

Abstract for

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Presentation

Workshop

Male / Female / Diverse

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Portrayals of Psychosis in Victorian Literature

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Abstract text up to 15 lines in English:

Introduction: Victorian literature, characterized by its rich tapestry of themes and narratives, offers a unique window into the portrayal of psychosis during the 19th century. This research explores the depiction of psychotic states in Victorian literature, aiming to understand how authors from that era represented and perceived mental disturbances.

Method: To investigate the portrayal of psychosis, a comprehensive review of key Victorian literary works was conducted. Texts from various genres were analyzed for their depictions of characters experiencing psychosis. Key themes, narrative techniques, and the societal context of the Victorian era were considered in the analysis.

Results:

-The Era's Limited Understanding of Psychosis: The Victorian era was marked by a nascent comprehension of mental health, and psychosis, characterized by hallucinations, delusions, and a disconnection from reality, was often interpreted through a moralistic or supernatural lens. These beliefs significantly influenced the literary portrayal of psychosis during this period.

-The Madwoman in the Attic: Bertha Mason in "Jane Eyre": Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" (1847) presents one of the most iconic portrayals of psychosis in Victorian literature through the character Bertha Mason. Locked in the attic by her husband, Bertha's portrayal is one of an uncontrollable, violent madwoman. Her confinement and erratic behavior mirror the era's limited understanding of mental illness, and the desire to keep such issues hidden.

- Female Hysteria and Psychosis: Victorian literature often conflated female hysteria with symptoms of psychosis. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) is a notable exploration of this theme. The story follows a woman's descent into psychosis, triggered by her confinement in a room. The narrative underscores the impact of societal constraints on mental health and effectively portrays psychosis.

-Gothic Elements and Psychosis: The Victorian era had a predilection for Gothic literature, where madness and the supernatural often intertwined. Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" (1847) featured characters exhibiting symptoms of psychosis. Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," explored the thin line between the supernatural and the psychological. These works highlighted the psychological horror associated with psychosis.

-Victorian Psychiatry and Medical Discourse: The Victorian era marked the early developments of psychiatric discourse. Wilkie Collins' "The Woman in White" (1860) tackled mental health issues, critiquing the treatment of those with mental health conditions and the injustices they faced. Charles Dickens, in "Bleak House" (1853), provided a critical lens through which to view the confinement and legal battles surrounding mental health.

-Duality and Psychosis: Victorian literature also delved into the duality of human nature as a precursor to psychosis. Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1886) explored the concept of split personalities and the potential for one to descend into madness. The novella asked profound questions about the origins of psychosis and the darker aspects of the human psyche.

Conclusion: Victorian literature's exploration of psychosis offers a deeper perspective into the era's comprehension of this mental health condition. It mirrors the limited understanding, stigmatization, and mystification of mental illness during the time. These portrayals provide a profound view into the historical and cultural context surrounding psychosis in the Victorian era, emphasizing the significant role that literature played in unraveling the intricacies of the human mind.