

A Study on Madness through Victorian Literature

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Abstract:

The Victorian era is characterized by its great technological as well as scientific advancements, which will eventually have a significant impact on society. This paper will explore the representation of *madness* through different Victorian works, specifically, “Green Tea” by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Woman in White* by William Wilkie Collins. The aim of this essay is to understand how authors made use of the complexities of the mind in order to criticize Victorian society and the new anxieties that emerged among the population. This will be accomplished through a close reading of the three narratives, taking into consideration the historical background. The analysis will begin with an introduction to the Victorian era and the rise of *madness*, it will continue with the body which will be divided into three different aspects—all supported by scholars—and it will finish with an overall conclusion, which suggests how this use of *madness* in gothic literature was purely a coping mechanism for the authors who feared the unknown. Furthermore, it will function as a means of criticizing the highest moral values that characterized the period.

Keywords: Madness, Victorian era, Green Tea, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson, The Woman in White, William Wilkie Collins, mental illnesses.

Introduction

This essay explores the representation of madness in Victorian literature; nevertheless, to understand this portrayal it is important to acknowledge the contextual background, which will be analyzed in the introduction. During the Victorian period, there were technological and scientific advancements; these contributed to a profound interest as well as a significant increase in psychology. The impact that this new world of the unknown had on society will be compiled in *The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, edited by Andrew Scull. This book is essential in this field of study in order to understand what was occurring at that time due to the fact that it investigates madness and the influence that it had in an era in which civilization was ruled by the highest moral values. Hence, *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen. The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era* illustrates the origin of this characteristic scientific period of the Victorian era; the creation of asylums

which were also known as madhouses, specialized doctors who were referred to as mad-doctors and their therapies, as well as their patients and the reaction of Victorian society towards these intricacies of the mind. In this paper this work will also be of immense importance because it will contextualize the environment in which the authors who will be mentioned subsequently created their narratives and characters. Therefore, to a certain extent, it is important for the purpose of understanding, not only the context in which these narratives were written but also the narrative itself.

Furthermore, in the body of this essay, the main works will be presented; “Green Tea” by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Woman in White* by William Wilkie Collins. The body will be divided into three parts, in which each narrative will be analyzed, taking into consideration fundamental concepts for the understanding of my thesis as well as the support of it. Consequently, considering the context of the Victorian era and the emergence of madness, as well as characteristic elements of the Gothic and how authors combined these two in their narratives, what I intend to demonstrate at the conclusion of this essay is how writers applied madness as a tool to cope with the unknown and alleviate the anxieties and terrors which were increasingly getting more prominent. Firstly, “Green Tea” by Le Fanu will be explored, which is an essential narrative in the study of the representation of madness in Victorian literature. This work portrays a character who is driven mad, nevertheless, this apparent madness mirrors the need to relieve Le Fanu’s apprehension, therefore, he applies madness as a coping mechanism. To understand this work and the use of madness in detail, Swedenborgianism is a fundamental concept to take into consideration; this religious movement supports a spiritual world in which the spiritual interconnects with the material (Donovan 1993, 732). In this section, *Jewett and Swedenborg* by Josephine Donovan and *Swedenborg: The Savant and the Seer* by William Barrett will be pivotal as they examine the origin of Swedenborgianism as well as what this movement involves. In this essay, these two works will help give meaning to the connection between the material body and the spiritual, soothing Le Fanu’s anxieties. Secondly, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Stevenson will be presented which contributes significantly to this field of study. Stevenson also presents madness through his characters, nonetheless, within this framework, madness functions as a criticism towards Victorian society. In this segment, two important concepts will be essential to the understanding of the analysis; *id*, *ego* and *superego* by Sigmund Freud and atavism by Cesare Lombroso. On the one hand, the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* support the idea that our inner selves were divided into different functions that were balanced with each other. To explore this hypothesis *An Introduction and Brief Overview of Psychoanalysis* by Martin Tarzian *et. al.* will be key since it examines this Freudian theory and its implications, investigating it in greater depth. On the other hand, atavism implies the reappearance of ancestral physical and psychological features and this theory will be investigated in *The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson’s “Jekyll and Hyde”* by Stephen Arata. These two works will bring a remarkable approach to the narrative because they will portray Hyde’s character, offering a simultaneous framework for understanding his persona. Finally, this paper will examine *The Woman in White* by Collins. On

this occasion, Collins depicts a feminization of madness – which will be referred to as gendered madness – as a means of controlling, therefore, in Collins’ narrative, madness also functions as a tool for criticism. In this last section, *Wilkie Collins’ Challenge to Traditional Female Roles in The Woman in White* by Lisa Pagander will be of relevance since it explores the role of the Victorian woman, interpreting society’s expectations from them. Consequently, this work will illustrate the environment in which these characters develop and the values by which they were governed.

Lastly, this paper will be completed by reinforcing my thesis with the conclusions that summarize and discuss the main aspects of each work. It is important to note that these studies contribute to recognizing the influence that Victorian literature, specifically the topic of madness, has had in other movements. For instance, in Modernism there is a rejection of the Victorian morals, however, there is also a significant change of character which is notably more complex. This change begins in the Victorian period with these narratives and characters that are written mad. Furthermore, madness in literature functions as a bridge between the present and the past, hence, these portrayals explore the evolution of mental illnesses and our behaviour towards it. The understanding of how these have developed throughout the years anticipates modern concerns. Accordingly, this essay contributes to the study of madness as a literary tool that not only allows the author to express their anxieties and criticize Victorian society, but also allows us to understand the context in which these works were written and how they documented the development of mental illnesses as we nowadays know and psychology.

During the Victorian era, *madness* was in everybody’s spotlight. This unusual and odd behavior outside what was considered habitual at that time frightened society but somehow, it also intrigued it. Psychology started to gain importance as a science and the human mind opened up to a vast and unknown world full of complexities that only became more and more complicated as the years went by. With fear among the multitude, asylums were created and doctors treated their patients fascinated with a glimpse of what they had yet to discover about the human mind and its intricacies. And at the end of each diagnosis, with no clear answers that will come after decades of study and analysis, the conclusion was always the same: *madness*. However, although it scared many, it also mesmerized others, as in the case of some of the authors that will be covered throughout the essay, who along with the paranormal and the bizarre, explored this new “mental illness,” trying to understand the human mind and how it fitted into society and its norms. But why did *madness* get deep inside their heads, fascinating them to such an extent?

In the nineteenth century, *madness* was progressively diagnosed as a recognized mental illness in need of a treatment by professionals legally authorized (Scull 6); nevertheless, there still remained a slight belief dating back to the eighteenth century that believed *madness* as a lack of rationality and sometimes, as a persistence of a moral evil (Bennett 2015, 2). There were different terms other than *madness*, such as insanity, to refer to it, being *madness* the most common among the professionals, however, nowadays, some of these are seen as controversial (Bennett 2015, 2), probably as a result of the negative connotation these words carried socially.

With the embrace of this new approach, one of the Victorian medical perspectives on mental disorder might be characterized as an understanding of dualism serving as a practical measure to evaluate physical and mental health and thus, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, physiologists and medical experts that used to call themselves mad-doctors gained acceptance for *madness*, as well as for hysteria and many others as pathological phases of psychophysical interaction (Clark 1981, 274). Nevertheless, psychology was at its peak and many other theories were being developed by doctors intrigued by this new science, as in the case of the neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who was one of the founders of the psychoanalytic perspective, in which he claimed that childhood restrained memories influence the behavior and emotions of a human being (Tarzian *et al.* 2023, 2). For Freud, the inner self of each person was divided into the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* (Craig 2012, 14), the *id* symbolizing the primitive instincts, the *superego* the assimilation of social standards and principles and the *ego* the rational part of the psyche which functions as a moderator between the *id* and the *superego* (Tarzian *et al.* 2023, 3), therefore, if there was an imbalance between these three roles, there was a change in behavior, which was considered unusual and inappropriate. Nonetheless, many of Freud's studies are now considered controversial but they contributed to the foundation of modern psychology and the interpretation of the human mind (Tarzian *et al.* 2023, 2).

Soon, this new interest towards the human mind began to create questions outside the scientific field, encompassing basic concepts that maintained order; for instance, in reference to the law. The statute of “moral insanity” was created and, somehow, protected the accused, where the will was contemplated to be corrupted but not the intellect, victimizing the accused (Evans 2023, 642). However, Europeans did not consider non-Europeans as equals, thus defying this new law and the morals of the British Empire. And with all these new queries, *madness* was not only racialized but gendered as well. According to Tasca *et al.*, women's own nature was *madness*; they were judged as weak and therefore prone to be influenced by mental illnesses (qtd. in Amaya Pérez 2021, 15). Nowadays, there are several theories as to why women were associated with insanity; some academics assert that they were more prone to *madness* because they were objects of a patriarchal society, others believe that it was a way for women to protest and finally, there are some who argue that it was a method to punish those who decided to break away from their social roles and rebel (Harper 2024, 1). Consequently, since there was already an established connection between women and *madness*, those who stood up and decided to challenge, as mentioned above, the societal roles, were immediately recognized as madwomen; even those who were supporters and promoters of the Women's Rights movement were labeled as mentally unstable (Harper 2024, 2). In addition, in Victorian times there were many mental disorders that were affiliated to a specific gender, one of the most well-known was hysteria, which was the most usual disease associated with women, although some men were also diagnosed with this illness but the cases were few (Harper 2024, 8-13).

As a result, with all the new patients that were emerging and the need to have control, doctors began to search for solutions, creating varied potential treatments to cure these diseases that were still unknown. At the beginning of the 19th century, there were devices that today would be regarded

as inhumane, such as the rotation chair, created by Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) (Bynum 1981, 34–37). As a result, later on, what was known as Moral Therapy developed, where the patients and their minds were tried to be manipulated with kindness and reasoning, rather than with fear (Bynum 1981, 37). Nonetheless, there were many other cures depending on what the doctors believed they were treating. For example, Thrailkill argues that for those women who suffered from *hysteria* there were several options, such as the Rest Cure, which consisted in restraining women from stimulating physical and mental activities (qtd. in Craig 2012, 36). The center of attention of this treatment was the body, because it was assumed that if the physical form was rested, so was the mind (qtd. in Craig 2012, 36). Mitchell contends that some women felt restored after the therapy but some others felt that it was merely a punitive treatment (qtd. in Craig 2012, 37). In opposition to this cure, Fee alludes that there was also the Drug Therapy which, as its name implies, medication – as sedatives or stimulants, etc – were administered, depending on the disease experts believed the patient had (qtd. in Craig 2012, 8). However, if no changes were observed after this therapy, they considered the option of hospitalization in an asylum (qtd. in Craig 2012, 8).

As it has been mentioned, this new science and all that it entailed, such as *madness*, was a matter that frightened some, intrigued others and fascinated many more. It was far from being an easy subject and as it has been observed in the course of history, experiments were conducted in order to find a way to deal with it. During the Victorian era there was a very conflicting attitude towards the mentally ill (Beveridge and Renvoize 1988, 411). As already shown, *madness* was usually racialized, gendered, and sometimes even associated with social class, therefore, there was a negative connotation towards this new disease. Consequently, McCandles states that Victorian society wanted to separate the insane from those they regarded as “normal,” but at the same time they were terrified of accidentally locking up by mistake those who were actually sane (qtd. in Beveridge and Renvoize 1988, 411). That is the reason why one of the most significant social responses of the time was the establishment of asylums (Beveridge and Renvoize 1988, 411). In addition, a study from the Victorian era revealed that society repudiated this disease, yet they felt some innate concern (Beveridge and Renvoize 1988, 413). The complexity of the human mind was a new and overwhelming concept that not many understood, thus different reactions were unleashed at all levels and extremes. Furthermore, as it was being increasingly studied and analyzed, *madness* seemed to be spreading, however, mental illnesses were simply being visibilized, therefore there was an interiorized fear of falling into what was known as insanity. Many experienced *madness* directly, some of whom were writers who lived the rise of this illness closely (Beveridge and Renvoize 1988, 411). Given the importance of this illness and how it affected society, it is easy to comprehend why authors wanted to write about it and understand it through their novels. As a result, they combined the supernatural and bizarre with all the theories that were coming out about the human mind, playing with their narratives in order to understand it better and even criticize the societal values of the Victorian era.

In this essay, three important works of some of the authors that were affected by this

significant era of study – the mind and its intricacies, – where *madness* was seen as a widespread illness, will be discussed. It will begin with “Green Tea” (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873), continuing with *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) and it will conclude with a piece that represents *madness* as a gendered disease, *The Woman in White* (1860) by William Wilkie Collins (1824–1889). These authors managed to represent madness differently in an attempt to express themselves. Each of these stories will be analyzed in order to understand what they intended to express and the purpose they were seeking to obtain.

Madness in the spiritual world of “Green Tea”

“Green Tea” by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu first appeared in four installments in *All the Year Round* in 1869, which was the magazine of one of the most significant authors of the Victorian Era, Charles Dickens (1812–1870). However, years later, in 1872 “Green Tea,” alongside four other short stories by Le Fanu, one of the most famous being “Carmilla,” was published in its entirety in his book *In a Glass Darkly*. The narrative takes a journey through *madness* – as it was understood during that period – blending, as it has been mentioned above, both the bizarre and the complex dynamics of the human mind. As mentioned above, many authors experienced *madness* at firsthand, and Le Fanu is no exception since Susanna Bennett Le Fanu, his wife, died in 1858. The cause of her death is unknown; however, her health had deteriorated due to a neurotic illness she was suffering from (Hughes 2005, 51). The death of Susanna marked a turning point in the writing of Le Fanu, who ended up isolating himself, eventually reflecting this in his later work.

The novella begins with the discourse of Dr. Martin Hesselius, a physician who postulates Metaphysical Medicine, holding that medicine navigates beyond the material, taking into consideration the spiritual world and the life that it has on its own. Dr. Hesselius believes that the material body, as he names it, is only a vestment. Accordingly, the death of one is only the death of said vestment, the spiritual persisting in the existence of it, therefore, life continuing now without the vesture. He supports this idea endorsing the concept of Swedenborgianism, a religious movement in which the spiritual world is acknowledged, the spiritual interconnecting with the material (Donovan 1993, 732). This new movement that emerges as a more optimistic view than what was the dominant belief in New England (Donovan 1993, 732), concluded that death was not an abrupt end but the continuation of the present life; therefore, the semblance of the elements of that spiritual world that is acknowledged, is the same as in the material life, so it is not really possible to distinguish the detachment from the material body (Barrett 1912, 36). As a result, Dr. Hesselius treats Mr. Jennings, a character that appears to suffer from an unknown illness, based on these ideas and beliefs. A small black monkey appears to Mr. Jennings, but he is the only one who can see it and feel the presence of it. That is the reason why, after these hallucinations grew constant, the monkey becoming more aggressive each time, he decided to ask the doctor for help. At this point of the story, when these visions are being described, this integration of the paranormal and strange, as well as the doctor’s theories of *madness* based on Metaphysic Medicine, start to be carried out. Nowadays, there

are a whole range of diagnoses that match Mr. Jennings' condition quite closely. Perhaps, he would be diagnosed with psychosis, which could stem from mental disorders such as schizophrenia, since he shares some of the symptoms that are usually associated with this state of mind; including delusions and hallucinations, in fact, the distortion of reality is a shared characteristic among psychotic symptoms (Gaebel and Zielasek 2015, 9). However, this possible explanation is far from being the one discussed in this story. It seems that the main problem lies in the green tea that Mr. Jennings has been drinking in order to focus on his work, since, according to the basis of the medical theories, not only Dr. Hesselius but also Mr. Jennings believes that tea has only worsened his mental health. This hypothesis should not be dismissed because during the nineteenth century, there were varying medical warnings suggesting that the ingestion of tea could have an effect on the nerves, as well as the mind (Dickson 2017, 81). In the following excerpts, it can be seen how the plot revolves around this fluid, later on creating hypothesis based on it:

I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so, I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure. I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea—green tea—every now and then as my work proceeded. (Le Fanu 2008, 22)

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. This fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found on the masses of brain or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectually established. (Le Fanu 2008, 39)

However, the doctor goes further on his explanation and based on his metaphysical assumptions, he states that, as seen in the last extract, the abusive ingestion of this liquid connects us with the spirits. Namely, this fluid, by influencing the nervous system, causes the consumer to lose the balance between body and spirit, making it vulnerable to the world of spirits. Consequently, the doctor believes that Mr. Jennings opens an inner eye, hence, in a way, green tea functions as a bridge between the material world and the spiritual. And although the rise of the term *madness* was the result of this new interest in psychology that is displayed in “Green Tea” by Le Fanu, at no point, the clergyman Mr. Jennings is considered mad or mentally ill. Perhaps, it is due to the fact that the case is treated from a professional standpoint, in a more spiritual point of view by Dr. Hesselius, in which there really is not an imbalance in the mind of the clergyman, but rather between the material and spiritual world caused by the opening of a third eye. Thus, Mr. Jennings is able to see beyond – this spiritual world that Swedenborgianism may refer to – what can be seen with ordinary vision. Thence, Le Fanu tried to understand the complexities of the mind connecting it to the spiritual world and observing the relationship between mind and spirit. This may be a result of a lack of answers that were being sought during the Victorian era. To some extent, this connection

demonstrates the desperation as well as the anxieties that not only Le Fanu but other authors were feeling in the expectation of getting answers that had yet to be explored. In addition, the monkey that Mr. Jennings sees may symbolize death itself and how the human being cannot escape this natural force that somehow ends up finding a way to do its job, for instance, in the following passage, the monkey follows him insistently, lurking:

This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me, on top of the wall. I stopped, looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it.” (Le Fanu 2008, 32).

However, Le Fanu also creates a fine line between life and death that could be supported by the Swedenborgian and Metaphysical ideas presented in the story, perhaps trying to give some meaning to death by connecting it to the spiritual – the afterlife – lowering the tyranny of death to a more bearable idea. Some scholars believe that the ape represents the darwinian discourse that had emerged during that era and some consider that it is a representation of repressed emotions, such as guilt. Furthermore, this apparition of a darwinian monkey could also represent repressed sexual desires (Dickson 2017, 78). Griem elucidates that these “monkey stories” originate from the need to contain those sexual impulses that are considered primitive (qtd. in Dickson 2017, 88). Therefore, in this case, the monkey embodies the clergyman Mr. Jennings’ repressed sexual desires, becoming a symbol of shame and remorse (Dickson 2017, 88). Nevertheless, it is claimed that this is not so, but that is rather a representation of the concern that Le Fanu had about Swedenborgianism after the death of his wife (Hughes 2005, 51), reinforcing the idea of the search for some significance in the death, believing in another world and in an afterlife. In addition, Le Fanu’s belief in another world that intervenes with this one, is prompted by these Swedenborgian ideas already exposed in some of his short stories, including this one, in which evil spirits from the other world threaten God and man’s relation; this credence was also evoked by the Irish folklore, such as entities like the fairies (Shaw 1989, 194). Thus, it can be inferred that Le Fanu did believe in this other world.

The role of Dr. Hesselius is also very important since it makes possible a reconciliation between fact and fiction, connecting the scientific world with the spiritual one. The doctor is a character who, despite his professionalism, feels sympathy for his patients, as in the case of Mr. Jennings. He could be considered the model doctor of the Victorian era, as he had a great fascination with the human mind and its intricacies, as well as the spiritual and, in his case, how they connect. But as it was usual during this era, doctors dismissed mental health as *madness* and Dr. Hesselius does the same by dismissing the struggles of Mr. Jennings as a hereditary suicide mania; Mr. Jennings had an inherent genetic tendency towards suicidal behavior, according to the doctor, as it shows the following extract: “His case was in the distinctive manner a complication, and the complaint under which he really succumbed, was hereditary suicidal mania.” (Le Fanu 2008, 40)

In conclusion, as it will be seen in other gothic authors, some of whom will be mentioned, such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu employed the characteristic supernatural

elements of the Gothic, as well as all these new ideas that were emerging to calm his anxieties. Le Fanu's beliefs of another world, as well as death as a continuation of the present life, represent the apprehension he felt. As a result, he relies on Swedenborgian ideas and the Metaphysical Medicine he introduces with Dr. Martin Hesselius. He was a man burdened by the death of his wife, Susanna, who was personally affected by this new disease, deeply affecting him and his writing. Le Fanu, with many unanswered questions, tried to find a way to connect and redeem death by finding a significance in it. In some way, he needed to find a connection between the material and the spiritual to fill the void and uncertainty left by death, specifically the emptiness left by the death of his wife. So, by representing *madness* in "Green Tea," his sole purpose was to understand this connection of the material and spiritual world and what lies beyond death, in order to search for meaning in life – and death – after the passing of his wife.

Madness in the duality of The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The first edition of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson was published in 1886 by Longmans, Green & Co. in London. The tale explores *madness* through the duality of man by implementing the unusual while experimenting with the new realities of the human mind in the process. Robert Louis Stevenson suffered from different chronic physical illnesses and in his maturity, these were mainly respiratory, experiencing repeated episodes of it (Guttmacher and 2000, 63). This degenerative condition, will later lead to a premature death. In "A Chapter on Dreams" (1892), one of his essays, explains how a vivid dream of the kind that he used to have materialised into *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He had always been captivated by dreams, which had been haunted by nightmares caused by his illness since he was a child; for Stevenson, these dreams were vital to his writing career as they shaped his literature (Coelho 2023, 62). Therefore, these disease-induced night terrors were of utmost importance to his writing and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is no exception. That is the reason why, this story is surrounded by a dismal atmosphere, as if it were a fever dream (Lutz 2021, 13).

The tale begins with a third-person narration of Mr. Utterson's viewpoint, who is a respectable lawyer in London. At the beginning of the plot he learns of the existence of Mr. Hyde, who has been embroiled in some disputes; Mr. Utterson decides to investigate him, thus discovering that he is involved with his good friend, Dr. Jekyll. However, Mr. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll himself, who had discovered how to separate his evil self from his good self, Dr. Jekyll embracing the good side and Mr. Hyde the bad. In modern studies, Dr. Jekyll is considered to suffer from multiple personality disorders, sharing one of the most prominent characteristics of this illness – the differentiation of two identities. Indeed, Vrettos highlights that during this period, some of the first cases of this disorder were already being recorded (qtd. in Yount 2019, 21). Nevertheless, there are some studies that assert that Dr. Jekyll's condition may also be one of bipolarity (Yount 2019, 21). Regardless, the influence of this piece of work is so profound that to this day, Jekyll and Hyde are terms used in medicine; for instance, these have been used to designate several personality disorders (Singh and

Chakrabarti 2008, 221). Stevenson uses this new reality from a lugubrious approach in an attempt to experiment with, as mentioned above, the duality of man; yet, the duality that he presents is intricate but significant, offering insights of the complexity of the human being. He presents two different characters, Dr. Jekyll, who is described as a wealthy respected doctor, and Mr. Hyde, who is described as a poor criminal, usually emphasizing his appearance, which was unsettling to those who came across him, as seen in the following extract:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation [...] all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. (Stevenson 2021, 15)

Therefore, from the beginning two completely different characters are introduced, one representing the good side of human nature as well as the Victorian society and the other, the bad side, the repressed desires. However, both are the same character, separated by the choice of doing good or bad. This complicated character and the duality he displays represents Freud's previously mentioned *id*, *ego* and *superego*. Mr. Hyde portrays the *id*, those primitive desires that are not socially accepted, whereas, Dr. Jekyll portrays the *ego*, which maintains the balance between those desires and the accepted societal norms. This is closely associated with atavism and the "criminal man" of Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909). Atavism is the reemergence of ancestral features, which may be physical, psychological or behavioral (Mian 2023, 1). According to scholars, the origins of atavism arose with the concept of reversion of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), which suggests the resurgence of ancestral features that have been lost for generations (Mian 2023, 1). Physical atavism, which is characterized by the reappearance of physical aspects such as a tail, and behavioral atavism, which is characterized by the reappearance of behavioral tendencies such as aggression (Mian 2023, 1), are of great importance for Lombroso's criminal man. Lombroso's theory of the criminal man claims that crime is biological, namely, it is partly a disease which is characterized by its atavistic inheritance (Ellwood 1912, 717). According to Lombroso, criminals were recognized because they shared psychological and physical traits, some of these being smaller and deformed skulls, deviated noses, receding foreheads and dark eyes, hair and skin (Lombroso 2006, 9), features that are also common to Hyde. Therefore, the complex that the duality of this character represents lies in all these repressed desires of Hyde – which are biological in both Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll – as well as in this primitive side; and in how repressing it could result in a loss of control, thus an inevitable degeneration. Victorian society was defined by an atmosphere of perfection, in which the community performed on the basis of the highest moral values (Rima 2021, 13). Therefore, it was common for them to try to adapt to the normative compliance and if they did not, they were considered an outcast (Rima 2021, 14). Consequently, the Victorian era is characterized as an age of absolute repression, which will be criticized by the authors of the time in their works. And this is not only seen with the character of Hyde, which Jekyll explicitly demonstrates, as in the following extract: "My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring." (Stevenson 2021, 53), but it will also be portrayed in other aspects of the novel. For instance, the laboratory, which is across the

yard, is described as a somber structure with no windows: “and he eyed the dingy, windowless structure with curiosity” (Stevenson 2021, 22), which is most of the time locked. This laboratory could be regarded as a solitary confinement, since Jekyll is entirely isolated, away from any stimulus. In there, Jekyll manages to create a potion that turns him into Mr. Hyde. As with the green tea in “Green Tea”, this potion could also be considered as a bridge, in this case, between the good side of man’s humanity and his repressed desires. Thus, this laboratory where the shifts between Jekyll and Hyde occur and where no one can enter – and nothing can be seen from the outside or inside – represents those restrained desires that cannot be exposed to a society that was ruled by the highest moral values. As a result, when the situation begins to get out of Jekyll’s hands, these shifts between characters start to occur outside the laboratory, picturing the consequences of repressed desires that are not restrained anymore, leading to a loss of control.

In addition, similar to “Green Tea” by Le Fanu, Mr. Hyde has also been considered a representation of Dr. Jekyll’s repressed sexual desires. As previously mentioned, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has been classified as one of those “monkey stories” by Griem, in which the narrative is built on the repression of those repressed and primitive sexual desires (Dickson 2017, 88). Thus, Mr. Hyde could be treated as a representation of Dr. Jekyll’s sexual desires that are finally liberated in a repressed society and end up getting out of control. That is the reason why, scholars suggest that the scene in which Mr. Hyde attacks a child violently, could also be seen as a frustrated rape (Coscolluela 2016, 2).

As Dr. Hesselius in “Green Tea”, the character of Dr. Jekyll also allows this reconciliation between fact and fiction since he presents modern concerns and materialize them into a fictitious narrative, creating Mr. Hyde. However, unlike Dr. Hesselius, Dr. Jekyll goes beyond and experiments with science in a manner that has never been done before. This is closely related to *Fin-de-siècle*, which was a term that was rapidly expanding during the Victorian era. As Laqueur proposes, *Fin-de-siècle* is a term that has also been used as another means of expressing degeneration and decadence (Laqueur 1996, 5); a term that represents Victorian society’s belief that the world was coming to an end. With the evolution of science, and as it has been seen, this new interest in psychology, medicine experimented in unexplored domains, creating a doubt in society between what is morally correct and what is not. This nature of concern was portrayed by authors, as in Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley (1797–1851) and Dr. Jekyll in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; both characters, ambitious to dominate science – in the case of Frankenstein life and death and in the case of Jekyll good and evil – play god and experiment with it to an extent that is no longer morally correct. A hint of this anxiety can be observed in one of the characters, Dr. Lanyon, who is Dr. Jekyll’s old friend: “But it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong, wrong in mind” (Stevenson 2021, 11). This concern arises from the fear that these new developments will lead to a loss of control, hence, a degeneration that will result in the end of civilization.

To conclude, Robert Louis Stevenson adopts the new realities of the human mind, as well as

the bizarre of the Gothic in an attempt to criticise Victorian society. With the character of Mr. Hyde, he achieves a representation of this new society, governed by a set of values that had to be perfect. Therefore, Stevenson tries to criticise this censorship imposed on civilization, that he believed was leading humanity to an inevitable degeneration; all these repressed desires would result in a worse consequence. Furthermore, he expands this criticism by raising the question of what is morally correct or what is not. Stevenson also challenges the limits that should be reached, in this case, in medicine and where crossing them would lead civilization to. As it has been mentioned before, this is solely a product of the lack of knowledge that was still present at the time and the fear and anxieties that the unknown provoked. Consequently, Robert Louis Stevenson's representation of *madness* is exclusively focused on this critique of Victorian society that, by repressing human's natural desires, was reaching a stage of moral and social decadence, reinforced by all the boundaries that were being crossed.

The gendered *madness* of *The Woman in White*

The Woman in White by William Wilkie Collins was first published in a series of installments in *All the Year Round* in 1859. In contrast to the previous stories, in this one, Collins presents this gendered *madness* mentioned before, in which *madness* and women were corruptly associated. Although, the previous authors who by some means or another had had contact with the depths of the mind – either *madness* itself or dreams, – this was not the exception in the case of Collins, however, he was inspired by a real case when he wrote *The Woman in White*, in which the family of Louisa Nottidge confined her in an asylum in order to gain control of her money (Thompson 2022, 15). Therefore, the scenario is entirely different; not only did it not affect him directly, but it was also a real case that occurred unfairly very often during the Victorian time, in which women were oppressed by society – male and female figures – with no opportunity to protest.

The novel begins with the narration of Walter Hartright, who in his journey to Limmeridge House – where he is going to impart painting classes to the half-sisters Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe – encounters a woman dressed in white. The woman in white, Anne Catherick, who escaped from an asylum, has a secret that involves Fairlie's husband, Sir Percival Glyde. Consequently, Walter, Laura and Marian attempt to learn Anne's secret while discovering who Anne Catherick and Sir Percival Glyde really are and how they are connected. During the whole course of the story Anne Catherick is characterized as being mentally fragile; this perception is portrayed by some characters who tell their side of the story emphasizing Anne's mental illness. As a result, other characters, as well as the reader, doubt Anne Catherick and her mental health. All the ambiguity around the character portrays the ambivalence that also prevailed about *madness* in the Victorian era (Jurečková 2024, 44). Nevertheless, the narrative diverges when it is revealed that Anne was imprisoned in the asylum by Sir Percival Glyde and her own mother because of the secret that she knew about Sir Percival. This injustice had already been reported by Anne on several occasions, who insisted that she had been silenced, as in the following extracts: "I have risked being shut up again in the mad-house – and all for

your sake, Miss Fairlie" (Collins 2003, 283) or "She asked me in return, if I should not be afraid of a man who had shut me up in a mad-house, and who would shut me up again, if he could?" (Collins 2003, 285). As it has already been mentioned, it has been speculated that some women were confined as a manner of punishment for rebelling themselves (Harper 2024, 1), thereby, women were being oppressed by men and then, this oppression continued by society. Indeed, society has a very important role since, as it has been previously mentioned, the Victorian era was characterized by the highest moral values that everyone needed to follow. Furthermore, in Victorian society, all women had to seek the same dream of being a wife and a mother (Pagander 2013, 9). As a consequence, in a civilization that was governed by the highest values in which women had to fulfill their role as a good wife and mother, any woman who deviated from these societal norms was considered mad for the sole purpose of gaining control over them again. And this is not only the case of Anne Catherick, who was silenced because she had a secret that could have ended with Sir Percival's reputation, but also Laura Fairlie's, who eventually is hospitalized in an asylum by her husband, Sir Percival Glyde, because he was convinced that she also knew the secret, even though she did not. However, the plot becomes even more intriguing when it is discovered that, in fact, Anne did not know the secret; she only knew that there was a secret that involved Sir Percival. Hence, these female characters, Anne and Laura, are oppressed and imprisoned lacking evidence of their supposed *madness*, because of the possibility that Sir Percival believed they had of rebelling; they were silenced out of fear. Thus, they did not know anything that made them threatening. In fact, there are symbolic elements in the novel that portray and emphasise this purity that both characters represent. For instance, according to Gilbert and Gubar, the white dresses that Laura and Anne wore symbolize the rejection of growing up, holding on to their infancy (qtd. in Pagander 2013, 9). In addition, continuing with the symbolic elements, the name of Fairlie also suggests the purity and fairness of Laura, contrasting with the aggressive behaviour of her husband, Sir Percival, who ironically bears the name of a hero of Arthurian romance. Therefore, from the beginning of the narrative there is the portrayal of a good man, Sir Percival Glyde, that follows this archetype of an Arthurian hero but over time is denied by his own behaviour. Furthermore, Laura's imprisonment begins significantly prior to her hospitalization in the asylum, which is symbolically portrayed by Blackwater Park. Both characters, Laura and Marian, are represented as free women when they reside in Limmeridge House, however, when Laura marries Sir Percival, they move to Blackwater Park; a desolate setting that keeps them in a state of confinement, lacking any form of cognitive and physical stimulation. This can be associated with the already mentioned Rest Cure, in which women were restrained from doing stimulating activities (Thraillkill qtd. in Craig 2012, 36). Consequently, they were both subjugated to two men, Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco, their freedom limited by them. This kind of tyranny cannot be disregarded since it can also be observed in other female characters such as Madame Fosco, who is entirely under the control of her husband and Mrs. Clement, who is not directly under the control of a man but is deceived by one, which leads to the tragic death of a female character, Anne Catherick.

Although the narrative is predominantly about the wrongful association of women with

insanity and how, according to Jurečková, this *madness* was used by men in order to limit their freedom and conduct (Jurečková 2024, 43), it also depicts how these restrictions affected women; who they were after being silenced. Laura Fairlie was drugged and used by men to attain their intentions with impunity. She was imprisoned by Sir Percival, presenting her under the disguise of Anne, who had died. When her sister, Marian, liberates her from the asylum, they attempt to demonstrate Laura's authentic identity. However, everyone remained uncertain, persisting in the belief that she was Anne:

He referred her to Count Fosco's letter, and to what she had herself told him of the personal resemblance between Anne and his deceased niece, and he positively declined to admit to his presence, even for one minute only, a madwoman, whom it was an insult and an outrage to have brought into his house at all. (Collins 2003, 437)

Laura is not believed because she is a presumed madwoman, therefore, the character is silenced with no possibility of protecting herself; Laura Fairlie has no voice anymore. As a result, Laura's existence is no longer acknowledged. However, this is not an isolated case. During the Victorian era, women were acknowledged by marriage, therefore, they were only visible through men, as it can be seen in the following extract:

In our present position I have no claim on her which society sanctions, which the law allows, to strengthen me in resisting him, and in protecting her [...] strong in the consciousness of Laura's safety, I must fight it for my Wife. (Collins 2003, 573)

For instance, as scholars assert, Walter's recognition of Laura as herself is significant because it facilitates the recovery of her true identity, therefore, his conception of Laura, the woman that he supposedly loves, is structured only around his own perception of her captivating physical attributes (Ablow 2003, 166). Consequently, the existence of a woman who was not married and, moreover, was considered insane, had no possibility of being recognized. Furthermore, this unjustified imprisonment condemned women as it transformed them in its entirety. In the following extracts, this important aspect is mentioned: "Lady Glyde's face and manner by her imprisonment in the Asylum was far more serious than Miss Halcombe had at first supposed." (Collins 2003, 438); "and the fatal resemblance which I had once seen and shuddered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my own eyes." (Collins 2003, 443). The minds of these women deteriorated when they were confined and silenced, and this degeneration was mirrored from the outside, as it also changed them physically, dehumanizing them and erasing their identity. As Ablow claims, Laura's experience in the asylum revoked her memory and identity, as a result, Marian and Walter helped her to remember who she was, nevertheless, it is impossible to discern whether they were assisting her or shaping her into the person they desired her to become (Ablow 2003, 165). Laura Fairlie changed to a great extent that even her closest relatives doubted her

individuality. The narrative follows female characters such as Laura Fairlie, Anne Catherick, Mrs. Catherick, among others, who are manipulated resulting in the marginalization and control of their own existence.

To summarize, William Wilkie Collins denounces this objectification of women through *madness*, exposing a narrative that, in addition to its fictional nature, was the real case of many women in the Victorian period. As opposed to the other two portrayals that blended the bizarre and supernatural with the complexities of the mind, criticizing aspects of Victorian society, in the present example, Collins challenges in a straightforward manner the corrupt imprisonment of women and the outcome of this process. In an era in which scientific advances were at the height of its influence, these new studies that dealt with *madness* and the unknown – that could not be questioned – were used to dehumanize women and gain control over them. Hence, Collins does not use *madness* to criticize society, but uses a case that could have happened to challenge the tyrannical and abusive power that was given to the use of the term *madness*, questioning a system that was neglecting the existence of women, marginalizing them to invisibility; he critiques the ease with which society controlled and silenced women.

Conclusions

Having analyzed in greater detail the three narratives presented after a historical contextualization, it may be inferred that *madness* was a recurrent theme that authors employed in their work, however, each of them had their own individual approach when portraying it. On the one hand, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu created a character that was troubled by his own mind, which pursued him to his death. Nevertheless, the story in its entirety is a reflection of the anxiety that haunted Le Fanu after his wife's death; with this representation of *madness*, blending Metaphysical theories and Swedenborgianism, he was seeking to make sense of life and death, attempting to get familiar with the unknown. On the other hand, despite the fact that Robert Louis Stevenson also wrote a character afflicted by his own mind that eventually led to his death, he moved his own afflictions to a more collective domain. Through *madness* he criticized a society that presumed to be morally perfect but the reality was markedly different, limiting the individual as well as crossing boundaries that were leading to inevitable degeneration. Finally, William Wilkie Collins did not challenge Victorian society through *madness* as Stevenson did but instead, he exposed a real case in which the term *madness* was oppressively applied to establish control and silence already marginalized groups. He attempted to make society aware of the reality, how this phenomenon influenced the individual affected and how it resonated with all that were involved; he questioned the system by presenting a real-life example. Therefore, each author portrayed the same concern through a different lens, employing *madness* in order to engage in an emotional expression that dealt with the unknown. Their work functioned as a portrait of their own emotions, stressing the fear of an aspect of life that cannot be controlled, understood or even questioned. Hence, *madness* through literature performs as an expressive tool that challenged the Victorian era by exposing common anxieties that still persist in today's society. Furthermore, Mr. Jennings, as well as Dr. Jekyll proceed to commit suicide and

Anne Catherick died due to a stress-induced heart disease; all of them passed away as a result of *madness* or being associated with it – as demonstrated by the latter. The death of these three characters could be interpreted as a strategy to emphasize these apprehensions that they bore, symbolically reinforcing this idea of decay; all these aspects previously analyzed – the unknown, repressed desires, crossing limits, unfair imprisonment – were leading to an inevitable deterioration which is embodied by the characters.

However, this raises the question of who was truly mad or who was not. Eventually, those characters perceived as mad were portrayed as outcasts who did not fit into societal norms thus, they were imprisoned to gain control over them or eradicate their individuality. Nevertheless, they functioned as a tool to challenge a society that was doomed to be censored by the highest values and dictated by taboo and still failed to achieve this unrealistic idealization. Therefore, they wrote characters that moved away from that oppression, obtaining mental freedom – the same one that allowed them to criticize society through their assumed *madness*, – and they compared them to others that were condemned to a corrupt society in which sanity was used as a disguise. Hence, it is worth considering if the mad were in fact insane or they were free from a society that was bound to fail, resulting in a decadent society driven by genuine *madness*.

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