



Neo-Victorian Madness

Rediagnosing Nineteenth-Century
Mental Illness in Literature and Other Media

Edited by
Sarah E. Maier
Brenda Ayres

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macmillan

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Sarah E. Maier
University of New Brunswick
Saint John, NB, Canada

Brenda Ayres
Liberty University
Lynchburg, VA, USA

ISBN 978-3-030-46581-0 ISBN 978-3-030-46582-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46582-7>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Robert J. Moore who granted us permission to use his painting *Ophelia Surfacing* on our cover.

We are so grateful for the pioneering work in neo-Victorianism, starting with David Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff in 2000 who published a collection of essays, *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*. Peter Widdowson in 2006 called it “re-visionary fiction,” Sally Shuttleworth in 2006 labelled it “the retro-Victorian novel,” Cora Kaplan in 2007 called it “Victoriana” and preferred the term “Neo-Victorian” and Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in 2010, liked “Neo-Victorianism.” Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss published an invaluable collection in 2014 titled *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. In that volume, Marie-Luise Kohlke referred to “neo-Victorian’s shape-shifting” (2) and asserted that we were currently busy tapping into the “cultural gold rush vein of neo-Victorian literature” (21). There have been others, too, who have asked why we are rewriting the Victorian past, but no one has analysed what specifically neo-Victorian is doing to correct the Victorians’ perceptions about mental illness. This is what *Neo-Victorian Madness* has attempted to do.

We want to express our great appreciation for the contributors of this volume: Marshall Needleman Armintor, Barbara Braid, Rachel M. Friars, John Murray, Kate Faber Oestreich, Tim Posada, Olivia Tjon-A-Meeuw and Eckart Voigts.

Ayres wants to thank the generosity of Penn State's library that loaned her hundreds of books and articles in order to do this project.

Aside from always being grateful for the support of Violet & Gido, Maier would like to acknowledge her indebtedness to several people for her interest in neo-Victorian madness and the history of hysteria, including Juliet McMaster, Elaine Showalter and Naomi Schor; and to Christine Coleman for teaching her the difference between *savoir* and *connaître*.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Marshall Needleman Armintor is Principal Lecturer in English at the University of North Texas. His research interests are primarily in twentieth-century British literature and critical theory, especially psychoanalysis; his book *Lacan and the Ghosts of Modernity: Masculinity, Tradition, and the Anxiety of Influence* (Peter Lang) was published in 2004. He has taught a wide range of courses at UNT since 2003, with topics ranging from graphic novels, to James Joyce, to Victorian literature and to videogame narrative. He maintains a blog on theory, neo-Marxism, and art in the age of late capital at posthegel.com.

Brenda Ayres is the coeditor of this volume and has coedited several past collections of essays with Sarah E. Maier, the most recent being *Neo-Gothic Narratives: Illusory Allusions from the Past* (2020); *Animals and Their Children in Victorian Culture* (2019) and *Reinventing Marie Corelli for the Twenty-First Century* (2019). She edited *Victorians and Their Animals: Beast on a Leash* (2019) and *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century* (2017). *Betwixt and Between the Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2017) is her latest monograph.

Barbara Braid earned her Ph.D. degree at Opole University, Poland, and currently holds a position of Assistant Professor and Deputy Head at the Institute of Literature and New Media in Szczecin University. Her most recent publications include: “The Frankenstein Meme: *Penny*

Dreadful and The Frankenstein Chronicles as Adaptations” in *Open Cultural Studies* 1 (2017) and “A Psychiatrist as a Detective: Laszlo Kreizler, Stratham Younger, and Max Liebermann” in: *Victorian Detectives in Contemporary Culture: Beyond Sherlock Holmes*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. She is currently working a monograph on female insanity motifs in Victorian and neo-Victorian novels.

Rachel M. Friars is a Ph.D. student at Queen’s University. Her dissertation centres on neo-Victorian lesbian narratives and nineteenth-century lesbianism, with a particular focus on the ways in which female authors construct a revised sexual history of the Victorian age. Her research areas include Victorianism, neo-Victorianism, Charlotte Brontë, queer theory, gender theory and lesbian and trauma studies.

Sarah E. Maier is the coeditor of this volume and Professor of English & Comparative Literature at the University of New Brunswick. With Brenda Ayres she has coedited *Neo-Gothic Narratives: Illusory Allusions from the Past* (2020); *Animals and Their Children in Victorian Culture* (2019) and *Reinventing Marie Corelli for the Twenty-First Century* (2019). Most recently, she has published extensively on the Brontës; edited special issues on *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* and *Neo-Victorian Considerations; Charlotte Brontë at the Bicentennial*; and published articles on biofiction and neo-Victorian narratives. Her current interests include neo-Victorian Young Adult Narratives and redheads.

John C. Murray is a professor of English and has served as Co-chair of the Humanities Division and Coordinator of the Department of English at Curry College. He teaches courses in British literature and film and novel. He published *Technologies of Power in the Victorian Period* (Cambridge, 2010), as well as numerous chapters, articles and reviews for Lexington Books, the *Journal of Literature and Science*, the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, *Nineteenth Century Studies* and *The British Society for Literature and Science Book Reviews*. He was recently appointed to serve as assistant book reviews editor for *The British Society for Literature and Science* website.

Kate Faber Oestreich is Associate Professor of English at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina. She and Jennifer Camden have coauthored a book titled *Transmedia Storytelling: Pemberley Digital’s Adaptations of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley* (2018). She has published four articles: “Deviant Celibacy: Renouncing Dinah’s Little Fetish

in *Adam Bede*” in *Straight Writ Queer: Non-normative Expressions of Heterosexual Desire in Literature*, edited by Richard Fantina (McFarland, 2006), “Gothic Remediation: *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Monk*” in *The College English Association Critic* (2011); “Sue’s Desires: Sexuality and Reform Fashion in *Jude the Obscure*” in *Victorians Institute Journal* (2013) and “‘Orlando About the Year 1840’: Woolf’s Rebellion Against Victorian Sexual Repression Through Image and Text” in *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* (2016).

Tim Posada is Chair of Journalism and New Media at Saddleback College. His writings have appeared in *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Palgrave Communications* and in volumes on film theory, digital media, comics studies, race and gender in speculative fiction and on the hysteria trope. He contributed a chapter on male hysteria in horror cinema for Leuven University Press’ forthcoming *Performing Hysteria*. He is currently working on a book for Lexington Books/Fortress Academic on depictions of the body, soul and spirit across popular culture. Posada holds a Ph.D. in cultural studies from Claremont Graduate University, where he wrote his dissertation on the emerging language of superhero media. He also serves as film columnist for the *Beverly Press*.

Olivia Tjon-A-Meeuw is a doctoral candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Zurich, where she is working on her dissertation on the intersection of race and sexuality in a British-Caribbean context in both Victorian and neo-Victorian narratives. She holds an M.A. in English Literature and a B.A. in English Linguistics and Literature from the University of Zurich. Her other research interests include feminism, gender and fan fiction.

Eckart Voigts is Professor of English Literature and Culture at TU Braunschweig, Germany and former President of CDE (2010–2016). He is the coeditor of *Companion to Adaptation* (Routledge 2018), *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* (WVT, 2015), and a special issue of *Adaptation on Transmedia Storytelling* (OUP, 2013). From 2016 to 2019 he was co-PI of a research project on “British-Jewish Theatre,” and from 2019 to 2022 he will be co-PI of the research project “Automated creativity in literature and music” (both funded by Volkswagen Foundation). The author of several research papers on neo-Victorianism, he also coedited *Reflecting on Darwin* (Ashgate, 2014) and *Transforming Cities. Discourses of Urban Change* (Winter, 2018).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Neo-Victorian Maladies of the Mind

Brenda Ayres and Sarah E. Maier

In any given university in 1990, clusters of graduate students were discussing *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) alongside *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and pondering the parallels between Charlotte Brontë's Bertha and Jane as drawn by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and their composite daguerreotype of oppressed women everywhere (356–62). In Gilbert and Gubar's words: "Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End)" (339). Gilbert and Gubar pitched Bertha as Jane's evil or, to use their term, the "monitory image" of Jane (361). Perhaps Brontë was simply being "Victorian" in depicting a Creole as the uncivilised, demonic, sensual woman who must be suppressed and harnessed, a dangerous creature who must be locked up in the attic of any proper woman's being, but for those doctoral candidates who were hot on the trail of postcolonial atrocities, this treatment would not do.

B. Ayres (✉)
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, USA

S. E. Maier
University of New Brunswick, Saint John, NB, Canada

The scholarship of the nineties was on a feminist cusp of rewriting great wrongs to women and championing writers like Jean Rhys who adjusted the cosmos by giving voice to the female, Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.¹ Rhys' was a more "authentic" story that had once been silenced by Brontë, that unwittingly imperialistic coloniser from the moors even if she herself had been an oppressed woman. Rhys gave voice to one of the most famous sulbaltern of all literature, Bertha. In Rhys' account, the Creole woman's confinement in the attic was not to be construed as the unfortunate trial for the impotent and to-be-pitied Edward Fairfax Rochester and the hapless impediment to the happiness of one long-suffering white, British governess, Jane Eyre. Rhys described the purloin of Antoinette's name and identity as the beginning of a woman's forced descent into darkness, a usurping of persona that led to her insanity, imprisonment and death. Bertha/Antoinette was the casualty from a collision between cultures in which the man had the power of the coloniser, and the woman had no power, not only because of her gender but also because of her race. Never did this attic inmate get to say with Jane's hope, happiness and promise of a happy-ever-ending, "Reader, I married him"; rather, for Antoinette Mason, he married her and stole her future. If she ever did say it, think it or hope it, savvy modern readers would only shake their heads and murmur, "Poor subaltern."

Little did those graduate students think that one day, someone like Sarah Shoemaker would rewrite the stories of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Mason Rochester from a sympathetic point of view of the quintessential patriarchy I bully, Mr. Rochester, which ends (before the epilogue) with "Reader, she married me," spoken humbly, gratefully and sincerely (2017). Those graduate students in the nineties would not have read anything yet that clearly articulated postfeminism as a consideration of gaps, contradictions and what Amelia Jones would argue to be a "monolithic entity" (1994, 57) of second-wave feminism. Doubtlessly they would not have thought about privileged patriarchy as a system that could and did disfranchise, marginalise and silence a white, British gentleman of property and wealth such as Edward Rochester. Neither would they realise that a new genre of literature was being hatched that would be designated "neo-Victorian." They would have still been wrestling with a definition of Victorianism.²

Inclined to reject any scholarship by men from earlier decades, nevertheless, those students would have appreciated that Jerome Hamilton Buckley still carried vital currency when he made a statement in 1951

that it was impossible to define “Victorian.” He suggested that Victorian explorers work with a term that was even more slippery but could serve as an approximation, and that is “Victorianism,” foregrounding the unknowability and variation in post-Victorian understandings of the past era.

The students might have deferred to that Victorian of Victorians, Charles Dickens, who attempted to describe his time in what would become one of the most well-known introductions of any novel:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, *the period was so far like the present period*, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (1868 [1859], 1; emphasis added)

A Tale of Two Cities opens in 1775 with this metafictional introduction in its looking back to another era that can speak to the same problems that irritated the Victorians. Clearly, paradoxes detected by Dickens in his own age are captured in Buckley’s definition of Victorians who were

torn by doubt, spiritually bewildered, lost in a troubled universe. They were crass materialists, wholly absorbed in the present, quite unconcerned “with abstract verities and eternal values”; but they were also excessively religious, lamentably idealistic, nostalgic for the past, and ready to forego present delights for the vision of a world beyond. Despite their slavish “conformity,” their purblind respect for convention, they were, we learn, “rugged individualists,” given to “doing as one likes,” heedless of culture, careless of a great tradition; they were iconoclasts who worshiped the idols of authority. They were, besides, at once sentimental humanitarians and hard-boiled proponents of free enterprise. Politically, they were governed by narrow insular prejudice, but swayed by dark imperialistic designs. Intellectually and emotionally, they believed in progress, denied original sin, and affirmed the death of the Devil; yet by temperament they were patently Manichaeans to whom living was a desperate struggle between the force of good and the power of darkness. (2–3)³

Another male scholar with currency in the nineties was Gordon Haight. Since graduate students in America usually teach lower-level classes, they might have read to their classes from *Portable Victorian Reader* (1972) Haight's own struggle with defining "Victorian": "The time is long past when *Victorian* meant everything prudish, sentimental, and conventional. Now that we know more about them, we can see that the surface of respectability the Victorians presented was often only a protective convenience covering feelings and conduct not unlike our own" (xi). Haight knew that the Victorians, in general, were not what they seemed. To study them invites the utilisation of tools of theory that operate like those under a magnifying glass: the scalpel, the tweezers, the file, or maybe more like the pick shovel or, more drastically, the sledgehammer or even a jackhammer. To exhume the Victorians then and now requires digging. Dickens certainly warned us that when it came to the Victorians, "All that glitters is not gold," as Shakespeare whispered from his grave.⁴ In *Our Mutual Friend*, readers are thrice removed from seeing people as they really are; they are told to view "the company" in "The great looking-glass above the sideboard" that "reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy—a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs. Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap" (1884 [1864], 11). Significantly, in the world of the Veneerings, "All things were in a state of high varnish and polish" (6). With the reflection in the looking-glass and the veneer that covers a multitude of sins, compounded with the story told through a narrator who is doing the looking, and with the story being read by a sesquicentennial or so later, it is no wonder that in this novel no one knows who anyone truly is. The looking-glass and rear-view mirrors⁵ necessarily both reflect the readers even though they seek clarity of the human condition from another time or place.

Identities and their portent of outcomes were even more mystifying in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a novel that Linda Hutcheon described as "historiographic metafiction," identifying it as "intensely self-reflexive yet paradoxically also lay[ing] claim to historical events and personages" (1988, 5). William Stephenson, in the 2007 introduction to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, explains the novel's literary strategies as "refusing to maintain a veneer of realist illusion or to

end in a decorous Victorian manner, it challenged the narratives handed down to it that explained how things ought to be (and how stories ought to end). At the same time, though, it retained many of the characteristic features of great nineteenth-century novels” (2007, 13). He points out the similarities between the problems that the Victorians faced and those that plagued the 1960s (13–14). The very present narrator of the novel tells the reader that Sarah was “given the veneer of a woman” and that she judged people as if they were “fictional characters” in a novel by Sir Walter Scott or Jane Austen (48). The reader can then expect multiple distortions coming through multiple reflections that lead to multiple, complex, postmodern possible endings through the narrator, through the character, through the character’s perceptions of fictional characters, through Victorian sensibilities as understood by a man writing in the 1960s and through the author’s sensitivities about issues in the 1960s, all combined to question our own perceptions of reality and our Victorian precursors. According to Christian Gutleben, neo-Victorian narrative “echoes the ethos of postmodernism” in its reconstitution of the Victorian “historical period: the different, and sometimes contradictory, visions and versions of the facts signal and essentially contingent and possibly unattainable conception of historical knowledge” (1994, 140). That is, perhaps, why we find it so compelling—the multiplicity of possible knowledge outcomes and alleys of investigation for issues of neo-Victorian representations of madness.

Thirteen years ago, Peter Widdowson wrote, “It is surely a truism by now to remark that large swathes of British ‘contemporary fiction’ by a diverse range of authors ... are in fact ‘historical’ novels of one kind or another” (2006, 491). Historical novels make up the bestselling genre for contemporary readers, and of those, the Victorian historical novels sell the most (Heilmann and Llewellyn 27). Widdowson’s term for them is “re-visionary fiction” (491) with writers not interested in “destroying myths and illusions about the past,” but rather in “using fiction as history to explore how the scars of the past persist into the present, how the past’s presence in the present determines the nature of that present” and if not that they may be “in fact making displaced and oblique comment on their own present by ironically counterpointing it with the past” (492). He theorised that we scholars believe that “canonic texts from the past” are “central to the construction of ‘our’ consciousness” (491).

The year of 1990, when graduate students began their interest in neo-Victorianism, whether they realised it or not, was also significant for

the appearance of A. S. Byatt's *Possession*. Her novel spawned a "veritable deluge of Victorian-centred novels currently being published in the British Isles," which Sally Shuttleworth termed "the retro-Victorian novel" (1997, 259). Although crediting *Possession* as the inaugural novel for this genre, Shuttleworth focused on a "literary subset," the natural history novel such as Byatt's *Angels and Insects* (1993) and Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1998), while listing their progenitors as *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). The popularity, Shuttleworth claimed, corresponded with "the current upsurge of interest in the Darwinian revolution [as] a displacement of current fears concerning the indivisibility of man and machine onto the no longer threatening relationship between human and animal life" (259).

Our "modern obsession with things Victorian" continued into the next century (Kaplan 2007, 1). "Victoriana," Cora Kaplan asserted, is "a British postwar vogue that shows no signs of exhaustion" (2); further, she defined it as the "self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire, as well as challenges to the conventional understandings of the historical itself" (3), noting the genre "has become so capacious and lucrative that it contains many mini-genres, including pastiche, Victorian crime fiction and mass-market romance" (88).

Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn have provided the seminal definition of this genre of narratives. In their *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009*, the two scholars perceive neo-Victorian literature to be more than historical fiction in encompassing texts ("literary, filmic, audio/visual") that "*self-consciously engage with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (2010, 4). Part of their neo-Victorian project is to address the question of how Victorian novels are relevant to the twenty-first century (3). They assure us that "re-reading and re-writing" the "Victorian experience" is what neo-Victorian writers do and "is something that defines our culture as much as it did theirs" (4). They warn against generalising "Victorian" as a "homogenized identity" (2). Indeed, several subgenres have now been identified as further means to particularise a scholar's inquiries.

Their treatise identifies "the ontological and epistemological roots of the *now* through a historical awareness of *then*" (4), addressing questions "relating to the aesthetic, ethical, metafictional, and metacritical parameters of their own acts of (readerly/writerly) appropriation" (4). Many

neo-Victorian works offer an “alternative view of the nineteenth century for the modern audience” (7). Some of them “correct aspects of the Victorian age, or the Victorians’ attitudes” (8). Heilmann and Llewellyn ask if neo-Victorian works are “mimicry or pastiche” (27) and, significantly, whether or not these texts succumb to nostalgia. In one way they are exactly this when one considers that we moderns deal with some of the same challenges and issues that the novels attempted to address, and therefore, we “seek a textual salvation in mimicking them as a salve to our (post)modern conditions” (27). Nevertheless, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous statement still holds true, that “Each age, it is found, must write its own books.”⁶ Neo-Victorian works may be set in the nineteenth century, but their creators and readers seek remedy for present woes, and to use a wonderfully Dickensian word, perspicacity.⁷

The term “neo-Victorian” first appeared in Enoch Arnold Bennett’s novel, *The Twain*, the third in a series titled *The Clayhanger Family*, published between 1910 and 1918. *The Twain* begins with the setting, 1892 in “Bleakridge, residential suburb of Bursley” (1916, 1),⁸ and immediately establishes a motif that will weave through the series: rapid change that contrasted old Victorian culture with “neo-Victorian” preferences. In 1892 the town was “still most plainly divided into old and new,—that is to say, into the dull red or dull yellow with stone facings, and the bright red with terra cotta gimcrackery” (1). Significantly, metaphorically, Bennett writes, “like incompatible liquids congealed in a pot, the two components had run into each other and mingled, but never mixed” (1). Much later, Auntie Hamps, who is very much the “old Victorian” who is dismayed “that the world would never stand still” (108), visits her niece’s house where the drawing room is very modern: “It quite ignored all the old Victorian ideals of furniture; and in ignoring the past, it also ignored the future. Victorian furniture had always sought after immortality. ... But this new suite thought not of the morrow; it did not even pretend to think of the morrow. ... Whereas the old Victorians lived in the future (in so far as they truly lived at all), the *neo-Victorians* lived careless in the present” (108; emphasis added). Bennett is using “neo-Victorians” to represent the *fin-de-siècle* Victorians. However, his sense of “Victorianism” holds true for contemporary books, film and media set the nineteenth century, with continued awareness of a “world that is too much for us,” as William Wordsworth lamented in 1802, along with nostalgia for a “simpler” past, along with an optimistic zeal for the future with faith in modern ingenuity and technology to solve the problems of the present. Therein lies

“the affective dynamics” of writers’, readers’ and viewers’ “compulsive recycling of Victorian material” (Kaplan 15), on one hand—such as the stone architecture in Bennett’s Bursley and the “immortal” furniture of Auntie Hemps’ ideal Victorian drawing room, in contrast to the “terra cotta gimcrackery” and the rinky-dink fabrication of the neo-Victorian (Bennett 108)—and on the other hand, a “transformation of the Victorian past” that is “permanently restless and unsettled” (Kaplan 3) that characterises a rewrite of the Victorian, or simply put: Victorianism versus neo-Victorianism. To borrow another metaphor from Bennett, the authors of the essays in *Neo-Victorian Madness* separate the “incompatible liquids,” of Victorianism and the neo-Victorianism, in their diagnoses of mental illnesses in the nineteenth century.

It may be worthy to note that the term “mental illness” was not concocted by any alienist (from the French, meaning one who heals the “insane”) or psychologist or psychiatrist (from the Greek, meaning one who gives medical treatment of the soul) or any other physician. Emily Brontë invented it in *Wuthering Heights*, when Nelly argues with Heathcliff about his insistence upon seeing Catherine Linton, lest it “create a favorable crisis in Catherine’s mental illness” (1858 [1847], 135). Besides documenting the historical past and its cultural idiosyncrasies, as is the case here with Brontë’s insight, literature often engenders history.

None of this discussion explains why we are so fascinated with the Victorians, that we keep reading the works published in the 1800s, rewrite them, imitate them, write sequels in the twenty-first century and watch movie after movie about those Victorians. Just how many remakes of *Jane Eyre* do we need and for what reason? “Victorian novels helped us evolve into better people,” so says psychologists interviewed by Ian Sample in *The Guardian* (2009). He deduces that Victorian novels not only iterate “values of Victorian society, they also shaped them,” adding, “Archetypal novels from the period extolled the virtues of an egalitarian society and pitted cooperation and affability against individual’s hunger for power and dominance” (quoted in Heilmann and Llewellyn 1). Sample seems to assume that all Victorians held the same values and virtues, and if that is so, a postmodern readership might simply discard them but still hope to find answers and appropriation for

overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of the environment and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations

of law and authority; science and religion; the postcolonial legacies of the empire. In the rewriting of the omniscient narrator of nineteenth-century fiction, often substituting for him/her the unreliable narrator we have recognized as common to appropriative fiction, postmodern authors find a useful metafictional method for reflecting on their own creative authorial impulses. (Sanders 2016, 129)

Victorian angst and mental illness—caused by rapidly changing technologies, uprootedness, moral relativism, situation ethics, unstable social ethos, expanding global awareness—have persisted into our current age. The Victorians did not understand the mental effects of such instability. Much of what they did suspect or were coming to learn about mental illness, they felt was improper to discuss. They believed that acceptable social behaviour was what separated humans from animals. Those individuals who did not act rationally or conform to social norms did not know how to control the animal within and therefore, deserved to be treated no better than most animals, and that is to be beaten, restrained, locked away and kept out of sight lest their moral decline pull down others or their degeneration be contagious. Those persons with a “pathology of the mind,” as the British psychiatrist, Henry Maudsley, diagnosed it,⁹ would include the mentally ill, the insane, the autistic, the “sexual deviant,” the depressed, the melancholy, the people with Down syndrome, the rebellious wife and a host of others perceived to be socially marginalised—they were simply silenced and locked away.

This lack of knowledge, awareness and recognition of mental conditions is one of the reasons that neo-Victorian novelists and filmmakers have been revisiting the nineteenth century—to correct that lapse. Following their lead, the authors of *Neo-Victorian Madness* have purposed to increase literary scholarship by scrutinising neo-Victorian perspectives in literature, television and film on mental illness. Why is it important for a contemporary reader or viewer to compare attitudes towards mental illness written in the nineteenth century to those portrayed in the nineteenth century by twenty-first-century writers? Earlier literature teaches us how *not* to treat those who diverge from the conventional norm as well as how to help those men, women and children who are in pain. By studying Victorian and Neo-Victorian narratives, we are investigating and untangling the web of depression, addictions, insecurities, anxieties, neuroses, psychoses and other troubling behaviour and torment that has ensnared many a modern.

This is a project of urgency. According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), “there are 192 drug overdose deaths every day” in America (“Drug Overdose Deaths” 2019). The problem seems to be the worst in the United States but not exclusively so when the World Health Organization reported that in 2015, 450,000 people died from drug use worldwide (“Management of Substance Abuse” 2018). In 2017, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, there were 1,400,000 suicide attempts, making suicide the “10th leading cause of death in the US.” The site lists a staggering 47,173 suicides in 2017 (“Suicide Statistics” 2019). “Close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year,” the World Health Organization reports, adding that there is a death by suicide “every 40s.” WHO estimates that for every death, there are 20 others who attempt suicide (“Mental Health: Suicide Data” 2009). These are just some of the extreme results of mental illness. Studies reveal that in the United States, nearly half of all adults will suffer from a mental illness during their lifetime and that 5% of the American adult population suffer from mental illness each year, to a figure of 43.8 million people, but only about 41 percent receive “professional health care or other services” (Kapil 2019). One out of every five people experiences mental illness in the world or about 970 million with women outdistancing men (Ritchie and Roser 2018). As of September 2, 2019, there were 37,866 gun-related incidents in the United States that resulted in 9987 deaths with over 285 mass shootings (“Gun Violence Archive” 2019), with 22 school shootings (Lou and Walker 2019). The median age of school shooters between 1982 and 2018 is 21 (Brown and Goodin 2018, 1385). Youth depression in America has increased 8.2% in the last five years (“The State of Mental Health in America” 2018, 4). America is not the only mentally disturbed place in the world; the news constantly reports on genocides and all manner of horrible killings perpetuated by the mentally ill.

Although not the only source for mental struggles, stress and trauma are common triggers in the modern world beginning with the Industrial Revolution. The American sociologist Kai Erikson defines “trauma” as “a violent event that injures in one sharp stab, while ‘stress’ refers to a series of events or even to a chronic condition that erodes the spirit more gradually” (1994, 230). He adds this about “trauma” as distinguished from “stress”: “trauma can issue from a sustained exposure to battle as well as from a moment of numbing shock, for a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single searing assault, from a period of severe

attenuation and erosion as well as from a sudden flash of fear” (230). Christian Gutleben and Julian Wolfreys are more specific in their definition where “trauma has to be redefined” because it must include “the effects of the loss of a unified self mirror those of the more conventional sense of trauma, which likewise produce a radical disjuncture in selfhood, between the self before and after, with intrusive flashbacks, nightmares and involuntary body memories resisting any subsequent regained sense of wholeness and integration” (2010, 42). In a recent survey of America, 60% of all men and 50% of all women between the ages of 15 and 54 have suffered some form and degree of trauma (Vickroy 2015, 7). “Examining fictionalized trauma scenarios,” Laurie Vickroy suggests in her *Reading Trauma Narratives* (2015), “allows the development of insights into subjective endurance, crisis, and conflict and shows that the defensive responses of trauma link many types and degrees of wounding, informing a common humanity” (2). In this collection, we are mindful that supposedly “whereas the disturbed nineteenth-century psyche constituted the exception ... the traumatized subject now assumes the position of the contemporary norm” (Kohlke and Gutleben 2010, 3). The writers of the chapters in this volume are ethically cognisant and respectful of the representation of marginalised, traumatised disruptions into and through some of the most popular neo-Victorian novels and films with the intention that such a study will increase awareness about mental illness and promote well-being.

Useful to such a study are recent considerations of Victorian psychology. Following the early, important work on the construction of female hysteria done in *The Female Malady* by Elaine Showalter (1985), Jane Ussher, for one, has written three excellent books: *Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (1991), *Managing the Monstrous Feminine* (2006) and *The Madness of Women* (2011). Very helpful are Lisa Appignanesi’s *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (2007) and the essays from Jonathan Andrews and Anne Digby’s *Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: Perspectives on Gender and Class in the History of British and Irish Psychiatry* (2004). *Neo-Victorian Madness* will look not only at female (mis)treatments but also male, as well as insane asylums and medical men in general. Two sources relevant to the first are Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore’s essays in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* (2004) and Valerie Pedlar’s *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (2006). The latter topic is contextualised by Kathryn Burtinshaw and John R. F. Burt’s *Lunatics, Imbeciles*

and *Idiots: A History of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (2017). Catharine Coleborne's medical knowledge is invaluable in her analysis of literary work that conveys the trauma of colonisation and immigration (2007 and 2015).

The critical significance of this collection is that it interrogates neo-Victorian representations of perceived receptions of moral insanity, mental illness, disturbed psyches and non-normative imaginings. It also addresses important issues of legal righteousness, social responsibility and methods of restraint and corrupt incarcerations.

Chapter 2, "I Am Not an Angel: Madness and Addiction in Neo-Victorian Appropriations of *Jane Eyre*" is Kate Faber Oestreich's analysis of the neo-Victorian transmedia series Nessa Aref and Alysson Hall's *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* (2013–2014), Margot Livesey's *The Flight of Gemma Hardy* (2012) and April Lindner's *Jane* (2010). She underscores how female characters who suffer from substance use disorders are understood to be mad, revealing anxieties specifically centred on women, sexuality and motherhood. These women are scapegoats, releasing the community from responsibility to protect them due to the perception that addiction is a form of insanity. This stigma runs deep enough to justify first neglecting and then murdering female characters who are addicts, whose deaths enable the romantic consummation of the heteronormative couple.

While the neo-Victorian madwoman has been extensively criticised, many scholars tend to analyse her presence in fiction alongside the isolation and silence in which she typically exists. Instead Rachel M. Friars and Brenda Ayres concentrate on both the neo-Victorian madwoman and her nurse as physical emblems of "the fundamental alliance between 'woman' and 'madness'" (Showalter 3). Assaying Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) and Sarah Shoemaker's *Mr. Rochester* (2017), Chapter 3 concludes that the female/female bonds and power dynamics established between the neo-Victorian madwoman and her nurse(s) illustrate the position of the madwoman as a "failed but heroic rebel" (Showalter 4) through her refusal to conform to social and patriarchal gender norms and place the nurse in a conformist, carceral space.

The fourth chapter, "The Daughters of Bertha Mason" by Olivia Tjon-A-Meeuw, reminds us that the madwoman is a recurring motif in the writings of Caribbean women, starting in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but Rhys is by no means the last to do so. As Kathleen J. Renk points out in *Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts* (1999), Bertha Mason reappears

in various texts (1999, 88). According to Renk, “this focus on female and colonial madness challenges the nineteenth-century discourse that positioned the madwoman and the colonies as loci of uncontrollable sexuality equated with a madness that must be controlled by paternal surveillance and governance” (89). In her neo-Victorian text *Strange Music*, Laura Fish combines the two approaches. In a story that includes two Afro-Caribbean women, the text disputes the nineteenth-century notion that madness is somehow inherent to black women in the tropics (Renk 93). Instead, the text supports Renk’s claim that Caribbean madwomen are “grounded in the earthy pain of racial and sexual exploitation” (93). The trauma of white paternal power, exerted in a way that it only could have been on the bodies of black women, is the cause of madness rather than the cure.

By altering “the past to suit current purposes” neo-Victorian novels act as “cultural doppelgängers of the Victorian Age” that both “mimic and challenge the discourses of the nineteenth century” (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014, 2). In their *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (2014), Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss insist that the term, “neo-Victorian” must include contemporary popular works that might not satisfy any academic status as “high brow,” and should include those books that are set in the Regency period, as were Austen’s books.¹⁰ In fact, instead of the term “neo-Victorian,” Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss prefer the term “neo-Victorianism” (3).

Marie-Luise Kohlke agrees with their theory of what and how contemporary Victorian tales deserve theoretical exploration; she deems it an “academic pitfall to deal with canonisation with debate of high and low culture exclusivity and inclusivity” (2014, 3). The Neo-Victorian needs to be “suitably elastic,” she says to represent the “shape-shifting” and “protean” reconstruction of the Victorian past in contemporary fiction (27). The canon is only one issue in selecting works to consider; there is a “problem with time and geography,” she says (27). Is “Victorian” restricted to just the British, given the fact that at the height of the British empire, its territory consisted of 13,700,000 square miles (Bowman 1922, 14) and 412 million people, ten times the population of Britain itself (Angus 2001, 97)? The United States, no longer a British colony, still uses the term “Victorian” to describe a style of its architecture and other arts. Aligning herself with Herbert J. Gans who calls

for a “cultural democracy and cultural pluralism” (1999, xi), Kohlke suggests that the “neo-Victorian” encompasses “texts that highlight the nineteenth century as the advent of modern-day globalization, migration, and networks of cultural exchange, via increasingly interdependent economies and markets—literary, mercantile, criminal—subverting the very possibility of categorical cut-offs for the Neo-Victorian novel at arbitrary national borders, which even in imperial Britain’s case, were already permeable and often in flux” (28). Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss add to this argument that the Victorians themselves had a mirror perspective of themselves, as Dickens illustrated in *A Tale of Two Cities*, of looking to the recent (and sometimes distant) past to compare themselves with then and now (5–6). Neo-Victorianism should include popular works, neo-Austen and multi-media (3).

Likewise, then, it is appropriate to include at least one chapter in *Neo-Victorian Madness* on neo-Regency works. Mary Balogh may be considered “too popular” to be on the academic radar, but she has published more than 60 novels and 30 novellas and has appeared more than 35 times on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. She was first inspired by the novels of Jane Austen and then by Georgette Heyer. With her first publication of *The Black Moth* in 1921, Heyer has been credited as the inventor of the historical romance and one of its subgenres, the Regency Romance (Regis 2003, 125–26). A. S. Byatt was so impressed with Heyer’s work that she wrote one article asking why she is so good (1992, 239) and extolling her works as “An Honourable Escape” (1992). She also wrote an article titled “Georgette Heyer is a Better Novelist Than You Think” (2001).

Similarly, Brenda Ayres values the work of Mary Balogh, in Chapter 5, “A Necessary Madness,” in particular, Balogh’s literary therapy of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although the Victorians typically romanticised war, Balogh’s bestselling novels, which are set mostly in the early nineteenth century, did not. Beginning in 2013, Balogh produced eight books that comprise the Survivors’ Club series and probe nearly every aspect imaginable of war-related PTSD. Without sentimentality, Balogh divulges the topsy-turviness and untidiness of war’s aftermath on commissioned officers from the Napoleonic War. Furthermore, her plots offer resolution, healing and hope, not only for her characters but also for her readers who may be suffering from PTSD or who knows someone afflicted by PTSD. Even though Balogh foregrounds PTSD caused by the Peninsular Wars, she concurrently draws parallels between it and

other forms of PTSD caused by behaviour and events that were also forbidden subjects to be discussed during the nineteenth century, such as spousal abuse, abandonment of a child by an alcoholic parent, Down syndrome, bankruptcy through gambling, psychological damage from social and familial rejection, rape, spousal infidelity, miscarriages, death of a spouse, death of a child, homosexuality and the inability of women to follow their dreams and hearts or to have a means to provide financially for themselves and children. Although such themes do appear in Victorian novels, they are not treated with the psychological insight and the possibility of recovery apparent in Balogh's novels.

Eckart Voigts bridges madness as it was depicted in the nineteenth century with a contemporary understanding of mental illness. Chapter 6, "Unreliable Neo-Victorian Narrators, 'Unwomen,' and *Femmes Fatales*: Nell Leyshon's *The Colour of Milk* and Jane Harris' *Gillespie and I*," opens with a reminder that as Gothic horror stories proliferated in the Victorian era, mad and unreliable narration became a standard device—from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Robert Browning's "mad" dramatic monologues in "My Last Duchess" or "Porphyria's Lover" (Rohwer-Happe 2011) to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Somewhat over-represented, madness has also been a staple of neo-Victorian narratives, whose "refashioning of the Victorian madness topos" (Kirchknopf 2008, 71) regularly features hysterical women and mad scientists. Even *Wide Sargasso Sea* seeks to redress the literary fate of the "madwoman in the attic" in *Jane Eyre* by reassigning narrative agency. While a frequently gendered revision of lunacy is thus a core concern in neo-Victorian narratives, Chapter 6 discusses questions of its reliability. Starting from the assumption that the unreliable narrator fulfils essential functions in Gothic and neo-Victorian tales of repression, memory and identity (Smith 2013, 188), Voigts argues that assignments of "madness" frequently seek to clarify the contemporary attitude vis-à-vis the Victorian Gothic scenarios. This chapter addresses questions of unreliability and insanity in texts such as Nell Leyshon's *The Colour of Milk* (2012) and Jane Harris' *Gillespie and I* (2011).

In Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), mental extremity takes on multiple forms in such figures as the extended cast of neo-Victorian types railing against grinding urban poverty. Chapter 7, "'Dear Holy Sister': Narrating Madness, Bodily Horror and Religious Ecstasy in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*" by Marshall Armintor, examines the layers of anxiety and insanity in both Faber's

novel and Munden and Coxon's adaptation, tied to the procreative and sexed body and the struggles of the female subjects in the Rackham orbit to seize and stabilise the narrative over those bodies. Faber's mental extremity takes on multiple forms in such figures as the extended cast of neo-Victorian types railing against grinding urban poverty. The many intertextual references woven into the book and also films (*The Exorcist*, *Clarissa* and *The Woman in White*) underline the struggle to make sense of the mania of life in the London of the 1870s. Even though each of the women in this novel are destined for some kind of narrative oblivion (whether through desertion, watery graves, or the threat of the asylum), each overcomes their confinement and trauma through madness.

Tensions between the Victorian and neo-Victorian emerge in the space between the sensationalism of ideologies in the nineteenth century and the modern understanding of people and concepts in the twenty-first century. At no point is this tension better realised than between the salacious incarnation of the "mad person" and the hard reality of mental illness. Elaine Showalter posits that the fictional nineteenth-century madwoman is representative of the "author's double" or "the incarceration of her own anxiety and rage" (1994, 4), and is, in fact, an "unconscious form of feminist protest" (5); however, in the context of the neo-Victorian novel, when not only madwomen but all women have "taken up residence in the front room" (52) of social, political and ideological discourses around sexuality and gender, one might ask how unconscious does this "feminist protest" remain, and what does the neo-Victorian madwoman and her relationships represent in a temporal period where rage is no longer unconscious?

In the nineteenth century, the most common diagnosis of women's "maladies" was called "female hysteria." As for functions of the woman's reproductive system, it simply was not proper to discuss such things. In general the many euphemisms boil down to "the unmentionables."¹¹ In Chapter 8, "The Unmentionable Madness of Being a Woman," Brenda Ayres tracks the attitudes of the Victorians during the nineteenth century to menstruation, puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum depression, sexual desire and menopause. Sarah E. Maier then analyses how *Ripper Street*, the BBC UK/Amazon series that ran for five seasons from and 37 episodes from December 30, 2012, to October 12, 2016, infuses contemporary awareness and sensitivities in contrast to Victorian ignorance of women's bodies and their minds. More significantly, Chapter 8 emphasises that Victorian perceptions of women and their sexual apparatus and

functions might have been defined by the best medical minds of the day, but in truth they were driven by patriarchal political ideologies meant to keep men in power in both the private and public spheres. Neo-Victorian narratives expose that agenda, rebel against it and give voice to what really was behind all that insanity experienced by our Victorian mothers and sisters.

The Victorian madwoman (and especially a hysterical woman) has been a feminist icon in feminist criticism, but as noted by Marta Caminero-Santangelo in *The Madwoman Cannot Speak* (1998), female madness constitutes an inherent paradox: The subversiveness of a madwoman is paired with her inability to express herself, her lack of language and retreat into the world of fantasy. This paradoxical failure of the madwoman as a rebellious ideal maybe, with the use of queer theory in line with Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), transformed into a sign of refusal to conform. This "embodiment of failure," the madwoman's lack of (coherent) language may instead represent the rejection of the logocentrism and coherence of the heterosexual matrix, as Barbara Braid argues in Chapter 9, "Queering the Madwoman." Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1997) is a neo-Victorian biofictional novel about a nineteenth-century murderess. Grace's "inability to speak"—fragmentation, instability and incompleteness of her narrative—is what makes it queer; its queerness is based in its refusal to be within the doctor-listener's/reader's grasp. Grace's (mad) story, via its narrative "failure" to offer a linear, coherent account, becomes the epitome of queer subversiveness. The chapter also discusses the television adaptation of the to examine alternative techniques used in the adaptive medium to express the instabilities and the incoherence of the self, and to examine if Grace Marks of the television show is also, indeed, a (queer) madwoman. Like Judith Butler's drag queen/king, who destabilises the assumptions of "true," coherent gender identity via imitation, parody and excess (2004, 52), a madwoman performs a similar role, undercutting the possibility of a self in general and a gender self in particular, working to "displace all certainty and especially to displace norms of identity" (Beasley 2005, 102).

Finding a kindred spirit in a closeted gay by the name of Dorian Gray, Vanessa Ives fractures the Freudian depiction of Victorian women as frivolous, unintelligent and in need of more masculine traits. In the Showtime television series *Penny Dreadful*, Tim Posada in Chapter 10 perceives a woman who is not powerful because she acts more like a man—a common convention in action films that merely make women just as violent