

Title: “Kate Williams’s *The Pleasures of Men* (2012): Mental Disorder, Trauma, Resilience”.

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Abstract

Violence against women has been an important issue for neo-Victorian studies. Women’s bodies and minds have been the object of violence in Victorian times and historical fiction echoes traumas from the past that need restoration and healing in the present. Kate Williams’s *The Pleasures of Men* (2012) is an example of a novel where the protagonist, Catherine Sorgeiul, is a middle-class girl who lives in a house in the East of London with her uncle after a traumatic past. She needs to heal the scars of her suffering after becoming an orphan, but she believes herself to be evil. She feels a fascination for the murders committed by a serial killer nicknamed The Man of Crows in London in 1840.

Catherine is a heroine with a vivid imagination and a mysterious past. This Gothic thriller takes the reader to a neo-Victorian city which becomes the landscape for female subjectless subjectivities. The victims of the killer and Catherine herself become fragmented, dislocated and haunted identities. London is the labyrinth where the lives of the poor and the destitute is precarious and has no value. The notion of Otherness can be found in the female victims as in Catherine herself, whose delirious psyche becomes akin to that of the killer. As the murders cause panic throughout the city, she comes to believe she can channel the voices of his victims and that they will lead her to the Man himself. However, lurking behind the lies she has been told about her past are secrets more deadly and devastating than anything her imagination can conjure.

The aim of this paper is to show how neo-Victorian novels can speak about society’s crimes against women. These crimes need restoration and healing. At the same time, Judith Butler’s notions about vulnerability and resistance and Sarah Bracke’s ideas about resilience become relevant to claim for women’s agency after trauma as well as recovery through adaptation and forgiveness.