

# Lunacy under Lock and Key

A Comparison of the Portrayal of Madness in Victorian  
and Neo-Victorian Fiction

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### Abstract

This thesis will research how mentally ill people are portrayed in works of fiction of the Victorian era as well as how they are portrayed in Neo-Victorian fiction. The research contrasts two Victorian novels, published in the early to mid-Victorian era, with two Neo-Victorian novels published in the twenty-first century. This study will answer the question how Victorian novels describe mentally ill people as part of society compared to Neo-Victorian novels. It will do so by close reading these novels on the bases of three specific features; language use, living accommodations and the looks and behaviour of mad characters. These separate findings will then be compared.

Research will show that the Victorian novels feature mentally ill people at the margins of society. They are hidden away and interacted with minimally. However, Neo-Victorian novels will do the opposite. They foreground the mentally ill people and focus on their lives and their problems.

Key words: Victorian, Neo-Victorian, Madness, Lunacy, Use of Language, Looks and Behaviour, Living Accommodation.

## Introduction

The *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* published an article in 1849 called “The New County Asylum for Middlesex, Colney Hatch”. This is one example of an article that provides an insight into how people with a mental illness, or lunatics as they were called, were regarded by Victorians around the 1850s. During the Victorian era, madness was a growing problem for society. More and more lunatics were admitted into asylums, which resulted in overcrowding. “The crowded state of the Hanwell Asylum, the daily applications for the admission of new patients, which are necessarily refused” (490). London in particular was facing difficulties with its considerable number of lunatics, which meant that new asylums had to be built; one of these was the Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum (490). The popular attitude was that people were against the building of the Asylum on this site; the prime reason being that it would raise taxes for the surrounding county. Another document from this time, that is an example of an insight into how Victorian society responded to these issues of mental illness, is the *Report of the Metropolitan commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor*. This is a detailed report to parliament about the conditions of mentally ill people in asylums throughout the country. The medical opinion regarding lunacy was rapidly changing during these years. Around the 1850s the first few investigations were done into madness and during these years lunacy finally became a “recognised and legitimate branch of medical science” (“The New County Asylum” 490). Doctors were starting to realise that madness was a disease and should be treated as such. A distinction was also made between the different forms of lunacy, which in turn was the reason for the rise of specific treatments for specific mental illnesses (Du Bois 113). The varying stages of diseases also meant it became easier to determine which patients were “proper objects for confinement” (109).

By the mid-nineteenth century, lunacy had come to be regarded as “one of the major forms of deviance in English society” (Scull 19). Lunatics were perceived to be degenerates,

as less than ordinary humans, rather than people with an illness. This is especially noticeable in institutions like Bedlam, where mentally ill people were displayed like freaks and people could look at them for entertainment. With the progression of the Victorian era an increasing amount of medical journals started reporting that lunacy was in fact an illness that was treatable and even curable. Society tried to segregate the insane from the rest of its people, motivated by a shared feeling of “concern to protect society from the disorder threatened by the raving” (Scull 21). At the same time they wanted to treat the lunatics more humanely, but they had no clear vision of how this could be achieved. Institutions like Bedlam made way for institutions like Colney Hatch, which were designed with the focus on the possibility of actually curing patients (“The New County Asylum” ). However, this was a very gradual process and popular opinion was very ambivalent.

During the Victorian era, literature also responded to this societal problem the Victorians faced, although it must be noted that there was not one particular fixed response. The Victorian era lasted sixty-six years and during that time opinions changed; including the opinions concerning mental illness. The Victorian age saw a diverse corpus of works of fiction, especially since the Mid-Victorian era was characterised by the “emergence of a modern print culture ... which saw a proliferation of printed material” (Palmer 86). The early to Mid-Victorian era mostly still shied away from topics such as mental illness. However, in both prose and poetry of this time we find responses. Poets like Lord Tennyson and Emily Dickinson incorporated themes of madness in their poetry, and Robert Browning published *Porphyria's Lover* in 1835 in which madness is feminised (Purchase 94). Prose also responded in a wide variety of ways. In the early to mid-Victorian century writers such as Emily Brontë and Charles Dickens wrote novels featuring a mad character. Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White* focused on wrongful imprisonment in an institution. In later Victorian responses “common sense and sanity are consciously inverted” (Purchase 94). This was

especially the case in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where what is considered to be madness is seen as the normal way of life. This thesis will only focus on prose literary representations of mentally ill people of the early to mid-Victorian era (1840-1860). During these years prose literature responded to the issue of mental illness mostly through the Sensational and Gothic genres. Both these genres dealt with unlikely occurrences and often had the theme of madness (Cox 8). Authors featured mad characters, but it was not the primary focus of the novel which would be the case in the late Victorian era. Among the authors to respond to the social problem in this way were Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens.

Since the second half of the twentieth century there has been a rise in academic and popular interest in the Victorians and their society. Especially Victorian literature has been extensively studied and researched academically. However, little research has been done into the literary representation of madness in the early to mid-Victorian novels. Valerie Beattie wrote an article named "The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in *Jane Eyre*". In this article she explores the issue of the mad woman in *Jane Eyre*, but does this linguistically and as a feminist critic. This means that she interprets the mad woman as a counterpart; or rather the restricted side of Jane. So instead of focussing on the mad character itself, the article focuses on how that character represents Jane's hidden desires. However, she does note that language is an important signifier when it comes to madness. Although Beattie's article is considered secondary literature, her model can be applied to other texts as well. Beattie uses Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic to create her own theory about language and madness. Kristeva's theory of the semiotic states that the emotional meaning of language is not carried within words themselves but rather in the spaces between the words (Kristeva 26). Beattie uses this idea and connects it to madness. She states that if the meaning is in between words, then mad characters will use those spaces to communicate. This thesis

will not go into the specific way in which mad characters use this space between words to communicate, but rather focuses on how Beattie uses this theory as a way of identifying how mad characters communicate with society.

In his book *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, Sean Purchase discusses madness in Victorian literature as a broader theme. He discusses the different ways in which madness is portrayed in Victorian novels. At the start of the century it is mostly a trope of both genre and plot, but later on it is a conscious choice to subvert sanity and make madness the norm (Purchase 94). He points out that in these novels it is mostly the women who suffer from madness. An interesting conclusion he draws is that the mad character is often imprisoned in the house they live in. Thus the Victorian home “is effectively transformed into an ‘asylum’ for women” (Purchase 95).

The rise in popularity of the Victorians can be seen in fiction of contemporary culture. It has created an entirely new genre, namely Neo-Victorianism. The start of the genre is generally considered to be the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys in 1966 (Hadley 2). The Neo-Victorian genre is a very broad one and can be defined as “contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure or both” (Hadley 4). For this thesis the genre has been narrowed down to focus on novels that use fictional events or characters to investigate issues of Victorian culture (Hadley 4). It is a genre that blends form and content and it makes use of the realist novel of the nineteenth century to portray nineteenth century life (Wallace 166). This allows writers to bring insights of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries into the text. These insights help “make explicit the buried subtexts of the original [Victorian] novels” (Wallace 116).

Most research that has been done into Neo-Victorian works of literature has focused on the issue of sexuality. *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture*, edited by Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, is one of the few studies that goes into the field of mental

illness slightly with a chapter written by Christy Rieger in which she explains “medical sensationalism”, which deals with *The Crimson Petal and the White* as an example. It is argued that “Neo-Victorian fiction interrogates issues of patient privacy and autonomy manifest ... and is prominent in anxiety over the unregulated dissemination of medical files” (Rieger 153).

The start of the twentieth century was very important for the Neo-Victorian genre, as McWilliam explains in “Victorian Sensations, Neo-Victorian Romances: Response”. Novelists deliberately chose a Victorian setting for their novels. Prominent examples of such writers are Michel Faber and Sarah Waters. Their novels “feature plenty of hysteria (madness for women), prostitution, consumerism spiritualism, uppity servants, cross-dressing, and transgression of boundaries” (McWilliam 107). Novelists like Faber and Waters return to the Victorian Sensation novel and draw on its themes and tropes, especially with regard to complex plots, female heroines and dark landscapes (McWilliam 109). Both authors have been researched thoroughly, but once again there is a missing aspect of how mental illness features in their works of fiction. Wallace in her book *Queer As History? Sarah Waters's Gothic Historical Novels* does look at Sarah Waters as a Neo-Victorian author. The book offers valuable insights into Waters as a Neo-Victorian author, but does not focus on the aspect of madness in her writing.

This thesis will discuss the representation of mentally ill people in literature by posing the following question: How do early to mid-Victorian novels portray mentally ill people as part of society compared to Neo-Victorian novels? Neo-Victorian novels are virtually the negative counterpart of Victorian fiction. What the Victorians regarded as taboo and did not mention, the Neo-Victorians bring to light. Very little research has been done into the literary representation of mentally ill people in Neo-Victorian books. It is a gap that needs to be filled.

This thesis will focus on two books from the early to mid-Victorian era, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and *Great Expectations* (1862) by Charles Dickens and two books from the early twenty-first century, *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters and *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) by Michael Faber. These books will portray the literary representation of mentally ill people during this time frame in the Victorian era. Although it must be noted that this was not the only response to how mentally ill people were regarded. The two Victorian books cannot be seen as representative of the entire Victorian period, but two books will give a literary representation of Victorian society that is appropriate within the limits of a Bachelor thesis. These books were chosen on the bases of them featuring a mad character. Both of the Victorian novels are Sensationalist and realist. This means that they deal with madness and some elements of the Gothic, mostly secrecy, but at the same time they are realistic and will give a fairly accurate literary representation of Victorian society at this particular period in time. The books of the twenty first century are both part of the Neo-Victorian genre; which is based largely on the Sensationalist genre of the Victorian era, and also deals with themes such as madness. It must be noted that *Fingersmith* has a unique position in this thesis. Although the character of Sue Trinder is in fact not mad, she is treated by her environment as if she is. The third part of the novel is the only part that is used for this thesis. The Victorian novels will be dealt with in the first chapter of this thesis; the Neo-Victorian ones in the second chapter. By grouping both novels together in one chapter, it will be easier to compare and contrast them.

The comparison between the two Victorian novels and the two Neo-Victorian novels will be based on a specific focus. They will be compared to each other on how mentally ill people are portrayed as being part of society; whether they are at the margins of society, or take active part in society. The analysis of the Victorian novels will set the precedent for the Neo-Victorian chapter. Through a close analysis of these novels, facts about the literary

representation of mentally ill people will be brought to light and discussed in the chapters mentioned. Each book will first identify the mad character, followed by an analyses of all passages that feature the mad person on the basis of three features. The first feature is how the mad characters communicate with other people. Valerie Beattie's article demonstrated that language was an important signifier when it comes to madness, so this thesis will look at how the mad characters use language and how they are able to communicate with others. The second feature discusses the living accommodation of the mad people. Sean Purchase noted that these mad characters are often imprisoned in their own homes, transforming the houses into a type of asylum. This will also demonstrate how they fit into society. The last feature will look at how mad people are described in terms of looks and behaviour. The Victorian era was obsessed with degeneration. By focussing on looks and behaviour it will become clear whether lunatics were seen as degenerates or not, and thus if they are part of society. On the basis of the evidence found in these passages, conclusions can be drawn to answer the research question of this thesis.

Research will show that the Victorian novels feature mentally ill people in the margins of society. They are hidden away and minimally interacted with. In contrast, Neo-Victorian novels offer a different perspective, because they will foreground the mentally ill people and focus on their lives and their problems.

## Chapter 1: The Victorian Novels

Victorian society, as early as 1829, was obsessed with mental illness, or as it was known then: lunacy. Between 1829 and 1840 the Metropolitan Commission on Lunacy reported on the state of the asylums throughout the country as well as several individual cases. This obsession with madness was heightened during the 1850s when fears arose that Queen Victoria herself had succumbed to a mental illness known as “porphyria”. What followed was a lunacy panic (Purchase 93). A natural consequence was that literature also responded to this growing crisis. It did so in different ways. Some authors chose to critique the treatment of mentally ill people; such as Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White*, in which Anne Catherick is wrongfully imprisoned in an asylum. Other authors also chose to consciously comment on the standard norms of their society and invert common behaviour. An example of this is Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* which makes madness seem normal, and normal seem different (Purchase 94-5).

However, there was also a different response; one that focussed on the mystery of mental illness. Although doctors were obsessed with finding causes and diagnosing the different illnesses; mental illness was still not understood (Purchase 92). During the early to mid-Victorian era this sense of mystery surrounding mental illness drew authors’ interests. The Sensational and Gothic genres were very popular and dealt with unlikely occurrences and secrecy. The theme of madness is often found in these kinds of novels, because it complies with the mysteriousness of these genres (Cox 8). In these types of novels the mad characters are usually plot devices; they are not the primary focus of the novel. Two novels that respond to madness in this way are Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

This chapter will analyse these two novels, with the criteria from Valerie Beattie, Sean Purchase and Allen Beveridge discussed in the introduction, to examine how the mad

characters (Bertha and Ms Havisham respectively) are part of the society portrayed in the novels. *Jane Eyre* will first be analysed, followed by *Great Expectations*.

### 1.1 Madness in *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) was originally published under the pseudonym Currer Bell. A well-known element in *Jane Eyre* is the figure of "the mad woman in the attic", which has been subject to substantial amounts of academic research. *Jane Eyre* set the precedent for these kinds of characters. This chapter will analyse *Jane Eyre* on how the figure of the mad woman is part of the novel's portrayed society. Society here will be defined according to the *Oxford Dictionary* as "the community of people living in a particular country or region and having shared customs, laws, and organizations". Charlotte Brontë had some first-hand experience of madness when she saw her own brother degenerate in front of her eyes (Beveridge 411). Her novel *Villette* (1853) was written when her brother was suffering from mental illness, consequently madness is described in more sympathetic terms. However, while she was writing *Jane Eyre* her brother was still in reasonably fine health. For *Jane Eyre* she mostly relied on the conventions of gothic writing to create her mad character (Beveridge 411). The mad character is Bertha Mason-Rochester. She is a woman from the West-Indies. Rochester was made to marry her for the fortune that she would bring him. Throughout the novel we learn that Jane experiences strange things around Thornfield Hall; strange laughs and echoes in corridors which were supposed to be empty. More seemingly unexplainable occurrences happen after Rochester's arrival: Jane sees an apparition, a fire starts suddenly in Rochester's bedroom, and the day before her wedding she sees a woman rip her veil in half. The reader is formally introduced to Bertha after Jane's failed marriage to Rochester, when Mr Mason arrives and reveals that Rochester is already married.

### 1.1.1 Language

Valerie Beattie notes in her article “The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in *Jane Eyre*” that the use of language of a mad person is very important. Language and madness are interlinked and Brontë used this to her advantage (496). Brontë had created the mad character of Bertha as a character that stands removed from society. Through the use of language she enforced this image. The reader is first introduced to Bertha –although it is not yet revealed that this is in fact Bertha – when both Jane and Rochester have been at Thornfield for an extended period of time. During the night, Jane is awoken by a laugh which is described as “a demonic laugh – low, suppressed and deep” (Brontë 173). As the sound moves closer, it is described more mysteriously as “something gurgled and moaned” (173). As Beattie notes Bertha is not reduced to silence, although that is what Rochester wants her to be (498). The only thing we hear of her is a laugh, which is described as demonic. All of Bertha’s other sounds are described as non-human. Beattie argues that this is a subtle warning of Jane’s prejudices against lunatics which we will see throughout the rest of the novel (498). The only way in which Bertha can seem to communicate is through what are described as “animal-like” sounds, and her laughter. In episodes where we meet Bertha, she is often announced by her laughter, yet in the presence of others she mostly remains silent. When Jane and Rochester’s marriage has been prevented, the whole party present at the church is brought to Thornfield’s attic to meet Bertha. Here, in the presence of others, Bertha only manages to communicate through screaming, which is described by Jane as “the manic bellowed” (Brontë 338). Again her screams are described with animal-like adjectives instead of human ones. We also learn from Grace Poole, her keeper, that she is not communicative: “One never knows what she has, sir” (338). As Sean Purchase points out Bertha “speaks only in mysterious grunts and gibbers” (95). She is unable to speak and can only express herself through demonic

laughter, and animalistic growls and grunts. She is unintelligible to the other characters of the portrayed society and cannot communicate with them.

### 1.1.2 Accommodation

Besides Bertha's use of language, Sean Purchase makes an important observation regarding Bertha's living accommodation. He states that "as 'the madwoman in the attic', Bertha is imprisoned in a space in which the Victorian 'home' is effectively transformed into an 'asylum' for women" (95). Jessica Cox also argues that the theme of imprisonment is very important for Gothic novels dealing with a mad character (6). In the novel Bertha is kept in a small room in the attic together with her keeper Grace Poole. She is effectively imprisoned by Rochester after he took her back to England. His marriage had been arranged by his father and brother, because a marriage with Bertha would come with a 30.000 Pound fortune. His family cared not for the rumours surrounding Bertha, but only cared for the fortune. When Rochester married her, her secrets were revealed. He quickly learned that her mother was incarcerated in a mental institution, her brother was an idiot and she herself began to exhibit insane-like tendencies. He wrote to his father of the circumstances adding "an urgent charge to keep it secret: and very soon the infamous conduct of the wife my father had selected for me was such as to make him blush to own her as his daughter-in-law ... He came as anxious to conceal it as myself" (Brontë 356). Rochester went to great lengths to conceal the mad woman whom he had married. At the ceremony of his marriage to Jane, the priest, after the revelation of the existence of the wife says: "'I never heard of a Mrs Rochester at Thornfield Hall.' I saw a grim smile contort Mr. Rochester's lips, and he muttered – 'No, by god! I took care that none should hear of it – or of her under that name'" (336). These passages reveal that Rochester and his family were ashamed of the mad behaviour of his new wife and therefore kept the marriage a secret. Mrs Rochester (Bertha) was effectively imprisoned to make sure no one

would ever find out about the shameful secret. Bertha is kept on the third floor of Thornfield Hall. However, she is not simply put into an attic room. When Rochester leads Jane and the rest of their party to the third floor, they step into a “tapestried room, with its great bed and its pictorial cabinet” (337). This room seems like a normal room for any servant in the house, but this is not where Bertha herself is kept. Within this room in the attic, Bertha is hidden even further away: “He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door” (Brontë 338). So within the already hidden room, there is a secret hidden door that leads to a smaller room, without a window and, as it appears, without any comforts the previous room had. The room without a window reminds one of a room in an asylum as Purchase points out (95). She is kept there to limit her movement and be monitored by her keeper, similar to an actual asylum. With regard to her movement, Beattie makes an interesting observation. While during the day it seems that Bertha is always locked away in her cell, during the night she freely moves about the Hall (501). In the narrative we actually meet her more outside of her cell than inside of it. It gives her agency as a mad person. This suggests that although she is locked away she can still influence the lives of the other people present in her environment.

### 1.1.3 Looks and Behaviour

The last important feature to look at is one that Sean Purchase, Valerie Beattie and Allen Beveridge all deem important. They all note the importance of how mad characters are described in terms of looks and behaviour. Bertha’s language use was mostly described in animal-like ways. With the description of her looks this becomes an even more pronounced comparison. The first description of Bertha is given the night before Jane’s wedding. Jane awakes and sees a person standing in her room. She describes the figure as “tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back” (Brontë 326). This is quite a masculine description as the feminine ideal was slim and slight in Victorian society, but it is a human

one. However, when Jane sees her face, this changes. Her face is described as “fearful and ghastly to me ... It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!” (327). She concludes that the image reminds her of a vampire. The way in which Bertha is described here is not human. She becomes almost supernatural, especially when Jane compares her to a vampire.

The second time Bertha is described is when Jane is taken up to the attic room after the interruption of her wedding. In this scene, Jane describes Bertha physically as “a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides” (Brontë 338). Again this strengthens the masculine description of Bertha. She is almost the opposite of the Victorian feminine ideal in the way she is described. However, Beattie notes that in the episode that follows Bertha becomes so unlike a female that she cannot be described in “human terms” (500). The description that we get from Jane is one of an animal-like creature, instead of a woman: “What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal” (Brontë 338). Here there is a literal comparison to an animal. She becomes an animal in Jane’s eyes, especially when Bertha attacks Rochester. “The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid teeth to his cheek” (Brontë 338). In this particular scene there is another interesting fact to be mentioned. Bertha is put on display in this scene in front of many curious people. The fact that they are all there to simply look at her almost makes her a freak show. This reminds one of institutions such as Bedlam where mad people were put on display in this way. This scene emphasizes the fact that throughout the novel Bertha has become an “it”, instead of a person (Beveridge 411). Madness as Allen Beveridge puts it is seen as an “otherness” (411). So Bertha is portrayed and described as an “other”, something that is completely different from the rest of the characters. She is rendered an “it”, and made almost animal-like.

On the basis of these three features it is now possible to draw conclusions about the character of Bertha. First of all, by examining the way in which Bertha uses language in the novel, it is revealed how she is able to communicate with society. However, it quickly becomes apparent that apart from laughing and making noises like an animal, she does not speak at all. She cannot be a part of society because she cannot communicate with other members of said society. So she stands removed at the margins of society. Secondly, Bertha is locked up by Rochester in Thornfield Hall the moment she reveals her madness. Everything is done to prevent word from leaking out that Mr Rochester has a mad wife, so he locks her away in Thornfield Hall and makes sure to never discuss the secret. In Thornfield Bertha is kept in the attic. The interesting thing is that she is not just hidden in an attic room, but even further away in a hidden room, without a window, behind the attic room. This means she is physically farthest removed from society. She does not have a window, so she has no contact with the outside world. She does not get a room like other people; she gets a cell. Finally, every time Bertha is introduced in the novel she is described in an inhuman way. Her actions make it impossible for Jane to describe her as a human, so she is mostly described as an almost demonic creature (a vampire) or a wild animal who walks on all fours and growls. This means she is described not as a human, but an animal. Therefore she cannot be part of society because she is not recognized as a human being.

## 1.2 Madness in *Great Expectations*

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861) was first published in serial form in a periodical called *All the Year Round*. Dickens saw mental illness as "a terrible calamity" and people with mental illness had to be treated with humanity (Beveridge 412). His interest in mental illness is reflected in his literary work. Many of his characters are said to be eccentrics and often even mad. His novels often contain a sympathetic portrayal of madness. Instead of mad characters being used as plot devices, in Dickens' novels they have a background story and

often there is a reason why they have become mentally ill (Beveridge 412). This is also the case in *Great Expectations*. The mad character in this novel is Ms Havisham. She had been left by her groom via a letter sent at twenty to nine while she was dressing for her wedding day. She immediately stopped the clocks and shut herself in her room after that. Dr John Bowen notes in the introduction to *Great Expectations* that Ms Havisham is “the victim of a terrible trauma, which she condemns herself to repeat day after day, night after night, alone and friendless” (IX). Ms Havisham remains changed after the jilting from her lover; it leaves her with a “bad illness” as Michael Slater calls it (292). The analysis of this novel will use the aforementioned works by Valerie Beattie and Sean Purchase and apply their criteria for analysing a mad character in a Victorian novel. First, Ms Havisham’s use of language will be dealt with, then her living accommodation before moving on to her behaviour and looks.

### 1.2.1 Language

Valerie Beattie has noted the importance of the link between language and madness. If a character is mad it is most likely that he or she will not be able to speak properly (496). However, at first glance Ms Havisham speaks with the diction of a gentlewoman, which is not in line with what Beattie suggests and argues. Because Ms Havisham has full control over her language use, she is able to communicate with other members of society and can take active part in it. However, she does sometimes lose her train of thought, stopping in a conversation only to pick it back up and “speaking as if there had been no lapse in our dialogue” (Dickens 307). There are other instances in which she has trouble understanding people when they talk. In these scenes she drifts off and needs to “force herself to attend” (Dickens 336) when someone is speaking. Yet, she is mostly able to communicate with other characters. However, in chapter 49 Ms Havisham seems to sink deeper into her madness. She realizes that she has hurt both Estella and Pip. It is here that she loses her language capability and adheres to

Beattie's theory of language and madness. She can only repeat three separate sentences: "What have I done?", "When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine", and "Take the pencil and write under my name 'I forgive her' " (Dickens 341). The order of the sentences does not change, Pip also notes that "she sometimes left out a word in one or other of them ... always leaving a blank and going on to the next word" (341). In this chapter, she becomes aware of the pain she caused both Pip and Estella, which maddens her even further. She is unable to speak coherently anymore, only repeating three sentences revolving around what she has done to the two children she cared for. As she sinks further into her madness she loses control of her language capability. This makes her unable to communicate with other people. It also drives people further away from her, because they cannot do anything to help her.

### 1.2.2 Accommodation

In terms of her living accommodation, Ms Havisham's house adheres to Sean Purchase's description of the house functioning as an asylum (95). As Bowen notes, the house in which Ms Havisham lives is "exactly where one might expect a semi-deranged woman to live – dark, miserable, decaying" (x). The outside of the house reflects her state of mind. It is in a state of decay and the brewery has shut. She has isolated herself from society through this dilapidated house. The courtyard surrounding the house is barred (Dickens 46), which makes the house an analogy of an asylum. The windows of the house were either barred or bricked over, so as to not let in any natural light, which makes the house similar to a prison. Ms Havisham herself always stays in her dressing room, far removed from other people in the house, and from society in general, for she has all the curtains drawn to seal herself off completely. She had been staying in that room since her wedding day and had kept everything exactly the same. For example the table is still set with her wedding cake, which is now

covered in cobwebs. In addition, the room is also in a state of disarray; there are clothes strewn about, and the surface of her dressing table is covered with trinkets “all confusedly heaped about the looking glass” (Dickens 49). This again reflects her state of mind. She herself is scattered and has lost herself since she had been left at the altar. The room is a reflection of this. The fact that the room can only be reached by a dark stairway is also proof of how Ms Havisham has kept herself removed from society. She has purposely removed herself to a dark corner of the house so as to not be disturbed in her madness. There are also few people who are allowed into this room. When her family visits they are received in a different room, across from Ms Havisham’s dressing room. It is in the same darkened, dilapidated and scattered state as her dressing room. Satis House itself is also a removed from the village in which it stands. It is physically removed from the rest of the village society. So through the house she removes herself from adults and their society in every way possible.

### 1.2.3 Looks and Behaviour

In terms of looks and behaviour Ms Havisham fits the character of a mad woman. Ms Havisham is described as a terrible sight. Slater describes her as “a fantastic creation, a being who has once been human” (292). Bowen agrees with this and notes that she exists at the margins of humanity, and society like a vampire (x). Throughout the novel Pip confirms this almost supernatural image of Ms Havisham. During their first meeting, he describes her as “corpse –like” and he thinks that “the natural light of day would have struck her to dust” (Dickens 51), emphasizing the vampire image Bowen relates. What is interesting is that Ms Havisham is mostly described in terms of dress by Pip, instead of her actual looks and behaviour: “She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks- all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on

her hands” (Dickens 48). In this first description, there is no indication that this is a mad character. It creates an image of a bride, but the only thing that seems odd is that the bride has white hair and is an old woman. However the description continues with: “but I saw everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes” (49). Here he reveals that there is something different about her. She is old and withered and is wearing old and withered clothes. He compares her to a waxwork, which he had seen in town on occasion. Again a comparison is made with something that is inhuman. Her behaviour is different from the other character as well. Her past has filled her with what Slater calls a “crazy vindictiveness” for the male sex (371). She purposely locks herself in the dark house to relive her wedding day for the rest of her life. Her behaviour towards others, and especially men is cold. She does not enjoy interacting with them. When her family visits her on her birthday she hardly speaks to them. She keeps walking around the room with Pip’s help. Again we see that she avoids adult society and prefers the children. Her behaviour in general influences Estella (her charge) who becomes cold and heartless and breaks Pip’s heart which had been Havisham’s idea from the start “Well! You can break his heart” (Dickens 50). Because of Havisham’s influence, Estella ends up in an unhappy and abusive marriage. When pip visits Havisham after Estella’s marriage Havisham finds remorse, “I meant to save her from misery like my own” (Dickens 338). However, this remorse sends her into a mad frenzy where she often cries out “What have I done?”. It elevates her from being an eccentric to a truly mad person in her behaviour.

After analysing the novel on these three points, it is possible to conclude that at first Havisham seems eccentric, but not truly mad. She has still retained her ability to use language and is able to communicate with other characters. However, in chapter 49 it becomes clear

that she truly is mad. Here she loses her ability to communicate with others and slips deeper into her madness. The house in which she lives is like an asylum for her. She stays in her dressing room, which is kept dark and separated from the rest of the house and the outside world. Lastly, in regard to her looks she is described as something that is not entirely human. She is perceived as a corpse or a vampire. She is old and withered and her looks and especially her clothes emphasize this. She reminds Pip of a waxwork; something that is inhuman.

### 1.3 Conclusion

After the analyses of the characters Bertha Mason and Ms Havisham, of *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* respectively, it is now possible to draw conclusions based on the three features on which they were analysed in this chapter. These three features will then create an insight into how these characters are part of the portrayed society and subsequently answer the question that this thesis has posed.

Bertha in *Jane Eyre* can only communicate by laughing and shrieking. The sounds she makes are described as sounds coming from an animal. She has no other language capabilities, which renders her unable to communicate with other characters in the novel. This inability to communicate removes her from the portrayed society simply because she cannot be understood by the people who form that society. In her living accommodation, Bertha is physically removed from society. She was imprisoned by Rochester against her will and has been locked up in a small hidden room behind an attic room, furthest removed from the rest of the household. Thornfield Hall has thus been transformed into an asylum as Sean Purchase described. Bertha has been forcibly removed from society in a literal way. Finally, the aspect that removes her from society completely is her behaviour. Bertha's behaviour is completely different from that of the other characters, which makes it impossible for her to be described

in human terms. This is the reason why Bertha is eventually described in animal terms, and even compared to an animal herself. Therefore she is no longer seen as human and cannot be a part of society.

Ms Havisham differs in some respects from Bertha. Especially at the start of the novel she stands in sharp contrast to Bertha because Ms Havisham is able to talk. She has the diction of a gentlewoman and has full control of her language skills. However, she refuses to talk to people. It is only after chapter 49 that she loses the ability to communicate with others. She is similar to Bertha in that her house has also been turned into a form of asylum for her. She stays in a dark room, far from other people residing in the house. However, Ms Havisham chose to lock herself in her room and kept herself in the nightmare of her failed wedding and actively avoids society. In terms of looks and behaviour Ms Havisham embodies the gothic characteristics of her character. She is considered not to be human, but something supernatural. At first she is compared to a vampire, but the image of a corpse is more persistent throughout the narrative. She continues to be represented as a corpse rather than a living human being.

## Chapter 2: The Neo-Victorian Novels

Society in the late twentieth century became very interested in the Victorian era. Its morality and society have been an interesting topic of research in the past decades. The Victorians have not only been of academic interest, but they are also frequently portrayed and discussed in popular culture. Over the last hundred years Victorians have been increasingly frequently rewritten and re-imagined by authors of fiction. This has led to the emergence of an entirely new genre: Neo-Victorian fiction (Hadley 1). The start of the genre has been subject to debate. Mark Llewellyn, for example, has suggested that “any text published after 1901 which is set in the Victorian period should be called a Neo-Victorian text” (qtd. in Hadley). However, most academics agree that the start of the genre should be considered the 1960s when Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) was published. It was not until the early 2000s that the genre became popular in mainstream culture. This was mostly due to the fact that prestigious literary awards such as the Man Booker Prize and the Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize were awarded to A.S. Byatt’s *Possession: A romance*. Since then the Man Booker Prize has frequently featured numerous books of this genre on both its long and short list (Hadley 2).

The Neo-Victorian genre very broadly defined by Louisa Hadley is “contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure or both” (4). The works produced in this genre are mostly pastiches of the Sensation novels of the Victorian era (Palmer 87). Besides the Sensationalist genre, Neo-Victorian writers also use the conventions of the nineteenth-century Realist novel to portray nineteenth century life (Wallace 166). This way authors bring twenty-first century insights into a nineteenth century setting and can comment on that society. These insights help “make explicit the buried subtexts of the original [Victorian] novels” (Wallace 166). Both Sarah Waters and Michel Faber are writers that operate in the Neo-Victorian genre in this way.

This chapter will analyse Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* and Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* in terms of language use, living accommodation and looks and behaviour, with the texts from Valerie Beattie and Sean Purchase previously explained, to examine how the mad characters (Sue Tinker and Agnes Rackham respectively) are incorporated in the societies portrayed in the novels. *Fingersmith* will be analysed first, followed by *The Crimson Petal and the White*.

## 2.1 Madness in *Fingersmith*

Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) is related to Victorian novels of the Sensationalist genre such as Mary Elizabeth Brandon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860). Parallels can especially be drawn with *The Woman in White*, because in both novels the main character of the narrative is wrongly imprisoned in an asylum. The novel was also influenced by the Gothic genre which tropes and devices help to expose and subvert certain histories and make them accessible to readers (Wallace 165). The mad figure in *Fingersmith* is somewhat different than those of the other novels in this thesis. Sue Tinker is wrongfully incarcerated in an asylum after she is enlisted in a plot to trick Maud Lily of her inheritance, however she finds herself wrongfully imprisoned in the asylum in Maud's place (Wallace 176). Her environment believes her to be mad and therefore she is useful for this research. In part three of the novel Sue's life in the asylum is described, thus this will be the only part of the book that will be used in this analysis.

### 2.1.1 Language

Valerie Beattie's article focuses on *Jane Eyre* in her analyses of language. However the semiotic theory of Julia Kristeva is at the base of her model. Beattie uses this theory of the semiotic in relation to madness and claims that they are both intrinsically connected (Beattie

496), as explained in the introduction. Therefore Beattie's theory of madness and language is applicable to other cases. In the case of *Fingersmith* part three of the book is very interesting. Sue - of course being sane - has her full language capability. She is able to speak perfectly clearly. However, the people around her think she is mad and therefore they either do not listen to her or pretend she is not speaking at all. The nurses for instance often speak over her words: "'Right in the face', said nurse Spiller, speaking across my words" (Waters 403). Everything she utters is seen as a confirmation of her madness rather than proves that she is sane. Especially at first when she is taken into custody does she strengthen the impression that she is mad. She only shrieks and trashes against the hold that the doctors have on her, when she tries to explain she has been tricked her words are ignored: "For God's sake', I cried. 'Won't you hear me? They've tricked me, they have tricked me- !'" (Waters 396). The nurse who is holding her sees this as a fit and hits her in her stomach, hard enough to knock the wind out of her. In this episode after first being ignored, she is then made to lose her voice so that she cannot speak anymore: "I could not tell them that I was not in a fit, but only winded ... that I was not a lunatic but sane as them" (396). Throughout the novel there are more instances in which the nurses literally take away her ability to speak; either by hitting her or threatening to hurt her. In this way she is bullied into silence and cannot speak the words she needs to speak in order to convince everyone she is sane. Besides the nurses the doctors also do not listen to her; when she tells Dr Christie that she is not Maud Rivers the doctor responds with: "'You are not ready to admit that you are Maud Rivers, hmm? That's quite a different thing'" (413). Because her husband Mr Rivers has said that she is mad, she is put away and everything she says, no matter how coherent, is no longer deemed plausible but are dismissed as the ramblings of a madwoman. This proves Beattie's theory that madness and language are interlinked. Once you were considered mad, your language capabilities were disregarded.

### 2.1.2 Accommodation

As Purchase has stated that living accommodations are important to analyse. However, rather than having Sue's own house function as an asylum for her, which was usually the case in Victorian novels, according to Purchase (95); the novel has chosen to put Sue in an actual asylum. The lunatic asylum in which Sue is incarcerated functions as a prison for her. The theme of imprisonment is important throughout all of Waters' novels and in *Fingersmith* it takes the shape of an asylum (Wallace 164). The novel combines this theme of imprisonment with Purchase's theory that a house functions as an asylum. As Sue starts paying attention to her surroundings in the novel she notices that the asylum was once an ordinary house: "and finally it broke upon me that this was the madhouse after all; that it had once been an ordinary gentleman's house" (Waters 408). In this way Purchase's theory, that the house functions as an asylum for women, has come to a literal fulfilment where a house is turned into an actual asylum. In addition to this she has described the asylum in such a way that it seems like a prison as well: "Some doors had locks. All the windows had bars on" (404). The fact that Sue is in an asylum already emphasises that she is far removed from society. However, even within the asylum itself, the mad people are removed from normalcy, because of the way the house is divided into rooms. Sue describes the room into which she is taken as "[The room] was not a proper room, but had been made by the building of a wooden wall, inside another ... The wooden wall had glass at the top that let in light from a window beyond it, but the room had no window of its own" (408). So within an already hidden away part of society, the rooms where the mad women are kept are not rooms at all, but manmade cells; a room built within a room. This description also strengthens the image of a prison, because the room has no windows of its own; thus making the mad people more isolated. Sue cannot look outside and neither can she see other people, save from the ones she shares her cell with. The fact that there is no window is also a means of preventing escape.

### 2.1.3 Looks and Behaviour

Finally, it is important to look at the looks and behaviour of a mad character.

However, officially Sue is not mad. Still her behaviour is very important to analyse. The interesting thing is that what convinces the doctors that she is mad is her sexuality. Mr Rivers tells the doctors that she has paid her 'maid' "gross attentions" (Wallace 181). These lesbian tendencies are what convince the doctors that she has to be incarcerated in the asylum. When she arrives at the asylum she is furious, because of the way she has been tricked. She becomes almost mad in her behaviour as she fumes over what has been done to her. For the duration of her anger (the first night in the asylum) there is an almost animal-like description of her: "My bare feet went slap, slap, slap on the oil cloth; and I put the glove in my mouth and I bit it" (401). After her anger fades she is no longer compared to an animal. She starts persuading the doctors that she is sane. However they do not believe her and that is when her behaviour starts to become more interesting to analyse. The longer she stays in the asylum the more she starts to lose herself. Her looks start to fit that of a mad person:

I looked, as the lady had said, like a lunatic. My hair was still sewn to my head, but had grown or worked loose from its stitches and stood out in tufts. My face was white but marked, here and there, with spots and scratches and fading bruises. My eyes were swollen –from want of sleep, I suppose – and red at the rims. My face was sharper than ever, my neck like a stick. (Waters 433)

Her behaviour also starts to change. She feels that the longer she is in there the more muddled her mind becomes. Eventually she cannot remember which day of the week it is and her memory starts to fade as she cannot remember the faces of her mother (Mrs Sucksby) or that of Mr Ibbs and even those of Gentleman and Maud fade. Interestingly at this point in the novel even the narrator starts to become unreliable. A certain fact is related and this is immediately followed by: "as I think I have said" (437). The narrator (Sue), is therefore no

longer reliable as a narrator because her own mind has started to become muddled. This has been done deliberately to show that even if you were not mad the lunatic asylum could make you mad in the end. So although her own behaviour is that of a sane person, the longer she stays in the asylum the more she starts to doubt she is in fact sane. She begins to act like the other mad women simply because that is the only thing she sees. In this way she enforces what the doctors and nurses already thought; that she is mad.

To conclude, Sue is not mad. The moment she is locked in the asylum her own voice becomes powerless and although she still has full command of her language capability, she cannot explain that she is sane and was tricked, because the doctors believe her to be mad. Her behaviour strengthens this impression at first because of her lesbianism, however the longer she stays in the asylum the more mad-like she becomes, because it is slowly driving her insane with its confines and almost prison-like interior.

## 2.2 Madness in *The Crimson Petal and the White*

Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) like *Fingersmith* also re-evaluates the Victorian period. It is already noticeable from the title that the novel is of the Neo-Victorian genre. It is a reference to the 1847 poem by Alfred Tennyson *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal*. This intertextuality already shows that the novel is connected to the Victorian period. It features madness in a different way from *Fingersmith*. The character of Agnes Rackham is in mad. She is the wife of William Rackham a middle-class perfume merchant. The novel gives the reader a reason for her madness; there is a tumour behind her eye and medicine was not advanced enough yet to discover this. This information is only divulged to the reader (Rieger 162).

### 2.2.1 Language

In her use of language it is at first not clear that Agnes is in fact mad. When following Beattie's theory of the relationship between language and madness she should be having trouble speaking. Yet, she has the ability to speak like a gentlewoman is expected to speak. However, as the novel progresses there are instances in which Agnes reveals trouble with correctly expressing herself. Often it is mentioned that some words elude her grasp. She cannot think of the correct word in the context and explains the word she means to say. For example, in one instance she says "brought higher... become more fashionable..", the word 'class' eludes her" (Faber 205). During conversations her trouble with conversing also arises. It is pointed out that she does not contribute much in a conversation: "'Yes, too kind', echoes Agnes, adding these three words to the approximately twenty she's contributed to the conversation ... She hasn't yet gained the knack of conversing with the world" (Faber 190). It is stressed here that she has trouble speaking with other members of society. The further the reader moves into the narrative the more Beattie's theory is proven correct. In Agnes' previous social season, as William Rackham explains to Sugar, she had been a disaster: "She laughed when there was nothing to laugh about, didn't laugh when there was. Shouted nonsense, warned people against invisible dangers. Crawled under a dinner table once, complaining the meat had blood in it. Fainted more times than I can remember" (296). Agnes in the novel's present time seems to want to avoid a similar experience in this social Season. This indicates that she is aware that her behaviour had been different from society's norm. So she trains herself in the art of conversing with Clara, her maidservant, and when the season starts it seems to be going well. However, as the narrative continues there are episodes in which Agnes is described speaking in a voice that is not her own. In this voice she insults people: "'You are fat and ugly and I never liked you,' the words ring out distinctly, in a harsh monotone unrecognisable as Agnes's, issuing from somewhere much deeper than her piccolo

throat” (393). Every time a scene such as this one occurs her voice is described as different from usual. It changes and becomes “a low, ugly voice” which William “has never heard from her before” (290). In her mad fits she uses a voice that is not her own, but it seems someone else’s entirely. Through this voice that is not her own, she alienates herself from society. She insults her hosts – which is an unforgivable act – and challenges her husband which does not fit the “angel of the house” image all Victorian women were supposed to adhere to (Braid, “Female Insanity” 140). Beside her spoken language ability the novel also notes her written language capacity. Sugar reads Agnes’s diaries and through those diaries it is revealed that Agnes suffers the same fits of language incapability in her writing as she does in her speech. For instance on page 528 Agnes is unable to start a passage in her diary. She started writing but stopped at “Dear Diary”; then she continued on a new page but again stopped after just one sentence; each time the last entrance is broken off mid-sentence.

### 2.2.2 Accommodation

With regard to Agnes’ living accommodation Faber adheres to the Victorian concept that Purchase describes in which the Victorian house becomes an asylum (95). She is mostly confined to her bedroom, where “the curtains are thick and almost always drawn” (Faber 155). The windows are always shut which makes the air stale and dense. In the narrative her room in the morning is compared to “the world’s smallest factory which has been working all night for no purpose but to turn oxygen into carbon dioxide” (203). Her bedroom is also removed from society much like an asylum. The house in which they live in general is not in London but in a village close to London; removed from London’s society. At the beginning of the narrative Agnes is still free to roam about the house. She can go where she pleases. Although, there are two doors that she may not enter; the doors to the nursery and Sophie’s schoolroom. “She wanders through the upper floors of the Rackham house, entering each

room except the Ones-Into-Which-She-Must-Never-Go” (Faber 288). She never goes in there but is free to wander about the rest of her house unencumbered. She is also allowed to go outside and move around in society during the Season. This is when she is still only occasionally suffering from mad fits. It is only when she becomes a burden to William and her antics no longer fit that of a respectable housewife that William decides to restrain her. She has become a monster in his eyes and needs to be contained for her own safety (Braid, “Monster/Angel” 6). At first he uses medicine to subdue her. When that no longer works he plans to literally imprison her in her bedroom by keeping the door locked. ““You mean you want – uh, the plan is.. for Agnes to be kept a..’, she swallows hard ‘locked up in her bedroom?’” (Faber 649). The servants and Sugar are very opposed to this idea and this makes William decide she has to be put into an actual Asylum. However, she escapes before William has the chance to actually remove her to an asylum, thus giving her some agency as a mad person.

### 2.2.3 Looks and Behaviour

With regard to her looks Agnes is described as the perfect Victorian ideal: “She is a paragon of porcelain femininity, five foot two with eyes of blue, her blonde hair smooth and fine, her mouth like a tiny pink vulva, pristine” (Faber 130). However as Barbara Braid suggests she is also possibly anorexic, which strengthens the idea that she is ill (4). Her behaviour is very volatile as William explains to Sugar ““The thing that puzzles me most, is that she changes from day to day. Some days she’s as normal as you or I, then suddenly she’ll do or say something wholly outrageous”” (Faber 295). During her mad episodes or fits she often swoons, in these instances she is described as a non human entity. After one episode she is described as “lying not in her usual swoon of decorous recline, but in a twisted rag-doll sprawl of slack limbs and exposed petticoats” (Faber 290). In another instance she is

compared to a bead “sliding along a string, her progress unnaturally straight, unnaturally rapid” (240). Another scene describes her eyes as “flipped open like a doll’s, animated by the electric change in atmosphere” (130). Each time she is almost doll-like, but definitely not human. An interesting observation that William Rackham makes in the novel regarding his wife’s behaviour is the following; “If there’s one thing that did his wife’s mind no good at all, it was giving birth to Sophie” (Faber 607). Agnes completely ignores the existence of her child, and refuses to see her. In her behaviour this makes her resemble Lilith, according to Braid (5). She rejects motherhood which is far from the Victorian ideal; motherhood was a woman’s single purpose (Braid, “Monster/Angel” 5). She not only refuses to accept motherhood, she also rejects the norms of society. She rejects her family and family values and consequently isolates herself. The fact that she does not trust men is also a cause for her isolation. She has been bullied by both male characters she comes into contact with (Braid, “Female Insanity” 141). She therefore instructs Clara to “aid and abet her mistress in the disobeying of all orders given by those two evil men, doctor curlew or William Rackham” (Faber 157). This again goes against societal values and further estranges Agnes.

### 2.3 Conclusion

After the analyses of the characters Sue Trinder and Agnes Rackham, of *Fingersmith* and *The Crimson Petal and the White* respectively, it is now possible to draw conclusions based on the three features on which they were analysed. These three features will then create an insight into how these characters are part of the portrayed society and thus answer the question that this thesis has posed.

Sue Trinder although not mad herself, is believed to be mad by her environment. This causes her voice to become powerless. Although she has the language capability of a sane person, the doctors disregard her speech as a madwoman’s ravings. Therefore she cannot

communicate with her immediate society and is thus unable to explain her situation. She is locked up in an actual asylum, far removed from any respectable society. The asylum, a converted gentleman's house, is turned into a prison for the lunatics kept there. Thus turning Purchase's theory into fact as the house is literally converted into an asylum for women. Although it is an asylum the building has prisonlike qualities; barred windows, locked doors and no windows in their rooms. These features all help to remove Sue even further from society as there is no connection accessible for her to the outside world. The most interesting part of the novel is that the longer Sue stays in the madhouse, the more she starts losing herself. She eventually starts acting like the other madwomen in the asylum. This removes her even further from society as she would not have remembered how to act in society if she would have stayed there much longer.

Agnes Rackham is mad, although she has occasional bouts in which she is perfectly normal. These bouts can be seen most clearly through her speech and writing. She is able to converse at times perfectly clearly, but at other times she is unable to remember certain words or she starts insulting people in a voice unlike her own. This removes her from society as she is displaying unacceptable behaviour. The house she lives in becomes an asylum for her, in which she is locked up in her darkened bedroom. The further her malady progresses the more she is kept in that room, especially when she becomes uncontrollable for William. Her bedroom is also removed from society much like an asylum. The fact that she keeps her windows and curtains shut also removes her from society as there is no chance of her looking outside and no chance of anyone looking in. Finally in her looks and behaviour she is described during her mad fits as something inhuman as William often describes her as a doll. Overall during these fits she is not seen as human and therefore is not a member of society. The fact also that she rejects societies values such as motherhood and her wifely duties make

her stand apart from society. By rejecting its values she also rejects the society and thus isolates herself.

In conclusion, Sue Trinder and Agnes Rackham are different characters but because they are mad (or seen as mad) their society has put them at the margins. Sue is literally removed to an asylum, whereas Agnes is removed by rejecting her societal values. She insults her hosts and rejects motherhood which cause society to reject her.

## Conclusion

After the analyses of the four novels and thus four characters (Bertha, Ms Havisham, Sue Trinder and Agnes Rackham) it is now possible to draw conclusions based on the three features on which they were analysed. All four novels were analysed through a close reading on three specific points. These points came from Sean Purchase and Valerie Beattie and to an extent Allen Beveridge. Purchase theorized that the living accommodation of lunatics was an important feature. This would reveal how the lunatics were treated: whether they had their own space or were locked up and removed from society. Beattie used the theory of the semiotic from Julia Kristeva and adapted it to her own view to create a theory that language and madness have an intrinsic relationship. This would show how lunatics were able to communicate with other people of their society. Finally Beveridge specifically detailed how looks and behaviour were important for Victorian novels. Purchase also touched upon this briefly which is why this was the third feature that was used in this thesis. From the analyses detailed in the previous chapters it is now possible to answer the question posed by this thesis: How do early to mid-Victorian novels portray mentally ill people as part of society compared to Neo-Victorian novels?

From the analyses detailed in the previous chapters evidence has been found that indicates that the early to mid-Victorian novels portray their mad characters at the margins of society. Bertha and Ms Havisham are both not involved in their respective societies. They are secluded through their accommodation and are unable to communicate through their impaired speech, in the case of Bertha no speech at all is possible. Finally, they are both described in non-human terms. Bertha has become an animal in Jane's descriptions, while Ms Havisham has taken on the guise of a corpse. In both cases they are not described as human which makes it impossible for them to be part of society. The curious case is that it seems Ms Havisham has done this voluntarily. She has secluded herself after her jilting at the altar and actively avoids

adult society. Bertha, however, has not chosen this. She is forcibly locked away in an attic room like a shameful secret.

The Neo-Victorian novels challenge the Victorian novels in their portrayal of the mad characters. The mad characters Sue Trinder and Agnes Rackham do not fully fulfil the criteria to be deemed completely at the margins of society. They have their language abilities to a certain extent; and thus are able to communicate with society. They are relatively normal in looks and behaviour. However, as Agnes's illness progresses she slowly starts fulfilling the criteria. She insults people and thus starts alienating herself from society. In her mad episodes she is described as a doll rather than a human being. Sue on the other hand is not mad, but because society thinks she is, she is ignored by her environment; her words mean nothing more than ravings of a mad woman. The longer she spends in the asylum the more her behaviour changes and becomes mad-like.

In addition to this evidence from the criteria on which the novels were analysed, there is the fact that the characters in the Victorian novels are also marginalised in the narrative itself. Bertha and Ms Havisham only have a minor role; they mostly function as plot devices, especially Bertha. Throughout the novel she is only used to bring Jane and Rochester closer together. Ms Havisham has a slightly larger role, but still she remains a very minor character. So as well as being at the margins of their portrayed society, they are also at the margins of the narrative itself. However, the Neo-Victorian novels differ greatly from the Victorian novels in this respect. Instead of marginalising the characters they bring them to the forefront. These novels give a voice to mad characters and give them agency which they did not have in Victorian novels. We get an interior look into these mad characters. Instead of madness being a shameful secret that is hidden away in a version of an asylum or used as a gothic element, the mad characters are brought into the light to be examined and commented on.

The theoretical framework used for this thesis worked well for the Victorian section. It was more difficult for the Neo-Victorian section. The sources detailing madness in Victorian novels were usually novel specific and thus secondary literature instead of theoretical works, this made them unsuitable to be used for the Neo-Victorian novels. For the Neo-Victorian novels it was difficult to find works researching madness or analysing mad characters, as the focus of Neo-Victorian studies lies mostly on sexuality. There was simply very little theoretical work on Neo-Victorian novels dealing with madness. So although it was difficult to apply the Victorian criteria to the Neo-Victorian novels it was a conscious choice. It was necessary to be able to compare how Neo-Victorian works comment on Victorian works.

The research has brought up a number of points which would be interesting topics for further research. In the case of the Victorian novels there is the question whether close proximity to a mad person can influence a character. *Jane Eyre* for instance features Grace Poole, who is in close contact with Bertha as her keeper, and seems to be distanced from society herself. In the case of *Great expectations* Estella is the one that is in close contact with Ms Havisham and also seems influenced by it. A further research could examine how exactly these characters are influenced and whether they too find themselves somewhat removed from the portrayed society.

For the Neo-Victorian novels the issue of sexuality is mostly researched. There is very little done about the aspect of madness itself, so this would be a field of research that can be explored further. Another suggestion for further research for Neo-Victorian novels is how madness and sexuality are linked. The mad women treated in this thesis do not exhibit sexual deviant behaviour excessively, except for Sue. So a suggestion for further research would be to compare Sue Trinder to Sugar from *the Crimson Petal and the White* and research whether Sugar should be seen as a madwoman instead of Agnes, because of her sexual deviance.

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