resentment. Miss Havisham's inability to move past her heartbreak reflects the profound impact of unresolved trauma on mental health and well-being (Nelson, 2020).

2. **Obsession and Fixation:** Following her betrayal, Miss Havisham becomes fixated on exacting revenge and perpetuating her pain. She freezes time in her decaying mansion, Satis House, and wears her wedding dress as a morbid reminder of her past. Her obsession with seeking vengeance against men, embodied in her manipulation of Estella, further demonstrates the destructive nature of unchecked fixation and resentment (ibid.).
3. **Isolation and Alienation:** Miss Havisham's depression and obsession lead to her isolation from society and estrangement from her loved ones. She withdraws from the world, shutting herself off from meaningful relationships and succumbing to self-imposed exile within the confines of Satis House. Her isolation exacerbates her mental anguish and perpetuates a cycle of despair and loneliness (ibid.).
4. **Symbolism and Imagery:** Dickens employs vivid symbolism and imagery to convey Miss Havisham's psychological state (Matus, 1995). Satis House, with its dilapidated grandeur and frozen clocks, serves as a metaphor for Miss Havisham's stagnant existence and arrested development. The wedding dress, yellowed with age and stained with decay, symbolizes the corrosive effects of bitterness and resentment on the human spirit (ibid.).
5. **Redemption and Healing:** Despite her tragic descent into depression and obsession, Miss Havisham experiences moments of redemption and catharsis towards the end of the novel (Foy, 2016 & 2017). Through her interactions with Pip and Estella, she confronts the consequences of her actions and seeks forgiveness for her past misdeeds. Her eventual recognition of the futility of her vendetta and her efforts to atone for her mistakes highlight the possibility of healing and redemption even in the face of profound psychological pain.

Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" and the Exploration of Dissociative Identity Disorder: Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886)" provides a fascinating exploration of dissociative identity disorder (DID), then known as multiple personality disorder, through the character of Dr Jekyll and his alter ego, Mr Hyde (Pearson, 2002). The novel delves into the psychological complexities of identity, morality, and the duality of human nature, offering insights into the manifestations and implications of DID. This novel offers a compelling exploration of dissociative identity disorder through the lens of Gothic fiction (Gildiner, 1990; Hughes, 2019; Mitchell & Snyder, 2009 & 2014; Pearson, 2002) and delves into the psychological intricacies the darker recesses of the human mind, providing valuable insights into the manifestations and implications of DID within the context of Victorian society.

1. **Presentation of Altered Identity:** Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde serves as a vivid portrayal of the dissociative experiences characteristic of DID. The sudden shifts in personality, behaviour, and consciousness experienced by Dr. Jekyll reflect the fragmentation of identity often observed in individuals with dissociative disorders. The coexistence of multiple selves within a single individual underscores the intricate nature of human psychology and the potential for internal conflict (Sandu, 2020).

2. **Psychological Triggers and Coping Mechanisms:** The novel explores the psychological triggers and underlying motivations that contribute to Dr. Jekyll's adoption of his alter ego, Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll's initial experimentation with chemical substances reflects his desire to suppress undesirable aspects of his personality and indulge in forbidden desires without consequence (Pearson, 2002; Foy, 2016 & 2017). The emergence of Mr. Hyde can be seen as a coping mechanism for Dr. Jekyll to dissociate from the moral constraints of society and satisfy his repressed urges.
3. **Loss of Control and Consequences:** As the novel progresses, Dr. Jekyll's inability to control his transformations and the escalating consequences of Mr. Hyde's actions highlight the destructive impact of dissociative identity disorder. The blurring of boundaries between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde underscores the loss of agency and autonomy experienced by individuals with DID, as well as the potential for harm to oneself and others (Foy, 2016 & 2017).
4. **Social Stigma and Isolation:** Dr. Jekyll's struggle to conceal his alter ego and the ensuing social stigma and isolation he experiences underscore the challenges faced by individuals living with dissociative identity disorder. The fear of being exposed and ostracized by society reflects the pervasive misunderstanding and stigma surrounding mental illness during the Victorian era, further exacerbating Dr. Jekyll's internal turmoil (Sandu, 2020; Morris, 2013; Podolsky, 2012).
5. **Symbolism and Metaphor:** The duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde serves as a powerful metaphor for the conflicting aspects of human nature and the struggle between good and evil. The physical transformation undergone by Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde symbolizes the psychological transformations experienced by individuals with dissociative identity disorder, as well as the profound impact of trauma and internal conflict on the psyche.

Collins' "The Woman in White" and the portrayal of psychological trauma and hysteria: In Collins' "The Woman in White," the portrayal of psychological trauma and hysteria is central to several key characters, offering a compelling exploration of the psychological effects of trauma, societal expectations, and gender roles during the Victorian era. (Showalter, 2019). Through his depiction of characters grappling with trauma and societal oppression, Collins offers a searing critique of the psychological toll of patriarchal control and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

1. **Anne Catherick's Trauma and Hysteria:** Anne Catherick, the titular "woman in white," serves as a poignant example of the psychological consequences of trauma and societal oppression (Breuer & Freud, 1895). Anne's traumatic experiences, including her confinement in an asylum and her mistreatment at the hands of Sir Percival Glyde, manifest in symptoms of hysteria, such as fainting spells, delusions, and erratic behaviour. Her hysteria can be interpreted as a coping mechanism for dealing with the psychological pain and powerlessness resulting from her traumatic past (Wood & Wood, 2020).
2. **Victorian Hysteria and Gendered Expectations:** Collins' portrayal of hysteria reflects the gendered expectations and societal pressures faced by Victorian women. Hysteria, a diagnosis commonly applied to women exhibiting symptoms

of emotional distress or unconventional behaviour, was often used to pathologize female autonomy and assertiveness (Wood & Wood, 2020; Williams, 2006). Through characters like Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, who both exhibit symptoms of hysteria, Collins critiques the restrictive gender norms and patriarchal control that contributed to the marginalization of women’s voices and experiences (Breuer & Freud, 1895; Showalter, 1985 & 2019; Clayton, 2020).

3. **Psychological Gaslighting and Manipulation:** The manipulation and gaslighting tactics employed by characters like Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco contribute to the psychological trauma experienced by the female characters in the novel. Laura Fairlie’s vulnerability to manipulation and her subsequent descent into hysteria highlight how psychological abuse and manipulation can exacerbate existing trauma and contribute to the erosion of one’s sense of self and agency (Wood & Wood, 2020).
4. **Narrative Structure and Unreliable Narrators:** Collins’ use of multiple narrators and epistolary forms adds layers of complexity to the portrayal of psychological trauma and hysteria in the novel. The unreliable nature of the narrators, particularly Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright, invites readers to question the validity of the characters’ perceptions and interpretations of events, highlighting the subjective nature of trauma and memory (Blanchette, 2020).
5. **Recovery and Resilience:** Besides the pervasive influence of trauma and hysteria in the novel, Collins explores themes of recovery and resilience. Characters like Marian Halcombe and Laura Fairlie demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, challenging societal expectations and asserting their agency in reclaiming their lives. Through their journeys of self-discovery and empowerment, Collins offers a hopeful vision of overcoming trauma and reclaiming one’s identity (Wood & Wood, 2020).

Depiction of mental illness: These works depict mental illness as a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by trauma, societal expectations, and individual psychology, with consequences ranging from personal suffering to societal oppression and moral degradation. Through their portrayal of characters grappling with mental illness, these authors shed light on the complexities of human nature and the challenges of navigating mental health in the face of societal pressures and personal trauma. Here is how mental illness is depicted in the works under review focusing on symptoms, causes, and consequences.

1. “Jane Eyre”:

- **Symptoms:** In “Jane Eyre,” mental illness is primarily depicted through the character of Bertha Mason, who exhibits symptoms of psychosis, including hallucinations, agitation, and violent outbursts (Lynch, 2012).
- **Causes:** Bertha’s mental illness is attributed to her traumatic experiences, particularly her forced confinement and isolation within Thornfield Hall, as well as her colonial background and societal marginalization (Shuttleworth, 2009).
- **Consequences:** Bertha’s mental illness has devastating consequences for herself and those around her, including Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre. Her

condition serves as a metaphor for societal oppression and the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal control (Lynch, 2012).

2. “Great Expectations”:

- **Symptoms:** Mental illness is depicted through characters like Miss Havisham, who exhibits symptoms of depression, obsession, and social withdrawal following her traumatic experience of being jilted at the altar (Matus, 1995).
- **Causes:** Her mental illness is caused by her unresolved trauma and grief, as well as societal expectations and gendered pressures (Matus, 1995).
- **Consequences:** Her mental illness leads to her isolation, bitterness, and manipulation of others, ultimately resulting in her unhappiness and the suffering of those around her (Matus, 1995).

3. “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”:

- **Symptoms:** Mental illness is depicted through the character of Dr Jekyll, who experiences dissociative identity disorder (DID), characterized by the sudden shifts in personality and behaviour between his alter egos, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Pearson, 2002).
- **Causes:** Dr. Jekyll’s mental illness is caused by his repressed desires, societal expectations, and the pressure to conform to moral standards, leading him to create an alter ego to indulge in his forbidden impulses (Pearson, 2002).
- **Consequences:** Dr Jekyll’s inability to control his transformations and the escalating consequences of Mr Hyde’s actions result in destruction, despair, and ultimately, his demise.

4. “The Woman in White”:

- **Symptoms:** Mental illness is depicted through characters like Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, who exhibit symptoms of hysteria, including fainting spells, delusions, and erratic behaviour, as well as the manipulation and gaslighting tactics employed by antagonistic characters (Clayton, 2020).
- **Causes:** Mental illness in “The Woman in White” is caused by trauma, societal oppression, and psychological abuse, perpetuated by characters like Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco (ibid.).
- **Consequences:** The consequences of mental illness in “The Woman in White” include social stigma, isolation, and vulnerability to manipulation, as well as the erosion of one’s sense of self and agency (ibid.).

Narrative Techniques and Literary Devices Used: The authors employ a variety of narrative techniques and literary devices to convey the characters’ mental states, including first-person narration, symbolism, dialogue, and narrative structure. Through these techniques, they provide

insight into the characters' inner lives, psychological struggles, and moral dilemmas, inviting readers to explore the complexities of human nature and the mysteries of the human mind.

1. **“Jane Eyre”:**

- **First-Person Narration:** Brontë employs first-person narration through the voice of Jane Eyre, allowing readers direct access to Jane's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This intimate narrative technique provides insight into Jane's internal struggles and mental states, including her resilience, independence, and moral integrity (Lynch, 2012; Shuttleworth, 2011).
- **Gothic Imagery and Atmosphere:** Brontë utilizes Gothic imagery and atmospheric descriptions to evoke a sense of psychological tension and foreboding (Gildiner, 1990). The gloomy landscapes, eerie settings, and mysterious encounters contribute to the atmosphere of suspense and unease, reflecting Jane's own psychological turmoil and inner conflicts (Lynch, 2012; Mitchell & Snyder, 2009 & 2014; Shuttleworth, 2011).

2. **“Great Expectations”:**

- **Symbolism and Allegory:** Dickens employs symbolism and allegory to convey the characters' psychological states and moral dilemmas. Miss Havisham's decaying mansion, Satis House, and her wedding dress symbolize her psychological deterioration and fixation on the past. Similarly, the motif of Pip's “great expectations” serves as a metaphor for his internal struggles with identity, ambition, and moral conscience (Matus, 1995).
- **Characterization through Dialogue:** Dickens utilizes dialogue to reveal the characters' inner thoughts, desires, and conflicts. Through conversations between characters like Pip, Miss Havisham, and Estella, Dickens explores themes of social class, identity, and personal transformation, providing insight into their psychological motivations and emotional states (Matus, 1995).

3. **“Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”:**

- **Narrative Structure:** Stevenson employs a fragmented narrative structure to reflect the fragmented psyche of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The novel is composed of multiple narratives, including Dr. Jekyll's confession letter, witness testimonies, and third-person narration, creating a sense of psychological suspense and uncertainty (Pearson, 2002).
- **The symbolism of Setting and Objects:** Stevenson utilizes the symbolism of setting and objects to convey the characters' mental states and moral conflicts (Pearson, 2002). The contrast between the respectable facade of Dr. Jekyll's home and the seedy streets of London symbolizes the duality of human nature, while the transforming potion serves as a physical manifestation of Dr. Jekyll's inner turmoil and moral degradation.

4. “The Woman in White”:

- **Multiple Narrators and Perspectives:** Collins employs multiple narrators and perspectives to provide a multifaceted portrayal of the characters’ mental states and experiences. Through the alternating viewpoints of characters like Walter Hartright, Marian Halcombe, and Laura Fairlie, Collins reveals the complexities of their inner lives and psychological struggles (Wood & Wood, 2020).
- **Epistolary Form:** Collins utilizes the epistolary form, including letters, diary entries, and witness testimonies, to convey the characters’ inner thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This fragmented narrative structure creates suspense and ambiguity, inviting readers to question the reliability of the narrators and the truth of their accounts.

Psychological Interpretation:

A psychological interpretation of these works delves into the characters’ inner worlds, motivations, and behaviours through the lens of psychological theories and concepts. The interpretation enriches the understanding of human nature, development, and social dynamics within the context of the Victorian era:

1. “Jane Eyre”:

- **Attachment Theory:** Jane Eyre’s development and relationships can be analyzed through attachment theory (Shuttleworth, 2015), which explores how early childhood experiences shape individuals’ attachment styles and relationships. Jane’s tumultuous upbringing, marked by neglect and mistreatment, influences her attachment patterns and interpersonal dynamics, particularly in her relationships with figures like Mrs. Reed and Mr. Rochester.
- **Identity Formation:** Jane’s journey of self-discovery and identity formation can be understood through Erik Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). Jane grapples with questions of identity, autonomy, and intimacy as she navigates societal expectations, personal integrity, and romantic relationships, ultimately achieving a sense of self-actualization and moral integrity.

2. “Great Expectations”:

- **Freudian Psychoanalysis:** “Great Expectations” can be analyzed through a Freudian lens, exploring themes of repression, desire, and the unconscious mind (Chancer & Shapiro, 2021). Characters like Miss Havisham and Pip exhibit psychological conflicts and motivations rooted in unconscious drives and desires, as well as unresolved childhood traumas and fantasies (Matus, 1995; Shuttleworth, 2015).
- **Social Cognitive Theory:** Dickens’ portrayal of character development and socialization can be understood through social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning, modelling, and cognitive processes in shaping behavior (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Pip’s social ascent, for example, reflects

his observational learning and internalization of societal norms and values, as well as his cognitive processing of social feedback and experiences (Matus, 1995).

3. “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”:

- **Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID):** The novel can be interpreted as an exploration of dissociative identity disorder (DID), characterized by the coexistence of multiple distinct identities or personality states within a single individual. Dr. Jekyll’s transformation into Mr. Hyde serves as a metaphor for dissociation, repression, and the fragmentation of the psyche, reflecting the psychological consequences of repressed desires and internal conflict (Pearson, 2002).
- **Psychodynamic Theory:** The novel can also be analyzed through psychodynamic theory, particularly Freud’s (Lindhard, 2020) structural model of the psyche (id, ego, and superego). Dr. Jekyll’s experimentations and subsequent transformations can be seen as manifestations of the interplay between his unconscious desires (id), conscious rationality (ego), and internalized moral standards (superego).

4. “The Woman in White”:

- **Trauma and Hysteria:** Collins’ depiction of characters like Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie can be understood through trauma theory and the concept of hysteria (Bogousslavsky, 2020). Both characters exhibit symptoms of hysteria, which can be interpreted as manifestations of unresolved trauma, repressed memories, and the social construction of femininity and madness (Wood & Wood, 2020; Scull, 2015).
- **Social Constructionism:** The novel can also be analyzed through social constructionist perspectives, which emphasize the role of social and cultural factors in shaping individuals’ experiences and identities (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Characters like Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe navigate societal expectations and gender roles, challenging conventional notions of femininity and agency within the constraints of Victorian society.

Application of modern psychological theories and concepts to the characters’ experiences of mental illness: Applying modern psychological theories and concepts to the characters’ experiences of mental illness in these works provides a contemporary framework for understanding their psychological struggles and behaviours. It also highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches and evidence-based interventions in addressing mental health issues. Here’s how modern psychological theories and concepts can be applied:

1. “Jane Eyre”:

- **Attachment Theory:** Jane Eyre’s experiences of neglect and mistreatment at the hands of her caregivers can be analyzed through attachment theory. Her insecure attachment style, stemming from early childhood trauma, influences her interpersonal relationships and emotional regulation throughout the novel (Lynch, 2012).

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Bertha Mason’s symptoms, including hallucinations, agitation, and violent outbursts, align with the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her traumatic experiences, such as confinement and mistreatment, contribute to the development of PTSD symptoms and the expression of her distress (Lynch, 2012).

2. “Great Expectations”:

- **Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD):** Miss Havisham’s experiences of prolonged emotional abuse and betrayal by her fiancé can be viewed through the lens of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD). Her symptoms, including emotional dysregulation, interpersonal difficulties, and negative self-perception, reflect the complex trauma she has endured (Matus, 1995).
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** Pip’s cognitive distortions and maladaptive coping strategies, such as self-doubt and negative self-talk, can be addressed through cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT techniques, such as cognitive restructuring and behavioural activation, could help Pip challenge his negative beliefs and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

3. “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”:

- **Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID):** Dr. Jekyll’s experiences of dissociation and the emergence of Mr. Hyde can be understood within the framework of dissociative identity disorder (DID). His fragmented sense of self and the presence of distinct alter egos reflect the hallmark symptoms of DID, stemming from unresolved trauma and internal conflict (Pearson, 2002).
- **Psychodynamic Psychotherapy:** Dr. Jekyll’s inner turmoil and conflicting desires can be explored through psychodynamic psychotherapy. By uncovering unconscious conflicts and defence mechanisms, psychodynamic therapy could help Dr. Jekyll integrate his disparate selves and achieve greater self-awareness and psychological integration.

4. “The Woman in White”:

- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie’s experiences of trauma and hysteria can be addressed through trauma-informed care approaches. These approaches prioritize safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment, offering support and validation for survivors of trauma while recognizing the impact of past experiences on current functioning.
- **Narrative Therapy:** Characters like Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright could benefit from narrative therapy, which focuses on exploring and reframing personal narratives and meanings. By examining their stories

and identifying strengths and resources, narrative therapy could help these characters construct more adaptive narratives and foster resilience.

Victorian Authors' Contemporary Understandings of Psychology and Psychiatry: Victorian authors drew from contemporary understandings of psychology and psychiatry in their literary works, reflecting the evolving scientific, philosophical, and cultural attitudes towards the human mind and behaviour during the 19th century. By incorporating insights, these authors contributed to a broader cultural conversation about the nature of consciousness, mental health, and the human condition. Here's how they may have incorporated these ideas into their writings:

1. **Observations of Human Behaviour:** Victorian authors were keen observers of human behaviour, drawing from their observations of individuals' thoughts, emotions, and actions to create realistic and psychologically nuanced characters. Authors like Dickens and Brontë incorporated insights from contemporary psychology into their characterizations, portraying complex psychological states and motivations (Matus, 1995).
2. **Interest in the Unconscious Mind:** Victorian literature often explored themes related to the unconscious mind and subconscious processes, reflecting contemporary interest in the hidden depths of human consciousness (Pearson, 2002). Authors like Robert Louis Stevenson in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" used the concept of the unconscious to explore the darker aspects of human nature and the consequences of repressed desires.
3. **Exploration of Mental Illness and Hysteria:** Victorian literature frequently depicted characters struggling with mental illness and hysteria, reflecting contemporary concerns about psychological well-being and social norms (Shuttleworth, 2011; Morris, 2013). Authors like Collins in "The Woman in White" and Brontë in "Jane Eyre" (Lynch, 2012) portrayed characters grappling with psychological distress, drawing on emerging understandings of mental health and the stigmatization of mental illness in Victorian society.
4. **Influence of Philosophical Ideas:** Victorian authors were also influenced by philosophical ideas that intersected with psychology and psychiatry, such as existentialism, determinism, and the nature of consciousness. These philosophical debates informed literary explorations of themes related to identity, free will, and the human condition (.....).
5. **Critique of Social Institutions:** Victorian literature often critiqued social institutions such as asylums, prisons, and the legal system, reflecting contemporary debates about the treatment of the mentally ill and marginalized members of society (Shuttleworth, 2009). Authors like Dickens in "Great Expectations" and Brontë in "Jane Eyre" highlighted the injustices and abuses perpetrated within these institutions, challenging prevailing attitudes towards mental health and social justice (Lynch, 2012; Matus, 1995).

societal factors contributing to the characters' mental health struggles: The societal factors such as gender roles, class inequalities, social expectations, and institutional power dynamics contribute to the characters' mental health struggles in these works, reflecting broader issues of social injustice, oppression, and marginalization prevalent in Victorian society (Showalter, 2019). Through their portrayal of characters grappling with mental illness within the context of their

social milieu, these authors shed light on the complex interplay between individual psychology and social structures.

1. **“Jane Eyre”:**

- **Gender Roles:** In “Jane Eyre,” societal expectations surrounding gender roles contribute to Jane’s mental health struggles. As a woman in Victorian society, Jane faces limitations on her autonomy, opportunities, and self-expression, leading to feelings of frustration, alienation, and emotional repression (Lynch, 2012).
- **Class Inequalities:** Class inequalities also impact Jane’s mental well-being, as she navigates the social hierarchies and power dynamics of 19th-century England (Tosh, 2010). Jane’s experiences as a governess highlight the precarious position of individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are subject to exploitation, marginalization, and social exclusion (Lynch, 2012).

2. **“Great Expectations”:**

- **Social Expectations:** Social expectations and pressures play a significant role in shaping the characters’ mental health struggles in “Great Expectations.” Pip’s internalization of societal norms and values, particularly regarding social status and material success, fuels his feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and moral conflict (Matus, 1995).
- **Class Divide:** The class divide exacerbates the characters’ mental health struggles, as individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face systemic barriers to social mobility and self-fulfilment. Characters like Miss Havisham and Estella grapple with the psychological consequences of their privileged upbringing and societal expectations (Matus, 1995).

3. **“Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”:**

- **Repression and Victorian Morality:** Victorian morality and the repression of desires contribute to Dr Jekyll’s mental health struggles in “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” The pressure to conform to societal expectations of respectability and virtue leads Dr. Jekyll to suppress his darker impulses, ultimately resulting in the emergence of Mr. Hyde as a manifestation of his repressed desires.
- **Scientific Hubris:** Dr. Jekyll’s experimentation with chemical substances reflects the hubris of Victorian science and the belief in humanity’s ability to transcend natural limitations. His pursuit of scientific knowledge and power exacerbates his mental health struggles, blurring the boundaries between reason and madness (Scull, 2015).

4. **“The Woman in White”:**

- **Gendered Expectations and Social Control:** Gendered expectations and social control contribute to the characters’ mental health struggles in “The Woman in White.” Female characters like Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick face societal pressures to conform to conventional ideals of femininity and submission, leading to feelings of powerlessness, repression, and alienation.
- **Legal and Medical Authority:** The legal and medical authorities depicted in the novel perpetuate the stigmatization and mistreatment of individuals with mental illness, reinforcing social hierarchies and power differentials. Characters like Anne Catherick are subjected to institutionalization and gaslighting, further exacerbating their mental distress.

Impact and Legacy:

Victorian literature has had a profound influence on subsequent portrayals of mental illness in literature and popular culture, shaping narratives, themes, and tropes that continue to resonate today. While reflecting the social and cultural attitudes of their time, Victorian works have also provided valuable insights into the psychological struggles and complexities of individuals grappling with mental illness, contributing to ongoing conversations about mental health stigma, representation, and empathy. Here’s how Victorian literature has influenced depictions of mental illness in subsequent works:

1. **Stigmatization and Othering:** Victorian literature often depicted characters with mental illness as objects of fear, fascination, or pity, reinforcing stereotypes and stigmatizing attitudes towards mental health. Subsequent portrayals of mental illness in literature and popular culture have continued to draw on these tropes, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and contributing to the stigmatization of individuals with mental health disorders (Morris, 2013; Shuttleworth, 2009).
2. **Gothic Tropes and Archetypes:** Victorian Gothic literature, with its themes of madness, repression, and the uncanny, has influenced subsequent portrayals of mental illness in horror, suspense, and psychological thriller genres (Gildiner, 1990; Scull, 2015). Tropes such as the “Madwoman in the Attic” as seen in “Jane Eyre” by Brontë (Lynch, 2012) and the doppelgänger as seen in “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” by Robert Louis Stevenson have been reinterpreted and adapted in modern literature and popular culture, contributing to the enduring appeal of Gothic motifs in storytelling (Gildiner, 1990; Shuttleworth, 2009; Mitchell & Snyder, 2009 & 2014).
3. **Psychological Complexity and Moral Ambiguity:** Victorian literature often explored the psychological complexity and moral ambiguity of characters grappling with mental illness, challenging simplistic portrayals of good versus evil. Subsequent works have continued to draw on these themes, presenting nuanced and multidimensional depictions of mental health struggles that reflect the complexities of human nature and societal influences (Shuttleworth, 2009).
4. **Critique of Social Norms and Institutions:** Victorian literature frequently critiqued societal norms and institutions, including the treatment of individuals with mental illness within asylums, prisons, and the legal system. Subsequent works have drawn on these critiques to explore issues of social justice, human rights, and

the ethics of mental health care, contributing to broader conversations about the intersection of mental illness and social inequality (Shuttleworth, 2009).

5. **Empathy and Representation:** Despite its limitations and shortcomings, Victorian literature also provided early examples of empathy and representation for characters with mental illness, challenging readers to confront the humanity and suffering of individuals marginalized by society. Subsequent works have built on this legacy, offering more diverse and inclusive representations of mental health experiences that reflect a greater understanding of the complexities of mental illness and the diversity of human experiences (Morris, 2013; Shuttleworth, 2009).

Victorian attitudes towards mental illness continue to shape contemporary perceptions and stigmas in several ways, influencing how mental health is understood, discussed, and addressed in modern society. By recognizing and challenging these historical legacies, we can work towards creating more empathetic, inclusive, and stigma-free attitudes towards mental health in the present day. Here are some key ways in which Victorian attitudes persist and impact contemporary perceptions of mental illness:

1. **Stigmatization and Othering:** Victorian literature often portrayed characters with mental illness as objects of fear, fascination, or pity, perpetuating stigmatizing attitudes and stereotypes that continue to influence contemporary perceptions of mental health. The “madwoman in the attic” trope, for example, perpetuates the idea of individuals with mental illness as dangerous or unpredictable, contributing to stigma and social exclusion (Podolsky, 2012; Shuttleworth, 2009).
2. **Medicalization and Pathologization:** Victorian psychiatry pathologized mental illness and sought to medicalize it through institutionalization, diagnosis, and treatment. While modern psychiatry has made significant strides in understanding and treating mental health disorders, the legacy of medicalization persists, shaping contemporary perceptions of mental illness as inherently pathological or abnormal (Shuttleworth, 2009).
3. **Gendered Expectations and Social Norms:** Victorian attitudes towards gender roles and social norms continue to influence contemporary perceptions of mental health, particularly regarding expressions of emotion and vulnerability. Stereotypes of masculinity and femininity may impact how individuals perceive and seek help for mental health issues, with men often facing pressure to conceal their emotions and women facing expectations to be nurturing and self-sacrificing (Showalter, 1985 & 2019; Shuttleworth, 2009).
4. **Institutionalization and Social Control:** Victorian institutions such as asylums and workhouses were used to confine and control individuals with mental illness, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards social order and discipline. While institutionalization has largely been replaced by community-based mental health care in contemporary society, the legacy of institutionalization persists in perceptions of mental health treatment as coercive or punitive (Shuttleworth, 1977 & 2009).
5. **Narratives of Recovery and Redemption:** Victorian literature often depicted characters with mental illness as tragic figures whose suffering was ultimately redemptive or transformative. While contemporary narratives of mental health

recovery and resilience offer more diverse and inclusive representations, the idea of mental illness as a narrative arc of suffering followed by redemption continues to shape cultural perceptions of mental health (Shuttleworth, 2009; Bronte & Gilbert, 1996).

The enduring relevance of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness lies in their profound exploration of the human experience, offering insights into the complexities of the mind, the impact of societal norms, and the universal struggles of individuals grappling with mental health issues. Despite the temporal and cultural differences between the Victorian era and contemporary society, these literary works continue to resonate with readers and provide valuable perspectives on the human condition. By engaging with these works with empathy, critical reflection, and cultural sensitivity, readers can gain a deeper understanding of mental health issues and contribute to efforts to reduce stigma, promote empathy, and foster inclusivity in discussions of mental illness. Here are some reflections on their enduring relevance:

1. **Universal Themes:** Victorian literature addresses universal themes of identity, agency, morality, and resilience, which remain relevant to readers across periods and cultures. Characters like Jane Eyre, Miss Havisham, Dr. Jekyll, and Laura Fairlie confront existential questions and moral dilemmas that resonate with contemporary audiences, fostering empathy and understanding for individuals experiencing mental health struggles (Shuttleworth, 2009).
2. **Psychological Complexity:** Victorian authors delved into the psychological complexity of characters grappling with mental illness, portraying the inner turmoil, conflicting desires, and emotional vulnerabilities of individuals navigating societal expectations and personal traumas (Morris, 2013). These nuanced portrayals offer valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of mental health disorders and the interplay between internal and external factors (Shuttleworth, 2009).
3. **Cultural Critique:** Victorian literature critiqued social institutions, gender roles, and class inequalities, shedding light on the systemic factors that contribute to mental health struggles and societal stigma. By examining the societal contexts in which characters with mental illness exist, these works invite readers to reflect on the broader cultural attitudes and structural injustices that shape contemporary perceptions of mental health (Showalter, 2019; Shuttleworth, 2009).
4. **Ethical Considerations:** Victorian literature raises ethical questions about the treatment and representation of individuals with mental illness, challenging readers to consider the ethical implications of societal responses to mental health disorders. By portraying characters with empathy and complexity, these works prompt reflection on issues of stigma, discrimination, and social responsibility in contemporary mental health discourse (Shuttleworth, 2009; Bronte & Gilbert, 1996).
5. **Narrative Resonance:** The narrative power of Victorian literature lies in its ability to engage readers on an emotional and intellectual level, inviting them to inhabit the lives and minds of characters experiencing mental health struggles. Through immersive storytelling and vivid characterization, these works evoke empathy,

introspection, and a deeper understanding of the human experience of mental illness (Morris, 2013; Shuttleworth, 2009).

Conclusion:

Summary of key findings and arguments presented in the paper: The research paper explores the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature, focusing on key works. Overall, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection of literature, psychology, and society in exploring the portrayal of mental illness in Victorian literature and its lasting impact on contemporary perceptions and stigmas surrounding mental health. Here's a summary of the key findings and arguments presented in the paper:

1. **Overview of Victorian Attitudes towards Mental Illness:** The paper provides an overview of prevailing attitudes towards mental illness in Victorian society, highlighting the stigmatization, medicalization, and institutionalization of individuals with mental health disorders during this period.
2. **Emergence of Psychiatry:** It discusses the emergence of psychiatry as a discipline and its influence on the understanding and treatment of mental disorders during the Victorian era, including the development of asylums and the medicalization of madness.
3. **Exploration of Asylums:** The paper explores the role of asylums in Victorian society, examining treatment methods, patient experiences, and the social and cultural implications of institutionalization for individuals with mental illness.
4. **Literary Analysis:** It provides a literary analysis of key works of Victorian literature, focusing on the portrayal of mental illness, symptoms, causes, consequences, and narrative techniques used by authors to convey characters' mental states.
5. **Influence on Subsequent Portrayals:** The paper discusses the influence of Victorian literature on subsequent portrayals of mental illness in literature and popular culture, highlighting themes, tropes, and narrative motifs that continue to shape contemporary perceptions of mental health.
6. **Reflection on Enduring Relevance:** It reflects on the enduring relevance of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness in understanding the human experience, emphasizing universal themes, psychological complexity, cultural critique, ethical considerations, and narrative resonance that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences.

Reflection on the significance of studying the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature: Studying the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature holds significant value for several reasons. It offers a multifaceted exploration of historical perspectives, societal constructs, psychological dynamics, and cultural legacies surrounding mental health. By engaging with these works with empathy, critical reflection, and interdisciplinary inquiry, the readers can deepen their understanding of the human experience of mental illness and contribute to ongoing conversations about mental health stigma, representation, and advocacy. Here's a reflection on the significance of such studies:

1. **Insight into Historical Perspectives:** Victorian literature provides a window into the historical perspectives and attitudes towards mental illness during the 19th century. By examining how mental health was understood, represented, and stigmatized in Victorian society, we gain insight into the cultural, social, and medical contexts that shaped perceptions of mental illness at that time.
2. **Exploration of Social Constructs and Norms:** The portrayal of mental illness in Victorian literature reflects broader societal constructs and norms, including gender roles, class inequalities, and moral expectations. By analyzing how characters with mental illness were depicted and treated within the context of Victorian social structures, we can better understand the impact of societal factors on mental health perceptions and experiences.
3. **Interplay of Literature and Psychology:** Victorian literature offers a rich tapestry of narratives and characters grappling with mental health struggles, providing fertile ground for interdisciplinary exploration of the interplay between literature and psychology. By examining the psychological complexities, motivations, and behaviours of characters with mental illness, we deepen our understanding of human nature and the intricacies of mental health disorders.
4. **Critical Reflection on Contemporary Perceptions:** Studying the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature prompts critical reflection on contemporary perceptions and stigmas surrounding mental health. By comparing historical representations of mental illness with modern understandings, we can identify persistent stereotypes, challenge harmful narratives, and work towards fostering more empathetic and inclusive attitudes towards mental health in the present day.
5. **Cultural and Literary Legacy:** Victorian literature continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary culture and storytelling, shaping narratives, themes, and tropes that resonate with audiences today. By examining the legacy of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness, we gain insight into enduring cultural motifs, ethical considerations, and narrative strategies that continue to inform contemporary portrayals of mental health in literature and popular culture.

Suggestions for further research in this area: Further research into the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature could explore various avenues to the understanding of this complex topic. Additionally, such research can contribute to ongoing conversations about mental health stigma, representation, and advocacy in contemporary society. Here are some suggestions for further research:

1. **Comparative Analysis:** Conduct comparative analyses of depictions of mental illness across different genres of Victorian literature to explore how mental illness is represented, perceived, and treated in various literary forms, and examine how these representations intersect with broader cultural, social, and medical discourses of the Victorian era.
2. **Intersectionality:** Investigate the intersectionality of mental illness with other social identities and experiences, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability, in Victorian literature. Explore how characters with intersecting identities are depicted, marginalized, or empowered in narratives of mental health, and examine how social hierarchies and power dynamics shape their experiences.

3. **Authorial Perspectives:** Analyze the authorial perspectives and motivations behind the portrayal of mental illness in Victorian literature. Investigate how authors' personal experiences, beliefs, and cultural contexts influence their representations of mental health, and explore how authors challenge or reinforce prevailing attitudes towards mental illness in their works.
4. **Reader Reception:** Examine reader reception and interpretation of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness through historical reception studies, literary criticism, and reader-response theory. Investigate how contemporary readers interpreted and responded to characters with mental illness in Victorian literature, and explore how these readings reflect changing attitudes towards mental health over time.
5. **Transnational Perspectives:** Adopt transnational and comparative approaches to studying the depiction of mental illness in Victorian literature, exploring how representations of mental health vary across different national contexts, cultural traditions, and literary movements. Compare Victorian depictions of mental illness with those in other literary traditions, such as French realism, Russian literature, or American gothic fiction, to gain insights into global perspectives on mental health during the 19th century.
6. **Impact on Contemporary Culture:** Investigate the ongoing impact of Victorian literary depictions of mental illness on contemporary culture, including literature, film, television, and popular media. Analyze how Victorian tropes, themes, and characters related to mental health are adapted, reinterpreted, or challenged in contemporary narratives, and explore how Victorian literature continues to shape contemporary understandings of mental health and illness.

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