

Beyond The Surface: Exploring The Depiction Of Mental Illness In English Literature

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Abstract

Literature is a strong medium of increasing awareness and understanding of mental illness, presenting a unique viewpoint on mental disease, and providing hope and solace to people who are suffering from it. Mental disease is caused by a complex interaction of genetic, environmental, and psychological variables, not by a person's character or personality. Mental illness has been depicted more realistically and nuancedly in literature, overcoming stigma and preconceptions. English literature explores the diverse experiences of people living with mental health disorders through a variety of themes and symbols. Isolation, identity and self-expression, fight for control, hospital or asylum imagery, and the mind as a prison or cage are among the themes explored by the English poets.

Keywords: Symbolism, Stigma, Mental illness, Poetry, Darkness, Portrayal.

Introduction

Today's culture is increasingly concerned about mental disease, which affects millions of individuals globally. Despite being widespread, mental illness is commonly stigmatized and misrepresented when we look at the language and imagery people use. ^[1] Poetry has long been a way to express difficult feelings and experiences, and the English poets have used their art to highlight the difficulties faced by people who are dealing with mental illness. This Paper will look at how the poets portray mental illness, structure to capture the perspectives of those who experience it. The paper will also delve into the frequent themes and imagery found in modern poetry about mental illness and analyze how these representations affect both those who experience it and our understanding of it.

It is crucial to depict mental illness accurately in English poetry for a number of reasons. First of all, millions of individuals around the world are impacted by the pervasive problem of psychosis in our society. In order to lessen stigma and discrimination, it is crucial to increase knowledge and understanding of mental illness. Poems are a potent medium that can assist in fostering empathy and understanding.

Second, poetry can offer a distinct viewpoint on mental illness that is frequently absent from other types of literature. Poets can examine the complicated feelings and experiences of people living with mental illness because of their capacity to utilize words in fresh and original ways. This can aid in dispelling myths and fostering a more complex view of mental illness.

Finally, poetry can offer hope and solace to those who are living with mental illness. By sharing their experiences and struggles through poetry, poets can provide a sense of connection and community for those who may feel isolated and alone. ^[2]

Literature Review

Numerous mental health issues that have an impact on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are referred to as mental illnesses. Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and eating disorders are just a few examples of the many ways that mental illness

can present itself. It is crucial to remember that mental disease results from a complex interaction of genetic, environmental, and psychological variables rather than from a person's character or personality.^[3]

Literature has frequently portrayed mental illness in ways that reinforce stigma and misunderstanding throughout history. In the past, mental illness was frequently interpreted as a consequence of sin or a moral failing. People with mental illnesses were frequently marginalized and excluded from society, which was a reflection of this viewpoint.

Shakespeare's plays, which frequently portrayed lunacy as a sort of retribution for characters who had committed crimes or violated social rules, are one example of this. The character Ophelia in the play "Hamlet," for instance, is driven insane by her father's remarriage and her own inner torment, which is perceived as a result of her own acts.^[4]

Another illustration can be found in Edgar Allan Poe's writings, who frequently wrote about lunacy. In his short story "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator becomes obsessed with killing his roommate because he thinks that the latter is deranged. This story is sometimes interpreted as a critique on how quickly society categorized people even when they were not.^[5]

But just as our perception of mental illness has changed, so too has the way it is portrayed in literature. A significant effort has emerged in recent years to portray mental illness realistically and to dispel the stigma and prejudices that have long been attached to it.

Authors like Sylvia Plath and J.D. Salinger, who wrote about mental illness in a way that was both honest and empathetic, provide one example of this. Esther, the main character in Plath's "The Bell Jar" battles melancholy and suicidal thoughts, whereas Holden Caulfield, the main character in Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," battles emotions of alienation and hopelessness.^[6]

These works are a part of a larger movement in English literature that aims to give an accurate and comprehensive picture of mental illness. By doing this, these authors eliminate common misconceptions about those who suffer from mental illness and cultivate greater understanding and compassion for them.

Poetry Analysis

William Wordsworth's well-known poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is frequently linked to the subject of mental illness. When the speaker is out on his own and wandering, he comes across a crowd of daffodils. The poem tells how this encounter makes him feel happy and inspired.

In this poem, Wordsworth uses the speaker's seclusion and solitude as one of the major strategies for illustrating mental illness. The first line of the poem, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," establishes the mood. The speaker is shown as being alone and cut off from the world, which raises the possibility that he is dealing with feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Daffodils, which are often used as a symbol of hope and renewal, are also used by Wordsworth to depict mental illness in this poem. The poem depicts the speaker's reaction to the daffodils as overwhelming and emotional, and argues that they give him with peace and solace. Daffodils can be used to express the message that there is hope and beauty to be discovered even in situations of gloom and sorrow.

In terms of poetic devices, Wordsworth uses a number of techniques to convey the themes of mental illness and renewal in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." For example, he uses imagery and symbolism to create a vivid and evocative picture of the daffodils and the natural world. He also uses repetition, such as the use of the phrase "I wandered lonely as a cloud," to emphasize the speaker's sense of isolation and detachment.

Overall, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is a powerful and moving poem that explores the themes of mental illness and renewal. Through the use of imagery, symbolism, and poetic devices, Wordsworth creates a vivid and emotional portrayal of the human experience, and suggests that even in the darkest of times, there is still hope and beauty to be found.

The poem "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath is another powerful piece that focuses on the theme of mental illness. The speaker in the poem is drawn to their own image in a mirror and repeatedly says "mirror, mirror". This repetition illustrates the speaker's desire for self-reflection

and introspection. However, their preoccupation with their appearance and their reliance on the mirror as a means of escaping reality ultimately reveals a deep sense of isolation and detachment.

One of the significant literary devices used in the poem to convey this theme is the use of repetition. The recurring phrase "mirror, mirror" emphasizes the speaker's obsession and fixation on their reflection. Additionally, the description of the mirror as a "cold glass" suggests a sense of detachment and disconnection from the world around them.

Another important poetic device used in the poem is the use of symbolism. The mirror is a symbol for the speaker's own reflection and their relationship with themselves. It represents their desire for self-reflection and introspection, but also their fear of what they might see. The mirror is also a symbol for the world around them, as the speaker is unable to interact with it or escape from it.

The poem also explores the theme of isolation and disconnection through the use of metaphor. The speaker's fixation on their own image in the mirror is a metaphor for their disconnection from the world around them. The mirror is a barrier between the speaker and the world, and the speaker is unable to break free from it.

To sum up, *Mirror* by Sylvia Plath is a powerful poem that explores the theme of mental illness through the use of poetic devices such as repetition, imagery, symbolism, and metaphor. The poem's use of repetition and imagery creates a sense of obsession and disconnection, while the use of symbolism and metaphor reveals a deep sense of isolation and disconnection. The poem is a powerful reflection on the experience of mental illness, and it serves as a reminder of the importance of self-reflection and introspection in our lives.

Another outstanding poet Emily Dickinson wrote a touching poem titled "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" that addresses the subject of mental illness. The speaker of the poem expresses the sense of loneliness and sadness that comes from feeling as though they are attending their own funeral in their own minds.

The speaker's feelings of loneliness and isolation are one of the poem's major themes. They talk about having the mental image of being the only survivor of a funeral, along with the

sensation of detachment and separation that this experience creates. Many people affected by mental health problems believe they are the only ones going through hardships.

The sense of despair and hopelessness that can accompany mental illness is another issue that is covered in the poem. The speaker talks of feeling "sitting in a dungeon" and "surrounded by shadows," as well as the sensation of desolation and gloom that this experience produces. As many people who are impacted by mental health concerns frequently feel as though they are imprisoned in a never-ending circle of pain.

The poem's uses the burial metaphor. The speaker's choice of the metaphor of a funeral, which is a typical representation of sorrow and loss, shows that they are feeling a sense of loss and grief. As many people who are impacted by mental health disorders frequently feel as though they have lost something vital, whether it be their sense of self, their relationships, or their capacity to experience joy and happiness, this theme of loss is a prominent one in poetry about mental illness.

Overall, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" is a strong and moving poem that analyzes the subject of mental illness in a striking way. Dickinson is able to convey the complex overpowering feelings that can accompany mental health disorders and to deliver a message of hope and perseverance to individuals who are experiencing difficulty through the use of vivid imagery and sharp language.

Themes And Symbols

Themes and symbols are commonly used in poetry to explore the complex and often stigmatized topic of mental illness. Through the use of these literary devices, poets can provide insight into the experiences of individuals living with mental health conditions and raise awareness about the importance of mental health support and understanding.

One of the most frequent themes in the English poetry about mental illness is isolation. This theme is often explored through the use of imagery that evokes feelings of loneliness, alienation, and disconnection. For example, poets use images of deserted landscapes, abandoned buildings, or empty rooms to convey a sense of isolation and disconnection.

Another constant theme is the struggle for identity and self-expression. Poets use imagery that highlights the fragmentation of the self, as well as the struggle to find meaning and purpose in life. This theme is often explored through the use of symbols that represent the fragmentation of the self, such as mirrors, broken glass, or shattered images.

Struggle for control is a theme that is frequently explored in contemporary poetry about mental illness. Poets also use imagery to evoke feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and the sense that one's life is out of control. This theme is often explored through the use of symbols that represent the struggle for control, such as chains, ropes, or handcuffs.

One of the most powerful symbols used in contemporary poetry about mental illness is the image of the hospital or asylum. This symbol represents the medicalization of mental illness and the stigma that often comes with it. Poets may use imagery that evokes feelings of confinement, isolation, and the sense that one is being institutionalized.

Mind as a prison or cage is also a powerful symbol used in contemporary poetry about mental illness. This symbol represents the sense of being trapped in one's own thoughts and feelings, and the struggle to find a way out. Poets may use imagery that evokes feelings of entrapment, suffocation, and the sense that one is being held captive.

In conclusion, contemporary poetry about mental illness frequently employs a range of themes and symbols to explore the complex and often stigmatized experiences of individuals living with mental health conditions.

Conclusion

Poetry has long been a powerful tool for raising awareness about mental illness and providing new perspectives and hope to those who are affected by it. Through the use of powerful imagery and thought-provoking language, poets have been able to convey the complexities of mental health in a way that breaks down the stigma surrounding mental illness. Many poets write about the feeling of being isolated and alone, and how this can aggravate mental health issues. They

explore the ways in which mental illness can make it difficult for people to connect and form meaningful relationships.

References

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